

September brings a reality check for UK retail with sharpest month on month drop in footfall since 2014

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New footfall data from [MRI Software](#) shows the UK's first annual decline in footfall since 2019, slipping -0.2% year-on-year. While modest, the drop marks a return to pre-pandemic seasonality, where factors like weather and consumer sentiment shape retail patterns.

Jenni Matthews, Senior Brand, PR & Content Manager (EMEA) at MRI Software tells us more.

After months of steady resilience, September delivered a reality check for UK retail, as total footfall recorded its first annual decline since 2019, slipping -0.2% year-on-year. While modest, this drop signals a return to pre-pandemic trends where natural seasonality, weather, and consumer sentiment once again shape retail performance.

High streets took the hardest hit, with visits down -1.1%, while shopping centres edged slightly lower by -0.2%. Retail parks, however, bucked the trend, climbing +1.9% year-on-year, bolstered by their convenience and broad appeal.

Month-on-month, total UK footfall declined -4.4%, marking the sharpest September fall since 2014, when activity declined by -4% from the month prior, and the steepest drop seen this year. This may well reflect the traditional post-summer dip as routines resume, but also the contrast against a particularly strong summer, when shoppers flocked to both indoor and outdoor retail destinations to enjoy events, experiences, and warmer weather. Overall, high streets saw the steepest fall at -6.3%, while retail parks and shopping centres proved slightly more resilient with drops of -3.9% and -0.9%, respectively.

With schools reopening and many employees returning to offices, weekday footfall rose +0.5% year-on-year, offsetting a -0.9% decline over the weekend. The weekday uplift highlights how the commuter economy continues to rebuild momentum, a stabilising trend that's quietly reshaping the retail landscape.

In contrast, MRI Software's Central London's Back to Office benchmark slipped -5.6% month-on-month, reflecting both early September's post-holiday lull and late-month disruption caused by Storm Amy. Even so, London managed a marginal +0.1% year-on-year uplift, pointing to a slow but steady recovery in the capital's core retail corridors.

Storm Amy, the first named storm of the season, brought widespread disruption in the final week of September, driving a -4.2% week-on-week fall in footfall. High streets bore the brunt, with visits plunging -14.7% across Friday (3rd October) and Saturday (4th October). Shopping centres saw smaller dips, while retail parks rebounded with growth once conditions eased.

For retail leaders, Storm Amy serves as an early signal that weather volatility will be a defining factor this Golden Quarter. Those who adapt quickly by swiftly adapting staff schedules, tailoring promotions, and deploying digital engagement, are likely to keep momentum and protect sales as the season unfolds. Real time data can help retailers respond to shifting footfall patterns, optimise energy use, and make strategic decisions that align with evolving consumer behaviour.

As we move into the Golden Quarter, consumer confidence dipped two points to -19 in September, reflecting the lingering impact of August's interest rate rise. Shoppers remain cautious but not necessarily disengaged. A [recent report](#) revealed the surging adoption of Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) schemes among older shoppers, with usage among 55-64-year-olds more than doubling in the past year. Once seen as a digital-first tool, BNPL is fast becoming a feature of physical retail, now offered by brands including John Lewis, The Range, and JD Sports. Used responsibly, it could help drive footfall as shoppers seek flexibility and the reassurance of interacting with products in-store before committing to purchase.

Meanwhile, social media is set to play a starring role this Golden Quarter. MRI Software's Insights from the Inside* revealed that 83% of store managers plan to use social channels to drive in-store visits, blending digital storytelling with physical experiences to create a powerful, omnichannel pull. Another attraction is membership models and exclusive loyalty rewards offered by retail leaders; by fostering a sense of belonging and community, they're creating emotional as well as transactional reasons to return, a strategy that will matter more than ever as households balance festive excitement with financial caution.

September's figures mark an inflection point; a return to normalcy that is being shaped by seasonality, sentiment, and weather. As we enter the Golden Quarter, agility, empathy and connection to the consumer will be key for retail leaders to embrace when maximising opportunities.

**A weekly survey of over 700 store managers which provides insights from the shop floor around how external factors and consumer behaviour are impacting both footfall and spending.*

Sept-25	High Street	Retail Park	Shopping Centre	OnLocation Footfall Index
YoY	-1.1%	1.9%	-0.2%	-0.2%
MoM	-6.3%	-0.9%	-3.9%	-4.4%