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GCSE Geography Project

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To what extent do the shops/services of Northwood satisfy the needs of the Local Community?

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Introduction:

Northwood is a town situated in the London Borough of Hillingdon, northwest of central London. Below is a map of the area showing the exact site of Northwood and its situation in relation to other settlements.

(Map taken from www.multimap.co.uk)

Here is a map of Green Lane and its adjoining roads, the commercial centre of Northwood. This is the area where I will carry out my investigation.

(Map taken from www.multimap.co.uk)

My investigation will try to determine how well Northwood's commercial centre (Green Lane) satisfies the needs of the local community by comparing two factors; what shops and services exist, and what the local people feel is needed in the way of shops and services.

Hypothesis

My hypothesis for this investigation is that the shops and services of Northwood do not fully satisfy the needs of the local community.

Northwood's commercial centre has relatively good travel links. It has bus and coach services to some surrounding areas; it also has a Metropolitan (Underground) Line station, and has a main road running through it (B469). This means that the commercial centre of Northwood is quite accessible. This means that many people using the commercial centre do not necessarily live locally in Northwood, raising Threshold Populations * to the requirements of middle order + shops/services.

* Threshold Population - the minimum number of population required in an area for a shop/service to be viable for that area.

+ Order - shops can be placed into a hierarchy based upon the services they provide. At the bottom of the hierarchy are small shops selling 'convenience' goods that are needed daily, such as a newspaper from a newsagents. At the top of the hierarchy are large shops selling specialist 'comparison' goods that are bought less frequently, such as furniture or a TV. Shops/services at the top of hierarchy are known as 'High Order' and shops/services at the bottom of hierarchy are known as 'Low Order'.

However, larger towns nearby, in particular Harrow or Watford are far more accessible. They also have their own Metropolitan Line stations; but in addition they have (Watford in particular) National Rail links, dozens of bus/coach services to other parts of South East England as well as local areas. It also has proximity to the M25 and other major A-roads. This means that accessibility to its CBD * is much

better than that of Northwood. Hence the population in the area is much higher. This means high order shops/services requiring large threshold populations (comparison, nationwide stores) can do good business in the area, and chose to go there instead of Northwood.

* Central Business District - the centre of a settlement where the main shops, services, travel links are found.

This absence of high order shops/services in Northwood means the local community will need to go elsewhere from time to time when needing to purchase expensive items such as a TV or HiFi. This means that the shops and services of Northwood do not fully satisfy the needs of the local community.

Plan:

My investigation will try to determine an understanding of how well Northwood's commercial centre (Green Lane) satisfies the needs of the local community. I have chosen to do this because I feel it is a relevant question that I can relate to my knowledge of settlements from the GCSE Geography syllabus; on a more personal level I feel it would be a good idea to thoroughly investigate the area I have recently moved into.

There are two sets of data I need to collect in order to determine an answer to the question; one is to discover what shops/services are in existence in Green Lane, the second is what the local public feel is needed in Green Lane. I will then compare my results for both in order to test the hypothesis.

In order to discover what is in existence I will conduct my own survey of the commercial centre of Northwood, Green Lane.

To survey the area I will make a 'Base Map' of Green Lane; a Base Map is simply a map of the area that you study, usually traced from a street map leaving out unnecessary details. To make my Base Map I will find the Green Lane area on a road map, photocopy the appropriate area onto A4; I will then trace onto plain A4 paper the specific roads concerned in my project. This A4 will then be enlarged onto A2, which will be my Base Map onto which I will record what shops and services I find along my 'Urban Belt Transect'.

'Transect' mapping is when a route (transect) is predefined before surveying the area; you can either record what is found directly on the line (a line transect) or you can record what is found on either side of the line (a belt transect). Due to my area of study being a road with shops on either side it would be sensible to do a belt transect. The width of the belt will be as wide as the street, which may change as I go along but will be OK. My 'Belt Transect' will take place in a town so hence I will map the shops and services on a base map along an 'Urban Belt Transect'.

(Enclosed is a Base Map showing my Urban Belt Transect Route).

