PROPERTY: SHOPPING CENTRES

A GRAND DAY OUT

Following a year of makeovers and extensions, MetroCentre has beaten fierce competition to regain its crown as the UK's most attractive shopping centre. **Jennifer Creevy** says adding value is now the ticket to success

Shopping centres can no longer rely on having the right range of shops to draw in customers. Nowadays, with choice so vast and competition so fierce, centres have to offer a broad range of stores, sufficient catering outlets, transport links, car parking and an array of other leisure facilities from cinemas to bowling alleys. And, according to the latest *Going Shopping 2006* report, MetroCentre in Gateshead comes top of its rankings for all-round attractiveness.

The report, released this week, which is compiled every 18 months by Trevor Wood Associates in conjunction with Savills, knocks Bluewater off the top spot in favour of MetroCentre. Ranked on a points system for attractiveness across several categories, including tenant mix, transport links, catering offer and whether it is enclosed or open, MetroCentre has worked hard over the past 18 months to extend, reconfigure and draw in new tenants while improving its overall offer.

"Bluewater has not lost any of its attractiveness, but MetroCentre has worked extremely hard to improve, extend and attract new tenants and that has pushed it up to the top spot," says Trevor Wood Associates director Trevor Wood.

Savills director Chris Blair says that, in terms of scale, Bluewater and MetroCentre will always rank among the top shopping centres, but the bigger issue is the level of added extras that a scheme has to offer. "Schemes can't just rely on shops any more – everything from catering to leisure and transport needs to be considered, so shoppers can make it a full day out," he says.

The two highest climbers in the top 10 were East Kilbride shopping centre and the Manchester Arndale. Scotland's East Kilbride Shopping Centre rocketed in at number eight – up from 124 – while Manchester Arndale moved to ninth place from 21.

East Kilbride has completed a period of consolidation with the partnership between Land Securities and British Land, which merged five shopping centres. Meanwhile, Manchester Arndale completed its redevelopment and extension last year.

East Kilbride was formed from the former Centre West, Olympia, Princes Mall, Princes Square, Southgate and Plaza shopping centres. The resulting 1.2 million sq ft (110,550 sq m) scheme, anchored by Debenhams, Marks & Spencer, Primark and Co-op, enters the top 10 for the first time.

Manchester Arndale completed the last phase of its redevelopment in September. It now covers 1.4 million sq ft (130,060 sq m) and has signed retailers including Apple, Aldo, Coast and Hotel Chocolat.

In the top 100, there are two new entries: Chapelfield shopping centre in Norwich and Drake Circus in Plymouth. Capital Shopping Centre's Chapelfield scheme opened in September 2005, anchored by House of Fraser. P&O Estates' Drake Circus opened more than a year later in October 2006, anchored by Marks & Spencer, Next and Primark.

The list of top tenants across the UK's shopping centres has remained fairly consistent since the 2004 survey. Ranked according to number of units and the dominance of the shopping centres where they are located, Clinton Cards tops the list, followed by Claire's Accessories, then Boots. Claire's Accessories pushed Boots down one place, while Game came fourth this year, pushing New Look into fifth.

Those retailers that featured in more than 60 per cent of the top 100 schemes in both this year's survey and the 2004 survey are a mix of familiar names, as well as an influx of mobile phone shops. They include Boots, Claire's Accessories, Clarks, Clinton Cards, Game, The Link, Next, New Look, Phones 4U and Vodafone.

The retailers that appear in more than 60 per cent of the top 100 schemes in just the 2006 survey are JD Sports, Orange, River Island, The Perfume Shop, O_2 and Carphone Warehouse. "Retailers such as O_2 and Carphone Warehouse have come out of nowhere to feature in the majority of shopping centres and the way mobile phone shops are expanding, we are likely to see their presence increase over the next 18 months," says Wood.

Blair says mobile phone shops are much more accepted these days by landlords. "Technology is so important – to a certain extent it runs our lives – and mobile phones do so much more these days that they are essential," he says. "There is a recognition that they add to the offer in a centre and shoppers expect to see them there. Plus, they offer a good service."

Blair explains that the store designs

TOP FIVE SHOPPING CENTRES

METROCENTRE

Capital Shopping Centres' 1.8 million sq ft (168,890 sq m) two-level enclosed MetroCentre in Gateshead is the largest scheme in Europe. This year, it regained the top spot it lost to Bluewater in 2000 after significant redevelopment and improvement in its tenant mix. It has added the red and blue malls and made space for several new tenants. Primark opened in the former Littlewoods unit and other recent lettings include Monsoon Accessorize, Coast and Dune.

BLUEWATER

Lend Lease's Bluewater shopping centre has lost its crown this year, although its score has remained level. The 1.6 million sq ft (149,570 sq m) scheme at Dartford in Kent has made changes to its tenant mix. Habitat – a key homewares tenant – is due to come out of the centre this year, but will be replaced by Urban Outfitters. Other new tenants include Murphy & Nye and Hotel Chocolat. One of its anchors, Marks & Spencer, unveiled its revamped store late last year.

