

ATCM 'First Impressions' Visit

Report on Eastleigh, Hampshire

Conducted Friday 25 September 2009

By Laura Holman and Tim Keeping, on behalf of Woking TCM

Expectations

The visiting team's perception of Eastleigh was that the town would offer a mix of good looking new retail areas (shopping centre) with the existing areas looking rather more 'tired' in comparison.

There was a belief that there would be several empty units, given the current economic climate.

Initial impressions

Travelling from Woking by car and entering the town centre was quite straightforward, although the car park entrance (to the Swan Centre) seemed to 'suddenly' appear round the corner.

That said, the town centre was reasonably well signposted, the roads were free from congestion and overall had a clean appearance.

The town had a safe, clean and tidy feel. The overriding impression was that the town centre was well maintained.

Overall appearance

Very impressed with the 'canopy' that runs around the independent shops, which really raised the look and feel of the town. The central green space and bench seating/statues in the public realm were very attractive.

There was also a noticeable lack of litter, detritus, cigarette litter, graffiti and fly posting.

We particularly liked the planters on street!

Overall appearance was positive, although the number of un-let units in the shopping centre was a bit disappointing.

Town Gateways (signage, beautification efforts etc)

Adequate finger post signage to relevant locations. Good use of floral displays throughout town centre. The lamp posts are attractive.

Drive about Section

Entering the town was pleasant and straightforward. Although the main streets are not pedestrianised, the traffic was not heavy and circulated around the one way system quite easily. The ring road around the town centre/shopping area was good although it seemed a missed opportunity that there were no banners advertising events or giving positive messages about/branding of Eastleigh, given that there is a captive audience passing by the town every day.

The external areas, which are mainly residential with some light industrial over the railway, looked neat and tidy.

We parked in the Swan Centre, which was very reasonably priced considering that the on-street parking looked quite limited.

Main shopping area appearance

There were lots of empty units in the shopping centre but were pleasantly surprised to find that there were very few in the surrounding streets (and those that were vacant were appropriately noticed with management agent's details). Empty sites facing street near new cinema/bowling area would benefit from more upmarket 'hoardings' and clearer signage to the entertainment facilities.

Industrial area appearance

We took a quick drive over the railway and into the industrial area along its main road. It appeared to be a large space with lots of potential for development, either further industrial or an 'outlet village' type offer, to avoid competing with existing retail in the town centre proper.

Walking Tour Section

Physical State of business

Our party initiated its walk from the car park, walking through the shopping centre then outside and alongside the train station, which looks recently painted and very tidy - a pleasant arrival point to the town with good bicycle racking.

The short walk from there into the shopping area was made more attractive (and would also be dry if the weather hadn't been as good it was) by the canopy, which also helped as a 'guide' through this area. This area was litter free with a nice variety of shops. This was reciprocated by businesses in that most stores had clean and tidy facades with no noticeable damage.

Less good was the area outside the job centre and the County Council offices, which was overgrown and looked quite unkempt (which was surprising, given that these are local authority buildings, and a shame given the amount of car and people traffic that passes by there).

The shopping centre floor had some damage but we liked the floor stickers to help direct people to the entertainment complex.

Range of businesses

Reasonable range and diversity of business type, although there were quite a few 'cash converter' style shops (which may not be surprising in the current climate) and a couple (?) of sex shops. Shops were generally lower end A3 use, but there were a few independent retailers and not too many charity shops.

People factor

Customer service was good in each retail and food outlet visited. We weren't so keen on the hard-sell in the shopping centres from the staff on promotional stands.

Community information

The fingerposts were good although some were pointing the wrong way. There were no on-street maps that we came across.

Public Toilets

Public toilets were not obvious to the visiting team. The only noticeable facilities were in the Shopping Centre.

Parking

Car parking

There was plenty of available parking in the Swan Centre, and there would normally be even more on the roof area (which was undergoing refurbishment when we visited).

Actor Section

Tourist / Visitor

A quick visit to the visitor information point in the library (Swan Centre) provided a map of the town centre area but we were not directed to any places of interest, although there were some reasonably well-stocked leaflet carousels outside the doors.

There did not appear to be any further visitor attractions in the town centre apart from the museum which we did not have time to visit.

The bus station was an area we thought could be developed and made more attractive.

Potential Resident/retiree

N/A

Potential Business Operator

It was felt that we would need to know more commercial data about trading both on street and in the shopping centre to make a decision about bringing a business here, but the town looked to be well-managed, with good rail and road connections.

Overall Feelings

Overall 'gut feeling'

We were pleasantly surprised. The weather was good, which always helps give a good impression of a place but we felt that the offer was good for the level of market that we thought Eastleigh was being aimed at, and the town centre was tidy and looked leafy and attractive. We wondered what the aims of Eastleigh TCM are, given that events didn't seem to be on the agenda when we visited.

6 most positive features

1. Canopy.
2. Street furniture.
3. Planting.
4. Pedestrianisation.
5. Green space and bandstand.
6. Public transport and road access.

Ideas to 'steal'

Canopy and planters.

Key areas for attention

Linking up the shopping centre with the entertainment/evening offer.

Tidying up and better use of the verges alongside the ring road, **perhaps using banner space for 'positive messages' about the destination and/or event promotion.**

Using the green space for events (which may already happen).

Developing the bus station area, and the opposite side of the road, so that there is less of a 'dead end' here.

Greatest impact positive /negative

The affect of the canopy to join up an otherwise fragmented shopping offer.

Supporting Images



Entrance to Swan Centre loading bay, but looks like car park entrance.



Attractive street scene with clock and planter.



The Swan Centre – entertainment complex entrance sadly lacking clear signage.



Eastleigh Railway Station – lots of bike racking and well presented.



Informative signage within shopping centre.



Canopy idea really 'joins up' diverse shopping into a cohesive offer.