



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government



# Build Back Better

High Streets

# Contents

- 04 Government's vision for thriving high streets**
- 09 Revitalising high streets**
- 15 Supporting high street businesses**
- 21 Improving the public realm**
- 28 Creating safer and cleaner spaces**
- 32 Celebrating pride in local communities**

# PM Foreword

Necessity being the mother of invention, this past year and a half or so has seen towns, cities and villages right across the country rediscover their high streets.

We've stayed close to home and shopped local. Turned to small independent retailers who found all kinds of innovative ways to keep us going. And tens of millions of us have realised that there's no reason whatsoever why our continental cousins should have a monopoly on the delights of al fresco dining.

Together it has shown us all that, contrary to whatever the doom-mongers have been saying for years, the decline experienced by high streets over the past 20 years is by no means inevitable or terminal – and that, with a little help from government, they can once again become the proud and prosperous heart of every community.

That's what this strategy is all about.

Successive governments have, with the best of intentions, sought to support our high streets by pretending that the 21st century hasn't happened, propping them up and sitting Canute-like as the waves of changing habits and online retail lap around their ankles.

We're doing things differently. Rather than attempting to force the toothpaste back into the tube, we're accepting that the world has changed and giving our high streets the freedom they need to change with it.

So, if a pub wants to serve fantastic food and drink to customers inside, it can offer the same to commuters stopping off for a takeaway on the way home.

If a vacant shop isn't working for retail, arcane rules shouldn't stand in the way of it becoming a nursery, or small independent fitness studio. And, given that it rains less in Nottingham than it does in Naples, why shouldn't café tables spill out

onto the pavements of the East Midlands, and indeed the rest of the country?

By clearing away the pointless red tape and making it easier to innovate, we'll make our high streets places that businesses want to be. And by correcting the mistakes of the past and giving drab, urban spaces a new lease of life – kicking out the litter-droppers, chewing-gum scatterers and wall spray-painters, and replacing them with millions of trees and flowers – we'll make them places that people want to be too, whether you live in a leafy Cotswolds market town or in the bustling centre of a great northern industrial city.

Because wherever you call home, you should have a local high street to be proud of – and, if we all work together, if we follow this strategy, that's exactly what we will all get.

**Boris Johnson, Prime Minister**



# Building Back Better High Streets

## What does the high street of the 21st century look like?

A crucial question after a year in which existing trends – the shift online and the blurring of home and work – have been magnified and accelerated at break-neck speed, bringing about great change.

Our high streets have been on the frontline of these challenges. As we level up and build back better, they must be at the forefront of our recovery. And this is what this work aims to deliver; an ambitious, imaginative vision of how our high streets can adapt – as they have always done – to boost pride and prosperity as the heartbeat of local communities up and down the land.

This strategy plays to their strengths as places with their own unique character, culture and heritage that offer a physical, social experience of togetherness that's just not available online and an irreplaceable part of life.

It gives our high streets much greater flexibility to adapt and succeed, supported by significant funding – with £10 billion of funding for high streets and town centres – targeted at urban regeneration and spurring private sector investment in historically underinvested in areas.

We saw how brilliantly this emphasis on flexibility worked through the pandemic, whether through freedom for shops to temporarily extend their opening hours, pubs to erect marquees and the al fresco dining revolution. We want to put many of those freedoms on a permanent footing. We are also providing the flexibility that small businesses and local entrepreneurs need through changes to Use Class Order and permitted development rights that have enabled offices to become cafés, hairdressers or yoga studios and, if derelict or empty, much needed homes.

We can see companies like John Lewis responding and looking to deliver homes for rent and gentle density in urban areas where people already work, shop, socialise and access amenities. We strongly encourage more housing around high streets and there are likely to be many opportunities as we emerge from the pandemic, for example for good quality conversions of offices to homes.

