March witnessed a modest rise in high street footfall across Scotland, with an increase of +2.7% compared to February, which is an improvement on last year when it rose by +1.7% for the same time period. This suggests that footfall trends are starting to stabilise.

Much of the uplift was driven by activity in the final two weeks of the month where footfall rose by an average of +7.5% from the week before. This coincided with the lead up to Easter, payday and the start of the Easter school holidays. A mid-month slump saw footfall decline by -8.6% from the week before when it had risen by +2.4% wiping out any gains made, and hinting consumer caution ahead of the great Easter shop.

The rise in footfall during the latter part of the month is encouraging despite stormy weather conditions and many people choosing to make the most of the Easter holidays with vacations abroad; three major UK airports reported this would be their busiest Easter ever, again another sign of normality returning following a volatile period since the pandemic.

Footfall declined from 2023 levels by -3.4% which is indicative of the shifts in key holidays moving forward. Weekday footfall also witnessed a marginal drop of -4.2% when compared against last year suggesting turbulent weather conditions are still likely to impact footfall. Footfall over the weekend period also declined however it was much less severe (-1.4%). This aligns with consumer confidence remaining unchanged in March from February (according to GFK) however there was an improvement in how people feel about their personal finances over the next 12 months suggesting an element of control being regained. This also aligns with the recent news from the British Retail Consortium (BRC) which highlighted that shop price inflation eased to its lowest level since December 2021 providing good news for consumers.

Looking ahead to April, a fresh set of rail strikes set to take place from 5th-8th April, coinciding with the Easter school holidays may dampen footfall, especially in towns and cities. However, the impact is expected to be less severe than on previous strike days due to it being bolstered by footfall on Good Friday when it rose by +12.5%. Retail parks and shopping centres are likely to experience a decline in activity however much of this will be as a result of the surge in activity leading up to Good Friday in the week prior. This new wave of strike action will no doubt impact businesses reliant on footfall during the school holidays such as leisure and hospitality particularly in market and historic towns, as well as regional cities including London. However, there may well be optimism for coastal towns, visitor attractions, and retail destinations where families can travel by car.

In an already challenging retail landscape, having visibility of store and portfolios performance remains crucial for businesses. Only by sourcing the right data can retailers make informed business-critical decisions, including forecasting their staffing needs, investing resources where it adds the most value, and optimising their energy and facilities management to drive efficiencies.