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## Bristol is flourishing, despite the recession



By Yhyhy Yhyhyh

BRISTOL'S main shopping centre is in better shape than it has been for more than five years, according to the latest letting figures.

Bosses at Cabot Circus and Broadmead say the number of shops occupied in the centre is higher now than it was before the recession hit the high street in the autumn of 2008.

The start of the biggest downturn in living memory coincided with the opening of the £500 million Cabot Circus shopping centre.

High-profile casualties in the city centre included Woolworths, music store Zawi and upmarket men's shop Hardy Amies.

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But according to the bosses of some of Bristol's biggest stores the city is still flourishing and only three per cent of shops in Cabot Circus are currently standing empty.

In the last two months there have been 25 new openings with both independent niche traders and national high street names coming to Bristol.

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Cabot Circus has seen 10 new arrivals, including Sanctuary Spa in its high-profile Quakers Friars square.

Other newcomers include designer clothes shop Garment Quarter. Eskimo, a store which specialises in children's clothes and hairdressing, has opted to move down from Clifton and into the shopping centre.

Jo Hawkins, the city centre retail manager, believes stores in Bristol are looking forward to one of their best Christmas shopping seasons in recent years.

She said: "With the opening of so many different shops in the city centre Bristol now has a retail offer which is second to none in the region.

"It is fantastic to welcome such a broad range of retail outlets into the city centre at this time. With vacant units at their lowest level for five years the future is looking very positive."

Kevin Duffy took over as head of Cabot Circus just over a month ago and he has been holding talks with business leaders across the city on the best way to improve Bristol's standing in the national rankings. The aim is to propel the city into the list of the country's top 10 shopping destinations. He said: "We are delighted to see the new stores opening up in time for Christmas.

"These latest lettings take Cabot Circus to 97 per cent let – a considerable achievement considering the economic climate we are currently operating in.

"We are also in discussions with potential tenants about all of the remaining units which means that we could be fully let by the start of the new year."

Other new brands at Cabot Circus include women's fashion shop Quiz and card chain Scribbler along with KFC and Spud-u-Like.

There are also plans to open a late night bar in Quakers Friars – the first in the city centre. An application has been lodged with Bristol City Council.

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