The creation of many more of these vibrant, mixed use communities is the way forward; sparing our countryside from unnecessary development and delivering more accessible, liveable, walkable places where people can put down roots.

We want to make our high streets greener, healthier and more sustainable, with tree-lined streets, living walls and vertical gardens, and also safer and more welcoming through visible improvements to safety, litter and graffiti and opportunities for local people to come together for events that attract locals and visitors alike, instilling pride and belonging.

So, the outlook for our high streets is more beautiful, more vibrant and more adaptable, with local communities empowered to take the lead and ensure they can succeed. Despite the obvious challenges, I am optimistic that, with the help of this ambitious and comprehensive vision, they will succeed as diverse, mixed use places that increasingly reflect their communities' unique spirit and identity - thriving high streets, not fearing the future, but shaping it.

**Communities Secretary, the Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP**





# Executive Summary

This government has long been committed to supporting our high streets, which are drivers of economic growth, jobs and innovation in all parts of the UK. They are focal points of local pride, with over 4m people employed on British high streets in 2018 and just over 1 in 6 British people living on or around a high street.

Whether through our ambitious Planning White Paper, our once in a lifetime investment in towns and high streets, or our upcoming Levelling Up White Paper, we have prioritised measures that help give councils and communities the flexibility and support they need to bring out the best for their local areas.

We want to help every part of the country achieve the same: vibrant high streets where communities are at the heart of place-making; where a mix of commercial and residential uses complement each other; and where businesses large and small feel welcome. We will launch a National High Streets Day where local communities can come together to celebrate and clean up their high street and through our record investment in local public services, we will make high streets safer and cleaner with more police and a laser-like focus on cleaning up litter and graffiti.

We want to help areas create a vision that brings together planning, design and management of public spaces and local community assets to create local areas that promote people's health, happiness, and well-being. We will be relentless in reducing the blight of boarded up shops, uncleanliness and disrepair.

To unleash places' potential, we want local leaders to champion their communities and be confident and flexible in responding to change.

Our Great British high streets are at the heart of this country and are the core of what reflects a local area and community.

This document captures this vision and showcases the best of what's already happening across the country, highlighting the work of councils and communities who are successfully using government support to make their high streets and town centres into thriving, commercial, social and cultural hubs. We will build on innovations seen over the pandemic and provide the regulatory flexibility that will enable high streets to be the hives of economic and social activity that local communities expect.

**This vision sets out how we plan to support places to achieve this vision, focussing on five key priorities:**

1. Breathing new life into empty buildings;
2. Supporting high street businesses;
3. Improving the public realm;
4. Creating safe and clean spaces;
5. Celebrating pride in local communities.

These priorities will be underpinned by a series of new and existing ambitious measures to help our high streets become clean, green, mixed-use spaces in which people not only want to shop but also live, work, and relax.

Through these actions, we hope to see more trade and investment as our high streets once again evolve to meet changing demand, as they have done successfully throughout our history. Whilst that change will lead to high streets looking different than recent years, we are committed to driving change that increases footfall and activity that is rooted in community pride.

The government remains determined to level up communities across our United Kingdom. We are steadfastly committed to helping ensure that our people and public services can recover from the impacts of Covid, an ambition which we share with the Devolved Administrations. We want to continue this dialogue as we implement the measures outlined in this strategy, working closely with other public authorities and stakeholders across the country to ensure we target our efforts to deliver the maximum impact and benefit for people in every corner of our great nation. It is through working together, as a strong United Kingdom, that we can engineer a sustainable recovery, building back better, fairer and greener.



Our interventions have been informed by the recommendations of the **Urban Centre Recovery Task Force** – experts from across the public, private and third sectors – who advised the government on the best ways to spur growth, create jobs and ensure that our high streets, towns and cities continue to thrive for generations to come.

