

## **Embattled high street retailers call for help as closures soar**

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### **Pubs, fashion outlets and estate agents prominent among 24,205 closures recorded in the first six months of this year**

Retailers have called for “decisive action” from the government to support the UK’s battered high streets after new data showed the number of shops, pubs and restaurants lying empty has soared by more than 4,400 in the first six months of this year.

Closures increased by nearly 17% to 24,205 across 3,000 towns, cities, retail parks and shopping centres monitored by the Local Data Company. The number of new openings of shops, restaurants, pubs and other leisure destinations declined by 2.1% to 19,803 over the half year – leaving 4,402 more gaps on the high street.(...)

Pubs were among the hardest hit, with a 6.5% decline in numbers over the six-month period as people drink more at home and young people consume less alcohol, while running costs rise. Retailers experiencing the biggest losses were electrical goods stores, fashion shops and news agents. Estate agents also suffered heavy closures. (...)

The number of shoppers on the high streets and in retail parks is in decline and the rapid increase in the number of empty shops has prompted fears about the future role of town centres and what can be done to make use of retail property that may never again be wanted by retail and leisure businesses.(...)

Tom Ironside, director of business and regulation at the British Retail Consortium, said retailers’ profit margins were being squeezed by rising business rates and increased import costs. At the same time shoppers’ ability to spend had been limited by a lack of real wage growth over the last decade.

He added: “The pressure on retailers, which is contributing to store closures, will continue unless the government takes decisive action.”(...)

There are some stores still thriving, led by barbers and beauty salons – whose services cannot be replicated online. Between January and June the number of barber shops rose by 349 while an additional 160 beauty salons, 122 shoe repairers and 50 health clubs opened their doors. (...)

Adapted from the Guardian