

Creating a new sense of optimism for the nation's flagship high streets

HIGH STREETS UK'S
FOUR-POINT PLAN

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1

The Treasury must comprehensively reform the business rates system so that it is progressive, rewards investment, and supports the anchor stores which drive so much footfall to our flagship high streets.

Retail, hospitality, and leisure on our flagship high streets function as a single economy, not three separate sectors, and policy needs to reflect that. Government has rightly stepped in to support pubs, clubs, and live music venues with a 20% rates reduction – but retail and leisure are an equally vital part of the high street equation.

High Streets UK data from 2025 found over 200 retail units at risk of closure due to increasing business rates. The Treasury must develop a proposal for comprehensive reform of business rates, moving away from a system with damaging cliff edges, counterproductive incentives, and the potential for punishingly high rates to be imposed on anchor stores.

2

Police forces across the nation, guided by the Home Office, should work with high street businesses and their representative BIDs to strengthen visible policing and tackle the organised crime and anti-social behaviour that undermine confidence in city centres.

We welcome the steps Government has taken to make our high streets safer, including the High Street Organised Crime Unit. Visitor and investor confidence is shaped as much by perception as fact, and our members' experience shows that the visibility of authority - including their own security teams - can have an unparalleled material impact on high street crime levels.

Close co-operation between our member Business Improvement Districts and local law enforcement in Birmingham, Liverpool, and London to make authority visible in key locations has led to a reduction in retail crime levels by as much as 90% for some retailers. Guided by the Home Office, police forces nationwide should be directed to work with high street businesses to make authority more visible on the high street.





Backing growth on the nation's flagship high streets

3

Overnight Visitor Levies should be proportionate, simple for operators, introduced only with the meaningful involvement of local tourism sectors, and their receipts ring-fenced to the local tourism sector's benefit.

Our members have real concerns over the impact an Overnight Visitor Levy will have on a tourist economy already under significant cost pressure. Where Levies are introduced, they must be as simple as possible for operators to administer, and, crucially, receipts must stay in the places that raise them. Receipts must be managed and distributed with Business Improvement Districts directly involved.

The devolved nations are further ahead than England when it comes to implementation of an Overnight Visitor Levy, and our member experience has shown us that where the tourism sector has not been directly involved in Levy funding allocation, receipts simply disappear into wider local budgets without delivering any visible local benefit.

4

High Streets UK members support the return of tax-free shopping or an alternative which serves the same goal of making the UK's flagship high streets more internationally competitive.

The UK remains the only major European economy without a VAT rebate scheme for international visitors, five years after tax-free shopping ended – a gap that now shows up directly in lost spend on our flagship high streets, with non-EU visitor spend stuck at 75% of 2019 levels, against 166% in Spain, 159% in France, and 137% in Italy.

We are calling on the Treasury to explore the return of tax-free shopping, or, as the fiscal situation may encourage, the exploration of modern, digital alternatives which protect Treasury revenue whilst restoring the competitiveness for the UK's flagship destinations which is currently being ceded to European rivals.

About High Streets UK

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High Streets UK is a pro-growth, nationwide partnership representing over 5,000 businesses across flagship high streets in England, Scotland, and Wales. Our membership is drawn from Business Improvement Districts representing some of the UK's largest and most economically significant high streets and retail, leisure, office, and hospitality destinations.

Across the country, high streets face a wide range of challenges – from the rise of retail crime and anti-social behaviour to a counterproductive business rates system and rising fiscal costs. At the same time, the Government has clearly identified bringing a new sense of optimism to the UK's high streets as a vehicle to drive both national and local growth.

High Streets UK is the voice of the high street: championing the places where people shop, work, visit, and meet, and making the case to Government for the conditions they need to thrive. Our members bring evidence from the ground, from Bristol to Edinburgh, from Cardiff to London, and we use it to advocate for change.



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