

Carl Sargeant AC / AM  
Y Gweinidog Tai ac Adfywio  
Minister for Housing and Regeneration



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cvf/Our ref MB/CS/1154/14

Alun Ffred Jones AM  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
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19<sup>th</sup> March 2014

Dear Alun Ffred,

Thank you for your question asked in the chamber on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> March;

- A yw'r ffigurau ynglŷn â siopau gwag ar ein strydoedd wedi cynyddu neu ostwng yn ystod y tair blynedd diwethaf? Have the figures regarding vacant shops on our high streets increased or decreased over the past three years?

Neither the UK Government nor Welsh Government currently collect these statistics but we are aware of the various private sector bodies that can provide this type of information. For example, a recent press release from the Local Data Company indicated a vacancy rate for Wales in February of 15.7%, somewhat better than the worst performing area of the North West with a 17.3% rate. They stat that all nations in the UK had an improving vacancy rate during 2013.

The Enterprise and Business Committee report into the Regeneration of Town Centres recommended research into the impact of out-of-town supermarkets on our town centres and this will be published soon. I will consider if further research or measurements are required after this has been published.

Yours sincerely,

**Carl Sargeant AC / AM**  
Y Gweinidog Tai ac Adfywio  
Minister for Housing and Regeneration

## Annex 1

LDC Press Release EMBARGOED until 0001hrs on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2014

### **2013 shows increasing North v South divide and increasing dominance of the 'mega malls' in GB retail.**

The Local Data Company's latest report on vacancy rates entitled '**Divide and Rule**' analyses over 2,100 town centres, shopping centres and retail parks visited in 2013. This report analyses both shop and leisure vacancy rates (**All Vacancy**) in 2013 to deliver the most comprehensive insight on the health of Britain's towns, retail parks and shopping centres.

Shop vacancy rates have shown marked improvement towards the end of the year from their peak of **14.6% in February 2012** to reaching below 14% (**13.9% in December 2013**) for the first time since July 2010.

The **North/South divide** evident in previous years is more accentuated with the North West and North East showing increases in their vacancy rates on 2012 with a combined average of 17%, which is nearly 5% above the national all vacancy average of 12.2%. The North West is the worst region for all (retail & leisure) vacancy at 17.3%. Of the top 10 worst town centres for vacant retail and leisure premises, all of whom are above 25%, 7 are in the North East or North West. Conversely, of the top 10 best performing town centres with the least vacant units, 6 are in Greater London.

**Small towns** (<200 units) are in the healthiest state at 9.0%, which is a 0.2% improvement on 2012. **Medium towns** (200-400 units) have shown an increase in their vacancy average by 0.15% to 11.9% and **large towns/cities** continue to have the highest overall 'town' vacancy rate at 13.4% but have also shown the greatest improvement at -0.33%. Overall **Retail Parks** lead the pack at 8.9%, which is a decline of 0.1% on 2012 and **Shopping Centres** continue to have the highest vacancy rate average at 15.4% which is a marginal improvement of -0.17% on 2012.

Regional analysis shows significant variations between different areas. Vacancy rates in the **South West (-0.60%)**, **East Midlands (-0.58%)**, **London (-0.44%)**, **West Midlands (-0.31%)**, **Yorkshire & The Humber (-0.12%)** and the **South East (-0.11%)** have all improved whilst the **North East (+0.35%)**, **North West (+0.20)** and the **East of England (+0.04%)** have all worsened in 2013. The North West's vacancy rate of 17.3% is more than double that of London which is 8.1%.

The data also shows the increasing impact and dominance of large shopping centres and retail parks on the towns that neighbour them. Analysis of 12 major '**mega malls**' shows that vacancy rates in the '**secondary towns**' around them are increasing and more than double than those of the mega malls. For example The Bullring in Birmingham's vacancy rate in 2013 was 2.7% but the Birmingham 'High Streets' average was 19.8%. Even in London this trend is evident with Westfield London being at 4.2% and the surrounding areas averaging 9%.

#### **Key facts**

- *In 2013 the GB retail and leisure vacancy rate reduced from 12.6% to 12.2% (-0.4%)*

- *The number of vacant premises in the top 650 town centres numbered 26,257 (-257 during 2013). Overall across all locations tracked by LDC there were 53,693 vacant premises at the end of 2013.*
- ***Wales** has the highest national vacancy rate at **15.7%**.*
- *All GB countries have shown an improvement in vacancy rates during 2013 with **Scotland** showing the most improvement at -0.81%.*
- *The **best performing** region by a long way (3.4%) is **London at 8.1%**.*
- *The **worst performing** region remains as the **North West at 17.3%**.*
- *The **South West** has shown the greatest **improvement at -0.6%**.*
- ***Shopping centres** continue to have the highest overall vacancy rate at **15.4%**, followed by large (13.4%) and medium (11.9%) town centres, small town centres (9.2%) and retail parks (8.9%).*
- ***Retail Parks**, whilst best performing overall, see similar differences to towns and shopping centres with 480 basis points difference between the highest regional retail park vacancy in the **West Midlands (11.1%)** and the lowest in the **South East (6.3%)**.*
- ***Shopping Centre** vacancy is clustered in the range between 13.3% (East of England) and 20.8% (North West) with **London (10.1%)** being a significant outlier.*
- ***Morecambe** has shown the most improvement over four years, reducing its shop vacancy rate from 30% in 2010 to 17.1% in 2013 (-12.9%)*
- ***Swansea** has shown the greatest increase in its shop vacancy rate over four years from 8.3% in 2010 to 23.1% in 2013 (+14.8%)*