

STORES

The grocer has unveiled a new interior at a Surrey store as part of its 'Format Flex' experiment to better cater to local needs. **John Ryan** looks at what it means

Morrisons' flexible f

One definition of a brand is a set of signals that combine to tell you what you're looking at. In the case of the largest supermarkets that consists largely of a series of colours and a materials palette that mean even if the logo is absent, you'll know exactly where you are.

Travel to Weybridge, however, and on the way into the small Surrey commuter town there's a supermarket that the shopper might struggle to identify if she were beamed down into its aisles.

Sure the colours are there – green and yellow with a smattering of red to indicate deals etc – so it must be a Morrisons.

But then there are the chiller and freezer units – long runs of internally LED-lit top-to-bottom clear glass stretching away into the distance and flanking the fresh food offer at the front of the store. Unfamiliar?

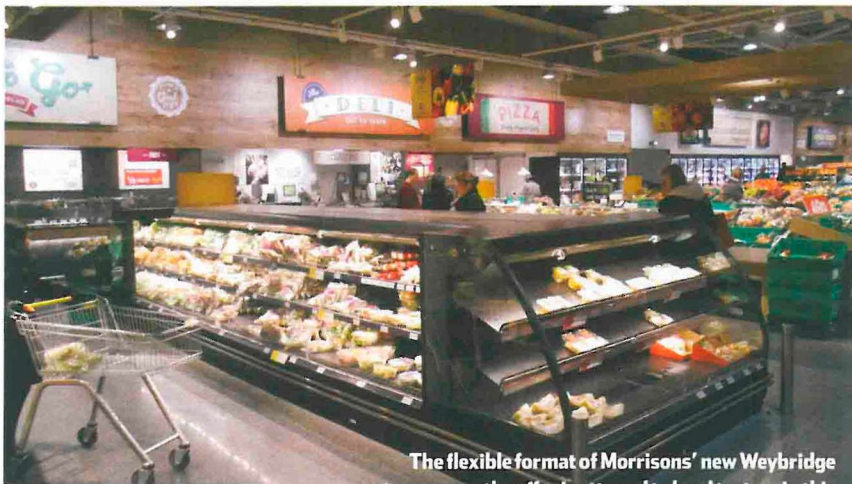
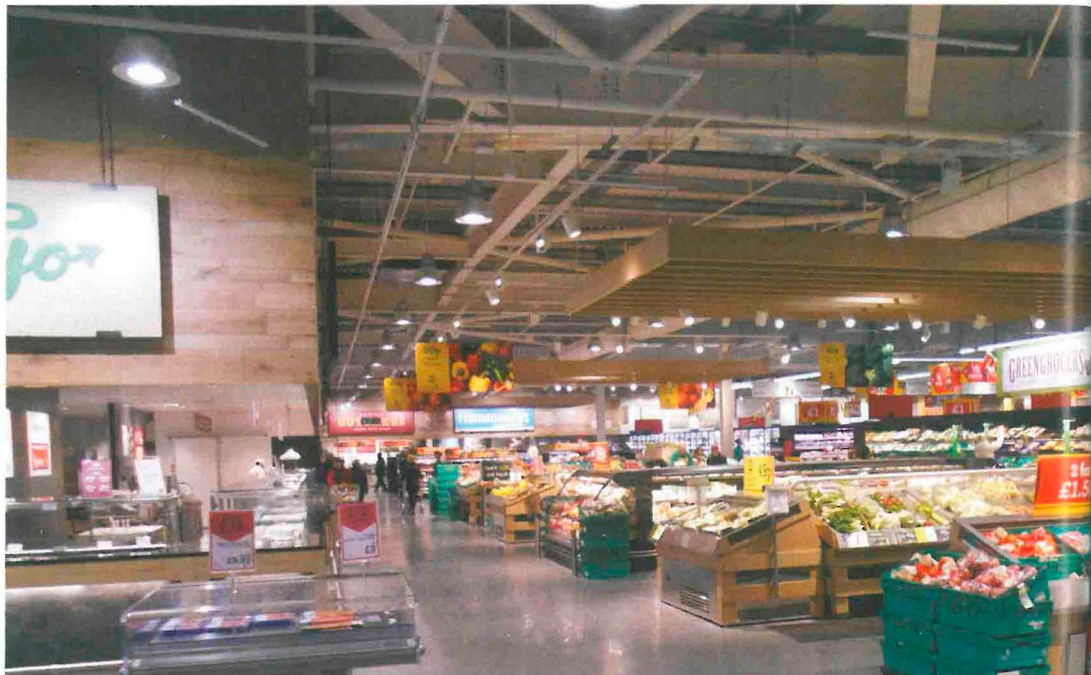
The mid-shop provides a measure of reassurance. There's a mister unit blowing clouds of water over some fancy veg, but beyond this there are wooden louvred ceiling rafts, just like Tesco, and the food-to-go counters to have wooden planked canopies.

