

# Big Retail Tour Birmingham

September 2020



# Big Retail Tour Birmingham

For the The Retail Tour of Birmingham I have joined forces with my good friend, ex competitor and retail expert Ian Scott, to cast an inquisitive look over retail in Birmingham, the UK's second city.

We focused on the key locations of The Bullring, Grand Central and Corporation Street.

Let's take a look.....




Ian Scott.  
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## Where we went!

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# The Big Retail Tour Birmingham

Why Birmingham? Well it was simple to be honest, I have lived in Solihull for nearly 30 years and wanted to take a closer look at the city which I have been visiting for all those years.

The UK's second city with over 1 million people , it is a vibrant modern city with some iconic retail landmarks.

# 01

## The Bullring

Developed in 2003, Bullring has transformed Birmingham's city centre making it the most exciting city outside London for international brands. With a footfall of 39 million per year, it is one of the UK's most successful shopping and dining destinations and regeneration projects. It also features the guardian bronze bull, the third most photographed landmark in Britain, as well as the iconic Selfridges as an anchor tenant.



# Selfridges

The Selfridges department store in Birmingham is one of the most recognisable and distinctive buildings in the UK. The six-storey building with the eye-catching 'golf ball' exterior, covered in 15,000 discs, was designed by Future Systems and cost £60m to build. It opened as part of the redeveloped Bullring Shopping Centre in 2003.





Project Earth marks a new chapter in Selfridges' history – the start of a challenging yet essential journey to completely change the way we shop and put sustainability at the heart of everything they do.

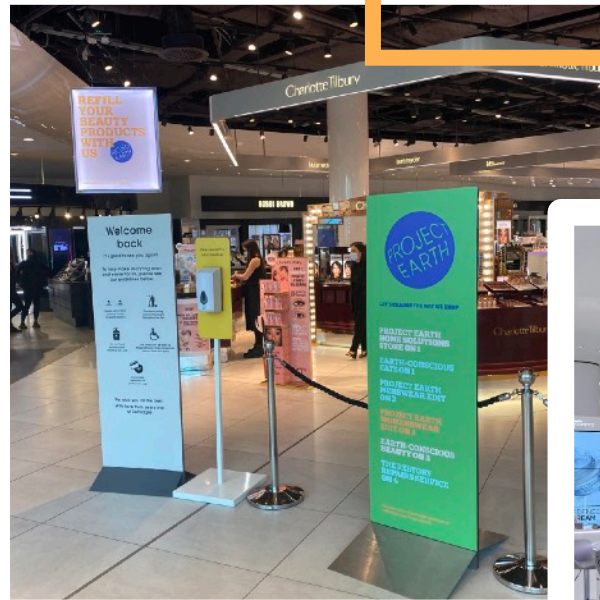
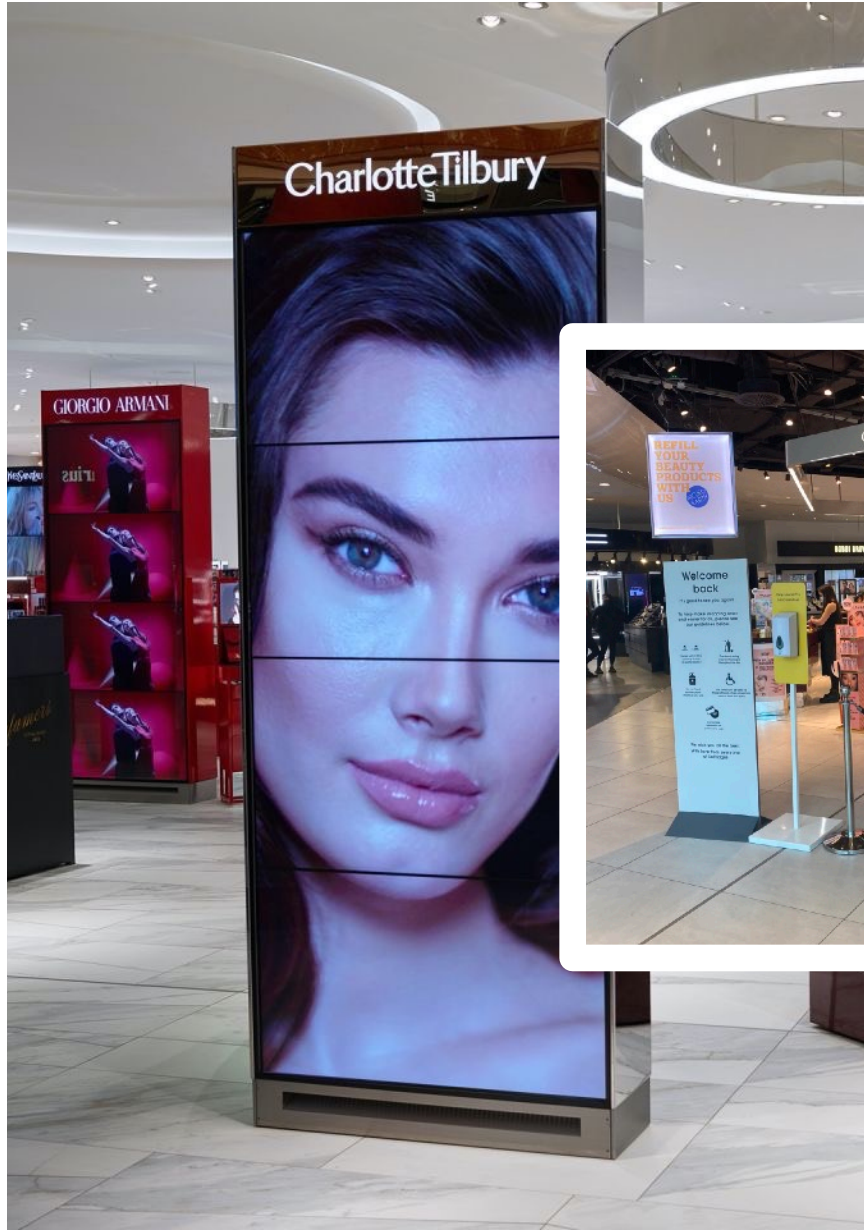
Selfridges want to reinvent retail. With the launch of Project Earth, they invite us to explore the experiments, innovations and conversations that will enable us – together – to do just that.

