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<https://shef-live.co.uk/index.php/2024/03/04/sheffield-city-centre-has-gone-downhill-says-trader-as-independent-game-shop-closes-on-norfolk-row/>



‘The town centre as a whole just seems to have gone downhill’ 3 year-old independent game shop closes on Norfolk Row

3 year-old games shop The Vault on Norfolk Row, just off of Fargate, closed on the 1st of March after decreased sales.

Owner Samir Jaouane made the decision to close the shop which opened in April 2021 after seeing a decline in sales, noting that even during the run up to Christmas it wasn't busy enough to earn the shop enough money to sustain itself.

Mr Jaouane said: "Fargate used to be really busy when we first opened a couple years ago and it used to be really busy and if you go and look around now there's a lot of empty units and it just seems to be getting worse and worse."

"There's not as many people sort of on the high street as there used to be, even like two years ago we opened straight after the last lockdown after Covid and it was really busy."

The Star has reported on Fargate's recurring theme of unoccupied units, reporting 23 of 40 units being unused in April 2022, and 8 of 32 units being unused in November 2023.

Mr Jaouane said: "Everything's increasing as well. Our overheads have gone up massively. Our business rates bills increased to £500 a month which is just ridiculous."

Fargate shops that have closed or are still running listed for sale include clothing store Rebel, convenience store Save a Lot, The Christmas Shop and The Phone Shop.

Tim Nye, founder of Marmadukes, which has a shop nearby on Norfolk Row, said: "We are actually really busy, probably because we're daytime, but that doesn't mean to say making a profit right now isn't very difficult."

The Office for National Statistics reports that four in 10 trading businesses have experienced a rise in price of goods and services, with increased prices said to be due to energy, raw materials and labour costs.

Jaouane said: "I think Sheffield City Council could do more. I've wrote and I've wrote to them multiple times just asking for any sort of help for any kind, if we could be given a break with this business right, you know just something to help us get through and they didn't even bother to respond."

Fargate has been considered for regeneration, with the final cost of the project drafted initially in November 2021 being £8.82m. The Star reported in November last year that costs of the project which has yet to start have increased to £33.6m.

Mr Jaouane said: "We were just an independent shop that was set up and there were no sort of incentives, no help or anything, not even any response from the council, or not even any response from the council, no advice or anything like that, they would just ignore us basically."

One of the Council's projects which incentivised local independent businesses was a container park in Fargate which opened in October 2022, costing over £500,000. It was used for only three months, meaning eight potential shops never opened or closed.

Mr Jaouane said: "I've been charged for delivering stock and stuff before, you know what I mean, I've had a £75 charge just for having some stock delivered once by van, so it's just a nightmare."

A Sheffield Council information sheet on Clean Air Zone charges claims it is £10 a day for polluting vans and light goods vehicles, and £50 a day for coaches, buses and lorries.

Sheffield Council has been contacted for a comment.