

# A site for sore eyes

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## Geography teaching resource

### College



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## Introduction

The High Street in many UK cities is facing renewed challenges. These arise partly from the continued development of out-of-town shopping opportunities and online shopping (which accounted for 18% of UK turnover in 2013) There has also been a reduction in spending as the financial crisis which started in 2008 continues to impact on some sectors of the population, and people are more cautious with spending, as outlined in a Parliamentary report published in June 2014. (Ref: <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn06186.pdf> )

Despite this gloomy prognosis, many new businesses open up each year, and companies are also looking to expand, as there are plenty of possible locations available. Vacancy rates in some towns are higher than others, but many town centres have retail premises which are currently empty. The rate of vacancy is reported from time to time, and organisations like the Local Data company use this data to advise companies (see the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXm02kCy7jc> )

This activity explores the decisions that companies have to make when choosing where to locate a new business in a small town. It is a good idea to keep the scale of the location fairly small, so that a manageable survey can be done – ideally this would be done in association with some fieldwork, but that is not essential.



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## Context

The activity is based on the opening of a new optician's premises called '**Spectacular Eyes Everyday**' (**SEE**). The owner of the company has engaged a firm of consultants (the students / groups of students) to choose a suitable property for the firm to move into. They have a number of stipulations for the property, which match those of many companies looking to locate a shop. Similar factors apply for industrial activities, such as manufacturing.

This activity could also be used as a vehicle for teaching the theory of industrial location, and how it has been affected by changes in technology and communication since the original theories were developed.

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One advantage of choosing an **optician** is that they act as a service as well as a retail business, and also require personal contact – it is hard to do an eye test over the internet.

You can locate the activity in any city which you choose. Check that all the supporting information that might be required is available for your chosen location. This could also be connected with a fieldwork activity, or a visit to / contact with an existing optician. It is also possible to change the context to a different shop or service to suit your existing schemes of work

Enquiry questions: ***What factors determine whether a shop succeeds or fails?***

## Starter



Who wears spectacles in the teaching set, or on the staff? Identify before the lesson a number of factors which might be taken into account when choosing which opticians they use and why they choose them. A few examples are provided in the '**Views on spectacles**' page, toward the end of the resource. These can be provided once students have given their ideas – do they match?

These decisions were made by real consumers, and the retailers have to bear them in mind when they make their decision as to where to locate, but locations is only one factor in the success of any business. Explain how the Ordnance Survey uses their mapping to help retail customers, as described in this press release:

*Supermarket chains use GIS to help site new stores and to plan their distribution networks. By comparing how many people live within 15-minutes drive time of a particular location with the number of supermarkets already trading in that area, the GIS can identify suitable locations with an optimised catchment area. Supermarket chains also use socio-economic data to create profiles of the people in their catchment areas to help them understand which other parts of the country are likely to be successful growth areas.*

## Factors to take into account

Traditional industrial location factors include the following:

- Market
- Competition
- Suitability of site / premises and opportunities for expansion
- Rental rates
- Demographics of area

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These involve an element of location to them. Ultimately, as with buying a house, the phrase 'location, location, location' is relevant.

## Activity

1. Identify a town or city where the activity is going to be based. This could be a place that the students have some familiarity with, or which you could access on a fieldwork visit for additional value and authenticity.
2. Choose a type of business which is going to be used as the example. For the purposes of this worked example, we are going to use an **optician**, but you can feel free to adapt this for your own purposes – perhaps to fit in with an existing **case study** which you use.
3. Organise students into groups, and explain that they are going to be taking the role of a team of consultants who advise companies on where to locate their business / shops.
4. Provide them with a range of resources to help them make the decision, start with the **consultancy letter** (at the end of the resource), which sets out the task.

### Tip

Identify suitable vacant properties before the activity starts using StreetView or your local knowledge, or create a list of properties which are nominally 'vacant' for the purposes of the activity if you want to engineer it a little more, or use an area that is unfamiliar to the students.

Use Digimap for Colleges to summarise the nature of the area which is being used in terms of its suitability for the proposed business. Are there plenty of potential customers? Good transport links? Other opticians operating within the area?

## Identifying the valuations of properties

A retail property has to pay rates based on the size and location of its premises.