### The Urban Centre Recovery Task Force experts:

**Sir Richard Leese**  
**Sir Howard Bernstein**  
**Dame Alison Nimmo**  
**Sir George Iacobescu**  
**Bill Hughes**  
**Selina Mason**  
**Helen Gordon**  
**Andy Street**  
**Alison Brittain**  
**Adrian Fisher**  
**Greg Clark**  
**Peter Freeman**

**We expect councils, businesses and community groups to use the funding and tools set out in this document to help our high streets to adapt.** Improvements to the public realm will be visible up and down the country over this parliament and we are confident that investment in our high streets, from both the public and private sector, will kick-start a cycle where people enjoy living, working and spending in their local centres and take even more pride in their localities. And these measures should not be seen in isolation – they are just one part of our ambitious approach to levelling up and helping communities build back better.

Taken together, our approach will empower communities and councils to ensure that our high streets truly can build back better.

# Revitalising high streets

1. The pandemic has had an unparalleled impact on many high streets themselves as well as on the lives of all of us who use them – and government has responded with a similarly unparalleled investment in business support throughout the pandemic.
2. Sadly, we have seen several major brands and familiar stores disappearing from our centres, and many shifting from stores on our high streets to online retail platforms. The change in how we all use our high streets, and particularly retail spaces, should not be underestimated. However, nor should we ignore the opportunities that come with adapting to this change. Empty shops can be changed into much-needed homes, into space for new restaurants, or into places where we can deliver high-quality public services.
3. Many of these high street spaces have already been filled by new tenants of all shapes and sizes. For example, we have seen a boom in independent business starting on high streets with many more barbers, beauty salons, grocers and ice cream parlours breathing new life into high streets.<sup>1</sup> Vacant high street space is also being repurposed, with several former Debenhams sites expected to be converted into university lecturing halls, new homes, art galleries and entertainment venues.
4. Shopping centres have also been hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Given their scale, responding to this will require innovative thinking from investors and local authorities about how these spaces can be transformed and repurposed to deliver on government's wider ambition for placemaking.
5. This government's ambitious programme of investment and planning reform have been carefully crafted to help high streets adapt to these challenges and flourish – and are just the start of our mission to keep helping the country build back better.



72%

**of retail sales in 2020 took place in store, the government is working to ensure a successful retail sector.**

## Planning reform

# Peterborough Town Deal

Through Peterborough's £22.9 million Town Deal, the town are in the process of purchasing and redeveloping the vacant unit at 62-68 Bridge Street (TK Maxx). The proposal to transform the unit into a mixed-use space called The Vine, which will accommodate a new library, community café, study area for children, meeting rooms for Council and Community use, cultural hub with rehearsal and gallery space for local arts and cultural organisations, business incubation space and office space for Council back office administration functions.

<sup>1</sup><https://london.ac.uk/news-opinion/london-connection/feature/how-covid-triggered-start-up-boom>

6. Planning is at the heart of effective placemaking. This government has set out its ambitious vision for how planning can deliver new homes, protect green space and involve communities throughout the process. This is as important on high streets and in town centres as anywhere else. Indeed, it is on high streets where the flexibility that government has ensured the planning system provides is most important in order to support a diverse mix of activity and businesses.
7. The government has therefore introduced significant flexibilities into the planning system to address this, including through introducing the ability for commercial, retail and certain leisure businesses to change use without needing planning permission, through the use class E. This gives businesses freedom to adjust to changing circumstances - a café can now become a shop, office, health centre, day nursery, gym or day centre without requiring planning permission.
8. We have also introduced flexibilities to allow vacant and redundant free-standing commercial and light industrial premises, and residential blocks of flats, to be demolished and replaced with new high street homes on brownfield land, through new permitted development rights; and a **new permitted development right**, allowing Class E uses such as empty shops, restaurants and offices to be converted into new homes.
9. We have also revised national policy for Article 4 Directions. The new policy requires that Article 4 directions by councils can remove the right to change to residential if they are targeted, well-evidenced and apply to the smallest area possible.

