

Retailers plead their case for earlier reopening date

Shops April 12

By Danielle Sheridan

ALL non-essential retail will reopen on April 12 but customers will have to shop alone.

The Government said reopening the indoor economy, which employs 1.2 million people, would restore jobs and livelihoods, and allow people to access important activities and services.

However, as additional premises reopen as part of Stage 2 of the roadmap, wider social contact rules will apply, so customers will have to shop either alone or with household groups.

While the news that non-essential retail would reopen was welcomed, the British Independent Retailers Association (Bira) took issue with the date.

Andrew Goodacre, Bira's CEO, said: "Whilst it is good for us to have a date, we are very disappointed that non-essential shops will miss the Easter period, especially as they also missed out on most of the busy festive period."

He called on the Chancellor to "recognise" this in the Budget, as he said independent retailers were "desperate to be open and serving their communities".

"In the meantime we have large general retailers, and garden centres free to trade, despite only selling a small amount of essential items, with the prospect of being free from competition for the next seven weeks," he added.

Helen Dickinson OBE, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, called on the Government to "remain flexible and allow non-essential retail to reopen as soon as the data suggests it is safe to do so".

She said: "Non-essential shops are ready to reopen and have been investing hundreds of millions on making themselves Covid-secure."

Last week the Tony Blair Institute published its blueprint to get Britain out of lockdown and suggested non-essential shops could start being opened towards the end of next month if Covid cases continued to drop at the current rates.