

TEXTE

Debenhams kicks off make-or-break year with 19 store closures

Struggling department store chain to shut down all 19 locations in a fortnight

Debenhams will begin a make-or-break year with 19 store closures this month that will result in 660 job losses on the UK's fragile high streets.

The struggling department store chain will close the sites in the space of a fortnight as it presses ahead with a rescue plan announced last year. The closures starting on 11 January are spread across the country, from Kirkcaldy in Scotland to Eastbourne on the south coast. This is just the first wave of shutdowns, as the retailer intends to pull down the shutters on a total of 50 of its worst-performing stores. [...]

A recent report highlighted that UK high streets shed more than 140,000 jobs in 2019 due to store closures and cost-cutting as the high street suffered as a result of the shift to online shopping. The problems of department stores reflect this upheaval. As more people buy goods on their phones or laptops, the number of visitors to high streets is falling, while the cost of running large stores is rising. Shoppers have also reined in spending on clothing and household goods due to the squeeze on spare cash and a shift towards renting rather than owning homes.

The 19 stores on Debenhams' closure list add up to about 1.3m sq ft of retail floor space, roughly a tenth of Debenhams' total of 14.3m sq ft, according to analysts at Radius Data Exchange.

James Child, the head of retail and industrial research at the commercial property magazine *EG*, said department stores were faced with "perilous headwinds".

"They having the USP of selling everything, but figuring out how to sell that concept to shoppers when they can access everything online is a huge test," he said.[...]

Debenhams said job losses from this first round of closures were lower than originally anticipated and it was hoped that some staff could be redeployed. Three stores – York, Haverfordwest and Orpington – closed at the end of 2019 but the main group will close in three stages, beginning next Saturday.

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