## Bringing empty units back into use

# Open Doors

The Open Doors programme pilot scheme was commissioned in 2018 to match empty properties with community groups looking for space.

The pilot brought these properties back into use for up to a year. Most of the Open Doors occupants were community groups or registered charities. Prior to Open Doors these groups often faced difficulties securing appropriate spaces to hold their activities. The Open Doors sites were used in a wide variety of ways, including support for young people to develop skills for volunteering, filmmakers, support for refugees and domestic abuse victims and games workshops for children.

The department published an evaluation of the pilot, which found that the programme benefitted both landlords and community groups, enabled community groups to deliver much-needed services to their users and build socially stronger communities and that the benefits of the pilot outweighed the costs of it.



10. Where retail units have become empty, we want to make sure these don't end up as local eyesores, and are instead used in new and innovative ways by the businesses and communities around them. The flexibility of today's economy provides any number of uses, waiting to be explored. These spaces can be used by start-ups or community groups, for cultural and creative uses and markets. We want councils to feel confident in working with local businesses and groups, making it easier for entrepreneurs to set up shop.
11. Learning from the 'Open Doors programme' pilots to tackle the problem of vacant units, we **will explore what additional support or measures might be needed to encourage the alternative "meanwhile" use of properties, to make sure they don't sit empty and to help high streets recover across the UK.** This could include working with public and private sector landlords on how they best manage and repurpose empty shops, for example through statutory powers or having a better understanding of local business and community needs; or helping prospective tenants navigate and overcome barriers or complexities that might otherwise stop them from taking up these opportunities. As ever technology has a crucial role to play and we will consider how digital platforms could be better used and publicised to places.

## Funding

# Bishop Auckland Town Deal

The £33.2 million Town Deal will support Bishop Auckland's development into a year-round visitor destination of national significance, leveraging over £200 million of further private sector investment into the town's visitor economy, including new attractions and special events. This has been a shining example of how local government, community groups and philanthropists have worked together to deliver what is now not just a regional but a national centre for tourism.

Projects will see the Weardale Railway developed, heritage walking and cycling routes enhanced, improved infrastructure to support the town's heritage destination status and the creation of a new heritage transport museum. The Town Deal also aims to open the town as a gateway to the Durham Dales and strengthen its established position as a 21st century market town and service centre.



12. Even before the pandemic, government had demonstrated its commitment to supporting vibrant, mixed use high streets through our unparalleled investment in the parts of the country that need it the most. This offer now includes the Future High Streets Fund, Towns Fund, the Getting Building Fund and Welcome Back Fund, as well as our UK-wide investment through the Levelling Up Fund and UK Community Renewal Fund. These funds are already supporting regeneration efforts across the country and transforming the spaces communities use and rely on.
13. Through the Levelling Up Fund in particular **we hope to support, among other priorities, the removal of derelict buildings to make way for new developments; remediation of abandoned or brownfield sites for both commercial and new residential use; and the delivery of new public spaces. Bids relating to the culture and heritage theme may include new, upgraded or protected community hubs.**
14. We wholeheartedly believe that communities should be at the heart of every high street, and every funding decision – making sure people have a real say in placemaking in their area, including by being involved in ownership.
15. Vacant and derelict buildings can be put to use through community ownership. This can be done through the Assets of Community Scheme, which enables local community and voluntary organisations, neighbourhood forums and parish councils to identify land and buildings that provide an important service in their community and then bid for the property if it comes up for sale. A Community Asset Transfer can also enable community ownership and management of publicly owned land and buildings. Where land that is in the ownership of certain public bodies is unused or underused, the Right to Regenerate empowers ministers to direct that the land is sold, enabling it to be put to better use.
16. And we are now going even further: **our new £150 million Community Ownership Fund will support communities across the UK to buy or take over local community assets at risk of being lost and run them as community-owned businesses. This funding will enable communities to keep important infrastructure on local high streets – for example, pubs, theatres and post office buildings – from closing, ensuring they continue to play a central role in towns and villages across the UK. The fund's bidding prospectus is launched alongside this vision for High Streets, meaning communities can now bid for up to £250,000 of matched funding.**