With the shops and service buildings drawn onto this Base Map I will have thus created my own 'GOAD MAP' of Green Lane. A 'GOAD' map is basically a map of an area where the buildings and the roads are shown, and then the names of the

buildings are labelled. However, I will develop this GOAD map to classify the buildings (by a key and colour shading of the buildings) according to whether they are shops or services, and whether they are high, low or middle order.

When surveying the transect, for each building I will record whether it is a shop or service and its order onto a Booking Sheet. A Booking Sheet is rather like a note pad but has predefined headings and columns, which make taking notes down more efficient when mapping and easier to present. This booking sheet can then be used to calculate the number of high order shops or low order services etc. making graphs/charts simpler to produce in order to gain an understanding of what exists in Northwood.

In order to determine whether a shop/service is low, middle or high order, the following process will be employed. Firstly the shop/service will be classified ie. Andy's Newsagents would be newsagent. Waitrose would be supermarket. Then a few factors are considered: how common are these in Northwood and other settlements (more common-lower order); what type of good/service they provide (more expensive-higher order); how frequently the shop/service would be visited by the same person in a year (less frequently -higher order).

The combination of the Booking Sheet and the survey map will help me know exactly what I find on the transect, and hence what is in existence in Northwood's CBD.

I also intend to get in contact with Hillingdon Council and ask them for any information that can be used as secondary data; I will ask for anything in relation to public schemes currently being implemented or in process in Northwood.

In order to discover what people need, I have decided to research for primary data by conducting a questionnaire in the local community.

A questionnaire is a list of questions addressed to a person; answers are recorded on a copy of the questionnaire. The answers can then be grouped and analysed. There are two types of questionnaire, one where the person being questioned writes down answers themselves; the other has somebody ask the questions for them and note down the answers. I have decided to go with the second option as I can decide what parts of the answers are relevant to my investigation.

A key issue with the questionnaire is that it would be too time intensive to ask every resident of Northwood the questionnaire. Therefore I have decided to conduct the questionnaire on a proportional sample of the local community. This means that the local community is reduced in scale to a microcosm of its original size. However the same proportions of age, gender and culture are maintained. This means the process will be more time efficient and still the results should reflect the opinion of the whole community.

My questionnaire will be conducted in two stages. One will be a preliminary questionnaire relevant to identifying the needs of the community. From this I hope to discover faults in my questionnaire that can be rectified in order to have a better questionnaire that can achieve more precise results. My preliminary questionnaire will be conducted on 10 people; however the revised questionnaire will be conducted

on a proportional sample of 40 people. Both questionnaires will be conducted by asking members of the public outside the local supermarket - Watirose, as I feel this is the one place in Northwood where just about everybody shops, hence I will be able to get a proportionate sample representing all genders and age groups.

Results:

In order to ascertain the accuracy in my hypothesis I decided to collect a lot of data so that it could be analysed on a large scale. Most of my results are figures found in this Results section; however some are sources found in the Appendix.

Source 1 is my booking sheet of the buildings found along the transect route; from this I created a tally sheet for the shops/services of Northwood, this is figure 1. This tally sheet was used to make figure 2:

Figure 2

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This bar chart of the number of high/middle/low order shops/services in Northwood shows several key points; one is that there are no high order shops/services at all in Northwood (all the shops and services are either middle/low order), another is that there are approximately double the number of services than shops, meaning actual shopping potential is lost. Finally there are a very few (only 6) middle order shops in Northwood. All these points immediately hinder Northwood's ability to be a comprehensive shopping area, meaning it won't fully satisfy the needs of the local community.

Using my Base Map and Booking sheet, I was able to produce 2 maps of the transect area. Sources 2 and 3 in the appendix are these maps; Source 2 is a map of buildings, classified whether they are a shop or a service, source 3 is a map of buildings, classifying whether they are high/middle/low order. Source 3, like figure 2, shows there are many low/middle order and no high order shops/services in existence; it also shows that 6 of the 88 buildings (7%) in Northwood's CBD are empty, showing a wastage of prime CBD land. Source 2 clearly shows that Northwood has an abundance of services. This is further demonstrated by figure 3, a pie chart showing the types of service in place in Northwood. It shows that over a third of all the services in Northwood are restaurants/cafes, banks, travel/estate agents or beauty salons. Most of these are rarely required frequently, and do not serve the short-term immediate needs of the local community, hence do not really encourage local people to shop in the area, lowering threshold populations and discouraging those high order shops from moving in.

