



No support for changing Sunday trading laws

One of the arguments recently deployed by the government and those wishing to see decisions on Sunday opening hours devolved to local authorities is that this measure is needed to help the high street counteract pressures from internet retailing.

A number of groups working together as Keep Sunday Special have conducted research into these claims, which show that restricted Sunday opening hours is not being identified by consumers or businesses as a factor in the rise of internet shopping, and that in fact these proposals would damage high streets.

CONSUMERS POLLING – SUNDAY TRADING DOESN'T MAKE PEOPLE SHOP ONLINE

The leading polling agency Populus spoke to a representative samples 2,008 consumers in a telephone omnibus survey on the weekend of 16 / 17 January 2016. They asked respondents whether they had shopped on line during the Christmas period, with two-thirds stating that they had. These respondents were then asked to say why they had chosen to shop on line, and these are given below:

What are the main reasons for you shopping online instead of on the high street over the Christmas period?

- *Convenience / ease / less hassle / less stressful : 47%*
- *Cheaper / lower prices / value for money : 29%*
- *Beating the crowds / avoiding queues : 23%*
- *Availability of items / products could only be purchased online / wider choice : 21%*
- *Better deals / offers / sales : 10%*
- *Speed / quicker to order online / saves time : 10%*
- *Delivery / saves carrying things / free or cheap delivery : 9%*
- *Easy to browse or find the products you need : 7%*
- *Can shop from comfort of own home : 5%*

Not a single respondent identified Sunday trading restrictions as a reason why they shopped on line during this period.

There is no link either in consumers' minds or in their behaviour between early morning and evening restrictions on Sunday opening and their use of the internet for shopping. Full results are [here](#).

LARGE BUSINESSES – SUNDAY TRADING HAS NO IMPACT ON SALES

Around fifty large retail businesses have published their Christmas trading figures up to 20 January 2016. These figures may cover the last quarter of 2015, or a number of weeks covering the lead up to and days immediately after Christmas. The figures are mixed, with many companies reporting challenging trading conditions over this period, and a full analysis is attached. The main challenges cited were:

- Competition with online sales (**mentioned 23 times by companies**)
- Decisions to reduce prices, discount goods, run more promotions (**19**)



- Issues with product range and availability (18)
- Weather conditions (10)

No companies, industry analysts or media commentators mentioned Sunday trading as a reason for poor trading results in response to the publication of sales figures. The full analysis of sales is available [here](#).

SMALL FAMILY-RUN BUSINESSES WILL BE HARMED

Proposals to liberalise Sunday trading laws have been opposed consistently by small business groups, including those representing small businesses trading on high streets. These organisations include the Federation of Small Businesses, the Association of Convenience Stores, the National Federation of Retail Newsagents, the National Federation of Subpostmasters, the Rural Shops Alliance and the Federation of Wholesale Distributors. Other retail organisations including the British Retail Consortium and the British Independent Retailers Association have questioned the Government's direction of travel.

There is strong agreement among retail and small business organisations that extended Sunday opening hours would draw trade away from small high street shops that can already open all day on a Sunday, and towards large out of town stores and retail parks that could be allowed to open for longer.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES WOULD SUPPORT OUT OF TOWN RETAILERS

The government has suggested that devolving powers to set Sunday trading hours, local authorities would be able to extend trading hours in town centres only rather than in large out of town stores and retail parks. ACS research of 70 local authority chief executives shows that in fact **the majority of councils would identify large out of town stores and retail parks as areas where extended hours should be applied.** This would further damage the high street and lead to an increase in the number of vacant properties in town centres which currently make up 12% of units nationally and over 20% in some town centres.