## Helping councils

17. We want councils to take a proactive and ambitious approach to placemaking.
18. The Urban Centre Recovery Task Force was clear in its recommendations that land assembly and where necessary compulsory purchase can be central to making sure ambitious projects are able to go ahead, particularly where there are a large number of landholders or specific long-term derelict or vacant buildings. We want councils to feel more confident in how they approach these challenges.
19. That is why our wide-ranging reforms to the legislative framework for compulsory purchase have already made the process clearer, fairer and faster for all. These reforms included measures specifically designed to speed up the process for deciding whether compulsory purchase orders are confirmed.
20. **We are going further by encouraging councils to use Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) for long-term empty properties** and where property owners are stalling regeneration plans. We want to:
  - **Ensure councils have the right Compulsory Purchase Order enabling powers** to support the transformation of high streets and other regeneration projects so that they can acquire vacant and derelict buildings in order to attract new private investment.
  - **Ensure as part of our planning reforms that Compulsory Purchase Orders can support more effective land assembly to facilitate the development of growth areas** identified in the new-style local plans, particularly when they support town centre regeneration.
  - **Strengthen the capacity and support for local authorities** to ensure they are able to use these new Compulsory Purchase Order powers and rights to support the transformation of high streets.

## Innovative delivery models and development corporations

21. We also believe that in some areas, a new and innovative approach to governance or delivery might help kickstart a council's ambitious plans.
22. Development corporations are set up to act as a planning authority for areas that need large-scale coordination of investment and planning. Their purpose is to regenerate a local area and bring land and buildings into effective use and they can be a powerful way of helping deliver particularly complex housing and regeneration schemes.
23. Through the New Development Corporation Competition (NDCC) we are helping areas to generate innovative delivery vehicle proposals to support transformational housing and economic growth opportunities, focusing on regeneration. In June we announced £2.8 million awarded to Carlisle, Exeter, Tewksbury and the Wirral to develop proposals to unlock significant numbers of homes and jobs.
24. We also want to make sure that these delivery vehicles are designed in a way that helps deliver in a way that reflects today's changing circumstances. In October 2019 we [launched a consultation on reforming the legislation covering development corporations](#) to seek views on whether the current varied legal framework inhibits the operation of development corporations, and we will publish the government's technical response in due course – as set out in the [Queens speech](#). We intend to reform the legislative **framework to ensure local areas have access to appropriate delivery vehicles to support growth and regeneration.**

# Supporting high street businesses

## Newcastle-Under-Lyme Town Deal

Newcastle-under-Lyme's £23.6 million Town Deal will support the town's vision to build on its rich heritage as a market town and its key, distinctive assets which drive productivity and growth in the area, particularly through Keele University and the town's connectivity.

The town's proposals include sustainable public transport solutions and improved pedestrian and cycle accessibility, developing a multi-use Circus and Performing Arts Centre, and to redevelop key gateway sites in the town centre. The proposals also include a project to support the regeneration at the Cross Street Estate in Chesterton, which will provide 125 new homes.

Newcastle-under-Lyme have also secured £11m from the Future High Streets Fund to further boost the town's regeneration plans. The Town Deal TIP has been designed to complement the plans of the Future High Streets Fund.