I have discovered from my investigation that Hillingdon Council are trying to make the shopping environment of Green Lane more pedestrian (ie. shopper) friendly. Source 4 is a map of Northwood with the public services/facilities shown; this source shows a high number of bins/benches/telephones/toilets and car parks - which are used by shoppers. These facilities are installed by the council, proving they are trying to make the area more attractive for shoppers in order to raise threshold populations to attract high order shops and make Northwood fully serving.

However I have found the Council are contradicting their actions. Source 5 is a leaflet I acquired from Hillingdon Council when requesting any information regarding any schemes being implemented, or in the pipeline for the Green Lane area in Northwood. The source is a map displaying, 'Northwood Residents' Permit Parking Scheme.' The general gist of the leaflet is that different roads in Northwood are being labelled at different levels for public parking, with some roads being free to park on, but as you reach the heart of Northwood (Green Lane) the roads become part of the 'Town Centre Scheme,' meaning only a few permitted cars are allowed to park, and only at high cost. This scheme makes shopping more difficult for those coming to Green Lane by car (because they won't be able to park), discouraging shoppers to come to the area, hence threshold populations are lowered and high order shops are not attracted, preventing Northwood from fully serving the community.

Figure 4 is a London Transport leaflet I received at Northwood Met Station; it shows that only 4 different (8A and 8B are the same route as 8, just different timings) bus routes run through Northwood's centre. In comparison with the dozens of different bus routes running through neighbouring towns such as Watford and Harrow, Northwood doesn't have that great a range from which external shoppers come, meaning the threshold populations stay lower than Harrow or Watford.

There was also a lot of information gathered from my questionnaire that can be used to answer whether or not the shops/services serve the communities' needs. Source 6 is the Preliminary questionnaire that I conducted on 10 people at random; this was very useful to do as I discovered important flaws in it. People answered 'not sure' because they didn't really know how to rate the subject in question, so I decided to split each subject into 2 aspects, one being how they rated it, the other how important it was to them. If they answered not really, then their rating could be ignored in order to avoid anomalies. I also needed to collect some personal information in order to prove I did the questionnaire on a proportionate sample of all ages/gender, so I decided to put check boxes for ages/gender on the revised questionnaire. I also narrowed the scale from 1-10 to 1-5 to make rating easier. I also simplified questions 2, 3 and 4 into one question of how they rated Northwood as a shopping area as people's answers were far too vague. I also decided to publish the questions in bold, making it easier to read. Finally it seemed that there was a lot of similarity in people's answers to questions 5, 6 and 7; so I decided to put these into check boxes that could be ticked, making analysis of the answers on the final questionnaire much easier. Source 7 is the Revised Questionnaire that was conducted on 40 people. From it I discovered some clear, common trends among the local community in Northwood.

Figure 5 is a bar chart showing the number of people I conducted the revised questionnaire on for each age/gender category. It shows that I conducted the survey on a proportionate sample as at least 2 people were questioned for each category, however mostly 3 or 4 people were questioned. This means that the accuracy of the results from the questionnaire is increased, making the conclusion more valid.

Figure 5

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Figure 6 is a vertical bar chart showing how many people answered 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 when asked to rate the shops/services in Northwood. The graph shows a normal distribution, meaning most people answered in the middle, with fewer answering towards the extremes. However it is clear that most people rated shops at 3 and the services at 2 (out of 5); this graph clearly shows that the public do not think very highly of the shops in Northwood.