They're going to work together with their brand partners to address the materials used in products – so we can shop more sustainably. They're launching a myriad of new ways of shopping, including resale, rental, refill and repair – so you can shop more sustainably.



# Selfridges Project Earth

# COVID-19 messaging & Project Earth Introduction





# Selfridges Virtual Reality Beauty

Selfridges had a great piece of retail tech within it's beauty area where you could try on make-up 'virtually' with this iPad installation.

It is a great idea but in this new 'non-touch' retail world we are currently in, when having to wear face masks then this is temporarily redundant.

There was an engraving machine where you could 'personalise' your Estee Lauder bottles, it was working but not sure if anyone would ever even use this.

The low level digital screens were impactful with moving, products & lifestyle content.





# Selfridges Retail Restrictions

On the upper floors of Selfridges are the luxury brands. They are all broken out into separate smaller stores, looking incredible with all their high end, expensive products. However, it was very interesting to see that every one was 'roped off' with queuing signs and no direct access. As a customer you had to wait, which I understand to restrict numbers but it was not a great customer experience for such a luxury area.



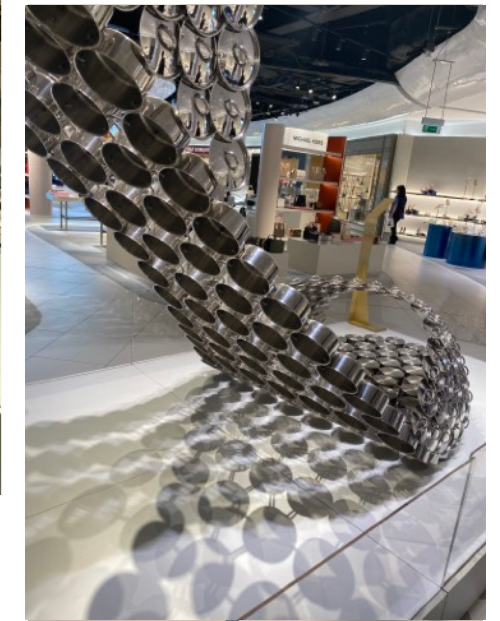
# Selfridges Luxury Experience?

This was something we also picked up on, on the upper floors of Selfridges. Again they had the 'roped off' store front with queuing signs and sanitiser we are all now familiar with.....but take a closer look, the customers are waiting, staff backs turned, no welcome from such a luxury brand and not a a great customer experience for such a luxury part of the store.

# Selfridges Art Installations

Selfridges has joined forces with the renowned independent Ikon Gallery to bring thought-provoking art to the iconic Birmingham department store.

This was an incredible example of in-store theatre which used aluminium saucepans to create a beautiful high heel shoe.





# Selfridges Luxury Face Masks

Face masks have moved on from being a pandemic necessity to a fashion 'must have' statement. It was no surprise to see an entire section dedicated to this new pandemic fashion item.

# Selfridges Project Earth

Selfridges is now offering under the Project Earth initiative a new 'Repair Service' where you can now speak to one of The Restory's experts about making your items as good as new, from covering over scratches on bags to resoling your favourite shoes!

I'm absolutely loving this idea but not sure how many people who can afford this level of product will take them back in to get them repaired.....i could be wrong!





# Selfridges Project Earth

Throughout the store there were many great examples of the work behind the Project Earth initiative.

Great display explaining that the icon Selfridges yellow bag has gone green!

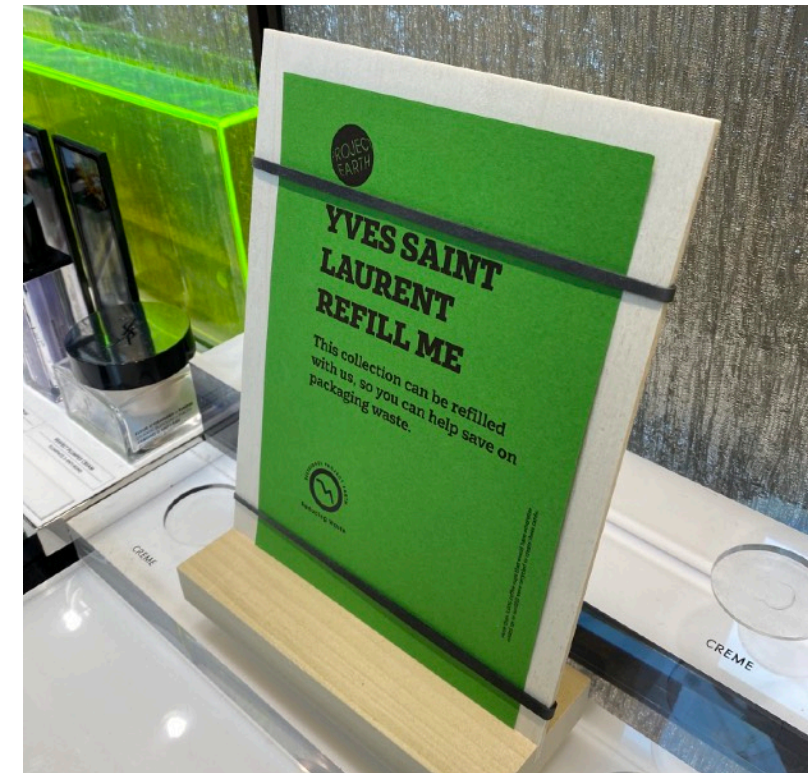
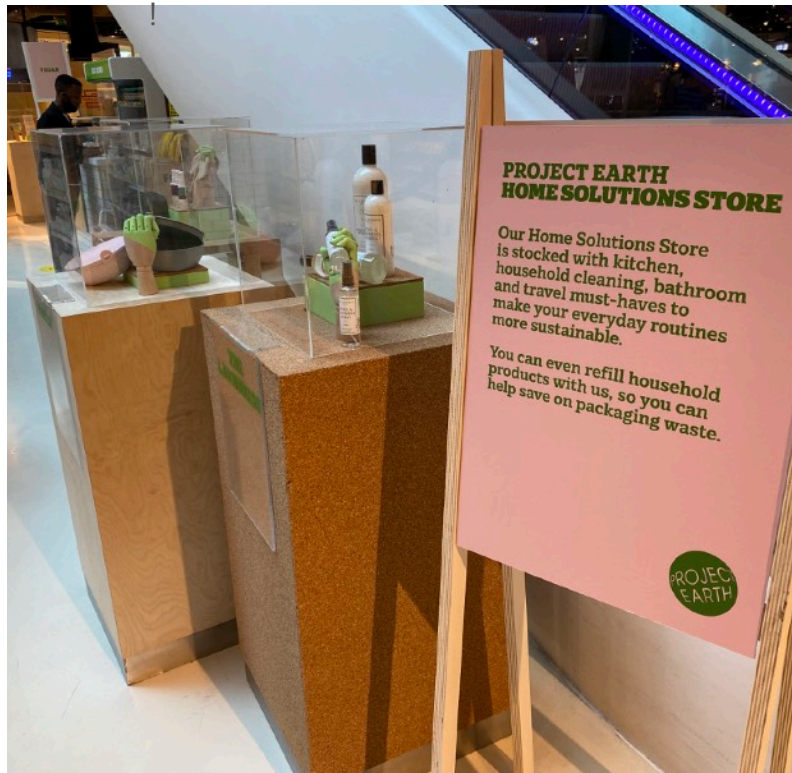
It's now made from 20% recycled coffee cups!

