Formal Council Questions and Responses

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1   **Question to the Leader of the Council : 2023/22 - Empty Shops and Premises**

Councillor Reeks asked:

It is disappointing to see BBC News Wales focus on Newport to highlight a story this weekend about Wales having the highest number of empty shops and premises across the UK on the high.

Whilst the report it cites was written in 2021 and developments such as the Market Arcade for example have evolved since then, will the leader agree with me that there is an urgent need to redouble the efforts on reversing the trend of shops and stores closing and moving out of the city centre and further outline Newport City Council's plans to regenerate the retail economy within the city centre?

Councillor Mudd responded:

Newport City Council published a full response to the 2021 research at the time it was issued, which was at the height of the pandemic and therefore set amidst the context of the national collapse of several recognised high street chains. The research referenced not only used a very different geographic boundary for the city centre, but also did not consider the number of properties within the city which are intentionally vacant because of redevelopment proposals.

Support for the city centre is and has remained a priority for Newport City Council. Significant developments have been completed since the report was issued, including the Mercure Hotel and Newport Market, both of which would have contributed to the count of 'vacant' shops in 2021. The Council provides direct financial support to city centre SMEs both through the unique rates reduction in place (which means SMEs within the boundary of the city centre effectively have had two years of trading free of NNDR), as well as grants, advice, and other support from our Economic Development team. This is part of the ongoing strategy to diversify the economic base of the city centre and encourage a broader range of sustainable economic property uses.