

Endurance or Extinction on the High Street

An end of an era for another iconic brand disappearing from the high street. BHS has been part of the UK's high street for over 88 years. In the same week we lost Austin Reed. The figures make for grim reading with 160 BHS stores to close and 11,000 employees to lose their jobs.

The principal players in this sorry tale such as Philip Green and Dominic Chappell will be subject to detailed questioning and investigation to explain the situation in front of MPs. However high street retailers need to look beyond the recriminations and the fall out that is inevitable and instead focus on the new landscape within which they operate otherwise the life of the high street populated by famous names will ebb away. The principle is the same whether you are a national retailer or a small independent. Without continued investment you will lose the battle to attract new footfall, especially when faced with the ravages of internet shopping and high business rates. Brands which were historically prominent in the high street and failed to adapt to the modern world rapidly disappeared, the likes of C&A, Habitat, Woolworths and Comet. These brands stood still permitting competitors to steal their market place. Unless there is continued investment to maintain brand relevance through revamping stores, updating websites and developing inspiring product ranges; the high street brands are simply unable to compete in the modern challenging retail market. Take by way of example brands such as John Lewis and Debenhams who have continued to invest in their stores. Marks and Spencer are following their lead and recognise that without fundamental change, survival on the high street is becoming a losing battle. The government may start to look at business rates and retailers may consider reducing the number of stores they operate especially in poor locations, however nothing can be done to slow the expansion of the online marketplace. This lesson was not learnt by Woolworths in 2008 and now we have lost another two firm fixtures on the high street. It is time now for the high street to reshape and refocus on its customers or become extinct.