Toys "R" Us, have collapsed, while others, such as Mothercare, have closed stores. On June 11th alone, Poundworld entered administration, risking 335 stores; Fabb Sofas closed, losing nine; and Henri Lloyd, a fashion retailer, came out of administration, but will still sell five shops.

Businesses that have not kept up with the internet are going to the wall. Around 16% of sales are now online, and that share is expected to rise to 40% by 2030. As their margins have been squeezed by the digital disruptors, bricks-and-mortar stores have been hit by rising business rates and wage bills, which affected them harder than online retailers. "The pace of change is speeding up," says Richard Lim, head of Retail Economics, a consultancy. Increasingly, successful brands concentrate their outlets in a few upmarket malls, and do the rest online. CBRE, a property company, used to advise retailers that they needed at least 200 stores to cover Britain. Now it recommends only 75.

But this does not mean the death of the high street, as many headlines claim. Indeed, high-street vacancy rates are low by the standards of recent years. Instead, the space freed up by capsizing chains is creating opportunities for the likes of Swingers. The new mantra on the high street is to focus on "what Amazon cannot do". On this basis trampoline parks, imported from America, are filling up former supermarkets. There are now about 120 in Britain. Just as it is impossible, for now, to trampoline in cyberspace, nor is it easy to paint your nails online. Lisa Hooker of PWC says that although the number of shops closing is high, several niches are bucking the trend, including beauticians, gelaterias (as posh ice-cream joints now style themselves) and boutique bookshops.

Retail space is also being repurposed to provide housing. Student housing is a popular option. In High Wycombe, for example, student flats have been built in the town centre in place of offices and shops.

Local councils have taken a lead in buying decaying, gloomy shopping centres to redevelop as mixed residential, retail and entertainment areas. This year councils are on course to invest more money than ever in such ventures. They can borrow at low cost from the government's Public Works Loan Board to buy retail space that is going cheaply. With their funding being slashed, councils hope to earn some income from these redevelopments.

Take Surrey Heath council. It bought the Camberley shopping centre for £86m ($115m) at the end of 2016. Work has begun on the redevelopment, which includes 700 new houses and flats. The council gets about £2m a year back in rents. Shopkeepers like the new mix, as the residents provide footfall. Ashwood House, the latest block, has just been finished—on the site of a former BHS store. ■

Town planning

Paddling against the Amazon

CAMBERLEY

As shoppers go online, high streets reinvent themselves

DEMORALISED shoppers on London's overcrowded Oxford Street can now leaven their day with a few rounds of crazy golf. Swingers has just opened near Oxford Circus. Customers can putt away on helter-skelter or big-wheel themed courses and refresh themselves at four cocktail bars. The venue, already popular with hen parties and corporate beanos, is on the site of the former flagship store of BHS, a fashion retailer that went bust two years ago.

Swingers is one of the businesses that is filling up the acres of floor space vacated by the recent collapse of some of Britain's most famous high-street brands, as well as many lesser-known ones. Near to the old BHS store is another sinking flagship, House of Fraser. On June 7th the company announced that it was closing 31 of its 59 shops, with a loss of up to 6,000 jobs. This continues the worst run of closures on Britain's high streets since 2010, just after the financial crash. Last year there was a net loss of 1,772 shops, according to analysis by the Local Data Company for PWC, a consultancy. This year several big names, such as

High times on the high street