# Selfridges Project Earth

There was a great Project Earth area dedicated to their new 'Home Solutions Store'

This is stocked with kitchen, household cleaning, bathroom and travel must-haves to make our everyday routines more sustainable.

You can even refill household products with Selfridges.....helping to reduce packaging waste!





# Selfridges Project Earth

Now I absolutely loved this area as the amount of toys that are made from cheap plastic is just unbelievable, so the Project Earth Toys were a great addition.

They have edited a range where you can forget throwaway plastic toys and discover sustainably crafted puzzles, games and toys all made from more sustainable materials like wood and cardboard.....this had my seal of approval.



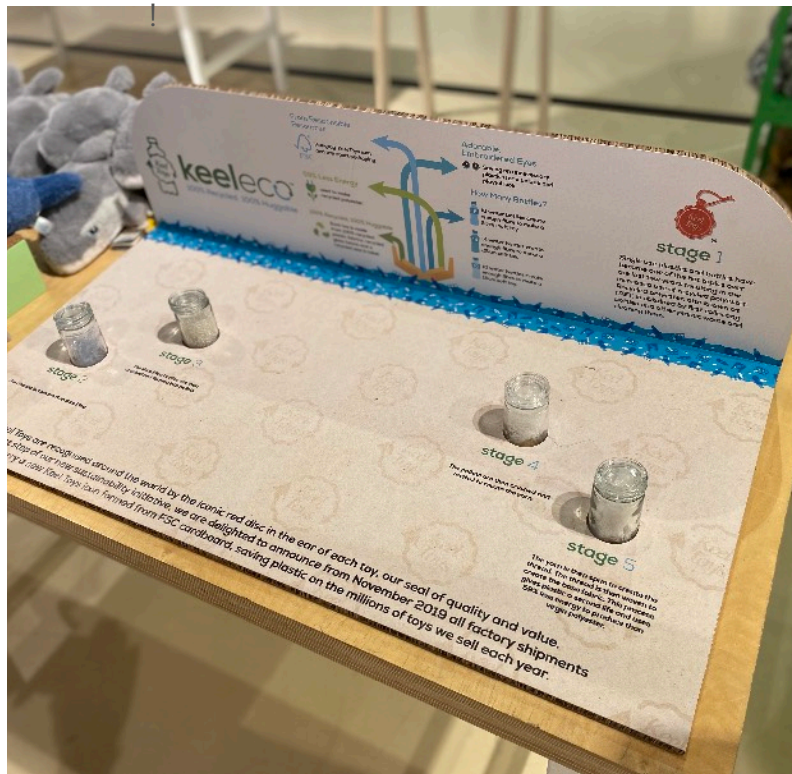
# Selfridges Project Earth

This display was outlining the sustainable credentials of the Keeleco toys.

The display had been made from honeycomb fibre board and gave it a great sustainable look & feel.

My only criticism of this was that the text was too small.....the display was too big and could have been made more fun or interactive as it was explaining the filling within the toys.

Missed opportunity here to really educate the consumer about the sustainable benefits of their products.



# Selfridges Personalised Products

This display for personalised products stood out for me but for the wrong reasons.

Two things, firstly.....they had just set a bunch of products which had been pre-personalised with a set of defined words which I get. Does this increase consumer engagement? Im sure that someone will show me data that supports it but would I buy one? Not sure.

Secondly, the displays were really clunky, rigid foam boards slotted together and looked a bit out of place.





# Vimto Slush Machine

Now this was a good display!

This Vimto slush & product display had the feel of a 'Willy Wonka Factory' about it and it definitely created impact, customer engagement and certainly commands attention within the store.





# Selfridges Retail Lightboxes

In the fashion area there were many back lit, flexible face light boxes which were highly visible. However, I am not sure what had gone wrong here but the LED lights were showing through the fabric.