The floor is a shiny, flecked grey terrazzo and the ceiling has pendant lights whose origin is up among the steel rafters that support the roof. Were it not for the giveaway that is a variation on the familiar Morrisons Market Street along the left-hand perimeter and the circular floor decal that reads "We now price match Aldi and Lidl", the visitor might be foxed.

All in all then, this is a Morrisons, just not a very familiar one. Indeed, it has about it rather more of a Continental supermarket coupled with a smattering of new-look Tesco or Waitrose than a normal Morrisons.

Community-focused

It is what the grocer is dubbing a 'Format Flex' store. It is a bespoke shop and perhaps goes to show that while Dalton Philips is heading for the exit door, the spirit of experiment



The flexible format of Morrisons' new Weybridge store means the offer is attuned to local tastes; in this case, there is an emphasis on fresh produce

MORRISONS 'FLEX' STORE, WEYBRIDGE

Location Monument Hill, Weybridge
Size 33,000 sq ft
Opened November 2014
Design In-house and M Worldwide
Ambience Continental
Other 'flex' lab stores Milton Keynes (opened this week) and Birtley (opening April)

that he, to an extent, embodied, may continue after he departs, new chief executive permitting.

The interior has been created by the in-house team, working with consultancy M Worldwide, to cater for the perceived needs of a specific location.

Andy Newton, director of format and space at Morrisons, says that Weybridge is a reorganisation of what's already in place in other branches across the portfolio: "This is not a new

format. This is where we flex our formats to be relevant for particular communities." He notes that in Weybridge, the major competitor is Waitrose and that the new store is in part a response to that.

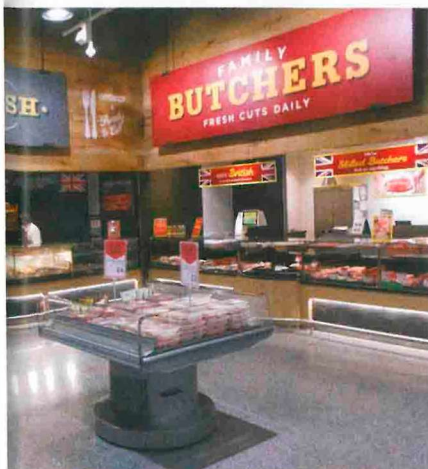
In the well-heeled 4x4 environs of Weybridge that means a strong emphasis on fresh and that is apparent from the moment the store is entered.

Newton says: "We've tried a

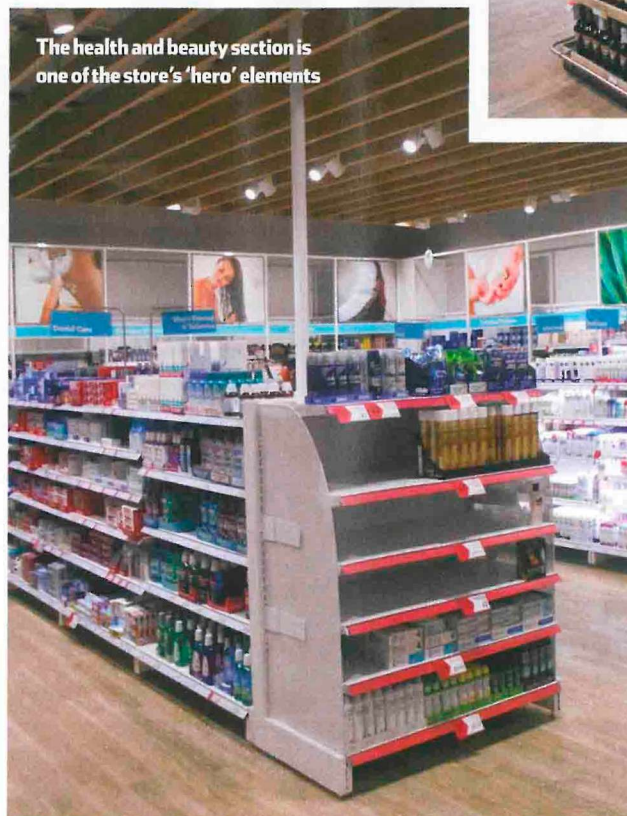
For more pictures of the Weybridge store and other stores visit Retail-week.com/stores



