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# INDUSTRY WEEKLY DIGEST

YOUR WEEKLY DIGEST OF CONTEMPORARY INDUSTRY TRENDS

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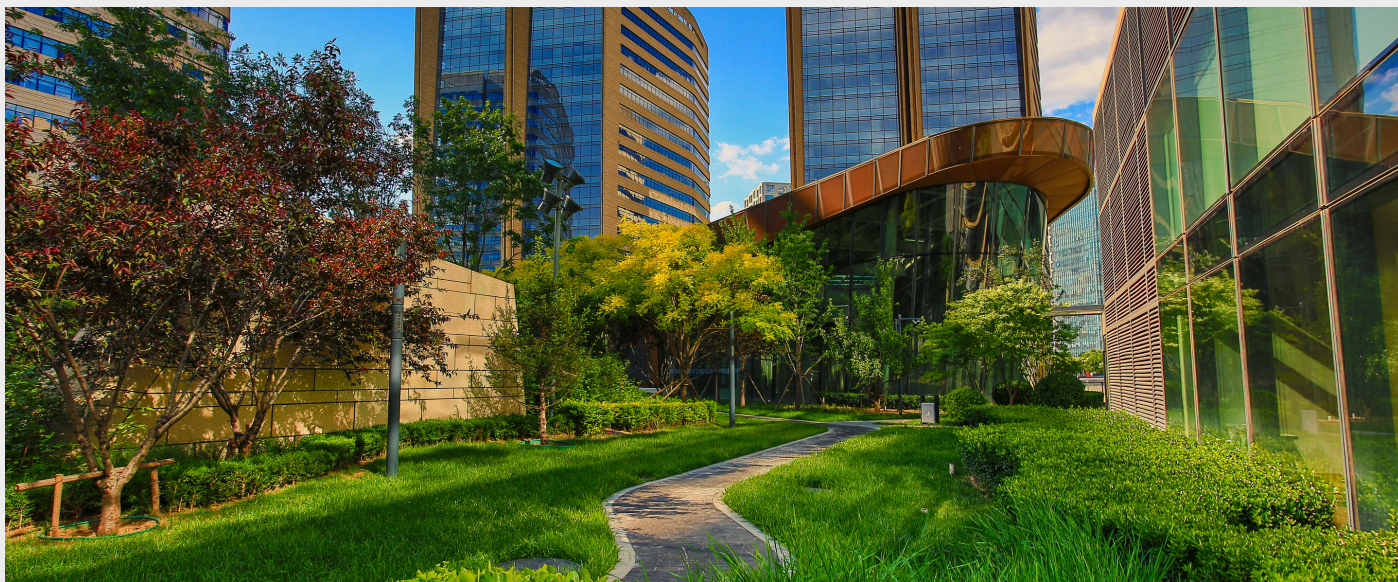


## CAN WE REINVENT THE UK HIGH STREET?

Recent years have been brutal ones for British hospitality and retail. In some towns and cities one in three commercial premises lie empty. But the UK high street does have a future - if national and local governments and local communities have the vision and drive to turn our urban centres from retail deserts into social and leisure hubs.

In this week's Industry Digest, [Professor Nigel Morgan](#) considers the changing make up of outlets on the high street and how these spaces might be reinvented for societal good.

Have a great weekend!



## REINVENTING AND REVITALIZING THE UK'S HIGH STREET OR, TRANSFORMING THEM INTO SUSTAINABLE AND VIBRANT CONTEMPORARY DESTINATIONS

**Professor Nigel Morgan**

The pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the cost of living crisis, and rising energy bills, have hit UK towns and cities hard. Almost 50 stores a day closed in 2022 and 15,000 more will close this year. More than 10% of the UK's hospitality businesses have permanently closed since March 2020.

In spite of this, the high street can have a future as a mixed residential, leisure, retail and social space. But for this to happen, almost half of the UK's retail space must be repurposed for leisure, hospitality, health or civic use so town centres become community and leisure hubs, with more public green spaces. This over-capacity in retail is blighting many town- and cityscapes.

If your local town or city has two shopping centres it has one too many. And so, since 2016 local authorities have been behind one in every five shopping centre purchases, with the aim of replacing them with green spaces, reinventing them for mixed leisure, residential and retail use, or revitalising them as more flexible retail space. From Edinburgh and Southend-on-Sea, to Merthyr Tydfil and Belfast, leisure, entertainment and residential quarters are replacing empty, soulless shopping centres.

In Stockton-on-Tees the local authority is consolidating and removing retail space by demolishing the tired 1970s Castlegate Shopping Centre and creating a new riverside green space for open-air events and community use.

Only local authorities can lead such radical urban repurposing as it deliberately removes commercial value. However, our very health and happiness may rely on such schemes. The single most important factor affecting well-being is the depth of our personal social networks and people who visit their local parks, pubs and cafes are more likely to have friends for support, and to feel happy and embedded in their community. People don't go into towns just to shop but to socialise, so we need informal spaces where we can relax and hang out. If our high streets are to truly see a renaissance, then we need to create a connected, liveable eco-system, which nurtures social and cultural life, curates local heritage and identity, and supports space for people to thrive.

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