# Young shop owner’s closure highlights impact of rising parking charges on UK high streets



The closure of Imperial Cards in Huddersfield marks not just a personal disappointment for its young owner, Stephen Mallalieu, but also serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges facing UK high streets. Despite optimism when he opened the shop in January at just 17 years old, the reality of running a retail business in these economic times proved daunting. Over the entire month of February, Stephen managed to generate only £300 in sales, an abysmal figure that highlights the dwindling footfall experienced by many brick-and-mortar retailers.

Stephen attributed his shop's struggles to high parking charges in the area, which he noted were detracting potential customers. “Since I started in January I have had no wage,” he lamented. On days known to be busy, such as Saturdays, his sales dwindled to as little as £1.20. This stark statistic underscores a broader trend impacting high streets across the UK, where parking fees have increasingly dissuaded consumers from venturing into town centres. A recent report indicated that rising parking costs have caused over two-thirds of motorists to avoid high streets, with many preferring out-of-town shopping centres that offer free parking, a significant lure in a climate of financial uncertainty.

The British Retail Consortium reported that retail footfall across the UK fell by 2.2% in 2024, representing the steepest decline since the pandemic. This drop, particularly acute during the final quarter of the year, correlates with a stagnating economy and the increased cost pressures retailers face. For many smaller shops like Imperial Cards, these factors create an untenable operating environment, encouraging closures that are becoming alarmingly frequent. In fact, data showed that 12,804 shops closed in 2024, averaging around 35 closures each day. This has left many high streets looking more like ghost towns, as local councils grapple with the challenge of reversing this trend.

The closures are not solely attributable to parking fees, however. Increased business costs stemming from government policies—such as rising National Living Wage and employer National Insurance contributions—have severely impacted the viability of many small retail outlets. Critics of recent budget measures argue that these financial burdens make it increasingly difficult for shops, especially those in high-rent locations, to survive. Gavin Peck, CEO of The Works, echoed these concerns, asserting that towns are attempting to offset falling revenues by hiking parking fees, ultimately resulting in a reduction in foot traffic to town centres.

The situation in Huddersfield mirrors similar tensions experienced in other urban centres. Councils like that of Gloucester have also faced criticism over rising car park charges, with fears that such measures could exacerbate the empty retail spaces plaguing local economies. While some local officials advocate for ongoing regeneration efforts, the stark reality remains: without meaningful intervention and support mechanisms for high streets, the decline may continue unabated.

As Stephen Mallalieu prepares to close his doors, his hopes have shifted toward finding employment in a theatre box office, a bittersweet transition following his attempts to uplift his local community through his small business. His experience serves as a microcosm of the challenges facing young entrepreneurs across the UK. "I feel disappointed and very sad," he shared, reflecting a sentiment that resonates across an increasingly uncertain retail landscape. The closure of Imperial Cards is not just a loss for its owner but a symptom of a larger decline that is forcing many to rethink their shopping habits.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2057899/heartbreak-uk-shop-closes> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-shopper-numbers-fell-last-year-by-most-since-pandemic-brc-says-2025-01-03/> - In 2024, UK retail footfall decreased by 2.2%, marking the steepest decline since 2021, according to the British Retail Consortium (BRC). The final quarter saw a 2.5% year-on-year drop, contrasting with a 0.1% rise in the third quarter. December experienced a 2.2% fall compared to the previous year, only slightly better than November's 4.5% decline, attributed to Black Friday extending into December. Britain's economy stagnated in the third quarter, with similar expectations for the fourth quarter. Retailers struggled, especially those in costly town-center locations, as shoppers preferred retail parks with free parking and larger stores. An increase in employment taxes and ongoing issues with property taxes pose additional challenges for retailers.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/rate-uk-shop-closures-accelerate-after-budget-tax-changes-says-report-2025-03-20/> - A report from PwC indicates that the rate of shop closures on Britain's high streets is expected to accelerate in 2025 due to increased business costs imposed by the government's latest budget. These costs include higher National Living Wage, employer National Insurance contributions, and business rates, which are making marginal retail and hospitality locations unviable. The Finance Minister Rachel Reeves' budget, aimed at raising funds for infrastructure and public services, has faced criticism from the business community. In 2024, a net of 12,804 shops belonging to multiples and chains closed in the UK, with overall net closures averaging 10 per day. The British Retail Consortium warns that these added costs could lead to higher prices, job losses, and reduced investment. While high street closures continue, out-of-town locations have experienced fewer closures and a rise in new store openings, driven by shifts from high streets to more convenient retail parks. The Labor government defends the budget measures as necessary steps to address a 22 billion pound ($28.5 billion) "black hole" it inherited from the previous Conservative administration.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-gloucestershire-65082431> - Councillor Alastair Chambers expressed concerns that a 33% increase in car park charges in Gloucester could lead to more shop closures, with the city already "looking like a ghost town." He highlighted the number of empty retail spaces in Eastgate Shopping Centre and other areas. Councillor Hannah Norman disagreed, stating that Gloucester was not a "dead city" and emphasized ongoing regeneration efforts. She mentioned that the council would monitor car park usage to assess the impact of the tariff increase on city center footfall.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2023/12/26/high-parking-fees-killing-high-street-warns-the-works-chief/> - Gavin Peck, CEO of The Works, warned that rising parking fees are damaging the high street, amid a subdued Boxing Day sales turnout. He stated that towns and cities are trying to replace other falling revenues by increasing parking fees, which leads to fewer people visiting town centers. He called for councils, the government, and landlords to collaborate to "reinvigorate" high streets and urged a review of business rates to make town centers more attractive to retailers.
6. <https://www.gbnews.com/lifestyle/cars/parking-costs-high-streets-death-local-shops> - A report revealed that rising parking costs have caused more than two-thirds of drivers to avoid high streets, raising concerns over the "death of the high street" due to declining footfall. The report found that 42% of parking costs in high streets, villages, and town centers have risen significantly in the past year. Over half of drivers (56%) said they were more likely to visit a supermarket with free parking, and 52% preferred out-of-town shopping centers with free parking. The report also noted that 82% of UK drivers would like to see councils offer free parking to support local shops.
7. <https://www.pwc.co.uk/press-room/templates/retail-resilience--great-britain-s-store-closures-hit-second-low.html> - PwC's latest figures for 2024 show that Great Britain experienced 12,804 store closures, averaging 35 closures per day, the second-lowest in a decade. This was offset by 9,002 openings, averaging 25 per day, resulting in a net decline of 3,802 stores. The report indicates a stabilizing trend in retail closures, with a net decline of 1.8% in 2024, compared to 2.8% in 2020. The data suggests that while closures continue, there is a shift towards convenience stores, coffee shops, and value retailers, which are showing net growth.