1. Google the postcode of a property in the area you are exploring
2. If the area you are exploring is in England or Wales, visit the Valuation Office Agency website: <http://www.2010.voa.gov.uk/rli/en/basic/find> or if the area you are exploring is in Scotland, visit the Scottish Assessors Association website: <http://www.saa.gov.uk>
3. Enter the postcode to get the rateable values of properties at the postcode by address
4. Use a field visit, or map of properties, or Google StreetView to match the locations to the map that you have provided students with, and identify the rateable values for similar properties to the ones that you are going to be identifying as possible sites.
5. You may want to add an extra section to the task, which is to identify a limit on the rateable value for the premises that the students identify

### Tip 1

Google Street View can offer a (rather unscientific) eye on some of these factors using the imagery that was captured by the cameras the street view car drove past the shops. This will not be possible in areas that are completely pedestrianised, as the Street View car would not have had access to the street. Quite a few High Streets in cities will have this issue.

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Students could create a map identifying suitable sites, with a **coloured polygon** using the annotation tools.

The symbols in the annotation tools could also be used to produce a map showing how rateable values vary along a section of the High Street in the chosen town, to show how particular areas vary in their accessibility to small businesses. This sometimes explains the clustering of shops in certain parts of the town centre. The Portas Review of the High Street identified high business rates as one challenge for shops to overcome.



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## Demographic profiling

A range of profiling tools have been made available to make use of data on the social and demographic profile of urban areas. These include CACI's ACORN and Experian's MOSAIC. One tool which is freely-available to use is Beacon Dodsworth's profiling tool: <http://www.beacon-dodsworth.co.uk/webservices/p2-profiling.htm>

Enter the postcode of an area to identify the type of people who are likely to be living there. Is there a typical demographic for a 'spectacle wearer'? Are older people more likely to wear spectacles or contact lenses than younger people for example?

You can identify a postcode using the Royal Mail's tool: <http://www.royalmail.com/find-a-postcode> which allows up to 50 searches from a computer each day.

## Plenary

Produce a report as requested by the business, along with the required information.

Use a map displayed on the whiteboard in the classroom to act as a backdrop as each group outlines their suggested location, and the reasons for selecting it.

You could perhaps use a colleague (or student from an older or younger age group) to act as the 'client' and make a final choice, perhaps based on the factors that were originally discussed, and the extent to which each group fulfilled the brief.

See the letter for further tasks that could be set, such as the creation of marketing materials to get customers from within the local area. How do business use social media and other tools to market themselves?

## References

There are some similar activities which could be used for comparative purposes, or as inspiration for further development or extension of the task:

Rotherham United's new stadium:

<http://www.geography.org.uk/projects/livinggeography/rotherham/locatinganewstadium/> - would be useful to compare with the actual location that was eventually chosen, and which has now been built in an area called 'New York'.

How well do you know your area?

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/HTMLDocs/dvc147/index.html> - a quiz testing local knowledge of the type that consultants like you should have!

Portas Review of the High Street (2011)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-portas-review-the-future-of-our-high-streets>

*See more recent press coverage too.*

### Views on Spectacles

*These are real comments from real people, when they were asked "Which optician do you use, and why?"*

Boots: Frames I actually liked in were in the cheapest range. Specsavers promised much, but cheaper ranges were ugly.

Vision Express: because it was local, quick and carried a large stock of specs!

Boots: as always done. Independents are exorbitant.

Tesco: They usually offer free sight tests, and I can use my Clubcard vouchers to buy the specs - 4x face value

Independent: Used to be Specsavers 12 miles away, but I shifted to a new small independent to support business in my home town.

Vision Express: Used to work for them. They have in-house labs so glasses and any problems can usually be sorted in-store, which means less waiting!

Independent: I use a local independent optician. They've a personal interest in test accuracy and return business - not in meeting sales targets

Vision Express: I used to always be with Specsavers, but prefer the range of glasses at Vision Express now.

Specsavers: Cost and convenience – two pairs for the price of one

Vision Express: you get Nectar points

**Spectacular: Eyes Everyday**  
50 Lens Road  
Seaview  
Norfolk  
NE1 U82

Dear Sir / Madam

***Request for consultancy on new business premises***

Our company is looking to locate new premises for our 2<sup>nd</sup> store. We currently operate in a small town nearby, and are looking to expand our business.

We would like to use your expertise to find us suitable premises. We have the following guidelines for you as background:

- the site needs to be of a reasonable size for a display area and consulting room and offices – we don't need a large site, but it must be similar in size to other optician's premises
- rates must be reasonably low compared to stores such as WH Smiths or other chain stores operating in the town
- we would like to be in an area with fairly high footfall (lots of pedestrians walking past the shop)
- staff parking may be an issue – we would like to be close to a car park if possible

We would like you to provide us with the following items:

- a map which shows the potential site, and one other alternative
- details on why you think this would make a good site, with ***at least three pieces of evidence*** as to why
- supporting information on the importance of selecting a good location for a business to thrive
- ideas on how we could market our business within the town to attract new customers

On completion of this task, we will process payment for your services

Best wishes

I. C. Clearly

*Managing Director*