



first stop **local shop**

Buying into the Forest's Retailers

www.firststoplocalshop.co.uk

Toolkit Launched To Help Retailers Combat Credit Crunch

Busy lifestyles, out-of-town shopping centres and the increase in internet sales have caused many people to drift away from our market towns.

And with the credit crunch biting, the Forest of Dean District Council in Gloucestershire has launched a free, interactive toolkit crammed with practical ideas in a timely bid to help UK towns woo shoppers back to their high streets.

The toolkit, available at www.firststoplocalshop.co.uk/go/toolkit pulls together the lessons learned from a successful three-year 'First Stop Local Shop' local retail support programme, launched after a report estimated that £100 million was being spent outside the Forest by local people every year - known as 'retail leakage'.

In a bid to encourage people to support their local high street retailers, the council forged a partnership with small businesses and launched the 'First Stop Local Shop' campaign in the four local market towns, with the support of £250,000 investment from the Gloucestershire Rural Renaissance Programme, managed by Gloucestershire First.

Richard Morgan, First Stop Local Shop Project Officer said: "Retail leakage is a problem shared by countless rural towns across the UK. We wanted to share a wealth of hard-won experience with other towns looking to support retailers during the economic downturn and beyond."

As a result of the First Stop Local Shop campaign, 9,000 local shoppers now carry the 'Forest Rewards' loyalty card which can be used in 140 shops. Customer footfall is up by 28% from 2003, while almost 90% of retailers surveyed have reported heightened awareness of their businesses.

The project used the marketing techniques of corporate competitors to raise awareness of, encourage and sustain local shopping.

A loyalty card, shopping magazines and gift vouchers were launched, along with a tailored programme of training for retailers which helped small independent shops compete more effectively with bigger chain stores. Grants helped them raise much-needed finance to improve their shop fronts.

Sharon Cinderey, partnership member and owner of Clothes Plus in Cinderford is full of praise for the initiative: "It's been great to be able to sing about the good things we have got," she said. "The funding allowed us to have free advertising which was done so professionally and distributed to such a target audience - something which, as a small business, I would be unable to afford."

Claire Edwards from Gloucestershire First, which manages the Rural Renaissance programme, said: "The First Stop Local Shop retail support programme has been very successful in the market towns of the Forest of Dean. Other towns in Gloucestershire like Tewkesbury, where the community was devastated by last year's floods, as well as Cirencester, are developing retail programmes along similar lines as a result. We are

delighted that other communities around the UK can now share the skills and knowledge that have been learned through this Toolkit."

The interactive toolkit, downloadable free from www.firststoplocalshop.co.uk/go/toolkit details the different retail support projects, tried and tested over three years, complete with top tips for success and printer-friendly information sheets.

The Gloucestershire Rural Renaissance programme, managed by Gloucestershire First, is now fully committed. It is investing £8 million in projects across the county to boost the rural economy and improve access to services. £4 million of that investment comes from the South West Regional Development Agency – the largest amount the Agency has invested in any county across the region to date. The rest comes from the public and private sectors. For more information, see www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/ruralrenaissance