

HEATWAVE HITS TOWN & CITY CENTRE SALES IN AUGUST

According to Diane Wehrle, of Rendle Intelligence & Insights & Beauclair's Brand Ambassador.

The intense heat during the first half of August has taken a significant toll on town and city centre sales during the peak summer month of 2026. Sales across the 500+ town and city centres in the High Street Index fell by -4.0% year on year, the second-largest decline of 2026, behind March's -4.9%, three times the -1.4% drop in July.

The weaker August sales pulled the three-month year-on-year average for June to August 2026 down -2.9%, compared with -2.0% over the same period in 2025. The decline was driven entirely by a sharp reduction in purchasing activity which given the exceptionally hot weather was perhaps unsurprising: the number of customers making purchases on the high street fell by -3.9% with transactions declining by -4.3%.

Declines widespread across GB

The impact was felt across the country, with every GB region recording an annual decline in sales. The North-East, South-West and West Midlands were the hardest hit, each recording an annual decline of more than -5%.

Smaller towns continue to outperform

The relative resilience of smaller towns, highlighted last month, continued into August - and the heatwave may well have amplified this trend. Exceptionally high temperatures are likely to have made longer journeys to larger town centres less attractive, encouraging consumers to shop closer to home.

While sales declined across all three town classes, the smallest towns remained significantly more resilient. The decline was almost half that recorded in the two larger town classes; a drop of -2.8% in Town Centres, compared with -4.9% in Major Town Centres and -4.5% in Regional Centres.

Fashion bears the brunt as Grocery remains resilient

The relative importance of the five key sectors remained broadly unchanged in August 2026, together accounting for 87% of total sales in GB towns and cities. Food & Drink accounted for the largest share at 27%, closely followed by Grocery at 26%, with Fashion at 15%, Health & Beauty at 11% and General Retail at 8%.

All five sectors recorded annual declines, but Fashion was by far the weakest, with sales falling by -7.2% compared with August 2025. Health & Beauty declined by -5.4%, Food & Drink by -4.7% and General Retail by -4.6%.

Grocery was the clear exception, with sales falling just -1.4% it was the most resilient of the five key sectors. The relative stability of Grocery may also help explain the continued resilience of Town Centres which typically have a proportionately larger grocery offer than larger Major Town Centres and Regional Centres, meaning their sales are likely to have been supported by consumers prioritising more essential, local shopping during the heatwave.

High Street Index – August 2026

Sector	Sales vs Aug25	Transactions vs Aug25	Customers vs Aug25	ATV vs Aug25	ATV
All Sectors	-4.0%	-4.3%	-3.9%	+0.3%	£19.34
Fashion	-7.2%	-5.4%	-5.6%	-2.0%	£41.28
Food & Drink	-4.7%	-6.7%	-5.7%	+2.1%	£15.68
General Retail	-4.6%	-5.5%	-4.4%	+0.9%	£18.99
Grocery	-1.4%	-1.0%	-1.7%	-0.4%	£16.61
Health & Beauty	-5.4%	-8.7%	-7.2%	+3.6%	£29.55

High Street Index – YTD August 2026

Sector	Sales YTD vs Aug25	Transactions YTD vs Aug25	Customers YTD vs Aug25	ATV YTD vs Aug25	ATV YTD
All Sectors	-2.7%	-3.6%	-3.3%	+0.9%	£19.23
Fashion	-4.6%	-4.2%	-4.7%	-0.5%	£42.84
Food & Drink	-3.3%	-5.0%	-4.7%	+1.7%	£15.10
General Retail	-3.0%	-5.9%	-5.1%	+3.1%	£19.04
Grocery	-0.5%	-1.2%	-1.8%	+0.7%	£16.76
Health & Beauty	-2.7%	-6.1%	-5.3%	+3.6%	£30.06

Our High Street Index is based on data from 500+ major retail areas as defined by the Geographic Data Service