# English high streets face ghost town future as essential services disappear



The decline of English high streets continues to evoke urgent calls for action, with a recent report highlighting a troubling trend reminiscent of "ghost towns." This assessment, produced by experts at Newcastle University and published by Health Equity North, sheds light on the specific challenges faced by these vital community spaces. The analysis reveals a continued loss of essential services—including banks, pharmacies, and supermarkets—replaced increasingly by vape shops, bookmakers, and takeaway outlets. The report attributes these shifts to multiple factors: the aftermath of the Covid pandemic, the effects of austerity measures, rising living costs, and altering consumer behaviours.

Professor Clare Bambra, who serves as the Academic Co-director at Health Equity North, articulated the severity of the situation. Speaking to the issue, she highlighted, “Over the last decade, our High Streets have been hit by a devastating succession of shocks—from the impact of austerity to the COVID-19 pandemic." She noted that deprived areas, particularly in coastal regions and the North of England, have been disproportionately affected, emphasising that this part of the country experiences double the number of vape shops compared to the South. The report advocates for government intervention to enhance both community resources and the vibrancy of local high streets.

Moreover, the findings underscore an alarming decline in "third spaces," which are vital for social interaction and community engagement. These include local cafes, libraries, and shopping centres that offer a break from home or work environments. Professor Adam Todd, focusing on the implications of this decline, stated, “For generations, the High Street has been the beating heart of our towns and cities.” He expressed concern that the current landscape feels diminished, with community amenities vanishing in favour of less healthy alternatives. The report suggests that efforts to revitalise high streets should not simply aim to restore a bygone era but must also adapt to contemporary habits, advocating for more pedestrian-friendly environments to encourage socialisation and communal engagement.

In light of these observations, the report calls for stricter regulations on facilities deemed "health-reducing," which includes takeaways and bookmakers. By doing so, the aim is to safeguard remaining community-centric amenities that serve the public interest. The researchers are urging government commitment to ensure that high streets can become vibrant hubs once more—critical spaces for interaction that bolster the fabric of community life.

As the landscape of these high streets continues to evolve, the need for strategic planning and community-focused initiatives has never been greater. The future vitality of these areas may depend on a collective effort to address the decline while recognising the lessons of the past and opportunities of the present.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060804/UK-seaside-northern-ghost-towns)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060804/UK-seaside-northern-ghost-towns)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060804/UK-seaside-northern-ghost-towns)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060804/UK-seaside-northern-ghost-towns)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2060804/UK-seaside-northern-ghost-towns> - Please view link - unable to able to access data