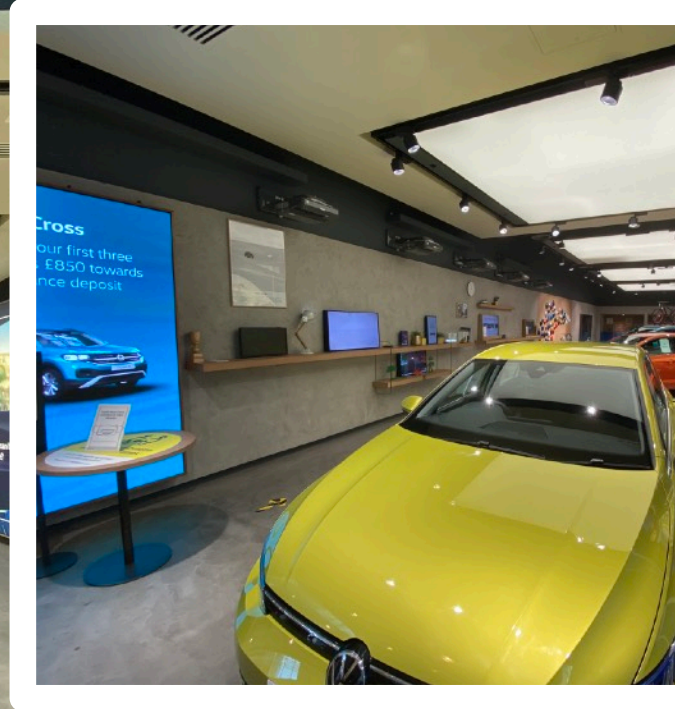
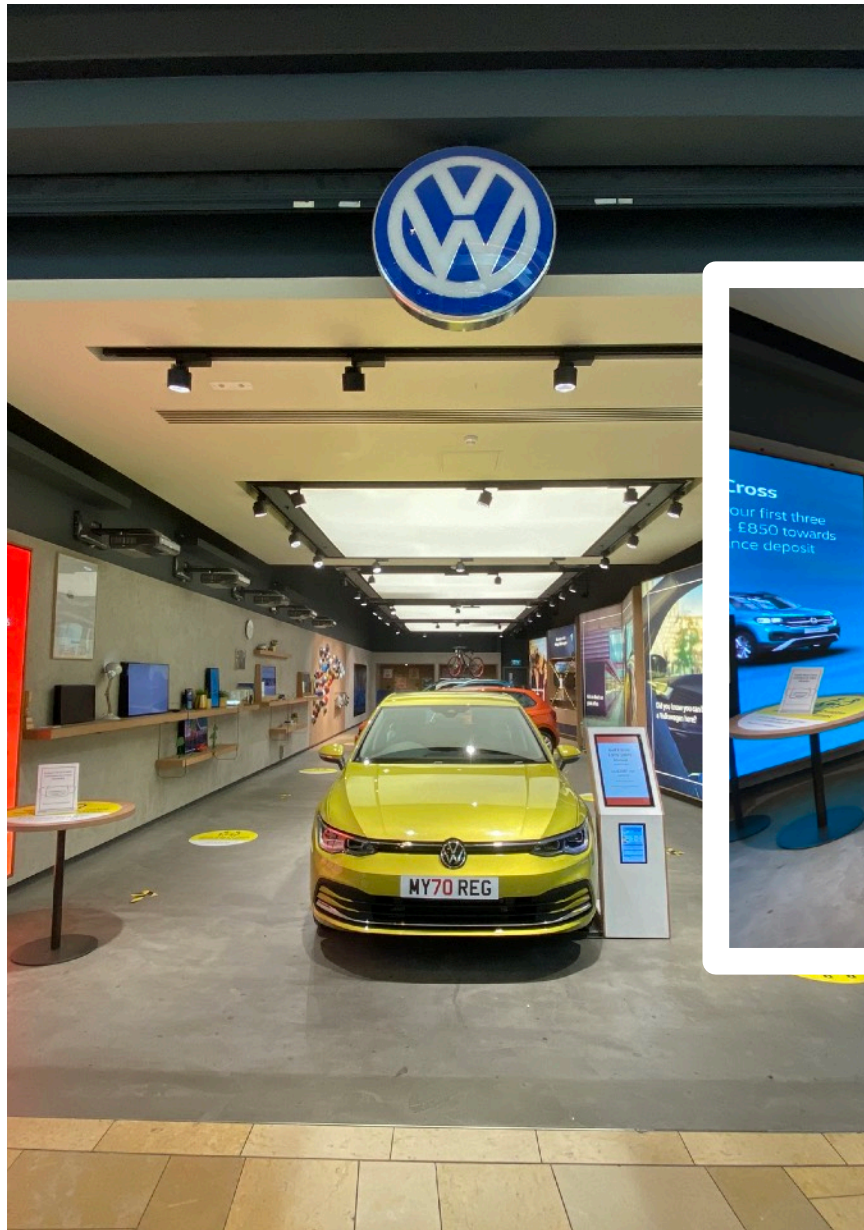
Had they used a new, sustainable material?  
Not sure but the LED light show through was really distracting to the overall marketing message.

# The Bullring's Main Shopping Area

From Selfridges we then moved into the main shopping mall area and took a walk through seeing what was new, exciting or engaging or was it going to be a retail apocalypse?



*Footfall still  
down **38%**!  
Retail Gazette  
Footfall Indicator*



# VW Retail Store

This was the beautiful store designed by Dalziel & Pow. With millennial consumers turning away from traditional dealerships and opting for urban, app-based transport solutions. They have re-designed the car dealership for new customers and put the excitement back into choosing and owning a car.

Shame the amazing projection mapping wasn't either working or was switched off as this was something I was really excited to see.

Why introduce incredible retail tech at such a cost then don't have it working? Always baffles me!

# The Bullring's concessions are open

Good to see that all the central food & beauty concessions are now open bringing a buzz back to the main shopping mall area.