25. Thriving businesses not only provide jobs, attract visitors and investment – but crucially deliver for communities, making sure everyone can access the goods and services they need for daily life.
26. We have backed business throughout the pandemic, with a comprehensive package of support of £352 billion, to help businesses that have been affected by Covid-19. This package includes business grants, the coronavirus loan schemes, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, as well as deferral of income tax payments.
27. This includes over £16 billion in business rates support for eligible retail, hospitality and leisure properties since April 2020, which along with Small Business Rates Relief, has meant that 750,000 properties in England benefited from 100% relief during the most challenging period of the pandemic.
28. This coincides with our efforts to look at the longer term of the business rates system through the ongoing Fundamental Review, and how we can balance support for businesses with the need to fund critical local services. We published a call for evidence in July 2020, inviting stakeholders to contribute their views on ideas for reform, followed by a further consultation on More Frequent Revaluations in June 2021. The review will conclude in the autumn.

29. We have also introduced innovative measures to help businesses adapt and keep customers safe. As a result, more high street businesses have used public spaces for outdoor hospitality, retail and leisure, as well as making it easier for businesses to weatherproof outdoor seating.
30. Government itself is a major commercial landlord in many town and city centres, and we have committed to harnessing that power to invest in properties and jobs across the UK for example through creating new roles and department headquarters in towns and cities like Darlington and Wolverhampton. Building on our town centre first approach, there is potential for broader public services to be co-located on high streets and in town centres as we rethink how to use these spaces, and we will explore opportunities for this.

## Cutting red tape for businesses



## Al fresco dining

A number of businesses on Northcote Road in Wandsworth have benefitted from the temporary pavement licence provisions which create a faster and cheaper process for businesses to obtain a licence to place tables and chairs on the highway, allowing for more al fresco dining.

To maximise support for businesses, Wandsworth have also pedestrianised Northcote Road at the weekends over the summer period to enable businesses to use the empty road space to place tables and chairs on the pavement and highway to operate at increased capacity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>[Council's website](#)

31. This flexibility in the planning system has been matched by our efforts to help businesses adapt and respond to the changing high street, throughout the pandemic and beyond, by making sure the rules and regulations that govern them are as simple and streamlined as possible.
32. We have helped businesses offer more al fresco dining by making it quicker and less expensive to get a temporary pavement licence, boosting the economy and helping licensed premises trade with social distancing measures. We allowed temporary change of use for cafes, pubs and restaurants to provide hot food takeaway when unable to operate as usual; and introduced a temporary permitted development right for moveable structures, enabling an increase in outdoor seating capacity by allowing new spaces to eat and drink in, such as through temporary marquees. And we acted to make it easier to host markets, stalls, marquees, car boot sales and fairs for longer without needing a planning application.
33. We have seen the benefits these flexibilities can offer to all of us – giving businesses the chance to respond to how communities today want to use and enjoy their high streets. That is why we want these to continue.
34. The temporary pavement licence measures, which were introduced as a valuable lifeline during the pandemic, will be extended for a further 12 months, **subject to Parliamentary approval, and we commit in principle to making them permanent.**
35. **We have also brought forward a 12-month extension to the new temporary permissions for off-sales of alcohol**, modifying provisions in the Licensing Act 2003 to provide automatic extensions to premises' licences that only permit sales of alcohol for consumption on the premises ("on-sales") to allow sales of alcohol for consumption off the premises ("off-sales") in England and Wales.
36. **We will also consider whether and how to build on the success of the pavement licence provisions which have made it quicker and less expensive to get a temporary pavement licence.**
37. **We will consider the future of the temporary permitted development rights over the summer, allowing sufficient time for any consultation and legislation if required.**

## Businesses as landlords and tenants

38. We also took steps during the pandemic to protect businesses who were worried about paying rent during the unprecedented circumstances in which they found themselves. We introduced a moratorium to protect jobs and livelihoods by making sure commercial tenants who were unable to pay rent were not evicted.
39. As restrictions now lift, we will help maintain the recovery efforts of businesses who are dealing with rent debt. We will put legislation in place to **ringfence the rent debt that has been accrued from March 2020 for tenants who have been impacted by Covid-19 business closures.** This will enable landlords and tenants to come to agreement on the payment of the ringfenced rent debt. Once those restrictions have been lifted, tenants should begin to pay rent according to their lease or as otherwise agreed.
40. **We will also introduce a system of binding arbitration for where agreement cannot be reached.** This signals the return of "business as usual" arrangements and we want to see landlords and tenants continuing to work together to negotiate for the benefit of the communities and areas who rely on their services.

