

ICELAND is reportedly planning to recruit 2,000 staff to have on “stand-by” if any of their stores are hit by the “pingdemic”.

The supermarket giant has reduced its trading hours and closed some stores after staff were required to self-isolate following notifications from the NHS Test and Trace app.

Richard Walker, the firm’s boss, has said at least 1,000 staff are currently self-isolating, and so employing temporary workers seems a smart move.

However, it’s not one that’s realistic for small independent

# COMMENT



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retailers. Instead, if any of our members – or their staff – are pinged by Test and Trace it is more than likely the business will have to shut completely.

In a small shop, if one member

of staff tests positive it is likely that nearly all that team will be deemed to be in close contact, including the owner.

And this comes at a time when they are in the process of rebuilding their businesses after many months of closure, with little or no income.

In addition, high street confidence is at its most fragile as shoppers navigate post-lockdown retail and an end to compulsory mask-wearing in England.

One of our members, who is already struggling to pay their

rent and other mounting debts accrued through months of lockdown, was forced to reduce their opening hours then shut completely after staff were “pinged”.

On August 16, those who have been double-jabbed will not be required to self-isolate. However, retail and hospitality may continue to struggle with staff shortages; many part-time staff may still not be in the double-jabbed category and therefore self-isolation will still apply.

Most independent retailers only qualified for the small

Restart Grant, barely enough to get up and running again let alone mitigate new challenges.

Bira recommends the money still sat in the bank accounts of local authorities, which was supposed to be allocated in Restart Grants – some £800million – is redistributed to help independent businesses facing further closures.

For if the Government does not step in now there will be yet more high street casualties. Is that something we really want to see when the focus is meant to be on economic recovery?