

STORES

Wickes is testing softening its DIY offer. John Ryan heads down to Kent to take a look at how the move could reposition the retailer's place in the market

WICKES SHOWS ITS



It's got our name on it' became almost as much of an advertising catchphrase as 'Every little helps'. The latter is Tesco, as if that needed to be spelt out, and the former is perhaps the only DIY outfit that has managed to create a memorable strapline: Wickes. Its slogan has now morphed into 'Let's do it right', and there is also change afoot in its stores.

Head down to Chatham, the historic Medway town, and shoppers will find a Wickes, but one with some significant differences. It is one of two new-look Wickes stores – the other is in Doncaster – that have opened in recent weeks with little fanfare, but which may represent a future direction for the retailer.

Testing the water

Wickes is aimed at the hard(er)-end DIY shopper as well as 'trade' customers, which separates it by some distance from home improvement retailer Homebase, with B&Q occupying a position somewhere between the two.

It also competes with Screwfix, the trade DIY and builders' merchant retailer, which is at present a stellar performer for the Kingfisher Group and shows little sign of flagging while many of its rivals consider their options.

Screwfix's increasing hold on the trade customer asks Wickes some difficult questions about its own options and position in the market. Focusing on softer-end DIY (aka home improvement) would involve a major rethink. Yet soft-end DIY, on the evidence of the Chatham store, is where it is heading, or at least it is testing the water.

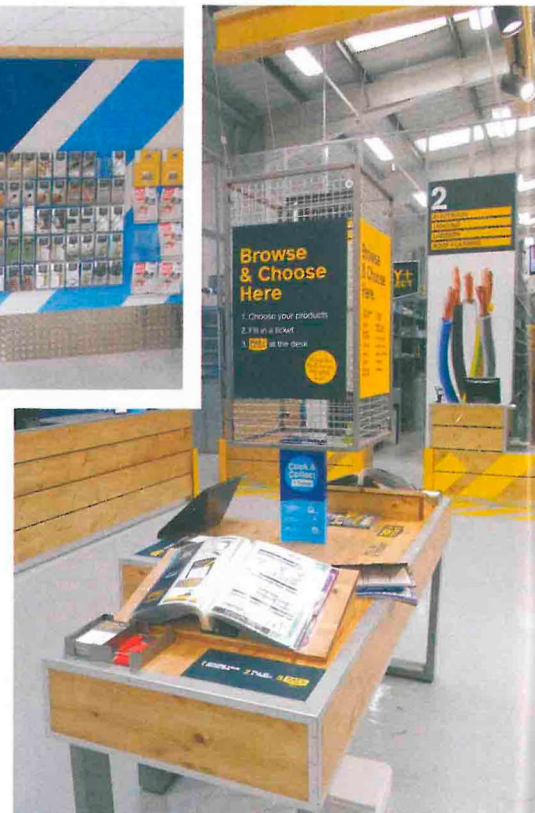
From the outside, this is a standard urban periphery retail shed. It is in a distinctly secondary location where rents will be lower, customer parking is free and access is still relatively straightforward. As such it is a typical DIY site and it looks, with the exception of an updated Wickes logo in blue and white, like many of the retailer's other branches.

But it does have differences – 4,000 of



them – in the shape of new products. And 'kitchens' and 'bathrooms' are flagged in bold letters across the fascia. On the other side of the logo, which occupies a central position above the door, the same font is used to announce 'building materials'. This does make it look as though Wickes is covering its options from one end of the DIY spectrum to the other.

Inside the entrance there is a foyer with a blue board bearing the message: 'Welcome to Chatham. Get help for your projects right here.' This is standard stuff at the DIY enthusiast, rather than trade, end of the market, but it does provide a signal about what is to follow when

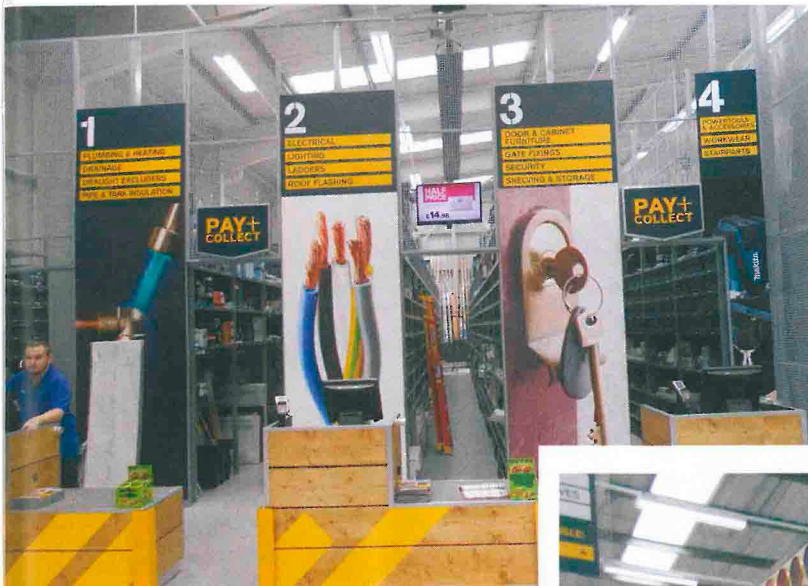
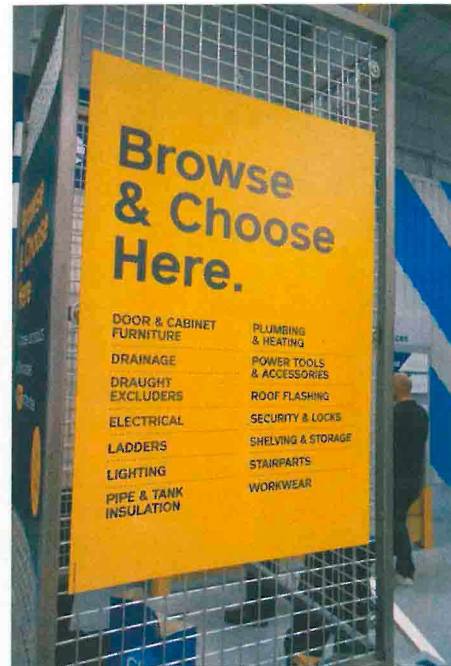


