We need an Industrial Strategy for Retail

Usdaw
Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

Save Our Shops

The retail sector is facing one of its most challenging periods in its history. Developments in technology, changes in consumer spending, the growth in online shopping and growing uncertainty around Brexit have all contributed towards a brutal trading environment.

Retail is the largest private sector employer in the UK, directly employing 3 million people with a further 1.5 million jobs reliant on the success of the industry. The crisis facing retail is having a huge impact across the economy.

Retail jobs are being lost at an alarming rate; the total number of retail employees dropped 2.4% year-on-year in the first three months of 2019. May, June and July 2019 have seen the worst retail sales figures in over 25 years.

High street stores are closing up and down the country. The retail landscape has already lost major retail names such as Woolworths and BHS. Other traditional big names like Marks and Spencer have announced reductions in store numbers.

Without action, the UK's high streets are becoming very different places. Many large department stores and well known retailers have already been forced to close, meaning that fewer people are coming into shopping areas and town centres. This has a knock-on effect on a range of other local businesses.

These changes are having a devastating impact on town centres and employment. Local economies are changing for the worse. The demise of the local high street is having a negative impact on communities and half-empty shopping areas will only encourage anti-social behaviour.

Usdaw – The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers – is campaigning for the Government to take urgent action to 'Save Our Shops' by implementing a comprehensive and co-ordinated Industrial Strategy for the Retail Sector.

Paddy Lillis
Usdaw General Secretary

Usdaw's Industrial Strategy for Retail is based on three key strands:

Economy and Community

We need measures to create a more level playing field between in-store and online retailing. The existing economic framework is no longer fit for purpose.

Usdaw wants:

- Reform of tax laws to level the playing field between online and 'bricks-and-mortar' retailers, including a fundamental review of business rates.
- A review of town centre parking charges and other transport issues.
- An increase in community focus to drive up footfall.
- A review of the role and function of the Competition and Markets Authority.

People and Productivity

Retail workers are working under a cloud of uncertainty and job insecurity. Staff morale in the sector is at an all-time low. Decent pay and job security for retail workers would help drive productivity in the sector, improving employee retention and engagement.

Usdaw wants:

- Minimum pay of £10 per hour – a real living wage - for all workers.
- Legislation to tackle underemployment and insecure work by providing a minimum contract of 16 hours (for those who want them).
- A contract that reflects the normal hours people actually work.
- Investment from Government in skills within the retail sector, with a particular focus on workers affected by automation.

Changing Perceptions – Retail Jobs are Real Jobs

We need to recognise the critical contribution retail jobs make to household incomes and the wider economy.

Usdaw wants:

- An increased focus on retail across Government policy and decision-making mechanisms.
- An increased focus by retailers on good customer service which is a valued element of the in-store retail experience.
- Measures to tackle retail crime, particularly in light of automation.

Campaign with Usdaw to Save Our Shops

Usdaw believes a co-ordinated joined-up approach involving national and local Government, retailers, the retail workforce, suppliers and the customers is needed. We are urging all key stakeholders to engage and work together with Usdaw to put a proper Industrial Strategy for Retail into action.

The retail sector is important to the economy, the high street is at the heart of our communities and shops provide jobs and social interaction. We need to act now to Save Our Shops. Join with Usdaw in campaigning for an Industrial Strategy for Retail.

For more information on Usdaw's Save Our Shops Campaign, or to download Usdaw's report 'Industrial Strategy for Retail' visit: www.usdaw.org.uk/saveourshops

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