A month of two halves provided May with a healthy boost in retail footfall with a recorded rise of +7.7% in Scotland’s high streets from the month before. The boost in activity overall is the greatest month on month rise seen since May 2021 (+41.2%), while much of Scotland was still going through a recovery period from the pandemic, which is encouraging news for high streets.

The first half of the month is likely to be where all of the gains were made as the early May bank holiday coupled with much warmer weather provided the perfect backdrop for people heading out, particularly to high streets where footfall rose week on week by an average of +3.2% in the first two weeks of the month. Even the rail strike action, which occurred in the second week of the month, appears to be subsiding.

Despite disruptions occurring throughout the week, footfall continued to rise both week on week (+4.2%) and year on year (+2.5%) in Scotland’s high streets. This is where we would normally expect to see the greatest effect however with the bank holiday weekend and warmer weather, it could be that towns and cities in Scotland kickstarted their summer events and festivals to drive footfall which is evident from the uplift in activity observed at either end of that particular week.

While May saw strong footfall performance in comparison to April, the year on year trends saw a decline of -3.2%. This was anticipated due to the three bank holidays which occurred last year including the King’s Coronation.

Looking ahead, there is much optimism for the retail and hospitality sector with major events including the Euros 2024, Glastonbury, and even Taylor Swift’s Eras tour arriving in the UK likely to boost in footfall in various locations across the country. Recent reports from GFK also revealed an improvement in consumer confidence which was largely driven by people feeling confident about their personal finances, increasing by 15 points when compared against this time last year. With a general election imminent and a heavy focus on revitalising the high street, only time will tell how election campaigns will impact retailer and consumer confidence in the coming weeks.