

UK Retail Footfall Slips Again in July

August 8, 2025

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Retail footfall across the United Kingdom declined slightly in July, underlining continued pressure on high streets and shopping centres. New figures released by the British Retail Consortium (BRC) and Sensormatic IQ show that total footfall dropped by 0.4% year-on-year, following a steeper 1.8% fall recorded in June.

The slowdown in the rate of decline may offer a small degree of reassurance, but the overall picture remains weak. High street footfall was down 1.7%, a modest improvement compared

to the 3.0% drop in June. Shopping centres recorded a 0.3% decrease, also faring better than the 1.6% decline seen the previous month.

Retail parks continue to buck the trend, with footfall rising 1.7% year-on-year. These locations have benefited from sustained investment, better occupancy, and a steady pace of new store openings.

Among the UK's four nations, only Wales posted a rise in footfall, with a 0.4% increase. England saw a slight decline of 0.3%, while Scotland fell by 1.3%. Northern Ireland recorded the sharpest fall at 3.0%, with Belfast experiencing a 2.9% drop and shopping centre visits falling 4.1%.

Helen Dickinson, Chief Executive of the British Retail Consortium, said the summer failed to deliver the expected increase in shopper activity.

“July failed to bring about the summer boost in shoppers that any retailers had hoped for. While there were positive signs in cities like Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds, the broader picture remains challenging.”

She warned that around one in seven shops across the country remain vacant and stressed the need for further government action.

“Although the Government's planned business rates reform is welcome in principle, what's needed is a substantial cut to revive our town centres and give businesses the breathing space they need to invest and grow.”

Despite early signs of consumer relief due to easing inflation, spending patterns remain cautious. Andy Sumpter, EMEA Retail Consultant at Sensormatic, acknowledged that July's numbers showed a slower pace of decline but said the trend is still concerning.

“Retail parks again showed resilience at +1.7%, benefitting from better occupancy and ongoing new openings. High streets and shopping centres did see softer declines than in June, but overall, footfall remains stubbornly negative.”

He also pointed to the impact of weather on consumer behaviour.

“The early July heatwave likely encouraged more leisure activity rather than retail. Meanwhile, one year into a new Labour Government, consumer confidence appears fragile.”

Northern Ireland Retail Consortium Director Neil Johnston expressed disappointment at the regional figures.

“July was better than June for visits to stores, but remains 3% down on the same period last year. Belfast, while faring better than other locations in Northern Ireland, still recorded a fall in footfall. The broader UK picture offers little encouragement either.”

Retailers now face the dual burden of reduced footfall and rising operational costs. Without meaningful policy support, concerns grow over the future of the UK's high streets and town centres.