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# New Holland & Barrett store

Holland & Barrett recently unveiled its new store format that focuses on making wellness more accessible and creating a safe and integrated digital shopping experience.

The health and wellness retailer opened its new store concept in Chelmsford with a fresh and spacious layout. The store has wooden flooring and ceiling panels to reflect the chain's ethos of being natural and environmentally friendly. It is designed to guide customers through their shopping experience to make it safer and convenient.

Absolutely loved the 'clean & conscious beauty' and the 'zero waste refill' areas.....easy to navigate, bright & welcoming!

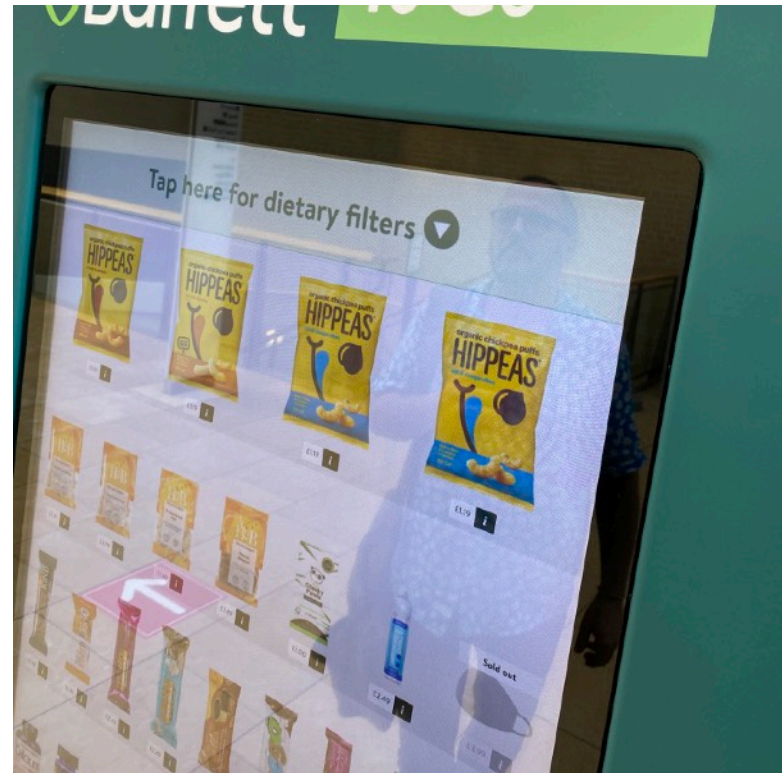


# New Holland & Barrett 'Wellness To Go'

Holland & Barrett have launched a vending machine.....we stumbled across this as we transitioned across from the main Bullring shopping mall to Grand Central.

Great touch screen vending machine with a huge digital 'touch screen' dispensing a variety of wellness products.

Great idea.....not too sure about who would actually use it?



# GAP Closing Down Sale

This is a shame as Gap will now disappear from Birmingham completely.





# Next..... What are these barriers?

Whilst I completely understand that retailers have to adhere to strict COVID-19 guidelines about customer flow etc.....is this an elegant solution? It looks like the builders are in doing some work. Come on Next, you can do better than that!

**Barriers &  
more barriers**



# New Peloton Store

Global interactive fitness brand Peloton is to launch a new store in Birmingham city centre later this month.

The company, which was founded in 2014, is opening the shop in the Bullring on August 28 in the old Bose store.

The 1,700 sq ft showroom will have private trial rooms and also sell branded clothing.

I loved the new design.....and nearly signed up for a bike and a monthly app subscription!



# The Bullring Empty Retail Stores

I have to bring up the subject of empty stores in The Bullring.

We have all heard the predictions of the 'retail apocalypse' and this shopping mall is not immune to store closures.

They have done a great job to 'rebrand' these empty retail outlets with great corporate imagery but it was sad to see so many closed & empty stores!

Hopefully we will see a recovery soon but every indicator is saying that this will not be the case.



