

Firms thinking big for Small Business Saturday

Britain's first ever Small Business Saturday was drawing shoppers into their local high streets up and down the country just as this issue of *First Voice* dropped through letterboxes.

Championed by Chuka Umunna, Shadow Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills, and supported by the Prime Minister and Business Secretary, Vince Cable, the day aimed to highlight the importance of small businesses to their local communities and to promote a 'shop local' message.

"Small businesses give consumers greater choice and contribute to the unique character of every area," said Mr Umunna. "As a nation, we do not celebrate nearly enough what small businesses do. Our nation's small businesses provide almost two thirds of private sector employment and almost half of private sector turnover."

The FSB has thrown its weight behind the idea. Branch members the length and breadth of the country organised a huge range of imaginative events in the run-up to and on the big day itself, 7 December – one of the busiest shopping days in the calendar.

FSB branches have enlisted the support of MPs, councils and leading business figures to plan attractions and organise networking opportunities or workshops to help traders boost takings.

FSB member, Carolyn Frank, is typical of the many thousands of small business owners who have enthusiastically embraced the idea.

"Businesses and local people need to work together to make their local high street a place to visit, or face losing it for good."



Andy Mardle of Libby Butler Jewellers in Helmsley, pictured with fellow business owners getting ready for Small Business Saturday.

Carolyn, who co-owns Libby Butler Jewellers in Helmsley with her partner Andy Mardle, was one of 100 small businesses from around the country chosen to feature on the Small Business Saturday Facebook page in the run-up to 7 December.

She got together with the 50 or so other independent traders to organise a Festive Fun Day, which included, among many other things, a man crèche in local pubs, food and drink tasting at street stalls and a dog fancy dress show to bring the shoppers out on Small Business Saturday.

"It is an excellent way to remind people of the number and variety of businesses we have in the town, and how important they are to the community throughout the year," said Carolyn.

The Helmsley in Business Group negotiated a parking discount for the day from its local council – as many local

business communities did.

In London, the FSB persuaded councils to drop parking charges on the day to encourage shoppers. The official Small Business Saturday tour bus visited a dozen major shopping centres across the UK in the final three weeks of the campaign to whip up interest. Its final stop was Streatham in London – Chuka Umunna's constituency – where its arrival was greeted by a sizeable contingent of FSB members.

"There has been fantastic support from borough councils, as well as positive feedback from across the political spectrum," said Sue Terpilowski, Policy Spokesman for London, which ran a competition urging shoppers to buy from a local shop and register online to be in with a chance of winning a £500 prize.

"Businesses and local people need to work together to make their high street a place to visit, or face losing it for good."