This view is reinforced by figure 7, another bar chart this time showing how many people answered excellent, good, OK, poor or terrible when asked to rate Northwood as an area for shopping compared to Harrow/Watford. This graph shows a negative skew, meaning that the peak bar comes to the right of the middle of the graph; the graph shows that most people rated Northwood as a poor area for shopping, another point to notice is that nobody at all said that Northwood was an excellent area for shopping.

Figure 7

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Figures 6 and 7 prove that the people of Northwood do not feel it is a flawless area for shopping, it was found that only 10 % answered no to whether they ever went outside Northwood to shop, this means that people in Northwood often have to go shopping elsewhere (90%), meaning the shops/services do not fully satisfy their needs.

Conclusion and Evaluation:

My finding is that the shops and services of Northwood do not fully satisfy the needs of the local community, proving my hypothesis to be true. The vast majority of my data collected shows this to be the case, as explained in Results. The reason that they do not fully serve the community's needs is that there are no high order shops/services (the local community usually has to commute for these into areas such as Harrow/Watford-shown in my questionnaire) in Northwood, meaning the public have to shop elsewhere when comparative items are needed (eg. TV/VCR), this was originally stated in my hypothesis.

The reason there aren't any high order in Northwood, and hence the reason why the shops/services don't serve the needs, is because of a vicious cycle currently in place concerning Northwood's CBD; population thresholds in Northwood are not high enough to attract high order shops/services. This means that locals have to shop in other areas instead of Northwood, lowering Northwood's population threshold, hence the high order shops (that require high thresholds) don't set up in the area, and hence locals have to shop elsewhere; and so the cycle persists.

I feel this cycle has existed for a long time. I believe it started when Northwood was first established along the Metropolitan Railway Line in the latter 19th Century. The original settlers would still have shopped in more established shopping areas of settlements inward towards London, ie. Harrow, Pinner. This meant that there was

nobody shopping in Northwood, hence no shops were attracted, therefore starting the cycle.

I feel my project went well, I believe I collected enough data to prove my hypothesis to be valid. I feel I have used both time and resources effectively. However there are a few points of my methods of data capturing that I feel would be reviewed and refined if I were to ever repeat the project.

Firstly I would not do the questionnaire face to face as it proved to be a problem collecting data, it was obvious that people were not comfortable with having to answer questions to a teenage boy, when they just wanted to shop. I felt they were prepared to rush through the questionnaire without giving it serious thought, this proved to be a disadvantage to collecting valid results.

When repeating the questionnaire I would adopt a new strategy and drop one through their mailbox with a letter of explanation and a SAE (to myself), they could fill in the questionnaire at their leisure and post it back. I feel this method would give more accurate results, as people would not feel intimidated. Also by conducting the questionnaire using this method, it could be done on a much larger scale (as no time would be required on my behalf actually asking the questions), meaning more answers could be analysed, increasing the accuracy of the results and enabling a more valid conclusion to be drawn.

Secondly I found that making my own GOAD maps was incredibly time consuming, to improve this I would either ask the Council if they could provide me with one. Failing that I would ask Ordnance Survey to make me one.

Most of the data I collected strongly supported my hypothesis. The booking sheet showed the absence of high order shops/services and the abundance of services that didn't serve the short-term needs of the community. The questionnaire showed how most people found Northwood not to fully serve them and that the majority of the opted to shop elsewhere. The map of public facilities showed that the Council were trying to make the Green Lane area more shopper friendly in order to boost threshold populations, installing several benches, bins, phone boxes etc.

However there were some results that rejected my hypothesis. In my refined questionnaire, 10% of the sample questioned answered 'No' when asked whether or not they ever had to go shopping elsewhere, hence meaning that in their opinion Northwood did not fully satisfy their needs. However if we look closer at their questionnaires, they were all over the age of 50 (3 out of the four were over 61), perhaps meaning that they were unable or unwilling to go elsewhere.

In order to determine a further understanding on the subject of Northwood's CBD, I would perhaps conduct an investigation to discover exactly what people brought from Northwood, and what items they went further a field to purchase. This information could then be used to tell the council just what businesses they needed to attract to make Green Lane fully serving.

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Computer Software used

Microsoft Word
Microsoft Excel

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