

Meadowhall – an out-of-town shopping centre case study

Sheffield has been known as a centre for cutlery for the best part of the last thousand years. By 1600, it had become the main centre of cutlery production in England and in the late 17th century, it was estimated that three out of every five Sheffield men worked in the cutlery trade. In 1726, the writer Daniel Defoe visited Sheffield and wrote in his '*Tour through the whole island of Great Britain*' that the houses were ...

'dark and black, occasioned by the continued smoke of the forges, which are always at work: Here they make all sorts of cutlery-ware, but especially that of edged-tools, knives, razors, axes and nails.'

At that time of Defoe's visit, Sheffield was rapidly evolving into one of England's main industrial cities of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and by the mid 19th century, 60% of all British cutlers worked in the Sheffield area.

The city also has an international reputation for steel making and metallurgy and this dates back to at least the 14th century. In the 19th century, the region manufactured 90 per cent of all British steel and nearly half the entire European output. The label 'Made in Sheffield' became an indication of quality across the country and around the world.

The lack of effective town planning meant that small, specialised workshops for the production of cutting tools and cutlery existed side by side with enormous steel factories in inner city areas.



The Anglo Works in Sheffield, one of a small number of surviving city centre cutlery and silversmith factories.

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Many advantages led to the development of the iron and steel industry in Sheffield. These were partly physical, e.g. the flat valley floor of the River Don, between Rotherham and Sheffield but increasingly, as the area developed a skilled workforce, became more linked to the workforce and other human factors. Local communities became dependent on this one industry, and generations of families were linked with the production of iron and steel.



The East Heckla Steel Works in 1946 – now the site of the Meadowhall Centre
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<http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/eaw000811>

Over time, both increasing competition from overseas suppliers and the decline in local raw materials led to a corresponding decline in Sheffield's traditional manufacturing industries. Although a considerable amount of iron and steel continued to be produced, the introduction of mechanisation reduced the number of people employed by the industry. Consequently, iron and steel works in Sheffield began to close during the second half of the 20th century.

The foundries then often remained empty for several years before the wrecking ball and the demolition teams moved in. Piles of rubble then replaced these foundries and the area became a derelict industrial wasteland. Development companies optimistically advertised these brownfield sites as possessing considerable development potential, stressing the strategic location next to a junction of the M1 motorway and the market potential of nearly nine million people living within one hour's drive. However, it was clear that the regeneration of this area would take a lot of investment and a bold vision.

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Shopping has changed a great deal in the last 50 years. There are now more shopping opportunities than ever, and with the growth of online shopping, there is often now no need to leave our homes. Another change has been the arrival of huge out-of-town retail parks. Some of these have caused problems for some town centres (CBDs) and some towns are now more like 'supermarket towns' than market towns.

One such out-of-town retail park is the Meadowhall Centre, between Sheffield and Rotherham, situated on the site of three demolished steel works. These closed in the 1980s and the 68 hectare brownfield site was cleared in 1987 when 100,000 cubic metres of waste were removed from the site. Construction work began a year later and the Meadowhall Centre was opened in September 1990. The centre cost around £275 million to build, but its present value is, of course, far greater. After Metro Centre, Gateshead and Brent Cross near London, this was the third out-of-town shopping centre to be built.

The Meadowhall Centre, with a site design based on a medieval city was advertised as 'a new dawn for leisure shopping' and the 132,800 square metres of retail space proved an immediate success. The shopping centre can accommodate up to 800,000 visitors a day in peak times, and has an average of 30 million visitors a year.



Part of the interior of the Meadowhall Centre

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<http://www.flickr.com/photos/17989497@N00/8502631511/>

Meadowhall construction facts

2 million bricks
100,000 cubic metres of concrete
20,000 cubic metres of Brazilian granite
11,000 tonnes of steel
16 kms of drainage pipe
21,000 panes of glass
Palm trees imported from Florida

The advantages for shoppers

- ✓ Around 270 retail outlets in one convenient location, 5 kms northeast of Sheffield town centre
- ✓ Dedicated access from Junction 34 of the M1, via a newly constructed roundabout and designated car lanes
- ✓ 12,000 free parking places in colour coded car parks
- ✓ Dedicated integrated transport interchange: bus, train, taxi ranks and Supertram stops
- ✓ Helicopter landing pad
- ✓ Network of cycle paths and cycle lockers to keep bikes safe
- ✓ Open 7 days a week, and late night opening, particularly in the run-up to Christmas
- ✓ Multi-screen cinema complex
- ✓ Close to Hallam FM Arena (a major concert venue) and Don Valley Stadium (venue for the World Student Games and music concerts)
- ✓ Close to Sheffield City Airport
- ✓ Food court area: 'The Oasis' – largest in the world when it opened, offering a wide range of food options
- ✓ Pleasant ambience: granite floors and planting,
- ✓ Regular seasonal attraction, e.g. Christmas entertainments

Transportation

The Meadowhall transport interchange is one of the major aspects of the project. If people are to be persuaded to shop anywhere other than the CBD – which is the most accessible place according to land use models, then they must be able to travel to the alternative destination quickly and cheaply.

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The centre is a stopping point on the Sheffield Supertram network. This is a local network of electric trams, which began operation in 1994. It links the CBD of Sheffield to several locations on the edge of the city. There are plans to extend the network to other local areas.



