

‘Road has been longer and corners sharper for retail’

A RETAIL expert argues that the Covid-19 pandemic will have an irreversible impact on towns across Carmarthenshire – but believes not all of it has been negative.

Laura James is a retail growth manager and a business lecturer at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) and claims those traders who survive the crisis will be the ones that adapt to the “new normal”.

Questions, of course, remain as to exactly what the county’s town centres could be like over coming years in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Laura, who is from Carmarthen, said: “The past 12 months have been onerous on all of us to say the least, but for retail the road has been longer and the corners sharper.”

The effect of this burden has been seen through the

loss of some retail giants such as Debenhams, which had stores in Carmarthen and Llanelli, being the latest casualties as the pandemic proves to be a journey too far.

Some traders have taken a stand against the crippling impact of the virus.

Laura said: “It is true that Covid-19 has had an irreversible effect on the high street but arguably not all of these have been negative.

“In the darkest hours, some of our retailers have stood up and refused to go unheard and unnoticed.

“Stories of our shops that extended a hand in times of despair when we all needed to feel a sense of belonging to our community.

“The local stores who, after a long day shift, stayed open into the night to allow their customers to buy Christmas presents in a Covid-safe environment following an abrupt lockdown announcement.”

This was certainly the case in Carmarthen just hours after the latest lockdown was announced with just days to go before Christmas.

It saw traders posting on social media that they were pulling out all the stops to allow shoppers to pick up orders and shopping as the clock ticked down to another lockdown, one that we are still living under the shadow of.

Carmarthen also saw a dedicated web portal set up by the town council, signposting shoppers to the websites of many independent traders, along with a campaign of promoting acts of kindness across the town as the community, as in many towns in Carmarthenshire, pulled together.

The loss of big names has even seen independents able to set up pop-up shop in units situated within prime spots such as St Catherine’s Walk in Carmarthen during the past few months.

Laura said: “These will be stories we will tell our children and our children’s children. The story of community and perseverance against adversity.

“We have seen the retailers who knew nothing much of online presence and social media marketing revolting against this disease and adapting to flourish in their new environment.

“The banks who have developed teams of digital heroes who have come to the aid of many who are new to the digital era, sharing their skills.

“They are the new dawn of retail.”

Over the past year, independent traders across the county took to posting much more on social

media, whether Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, to tell customers, both loyal and new, that they were still very much in business in an unfolding brave new world.

And it’s not just shops that have changed the way they operate, with more online and click and collect options among independent traders. As consumers we have been thrown into a new era where we have been forced to change our habits, often kicking and screaming, Laura said.

She added: “The acceleration of the trend in the demands by us as consumers is phenomenal and it is true that we have often been left waiting for retail to catch up.

“Our journey of change did indeed start before the pandemic swarmed our streets and we had begun to enjoy the freedom and



A retail growth expert argues the Covid-19 pandemic will have an irreversible impact on towns across Carmarthenshire but said not all of it has been negative. Laura James, a manager of retail growth and a business lecturer at University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD), claims those traders who survive the crisis will be the ones that adapt to the “new normal”.

changing.

“How we pay for things has seen a shift, too, with the contactless payment limit being increased to allow for a safer payment method and cash often lying redundant in our purses.

“Whether these changes to our consumer behaviour will continue as we ease out of lockdown and return to the high street, only time will tell, but we should and must prepare for the new normal of the high street.

“While many will be eager to return to the delights of a shopping trip in a physical store and banking with a human who wears a smile, we will likely hang on to some fondness for the pandemic shopping story.

“It is very likely that we will want the choice to choose between and change between online and shopping in person.”

This will involve town centres having to adapt. Laura explained: “The important thing is that the high street needs to learn to adapt and change too.

“Not before us, not after us, but beside us as consumers who are willing them to thrive.

“The new dawn of retail must see the birth of a new

hybrid shop, adapting and growing with their customers offering multiple ways to shop.

“Small green shoots of recovery are beginning to show as our smaller, local shops are starting to poke through the winter foliage to be seen and heard and loved.

“Retailers that offer efficient online and click and collect platforms alongside a physical space – these are the retailers of our post-pandemic society.

“I think we will see a new hybrid shopping experience that sees a high street littered with independent shops that have adapted and continue to adapt to every hurdle faced and every challenge accepted.

“We must not mourn the high street of the past but look forward to the excitement of the future and all the benefit it brings with it.

“A greener future for retail and a thriving high street that threads through the heart of the community. A dynamic workforce that welcomes change and embraces agility, one which not only sustains their business but one which promotes growth and diversification.”

Calling all dog lovers!

TeamDogs brings you the best recommendations by dog people, for dog people

Sign up today at TeamDogs.co.uk

Ydych chi wedi ystyried maethu?

Os yw COVID 19 wedi newid y ffordd rydych yn ystyried eich dyfodol, ac wedi'ch helpu i ystyried yr hyn sy'n bwysig mewn bywyd, **dewch atom i gael sgwrs am faethu yn yr awdurdod lleol.**

Have you considered fostering?

If COVID 19 has altered the way you see your future and helped you consider what's important in life - **come to us to talk about local authority fostering.**

0800 0933 699

maethu.canolbarthagorllewin.cymru
foster.midandwest.wales

Mae Maethu Sir Gâr bellach yn recriwtio

Sesiwn Gwybodaeth Maethu Cymru
12:30yp – 13:30yp
18:00yp – 19:00yp

Cysylltwch â PALEvans@sirgar.gov.uk i archebu'ch sesiwn wybodaeth.

Foster Carmarthenshire are now recruiting!

Teams Fostering Information Event
Wednesday 24th March
12:30pm – 13:30pm
18:00pm – 19:00pm

Email PALEvans@carmarthenshire.gov.uk to book your info session.

Cyngor Sir Gâr
Carmarthenshire
County Council