

More Wilko job losses loom as Putman rescue deal collapses

Fears intensified on Monday morning over thousands of high street job losses at Wilko, the stricken value retailer, when a rescue deal involving the owner of HMV collapsed.

Sky News has learnt that Doug Putman has ended talks with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) over a slimmed-down deal to acquire about 100 Wilko sites.

The transaction is understood to have collapsed over the central costs associated with taking on the chain's infrastructure.

A retail executive close to the situation said he expected that PwC would now seek to strike an agreement with the owner of Poundland to offload about 100 stores.

However, as with a [separate deal that saw 51 Wilko sites sold to B&M European Value Retail](#), it was unclear whether the staff who work at those stores would form part of the transaction.

The Range, another value retailer, is in advanced talks to buy Wilko's brand and online assets.

The collapse of the [talks with Mr Putman after weeks of negotiations](#) will come as a bitter blow to hopes that thousands of members of Wilko's 12,500-strong pre-administration workforce could be salvaged.

PwC [has already announced about 1,600 redundancies](#) since the family-owned chain crashed into insolvency last month.

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Mr Putman, whose financial backer, Gordon Brothers, recently pulled out, had sought to reshape the deal several times.

As recently as last Thursday, he was close to signing a deal to take over more than a quarter of Wilko's stores.

It means that the number of jobs which now disappear could represent the vast majority of Wilko's website, barring another bidder emerging.

One insider told Sky News last week that PwC had been preoccupied with preserving as many of Wilko's workforce as possible in the month since its collapse, within the context of its obligations to maximise value for creditors.

PwC declined to comment, while Mr Putman could not be reached for comment.

Wilko – owned by the founding Wilkinson family for decades –

had been seeking external investment for months, a search which acquired greater urgency four weeks ago when PwC was formally appointed as administrator.

Established by the Wilkinson family in 1930, the chain sells homeware and garden furniture at discounted prices.

Like many high street retailers, it has been hit by inflationary pressures and supply chain challenges.

In recent months, it had been seeking to finalise a company voluntary arrangement (CVA) – a mechanism that would have triggered steep rent cuts at hundreds of stores but avoided any closures.