More pictures of Wickes' new-look DIY store in Chatham on Retail-week.com/wickeschatham



SOFT SIDE

WICKES, CHATHAM
Store status Trial
Opened March 2015
Ambience Hard-end DIY meets home improvement
Store design Household
Future A possible avenue for Wickes to gain market share

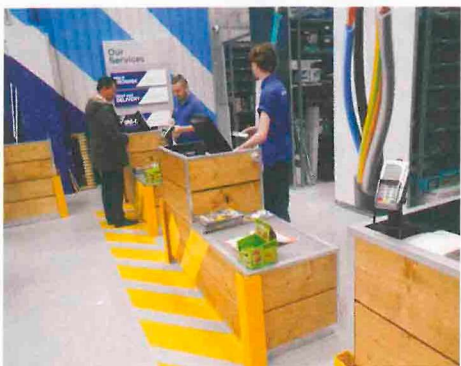


the shopper ventures further into the store. Beyond the foyer there is a cash desk to the right and a 'Here to help' area to the left. Both are clad in untreated timber. Again, there is nothing terribly remarkable about that perhaps, but this layout does allow an uninterrupted view of the rest of the store. This divides in two and traditional DIY tools and materials occupy 12 aisles to the left while bathrooms and kitchens are presented as a series of semi-roomsets on the right. It is likely that prior to entering the main part of the store the DIY shopper will at least

“This new-look Wickes store may represent a future direction for the retailer”

pause in the 'Here to help' area, to take in the bold use of blue, white and yellow. Coupled with more untreated timber, it looks functional and appealing. Yellow dominates and a yellow metal frame is suspended above the space, intended to colour-code the area as the place that click-and-collectors, range browsers and help-seekers should head for. In the middle of this space there is a pair of 'Browse & choose' units. These consist of a wooden and plain metal desk with product catalogues and an iPad in case a digital display is preferred to print when browsing the range. ▶

STORES



As such this is halfway towards what Argos has done with its in-store tablet devices in its digital stores, but in Wickes, rather than ordering from the iPad, products can only be viewed and then a ticket has to be completed.

Having completed a ticket the shopper then heads to the 'Pay + collect desk', which is located on the perimeter directly behind the browsing fixtures. All good, although perhaps the experience might be improved if shoppers could order directly from the iPads and if the iPads functioned on the day of visiting.

Nonetheless, shoppers were heading for this part of the store *en masse* and there were plenty of staff on hand to help with their enquiries. The same part of the shop houses a timber and metal unit for power tools. These are, to an extent, the glamour objects of the DIY world and Wickes has chosen to give them a prominent place at the front of the shop. Throughout this part of the store, there are graphics reminding shoppers that, '1 hour collection is now available' – for those ordering online.

Immediately to the right of the shopper help and power tool area and just behind the cash desk, there is another suspended metal frame, this time in red. This is the 'deal' part of the shop, where the value-led offers are on show. As with the 'Help' part of the shop, the displays are kept relatively low-level in order to afford better views of what lies beyond.

Mixing things up

In the area behind what is, in effect, the introductory 'decompression' zone, the first thing on view is paint. Wickes stocks own-label paint and Dulux in this store. The brand has provided a 'Mixlab' where bespoke colours can be made, and it takes centre-stage in this part of the shop. Once more, this sort of thing is quite normal in soft-end DIY, but there are only two

of these – in Chatham and Doncaster – in the Wickes estate, according to a visitor from Dulux head office.

The rest of the materials and tools in this store are in many ways what those familiar with Wickes might expect in terms of its DIY offer, but the presentation is cleaner and more consumer than trade in look and feel.

It is the many roomsets, however, divided up by timber and metal screens, which give this store its soft edge. A display library, for example, showing different kitchen surfaces surmounted by graphics that read 'Imagine', 'Create' and 'Decide', makes this about home

improvement rather than DIY. As such, it would appear that Wickes has moved into the consumer mainstream. Yet it is doing so in a manner that will not alienate its trade customers – a fine line to tread.

Wickes chief marketing officer Ian Crook said: "This is just one of a number of trials throughout the country that we have been doing to help improve the business for our customers and colleagues. This shop refresh will help us to appeal to existing and potential customers in the local areas." On the evidence of shopper numbers in Chatham last week, he has a point. 📊