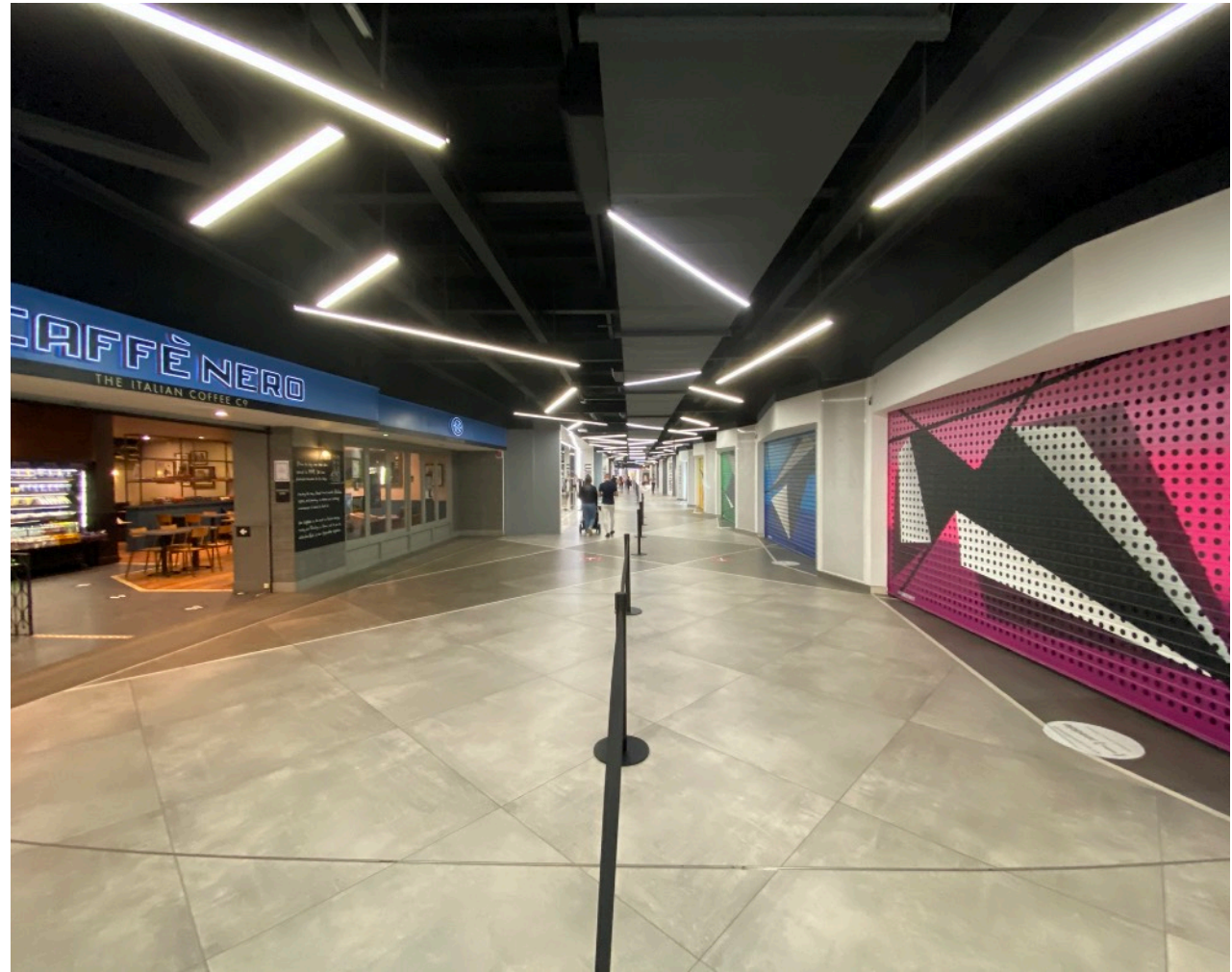


# The Bullring Empty Retail Stores



# Link Street to Grand Central

Now this was one of the saddest parts of the day for me as this was a depressing walk past closed & shuttered retail outlets. This is the main connection route from The Bullring to Grand Central.



# 02



## Grand Central

Grand Central opened in September 2015, providing high-quality retail space, anchored by a 23,000m<sup>2</sup> John Lewis. It also has a huge food court and some incredible brands & retailers giving it the potential of becoming a retail destination. Located adjacent to Bullring and above the redeveloped New Street Station – the busiest train station outside London.

# Grand Central Where is everyone?

Now the Grand Central in my opinion was always an ambitious plan to create a new retail destination away from the main shopping areas of Corporation Street and The Bullring.

The biggest draw was the UK's largest John Lewis, opened with huge fanfare in 2015 at a cost of £35 million.....was it a vanity project?

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen train commuter number collapse and it's in the wrong place now!

Shoppers are not going to walk across from The Bullring.....and it is sad to see it slowly closing.....even my favourite store in the world Moleskine was closed!



# Goodbye John Lewis!

Now this was 'the' saddest part of the whole big retail tour of Birmingham!

John Lewis Birmingham employs 399 people, and they are among the 1300 staff at risk of losing their jobs as part of the wider plans to shut down eight stores.

When Dame Sharon White – who succeeded Sir Charlie Mayfield in February this year – revealed that the store was set for permanent closure, Andy Street, the former MD tweeted that it was “dreadful mistake”.....maybe it was a mistake building it in the first place!



OUR BIRMINGHAM SHOP IS NOW  
PERMANENTLY CLOSED, BUT WE HOPE  
YOUR JOURNEY WITH US CONTINUES

# Grand Central Store Closures

Before we left Grand Central we took a walk around the other retailers and we saw many of them still closed and shuttered.

Some had closed and moved with graphics over the windows.

The whole area felt like a dark, depressing, dead space which is sad as it used to be a vibrant, busy area with champagne bars enticing train travellers to stop, drink & browse the retail outlets.

Without the train passengers and retail foot fall still down by 44% and the loss of the flagship John Lewis store I fear this will become a dusty old relic of the giant shopping mall era!