riend in Weybridge



The health and beauty section is one of the store's 'hero' elements



Were it not for the giveaway of the variation on the familiar Market Street, the visitor might be foxed

different look and feel for our counters. We've tried a different supplier for them. We've used them before, but not for the counters."

Things do look different and as Newton remarks, this also has a lot to do with the lighting: "When we did the original lighting for the store, we put different lighting across the whole space, but we wound that back a bit." That means that the fresh area at the front of the store, the perimeter and the semi-discrete shop-in-shops that are at the other end of the 33,000 sq ft shop, are where the most obvious differences are apparent.

The Nutmeg kids' clothing area, the health and beauty space and the wine, beer and spirits shop, all on the perimeter, are 'hero' elements in the store.

And all of them boast the same wooden ceiling rafts that help to turn the space underneath them into something on which the eye will focus. ▶

STORES

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What has been done elevates the whole towards Waitrose territory

► There is a cleanliness of execution about what has been done that once more elevates the whole towards Waitrose territory and makes this an appropriate addition to the Weybridge retail landscape.

The middle of the shop is largely the home of ambient merchandise and is where the deal alley, cutting across the middle of the store, is located. In spite of the new floor and the better-looking display units and chiller cabinets, this does not feel more like a standard Morrisons and has substantially less wow about it than the rest of the store.

And so to the checkouts. There are 14, which make this a medium-sized supermarket – not a convenience outfit, but certainly a long way from any kind of food retail behemoth.

They are accompanied by a handful of self-scan checkouts and beyond this, there is the cafe. The latter is a new design for Morrisons and while it has not been specifically created for Weybridge, it is in few other locations so far.

On the early evening of visiting there were relatively few people in the cafe. But it did look a pleasant haven for the mothers and children in it who were presumably looking for somewhere to go after the rigours of a supermarket shop and before heading back to the large car park beneath the store.

More flex formats

It may still be a while before Morrisons Weybridge gains acceptance from the genteel types found in this



The cafe provides weary shoppers with an opportunity for refreshment



neck of the woods, but it would be churlish to say this one isn't in with a chance. It is, however, just one of three stores in which new elements are on trial for the retailer. A

'Format Flex' Morrisons in Milton Keynes opened last week, aimed more at catering for the needs of young families in the area.

Newton says there has been a focus on raising the game as far as the health and beauty and baby areas in this store are concerned.

But he notes that the Milton Keynes store is "a return to a more standard Morrisons look and feel".

It is, and north of Milton Keynes lies the nascent Birtley store, in Gateshead, due to open in April.



Details on how this will be a reflection of its location are scant, but it seems reasonable to assume that it will be different once more.

Meanwhile, the Weybridge store has been trading for close to two months and Newton says that, among other things, there has been a "tick up in wine compared to control stores". If anything were to do well in Weybridge it would be a fair guess that it might be wine, but detailed research on what works and what doesn't is now under way, according to Newton.

As Dalton Philips' tenure in the top job at Morrisons comes to an end it seems likely that the new boss, whoever it turns out to be, will be keeping a close eye on what is happening in Surrey.

Making stores appropriate to a location is one of retail's Holy Grails, and with Weybridge, in spite of Morrisons' well-documented problems, the grocer may have come a step closer to creating something that can work in this manner. ■

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