

Falmouth sends invite to Mary Queen of Shops

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Richard Wilcox

Business leaders from Falmouth were in Westminster to meet Mary Portas at a 'summit' on the state of UK high streets. Television's so-called Queen of Shops has been called on by the Government to make struggling cities and towns more prosperous and diverse. She told MPs and

retailers that her much-anticipated blueprint would be published next month, and that she might engage two "pilot" towns to drive forward her ideas.

Before the event, delegates from the Falmouth Business Improvement District (BID), a coalition of 400 firms based in the town, presented Ms Portas with a dossier mapping out their own vision for the future.

Falmouth BID manager Richard Wilcox said the one-on-one with the television personality was "hugely encouraging" as many of their ideas for high street revival chimed.

Falmouth's Save the High Street campaign is lobbying to reduce town centre parking charges, get local control of business rates and press for a targeted VAT cut. Mr Wilcox said: "It was hugely encouraging. From a Cornwall context we are on the right path. We have invited Mary to Falmouth and hopefully we can show her why a Cornish town should be one of the pilot areas.

"At the meeting she was asked what were her plans, and a number of things she identified are in her plan – so we seem to be on the same wavelength – things to do with the public realm, VAT, car parking and the 'community high street'."

Ms Portas attended the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Town Centres, a cross-party group of campaigning MPs, alongside Business Minister Ed Davey.

Central to her plan will be tackling the problem of vacant shops, preventing "clone towns" being created and increasing the number of small and independent retailers doing business in local town centres.

Mr Wilcox said: "We would like Mary to come down to Cornwall, not just to Falmouth, to see how Cornwall is in a different position to other areas.

"We have the lowest wages in the country, but also the third highest house prices. There are low shop vacancy numbers in Falmouth, but other towns are in a different position. We would like her to see the extremities."