

Whitgift in UK's top 10 malls

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CROYDON's original shopping mall is the 10th best centre in the UK, according to a new survey.

The Whitgift shopping centre beat hundreds of retail centres, including major malls in cities such as Nottingham, Newcastle and Bristol.

It held its own in a fiercely competitive retail environment to score highly in the survey, which was compiled by retail consultants Trevor Wood Associates and property experts, Savills.

The Going Shopping 2006 report is carried out every 18 months.

Lucy Forrester, the Whitgift's marketing manager, said: "It's really important to be recognised. We're 40 years old next year and a lot of these other centres are new. They have a broader mix and they might have a health club and cinema and we're competing alongside these people."

In the past Whitgift has been even higher in the charts, but she said it was not a case of the Centre getting worse, adding: "It's more a case of other people going up the table."

The top 10 reads like a Who's Who of the UK's top retail centres and is topped by the MetroCentre, a 1.8 million square foot complex in Gateshead.

Other nearby contenders are Bluewater in Kent, which came second, and Lakeside in Thurrock, which was fifth.

The Whitgift has more than 160 shops and welcomes more than 26 million visitors each year.

But Centrale - only opened in September 2004 and where the toilets were recently voted the best in Britain - is still only at 110, having risen 17 places.

But its size has limited its rise, said Trevor Wood, of Trevor Wood Associates: "Centrale is less than half the size of the Whitgift, therefore it's not going to have the range.

"If we were to divide the score by size of the centre, Centrale may well have had a higher score. But some of the larger centres are not even in the top 200."

Mr Wood would not reveal the exact scores the Whitgift and Centrale got, but said that all contenders were ranked according to an analysis of their selection of shops, transport links, environment and catering facilities.

The ranking system also takes into account whether the centres are open on Sundays and have longer opening hours at Christmas and the parking facilities. It even takes into account the turnover of the retailers, so poorly performing or unpopular shops can lower the score.

Mr Wood added: "Part of the reason Centrale has risen is that there were vacant units in 2004. I would expect the centre to increase slightly more next year."

He expected the proposed Park Place development to be high up the table straight away once it was open. "I would expect it to be in the top 50, even possibly in the top 20," he said.

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