

**P-05-967 Welsh Government to amend its NDR relief policy to help keep Debenhams stores open in Wales, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 09.06.20**

Thank you for your email. I do understand that Debenhams is already in trouble, but the Swansea branch in particular is one of the best-performing of its stores. There is every reason to believe that if it reopens in more normal times then it will survive. The discretionary powers being used by Swansea and Newport Councils amount to a temporary measure, and just defers the liability until 31 March rather than expunging it.

The threshold for rates relief being set by the Welsh Government of £500,000 may well assist a lot of smaller businesses, but the larger stores with higher rateable value act as anchor stores, and the footfall they attract into town and city centres helps sustain those smaller retail businesses. If these anchor stores disappear then other, smaller businesses may fail as well. That is why Wales should have followed the model of relief adopted by the UK Government.

I note that talks are ongoing with Debenhams and I would hope that the committee will explore further with the Minister the options being explored in these talks and their likelihood of success in securing the future of Debenham stores in Wales. There are a lot of jobs at stake here, as well as the future viability of many shopping centres, already in trouble because of the Covid lockdown, and not all those people at risk of losing their jobs work for Debenhams.

I am happy to expand on these views to the committee if required. Thank you

Peter