# Main Shopping Area Corporation Street

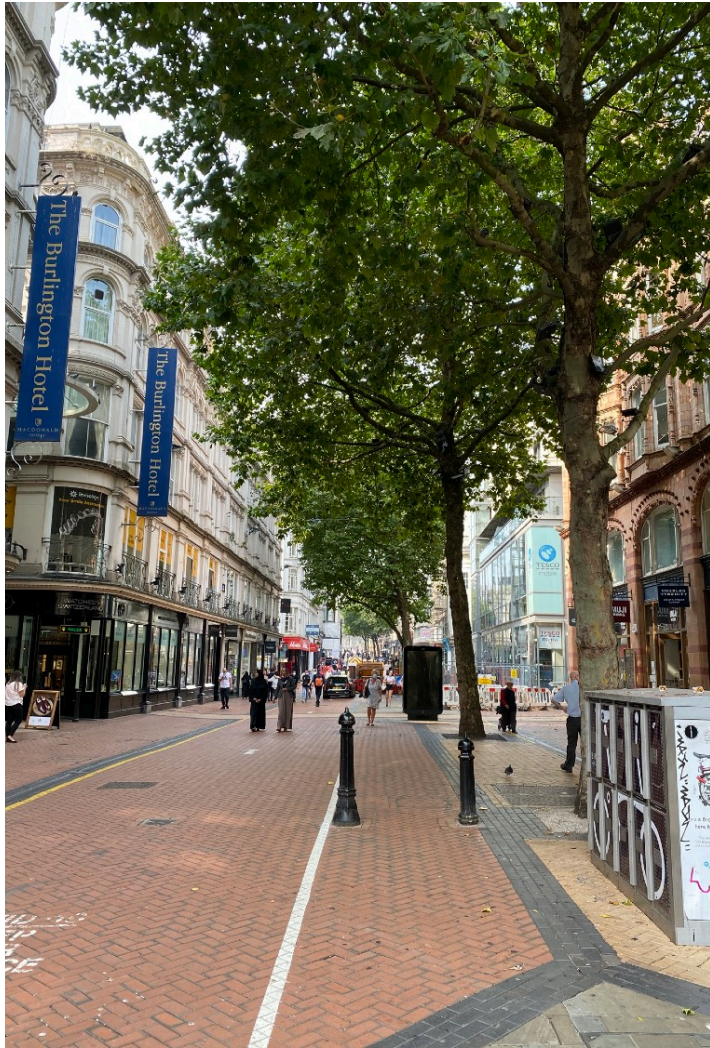
# 03



Corporation Street was once the home of shopping in Birmingham. It was, undeniably, the place to go on a Saturday afternoon to buy a dress or shirt for a night out or to spend your pocket money with your mum. Over the years, this city centre street was where you'd find large department stores like Lewis's, C&A, Beatties and the old Rackhams.

However, following the launch of Bullring and the world's biggest Primark, the landscape for shoppers has changed here dramatically. Today, it is home to two huge Poundland stores, charity shops, chemists, and a couple of clothes and jewellery stores with the tram line cutting right through the heart of it.

But on a positive, it does have the most beautifully designed Apple store in a huge old bank.



When you think of modern, experiential, engaging, impactful, modern retail you wouldn't see it here in this part of Birmingham.

It should be better.....it links the incredibly well designed new library, town hall and Brindley Place with the The Bullring.

This part is 'functional' with banks, chemists, coffee shops and 24 hour grocery stores!  
Retail isn't dead.....but this style of retail is definitely dead!



**Old Retail  
is Dead!**



**Just when I  
thought retail  
was dead...  
LUSH came  
along!**



# LUSH's Bath Bomb Sushi Bar



# LUSH Store

Lush opened their world's biggest store in Birmingham!

The brand is known for its cruelty-free beauty products, including the fizzing bath bomb, shower jellies and solid shampoo bars. The store also offers a variety of treatment services for shoppers - in the main store area and a separate spa area.

Inside the store there are consultation pods, where customers can get advice in private on what products to buy.

The staff were incredibly friendly, knowledgeable and hugely proud to be working for LUSH!





# LUSH Store Honeycomb Display

Immediately noticed this window display made from a fibre honeycomb board, probably made from 100% recycled content and 100% recyclable.

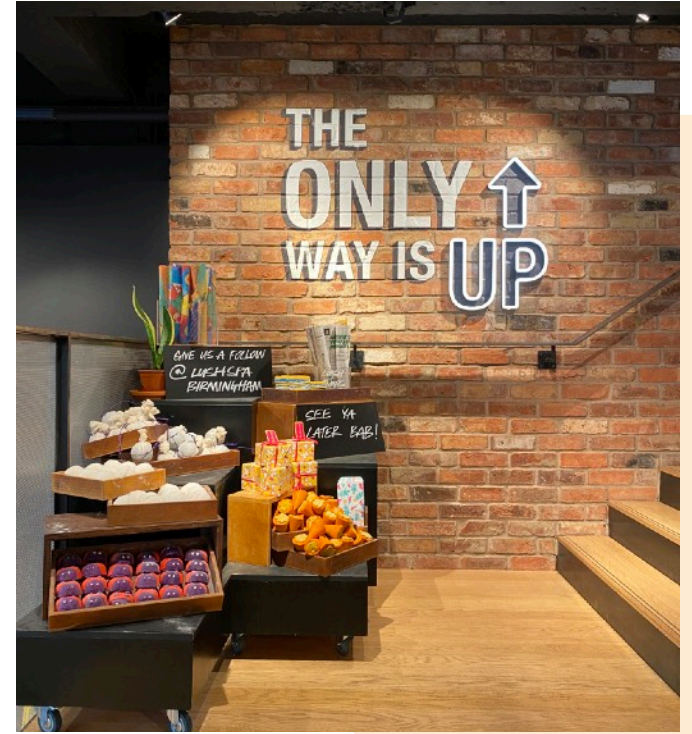
Creative design allowing all parts to be slotted together so no additional plastic clips or hangers.

The display was showcasing the new soaps that were in-store.

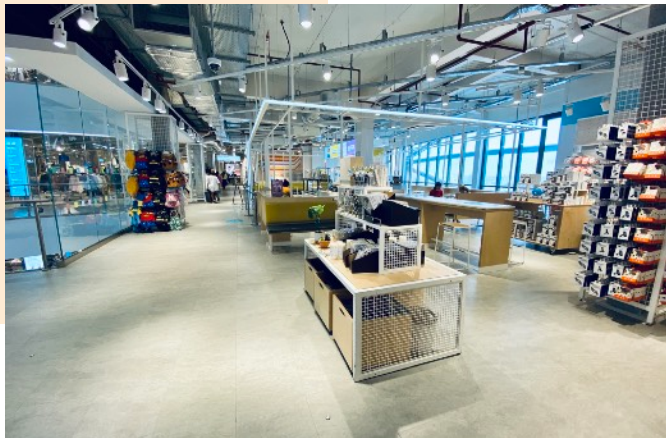
# LUSH Store Recycled POS

This was great to see.....all the black in-store signs & product information labels were all made from 100% recycled, returned black pots. Closed loop recycling at it's very best!











