



Battersea Power Station Retail

# The high street *fights back*

**Local business improvement districts (BIDs) are helping to boost the fortunes of retailers in Wandsworth borough...**

**The UK high street has been something of a bloodbath in recent years. Newsfeeds have been littered with stories about retailers going out of business, shedding jobs or closing stores as consumers increasingly choose to save their spare cash or do their shopping online.**

Yet despite the challenging economic landscape, many retailers have survived and some are even thriving. Encouragingly, recent statistics suggest that proclamations about the death of the high street might be a little premature.

According to the latest Retail Sales Index from the Office for National Statistics, month-on-month UK sales volumes rose

a modest 0.9% in January – the first rise since October – mainly due to moderate growth in food stores (1.7%) and non-food stores (1.3%). Meanwhile, online sales as a proportion of all retailing dropped from 19.3% in December 2019 to 19.0% in January 2020 – indicating, perhaps, a levelling out of the online market.

Reacting to these statistics, the British Retail Consortium (BRC) said the rise in consumer confidence since the December election may have lifted willingness to spend.

Kyle Monk, head of retail insights and analytics at the BRC, said: “A rise in sales, coupled with the tightness in the labour

market and inflation accelerating ahead of forecast, adds to the case that the Bank of England should hold off cutting interest rates. However, weakness over the festive period means that sales volumes are only up 0.8% year on year and still down 0.8% on a three-month by three-month basis. Despite the slight rally seen in January, markets have failed to react.

“It is essential progress is made quickly in the upcoming EU trade negotiations otherwise the UK risks squandering any boost to consumer confidence. Without a comprehensive deal, food and other goods will face extensive tariffs, checks and delays at the border - raising costs and creating disruption for consumers.”





Despite the political and economic uncertainty surrounding Britain's recent exit from the European Union, retailers in Wandsworth borough are just getting on with the day-to-day job of doing business.

Pieter Strombeck, general manager of Southside Shopping Centre, says: "It's certainly not all doom and gloom. We're seeing some positive performers out there, especially companies with good store managers who are able to deliver great customer service. As an example, Hotel Chocolat do this very well and they've changed their focus to be more customer-driven rather than simply meeting specific sales KPIs – in effect, having fun with their customers, engaging with them and delivering a fantastic experience. Overall, shopper numbers to UK high streets have declined by 10% in the last seven years, so it is certainly very challenging to achieve year-on-year sales growth. It has to be about experience and that is one thing online-only retailers cannot compete with."

Pieter reports an encouraging growth in footfall numbers at Southside over the last three months. The key challenge is



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to offer value for money in physical outlets and ensure the experience is sufficiently enticing to keep customers coming back.

Another critical factor in retailers' success is the ability to offer a multi-channel experience, where physical stores seamlessly co-exist with an online offering.

Pieter adds: "I also think that retailers need to focus on communicating their values, certainly around sustainability and staff wellbeing, which I believe will be a key part of a successful growth strategy in the future."

Pieter is also chairman of the Wandsworth Business Improvement District (BID), which was established in 2017 to promote the town's heritage and culture, help businesses improve their performance and enhance the town centre experience for shoppers, visitors and workers.

He says: "The BID offers a lot of assistance for businesses including networking opportunities, loyalty cards, discount schemes, marketing support and

events such as Old York Road Unplugged, an annual music festival where the road is closed to traffic. This is very popular and a real help to businesses.

"We look at cost-saving options such as how businesses can reduce their utility bills or improve their waste management strategies. The BID is also looking to invest in the town by creating green spaces in certain areas and improving air quality in locations where traffic throughput is high."

Another BID, This is Clapham, also benefits businesses in the borough of Wandsworth, particularly those located to the west and north of Clapham Town. Established in 2014, it is a not-for-profit company funded by 370 businesses and governed by volunteers from the local business community through its board and sub-groups. These volunteers determine which projects to pursue and how the collected levies and any additional income is spent.

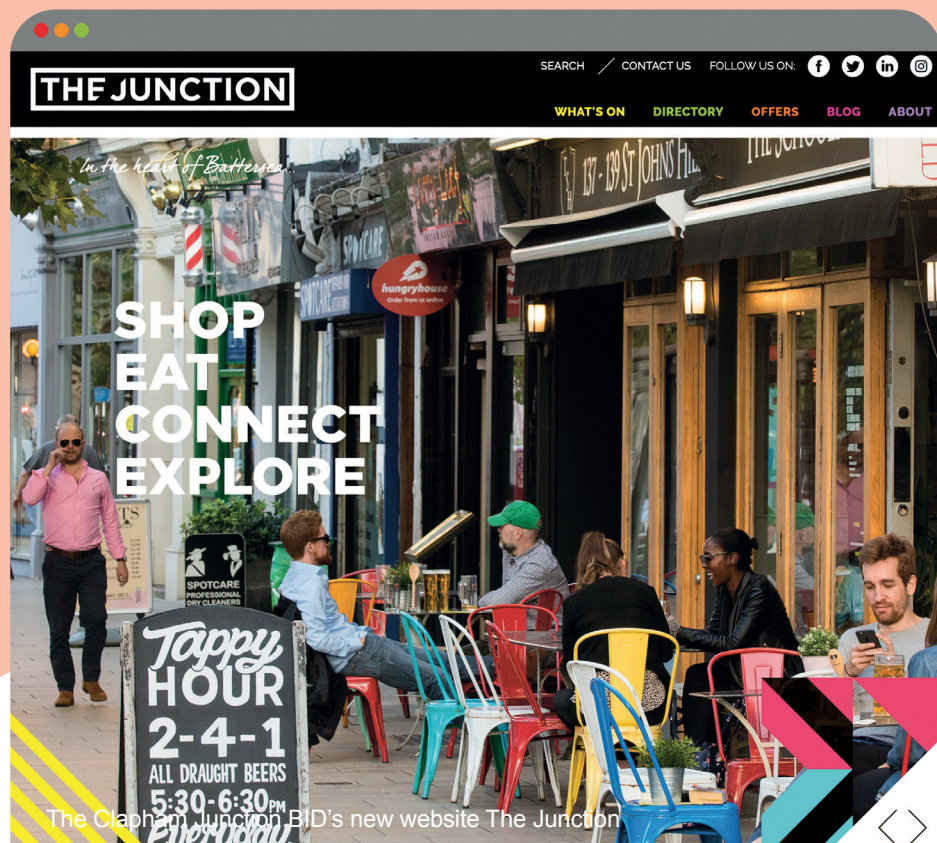
Examples of successful projects include free business recycling, additional street cleaning, local area marketing and initiatives to cut crime and anti-social behaviour. Companies and their employees can also take advantage of offers, invitations and discounted deals via the Clapham Card, which was introduced to boost spending and cross-trading in the area.

