

Retail in Waterford - does it need a rebrand?

A very interesting gathering took place of retailers and some experts in Waterford last Tuesday. It proved most illuminating and suggested that there is not as much retail leakage to other areas as is popularly felt. There is only a small minority of shoppers going to Cork, Kilkenny and Dublin, over 70 per cent shop in Waterford according to a data project by AIB based on shopping using credit and debit cards,

Online shopping is growing and is up to 20 per cent against 80 per cent in store.

Younger people under 35 are shopping online more for clothes, footwear and electronic goods. In Waterford, it was felt that there was a need for Waterford to get a better name for branding, which came up in the discussion at a special breakfast workshop organised by Waterford Chamber of Commerce, Waterford Enterprise office and AIB.

There had been one in the past called the Merchants Quarter that was proposed by Waterford Chamber and worth revisiting again.

David Fitzsimmons reckoned that there are good examples out there and Waterford had the potential to improve. He gave Kildare Village as a good example of customer service and how retailers staff there have good standards and training. There is a list of annual events or festivals going on in Waterford for the year like Spraoi and Winterval, which are very successful. This brings crowds into the city and boosts business.



Another idea that was not floated relates to a strong outdoor market that could be in Waterford for food, crafts, clothes and items not often stocked in shops. This works very well in Belfast, Cork with the English market, Limerick, we have written in the past how towns in the UK like Gravesend and Basildon, as well as Heald in Manchester have thriving markets that are all weather. These are covered Victorian markets revitalised, Swansea in Wales also has one.

Given our Winterval success Waterford could be the leading market destination for a regional city. If the right location, traders and operators were found. In Gravesend, they found they complemented the retailers and some operated both types. The Belfast markets are also successful at weekends. This brings a social element to shopping, having music and events in city is also a draw, like the Harvest Festival and Spraoi that we have currently.

There is much to do and with a new young breed of retailers much could be achieved.

The north wharf did not get a big mention but that is on the horizon also.

In the meantime, rather than waiting Waterford retailers and shoppers need to support one another and maintain jobs. We only need look at other locations, where they work well - Killarney in Kerry is a great example. More can be done and is possible.