

Opening date set for Bobby's department store in Bournemouth

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The developers relaunching the Bobby & Co department store in Bournemouth have announced a start date for the first phase of its grand reopening.

Verve Properties is currently restoring the former Debenhams building in The Square in the seaside town's centre, to create a retail hub featuring "local, ethical and unique" businesses.

The complex will carry the Bobby's name, marking [the return of the provincial department store's brand](#) to the same building almost 50 years after it was replaced by Debenhams.

As part of the building's restoration, the original 1915 shop entrance is set to be reinstated, with architectural detailing from the 1920s uncovered and restored to sit alongside contemporary finishes.

London-based Verve has now said that the first elements of the revival will be open to the public from Saturday August 7, with more set to follow later in the year and into 2022.

A beauty hall will be first to open on the building's ground floor featuring products from local business such as skincare

brand Bao, with a barber shop, treatment rooms and wellness activities to be added later in the year.

Also in the initial opening will be an artist-run space and new gallery focused on international contemporary art, a traditional ice cream and coffee parlour, outdoor seating in the Square and a sushi restaurant.

Visitors will also get to experience the DR00L, described as “the world’s first food hall devoted entirely to dogs”. The pop up cafe will include a cake shop, a “doggy tuck shop”, and a dog ball recycling centre.

Later in 2021 the building will see the opening of The Bobby & Co Market Hall on the first floor, which will also incorporate a bar, coffee lounge and seating for up to 400 people.

A smokehouse restaurant serving craft beers, a top floor fine dining restaurant and an onsite bakery and gardens are also planned.

Verve has said the new incarnation of Bobby’s would not be a department store in its “previous understanding” and would offer retail experiences that are not easy to replicate online.

Ashley Nicholson, director of Verve Properties, said the aim of the project was to make Bobby’s a building of “regional significance” and show there was a future for highstreets across the UK.

Mr Nicholson said: “Covid accelerated change already underway in our town centres – much as the impact on much of the high-street has seen retailers faced with enormous challenges, this hastening of a shift already happening also presents an opportunity for a complete reboot in terms of the way we use town centres.

“Four main drivers, community, localism, sustainability, and

experience will dominate the new era of in-person shopping – and we have worked to ensure they will be the focus of our repurposing of Bobby’s.

Prior to the current challenges faced by the high street – town markets were a central reason for people to gather, and that gathering creates a hub for community life.”

Mr Nicholson added that a rota of events and activities would be held at the store in order to “bring together the community.”

Debenhams [closed its doors in Bournemouth in May](#) following the company’s collapse and subsequent sale of its website and brand to online fashion retailer Boohoo.

Bobby & Co was founded when Frederick James Bobby bought a drapery store in Margate, Kent, in 1887. In the early 20th century the business expanded, opening in mostly seaside towns across the south of England.

The business later became part of retail group the Drapery Trust, from which Debenhams had emerged by the 1950s. Debenhams rebranded all of its subsidiaries, including Bobby’s in Bournemouth, in the early 1970s.

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