

FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES

SOMERSET & WILTSHIRE FSB PRESS RELEASE

PRFSB120/ 07022012

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Keep Trade Local and Help our High Streets!

The number of empty shops on UK High Streets will grow, according to a report from The Local Data Company (LDC). The expected increase will be caused by weak consumer confidence, rising unemployment and growing online sales.

Shopping in out-of-town shopping centres had risen to from 28.1% in 2000 to 31.5% in 2011. But report claims the main cause for the decline of High Street shops is online shopping.

The squeeze on retailers has never been experienced like this before, and our high streets are under threat.

But the overwhelming message from small businesses, traders and the wider public is

"It's time to support our local shops and traders – this is the only way to preserve the quality of our high streets which are the heart of our communities."

The Federation of Small Business's (FSB) Keep Trade Local campaign seeks to stem this tide of business closures; reverse the trend of decline of independent shops and defend the choice and diversity that customers deserve. The FSB is now working harder than ever to reassert the voice of small businesses at every level of government to ensure a viable future, for independent shops on and off the high streets in the UK.

Town centres need to adapt to this changing environment if they are to survive and thrive.

Ms Portas, the star of TV show Mary Queen of Shops, was appointed to advise the government on town centres in 2011. In December the FSB welcomed the findings in the Portas Review of the high streets.

The review focused on planning, parking and business rates where real change can be achieved. Simple steps, such as National Market Days and removing regulations to make it easier for people to trade in the high street, could help to reinvigorate our high streets.

As the FSB has long argued that getting these policies right is key to revitalising the country's high streets: this in turn will create jobs and encourage investment. But this can only happen if central and local Government put these recommendations in place as soon as possible.

On Saturday, the government announced that it was looking for 12 run-down High Streets in England to compete for a £1m prize as part of plans proposed by retail consultant Mary Portas. The scheme was described as a "golden ticket" for town centres by local government minister, Grant Shapps. As part of the contest, areas will bid for support from a dedicated team and Ms Portas herself.



As part of her review, Ms Portas recommended that town centres should be managed through new "town teams" who would be responsible for developing businesses in the area.

Mary Webb, FSB Chairman for Somerset and Wiltshire said:

“Sustaining a high street and a community is not only about shopping locally from independent small shops. It is about ensuring that the high street and people who live in the community have a viable sustainable future. Parking, transport, procurement, the threats of supermarkets and out-of town developments - all these issues are best dealt with by local authorities, local community groups, local businesses and local people working together. “

ENDS

Photo: from left, Colin Sandford, FSB Weston-super-Mare Chairman with John Walker, FSB National Chairman

Notes to Editors:

The FSB is Britain's biggest business organisation with over 200,000 members. In the Somerset and Wiltshire Region there are 7,500 member businesses in the 7 local Branches.

The FSB protects and promotes the interests of the self-employed and all those who run their own business.

More information is available at www.fsb.org.uk and also at the Somerset & Wiltshire Region website:

www.fsb.org.uk/somerset-and-wilts

If you require local quotes from local businesses and feedback on business issues in the Somerset and Wiltshire area please contact Mary as below:

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