# Primark's Sustainable Initiatives

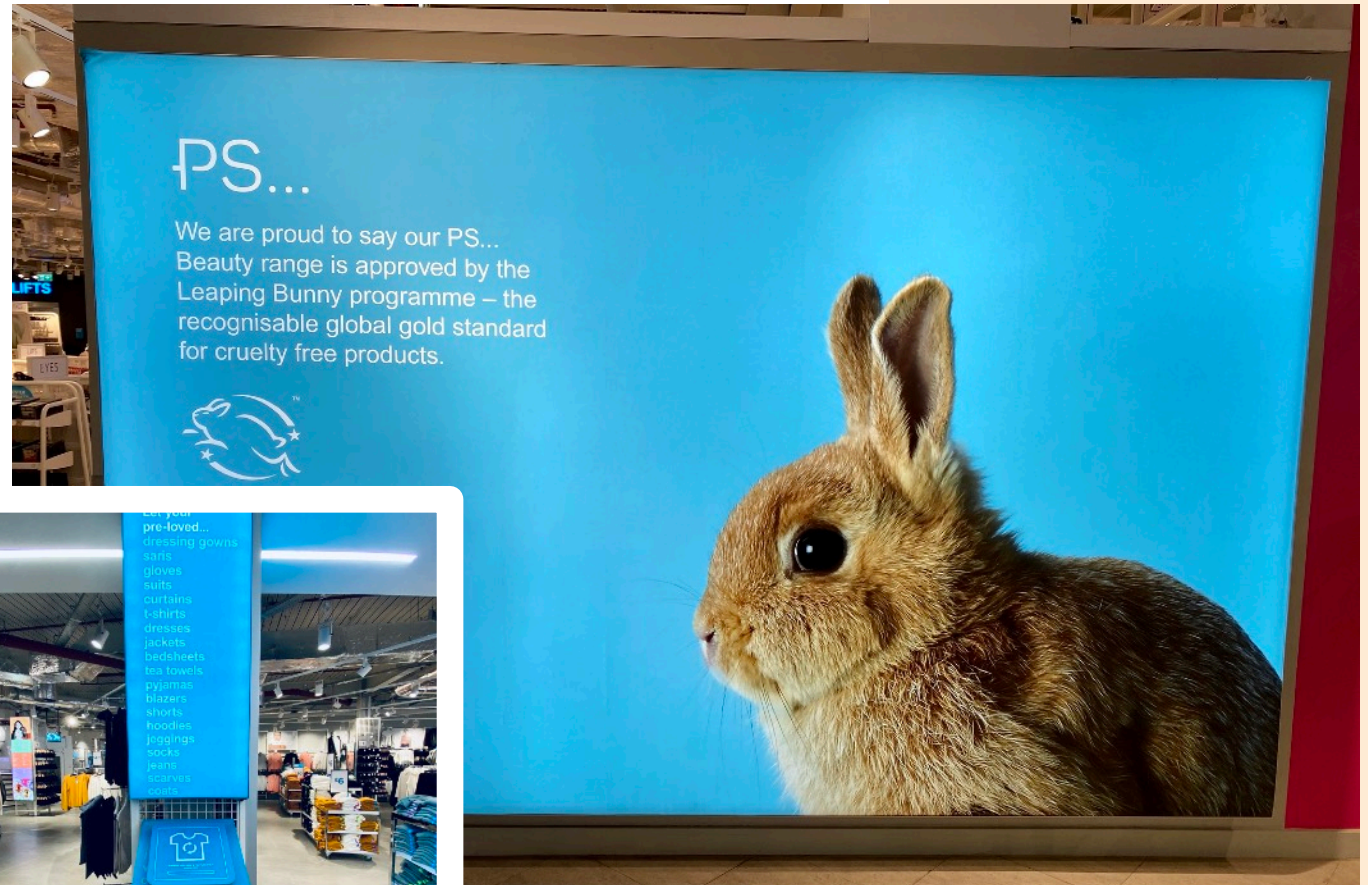
These were two of the sustainable initiatives that we could see within the store.

Firstly, there was a clothes recycling service called

'Let your pre-loved be re-loved'

You can recycle your clothes and all profits generated will be donated to UNICEF.

Their second initiative was for their 'Leaping Bunny' programme - the recognised global gold standard for cruelty free cosmetics.



# Birmingham's Footfall Where is everyone?

These images were taken on a Wednesday at 2pm in September. This is COVID-19's true impact on retail and the LIVE footfall trend from The Retail Gazette is still showing that it is -38% down on year ago comparison numbers.





# Vodafone Why?

Now this was the winner of the 'most pointless marketing activation' of the day award.

I fully understand about brand awareness etc but this pop-up event was pointless.

No-one interested, the van was empty on the inside apart from a digital screen which was turned off.

Will it showcase the brand?

Yes, however there was absolutely no customer interaction or engagement.

“

*“Having visited some other cities in the UK, I was keen to see how Birmingham was coping with the virus. We found stores that were heavy handed with safety, at the expense of customer access and interaction, while others were applying questionable levels of safety.*

*Stores like Lush are continuing their impressive store experience, introducing new details and features to delight shoppers. Selfridges Project Earth is a great story to tell, and was consistent throughout the store. Holland & Barrett has launched a new, improved concept, including an adventurous vending offer too.*

*Retailers need to start to accelerate the engagement within stores, otherwise shoppers will just go online. Footfall was sporadic and inconsistent in the city, so brands have to maximise the effectiveness of their stores to give people a reason to return.”*

**Ian Scott.**  
retail  
consulting

# 04

## Thoughts of The Day

**“It was a fascinating day spent seeing first hand the huge impact that the pandemic restrictions have had on retail in the UK’s second city. There were pockets of optimism with the incredibly engaging store from LUSH but I cannot help feel that we have a very long way to go before retail returns to anywhere near normal”**

*Steve Lister*



SteveLister.com



# What's next?

# 05

## The Big Retail Tour Bicester Village

Luxury shopping at 160+ designer brands , just 46 minutes from London Marylebone & 13 minutes from Oxford by train.

I will be completing the retail tour with my good friend and retail industry expert, Tim Smith, Managing Director at Quantum 4 Ltd.

Our focus for this tour will be not just how Bicester Village is reacting to the retail pandemic restrictions but a fascinating view of store & fixture design from Tim's perspective.

06

GRAND CENTRAL

Photo Credit:slaterislost.com



**Let's  
Talk....**

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