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Oct 30 2009 by Anna Blackaby

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Birmingham lags behind all the other major UK cities in the ratio of independent coffee shops to chain outlets according to new nationwide research

Fifty-five per cent of coffee shops in Birmingham are independently-run compared to 79 per cent in Cardiff and 77 per cent in Edinburgh according to research by the Local Data Company (LDC)

The LDC figures which are likely to fuel criticism that Birmingham's independent retail offering is overshadowed by other cities show a nationwide boom in coffee shop chains like Starbucks and Costa Coffee opening up last year

Despite the recession the sector grew by a massive 47 per cent across the UK during the period

According to the analysis multiples only increased by 4.9 per cent across the UK's top ten cities suggesting that it was rural areas which have seen the bulk of the growth

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the sector now makes up 70 per cent of the coffee shop market nationwide, taking one per cent from the multiples

Ian Fletcher, director of policy at the British Property Federation, said: "As much as people would like chocolate-box high streets that are perfectly planned, clearly you can't fight the market and there's obviously a continued demand for coffee. Any retail success is a good thing for landlords."

Researchers pointed to an influx of newly-redundant businesspeople with laptops and Blackberries making use of the cheap, connected space offered by coffee shops to drum up work.

James Moss, director at Curzon Investment Property, said the downturn had actually helped the sector as businesspeople are shunning restaurants as venues for meetings.

"Because of the recession, many more business meetings are held over coffee rather than expensive meals. And with an increasingly mobile workforce, the rise of wi-fi has meant that more and more people can spend their days working in coffee shops."

"With the market likely to be worth £12 billion by 2012, clearly that's going to leave a bitter taste in the mouth of British tea punts."

The researchers said there were significant opportunities in areas like Birmingham which had a lower density of coffee shops and where the recession had made high streets more affordable than they once were.

The research found that Birmingham, along with Leeds, Manchester and Cardiff were well below average in the number of outlets per head of shopper population whereas Central London, Edinburgh and Bristol all have a higher number of coffee shops per person.

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