MEADOWHALL

British Land's Meadowhall shopping centre in Sheffield could well improve its rank next year, because the centre is undergoing a redevelopment and extension. The £50 million extension will add 59,530 sq ft (5,530 sq m) of retail space and create an upper mall walkway in the Market Street area of the centre. The surrendered Sainsbury's unit will be reconfigured into several retail units with additional mezzanine space. Primark is opening an anchor store in August and Next will relocate to an adjacent larger unit in the same month.

TRAFFORD CENTRE

Peel Holdings' 1.6 million sq ft (148,640 sq m) Trafford Centre in Manchester has increased its appeal following the redevelopment of its Festival Village and the extension of the scheme, which led to a John Lewis department store opening in May 2005. The scheme has also placed greater emphasis on its catering offer: Café Rouge, Giraffe and Pizza Express all opened here in 2006. Its Great Hall extension opens later this year and will house Zinc Bar, Zinc Grill and Costa Coffee.

LAKESIDE

Capital Shopping Centres' Lakeside shopping centre in Thurrock is being remodelled to make space for new tenants at present. The 1.4 million sq ft (130,340 sq m) three-level enclosed scheme added Primark to its list of anchors in December 2005. Since then, several other openings have included the first standalone Virgin Mobile store and the first UK store for French childrenswear retailer Du Pareil Au Meme.

and fascias of mobile phone shops are now world's apart from when they started out. "The 3 shops or Orange shops that are opening look great and completely different to older formats, such as The Link," he says.

According to Blair, landlords are still cautious about where to place mobile phone shops, because they don't want a row of four or five together in a shopping centre. "As long as they are carefully placed into the mix, they have a place in shopping centres," he insists.

The survey also highlighted the increase in Sunday trading activity among the 500 leading shopping centres. The market is fast approaching saturation point, with 87 per cent of these schemes trading every Sunday and 99 per cent open on Sundays in the run-up to Christmas.

All the schemes in the top 100 open every Sunday throughout the year and, of these, 36 incorporate a food court, 22 have cinemas, 11 have libraries, five have bowling alleys and 13 have fitness or leisure centres.

"The fact that most centres are now open on Sundays is no surprise, because accessibility is key to maintaining loyal shoppers," says Wood. "And because most of the top 100 schemes also have other leisure facilities and catering offers, it provides further evidence that centres need to provide a good day out, have something to interest all the family and be open and accessible whenever shoppers want to go there."

Added value is definitely the theme for shopping centres in 2007 and, with the influx of new, bigger and better schemes opening this year and next, existing centres need to stay ahead of customers' expectations. RW

TOP 20 SHOPPING CENTRE TENANTS

2006 Rank	2004 Rank		Fascia	Points
1	1	-	Clinton Cards	775,249
2	3	▲	Claire's Accessories	691,140
3	2	▼	Boots	654,255
4	5	▲	Game	609,860
5	4	▼	New Look	608,927
6	7	▲	Superdrug	528,734
7	8	▲	H Samuel	492,213
8	11	▲	Thorntons	473,864
9	13	▲	Clarks	460,623
10	6	▼	Birthdays	454,777
11	27	▲	Phones 4U	444,510
12	42	▲	O2	441,987
13	34	▲	Carphone Warehouse	440,408
14	15	▲	Holland & Barrett	431,836
15	9	▼	Adams	424,816
16	26	▲	Next	420,231
17	31	▲	Greggs	414,622
18	33	▲	JD Sports	413,566
19	14	▼	WHSmith	410,098
20	24	▲	Argos	399,815

TOP 20 UK SHOPPING CENTRES

2006 Rank	2004 Rank	Scheme	Location	Points	Gross area (sq ft)
1	2	MetroCentre	Gateshead	7,771	1.8m
2	1	Bluewater	Kent	7,719	1.6m
3	3	Meadowhall	Sheffield	7,326	1.5m
4	5	The Trafford Centre	Manchester	7,028	1.6m
5	4	Lakeside Shopping Centre	Grays, Thurrock	6,764	1.4m
6	6	Merry Hill	Brierley Hill	6,427	1.5m
7	7	The centre:mk	Milton Keynes	5,928	1.3m
8	124	East Kilbride Shopping Centre	Scotland	5,514	1.2m
9	21	Manchester Arndale	Manchester	5,208	1.4m
10	9	Whitgift Centre	Croydon	4,974	1.2m
11	8	Eldon Square Shopping Centre	Newcastle-upon-Tyne	4,864	961,000
12	14	Bullring	Birmingham	4,822	1.2m
13	12	The Harlequin	Watford	4,805	726,000
14	15	The Telford Shopping Centre	Telford	4,703	1m
15	10	Festival Place	Basingstoke	4,689	850,000
16	13	The Mall at Cribbs Causeway	Bristol	4,687	750,000
17	11	Brent Cross Shopping Centre	London	4,637	855,000
18	20	Queensgate Shopping Centre	Peterborough	4,437	834,280
19	16	The Victoria Centre	Nottingham	4,386	981,000
20	17	The Arndale Shopping Centre	Luton	4,361	750,000

Source: Going Shopping 2006