

Robert Downes, policy advisor at the Forum of Private Business, said: “It’s great to see the government thinks our high streets are worth saving, and is making a credible effort to stop the rot.

“The mission to save UK high streets will indeed require a collaborative effort, and the Future High Street Forum appears to be heading in the right direction by bringing a variety of organisations together.

“The Forum thinks councils have to take a lead at a local level though, through initiatives such as free car parking, and better public transport links. Crucially though, planning departments need to change, as do the rules and regulations they are governed, to make it less onerous for new businesses to start-up and harder for supermarkets to move in and take-over.

"While the Internet has been blamed for the damage to the high street, we must remember supermarkets have played their part as well. Only recently there've been reports of supermarkets clamouring to take over premises now empty thanks to the collapse of firms such as Jessops and Blockbuster.

"So what we really need is for authorities to be given new planning powers allowing them to refuse applications by supermarkets if it's likely they will prove detrimental to other businesses already there. Under present laws council planners can only decide an application purely on planning grounds and nothing else.

"This change would allow councils to effectively safeguard the livelihood of smaller, independent traders and prevent, where necessary, the spread of mini-mart supermarkets which have done so much damage to district town centres in recent years.

“Time really is of the essence now, and so far there’s been little movement since the Portas review in 2011. We’ve seen big name stores collapsing one after the other, and 2013 has not started very well either.”