A Sheffield supertram
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<http://www.flickr.com/photos/34085730@N06>

Meadowhall has also succeeded due to the increased growth in car ownership in the UK and more than 7.5 million people within an hour's drive of the centre. It has successfully persuaded people that shopping can be a leisure activity rather than a chore. Meadowhall offers a large food court called 'The Oasis' with regular entertainment and there is a multi-screen cinema and crèche for children.



Car parking facilities at the Meadowhall Centre in January 2000
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<http://www.heritage-explorer.co.uk/web/he/searchdetail.aspx?id=2926&crit=2000s>

The Meadowhall effect

The opening of the Meadowhall Centre has a considerable effect on both the immediate area and further afield. The city centre of Sheffield and the town centre of Rotherham found it difficult to compete with the variety of retail possibilities offered by Meadowhall and this caused an economic downturn in their traditional CBD shopping areas.

Many businesses also moved to Meadowhall from nearby towns, and there has been some decline in trade in these areas. With one eighth of the British population living within an hour's drive, the 'Meadowhall effect' has started to spread wider.

Memories of the past

The Don Valley area has undergone a remarkable transformation in the last 20 years and visitors will see few reminders of the areas industrial past, although there are some art works that refer back to this time. Mostly, however, the name Meadowhall is now synonymous with the shopping centre.



A tribute to Sheffield steel workers at Meadowhall centre

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<http://www.flickr.com/photos/mjtmail/7045230039>

The Steel, Peech and Tozers steel foundry on the outskirts of Rotherham is another successful part of the area's regeneration. The melting shop has re-opened as the 'Magna Science Adventure Centre' themed around the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. It provides interactive activities for children, including the chance to operate a JCB, see a fiery tornado and watch a reconstruction of an actual arc furnace at work in 'the big melt'. The surrounding site is being redeveloped as a business park.

Student tasks

1. Use an online mapping tool e.g. Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com>) or ArcGIS Explorer Online (<http://www.arcgis.com/explorer>), create an annotated map of the advantages of the location of the Meadowhall Centre.
2. On a blank outline map of the UK, locate other major out-of-town centres. Nine examples are provided below:

Bluewater	Westfield, Stratford	Merry Hill
Trafford Centre	Metro Centre	Bridgend Designer Outlet
Cabot Circus	Cribbs Causeway	Thecentre: mk

Research additional locations using the websites:

- <http://www.heritage-explorer.co.uk/web/he/search.aspx?crit=shopping%20mall&start=1&rt=0>
 - http://www.bcsc.org.uk/centrelist_100.asp
 - <http://www.retail-week.com/property/top-100-shopping-centres/>
3. How does Meadowhall rank in terms of size, and popularity with other shopping centres?
 4. Investigate the impact of large shopping centres in your own home area. Is there a 'Meadowhall effect' from your nearest out-of-town shopping centre?
 5. The Face of Steel is part of the exhibition at the Magna Science Adventure centre. It provides an opportunity to hear the voices of past steel workers. Iron and Steel has given way to tourism and shopping and this is a phenomenon seen in other areas.

Use the internet to produce a fact file on one of the following:

- Yorkshire Museum of Farming
- Big Pit National Coal Mining Museum
- Beamish Museum
- Etruria Industrial Museum
- Leeds Industrial Museum
- Ironbridge Gorge Museum
- Geevor Tin Mine and Museum
- Welsh National Slate Mining Museum

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6. Meadowhall: Is it Meadow 'hell' or Meadow 'heaven'? The comments below were adapted from an online forum for Sheffield residents. Two shoppers, Sean and Victoria have given their contrasting opinions on the Meadowhall Centre.

I feel Meadowhall has taken shops away from the city centre of Sheffield and other local cities.	Meadowhall is only really OK for clothes shopping.	It's warmer and less rainy than town, and you don't get pestered as you're walking along.
You can never find anywhere to park: it's 'Meadow hell' for me	I watched the once great shopping centre of Rotherham disappear with the opening of Meadowhall.	The shops all keep changing.
I stopped going when they banned smoking.	I always end up with a headache after being in there. I prefer the fresh air, where you can avoid the buggies and kids.	I think Sheffield would have a much better city centre if it were not for Meadowhall.
I think Meadowhall is brilliant. There are so many shops.	I 'liked' Meadowhall on Facebook and now I get all the latest news. Clever!	It gets full of teenagers at the weekend. It's where they all hang out.

Sort the comments into either **IN FAVOUR OF** or **AGAINST** the out-of-town retail park developments such as Meadowhall.

Place the comments on a continuum from **POSITIVE** to **NEGATIVE** aspects of the centre, with the 'most positive' statement at one end, and the 'most negative' statement at the other.



7. The world's first supermarket is generally considered to be King Kullen in New York. This opened in a former garage in 1930 and introduced the idea of self-service and the checkout system, which continues today. Ask your parents or grandparents to describe shopping when they were your age. What differences have they noticed? Remember that it was not so long ago that shops stayed closed on Sunday.

Useful webpages

Meadowhall Centre website: <http://www.meadowhall.co.uk>

BBC Class Clip: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/out-of-town-shopping-centres/8195.html>

BBC Class Clip: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/sheffield-redevelopment-and-employment/9361.html>

Redevelopment of The Moor in Sheffield: <http://www.cuddy-group.com/wp-content/uploads/moor.pdf> and <http://www.moorsheffield.com/overview.htm>

Guide to UK shopping centres: <http://mediamaps.esri.com/UKShoppingCentres>