



**Labour's  
Policy  
Review**

## **Helping our High Streets: Empowering Local Communities**

## **Cause for hope**

There is a future for the high street and one of the most striking trends is the increasing importance of shopping as an experience. Studies have shown that many people want to spend their time shopping in attractive places, with a good mix of retail and leisure. For instance, the Association of Town Centre Management has identified the importance of the mix of leisure, entertainment and cultural facilities alongside shops as one of the key characteristics of a successful town centre.

The increasing importance of entertainment, service and leisure outlets is reflected by the relatively strong performance of these uses which have markedly lower vacancy rates than traditional retail outlets. The most recent Local Data Company report found that whilst 14.2 per cent of shops are empty, the total vacancy rate (including empty shops, restaurants, banks and other service and leisure uses) is around 2 per cent lower<sup>4</sup>, as retail makes up around 70 per cent of our high streets, these other uses have a vacancy rate of around 8 per cent<sup>5</sup>.

Due to the rise of well managed shopping centres and competition from the internet, high streets and town centres must be places people want to spend time if they are to survive. They need to work harder to attract visitors and investment; the type and balance of shops is central in this. In her review of the high street, Mary Portas states that *"when a high street has too much of one thing it tips the balance of the location and inevitably puts off potential retailers and investors"*<sup>6</sup>. She cites betting shops and fast food outlets as particularly worrying when they cluster together. An opinion poll from the LGA reached a similar conclusion showing that 37 per cent of people actively identify that the over-concentration of certain types of shops puts them off shopping in an area<sup>7</sup>.

Where there is a vibrant mix of retail, entertainment, leisure and other uses in an attractive environment the high street can thrive. We want to give local councils greater powers to create and promote such a balance.

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<sup>4</sup> Local Data Company End year shop vacancy report 2012 *February 2013*

<sup>5</sup> Calculated at though shops account for 70% of high street

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.maryportas.com/wp-content/uploads/The\\_Portas\\_Review.pdf](http://www.maryportas.com/wp-content/uploads/The_Portas_Review.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.rudi.net/node/22907>