Jeremy Keates, manager of This is Clapham, says: "In the six years since we first set up, there has been a significant evolution in the local retailing landscape. Although there has been a decline in the number of traditional retailers, other businesses have set up in the area and taken space in previously empty shops.



Pieter Strombeck





"As well as driving forward initiatives like free recycling and street cleaning, we've also tried to promote companies via online listings on our website; we've had about 180,000 listings in the last twelve months. This allows us to promote the area as a whole and boost the presence of individual businesses, particularly those that don't have a strong online footprint.

"We've also been involved in schemes designed to make the area more appealing for residents and visitors, such as arts and public realm projects around Clapham Common and in areas to the west of Clapham old town. Essentially, what we're trying to do is to bring more people into the area, encourage them to spend their money here and get businesses trading with each other."

In the north east of Wandsworth borough, New Covent Garden Market is a vital supplier to retailers, providing them with fruit, vegetables, flowers and other wholesale goods which can then be sold onto consumers. Based in Nine Elms since 1974, the iconic market is home to nearly 200 businesses with around 2,500 employees. It is currently undergoing an exciting development that will transform the site into a thriving, modern food quarter.

Meanwhile, Battersea Power Station recently announced the first line-up of UK and international retail and leisure brands set to open their doors in the iconic Grade II\* listed building when it launches in 2021. These companies include luxury fashion house Hugo Boss, Japanese casualwear

giant Uniqlo, elegant perfumery and candlemaker Jo Malone London, and one of the UK's largest Swiss watch luxury retailers, Watches of Switzerland.

Once open, the power station will be home to more than one hundred established, luxury and emerging retail, food and leisure brands, providing a space for new, unique concepts and creative designs that will complement the host of shops and restaurants already open at Circus West Village, the first chapter in this redevelopment.

Approximately 70% of the total commercial space within the power station is now let, with more than 45% of the retail and leisure floorspace exchanged or under offer.

Simon Murphy, chief executive officer at Battersea Power Station Development Company (BPSDC), said: "We are delighted to be partnering with these exciting brands which set the tone for our retail and leisure offering inside the power station. On behalf of our Malaysian shareholders we are delivering a destination for our local community as well as London and far beyond."

Brian Duffy, CEO of Watches of Switzerland, said: "We think the whole project south of the river is an amazing development in all aspects of residential and commercial.

We have looked at the power station on the landscape for a number of years and never imagined it would become such a retail destination. We are proud to be one of the flagship stores anchored by the country's number one luxury watch brand, Rolex."



Battersea is also home for Roz Lloyd-Williams, who has been a resident there for more than two decades. Roz is Executive BID Director of the Clapham Junction BID, which is responsible for delivering innovative projects that help to improve the trading environment for businesses, drive tourism and enhance the shopping experience for residents and visitors.

Roz says: "The Junction BID is prioritising three key themes, highlighted by BID area businesses, during the extensive consultation prior to the November 2018 ballot. These themes are marketing and promotion, safe and welcoming, and events and festivals. However, we have huge scope for flexibility to respond perennially to changing demands.

"We want to create effective partnerships that enable the area to flourish. Our aim is to identify and create as many new opportunities and initiatives to enable positive change. We're maximising the value of local events to increase footfall and presence in the London events marketplace; the Lavender in Bloom (June), Eat & Drink The Junction (15-30 June), The Summer Festival and Christmas Market on Northcote Road for BID businesses are good examples of this. We also introduced street art and bespoke Christmas lights last year and will be undertaking urban landscaping projects to add extra character to the area.

"We carry out street cleansing operations and work closely with the police to make the BID area a safer place to live and work via, for example, our extensive promotion of the Wandsworth Business Against Crime app and the launch of a new Pubwatch group spearheaded by the BID."

The Junction BID is also active on social media and has created a consumer-facing website - [www.visitclaphamjunction.com](http://www.visitclaphamjunction.com) - with B2B elements for employees, offering them special discounts, incentives and memberships.

Anthony Laban (Mint Hair London Ltd), chair of The Junction BID, says: "We're delighted to deliver a new consumer-facing website that really reflects the personality of Clapham Junction and its surrounding environs, while delivering powerful functionality. We chose a design system that could be tailored to suit both the needs of the businesses we represent, and our residents and visitor market.

"In addition to promoting what The Junction has to offer, driving footfall and increasing visitors, we will be able to use the platform to really track and analyse our digital marketing and, in turn, help businesses with their future marketing. The B2B 'app' component launches this April which will facilitate the development of loyalty schemes and exclusive deals at local shops, restaurants and services, with B2B integration for Junction employees. The B2C 'app' for consumers also launches this April."

The BID is also introducing two new schemes for recycling and waste, and group amenity-buying - to save businesses money.