41. We also recognise that commercial leasehold legislation has not kept pace with the change in how businesses use space on the high street. The archaic system holds back the flexible, thriving mix of uses we want to see on high streets. In response, we announced in December 2020 that we would undertake a review into the commercial landlord and tenant relationship and the underpinning Landlord and Tenant Act 1954, Part II. **The review will be launched in Autumn 2021 and will focus on developing proposals for a legislative and regulatory framework that helps support the efficient, flexible use of space and supports high streets and town centres; provides flexibility and protections to both landlords and tenants; ensures both parties are invested in the success of the property; and balances the interests of landlords and tenants fairly.**
42. We want to see businesses not only working well but working together, for example through successful Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). We supported BIDs throughout the pandemic with around £6 million of funding delivered via local authorities, and **now want to continue that support by working with the sector to consider how a range of stakeholders – from property owners to community groups – can be better engaged and how BIDs could be used to further improve the local trading environment.**



## Hospitality and retail

43. The experience of the pandemic has shown more than ever the extent to which our enjoyment of everyday life relies on thriving hospitality and retail on our high streets.
44. **Restaurants, pubs, cafes and other hospitality venues have truly risen to the challenge of the past year, showing flexibility and innovation in the face of unprecedented challenges. We want to help the sector bounce back and build its resilience, and commit to publishing a Hospitality Strategy soon after step 4 that will set out the government's long-term vision to help them on their road to recovery and beyond.**
45. We will also encourage the use of high street spaces for hospitality, creating new opportunities for micro businesses and start-ups that will re-energise and revitalise spaces that have fallen out of use, working with local people to unlock their talents and creating a new generation of hospitality entrepreneurs. **To support this, we will work with the hospitality sector to develop a model for hospitality-led regeneration hubs, with demonstrators delivered in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.**
46. In the same way the retail sector has for many years demonstrated its ability to adapt and change, offering consumers choice, and convenience. We will continue to work with the sector on its long-term strategic needs to ensure we have a retail sector where businesses are profitable, resilient, innovative, and support local economies in socially and environmentally responsible ways.
47. It is also a vital source of jobs for our communities and we want to see employees appropriately rewarded and developing skills that support new career opportunities.
48. **Over the coming months we will work with the Retail Sector Council, wider retailers, industry experts and relevant government departments to explore strategic areas for joint working, including on levelling up, employment, skills and meeting the challenges of net zero.**
49. **Government has funded a 'Green Guide' for SME retailers, developed by the Retail Sector Council, to demonstrate the actions they can take to make their businesses greener. The Council are also scoping the potential for 'Green Street' pilots to trial ways in which high street retailers can become greener.**



# Improving the public realm

## Swindon - Future High Streets Fund

Through Swindon's £25 million Future High Streets Fund allocation, proposals for town centre aim to attract new residential developments and quality office space as well as food, drink and leisure activities to support employment growth.

Future High Streets Fund investment will enable the Fleming Way Bus Boulevard project to create a new public transport hub for buses out of Fleming Way, a scheme also includes improved cycle routes and improved public realm.

50. Placemaking relies on being able to create high streets and other public spaces that are clean, sustainable, welcoming and accessible for everyone. This means focussing on accessible, green infrastructure – and tackling the issues that can detract from the beauty and upkeep of local areas.

### Accessibility

51. Accessibility is of paramount importance. Our National Disability Strategy will set out how we are transforming the accessibility of our towns and high streets. **We are also embedding accessibility within our criteria for how we design and allocate investment to local regeneration projects.**

### Green infrastructure

## Stockton - Future High Streets Fund

Where it is lacking, green infrastructure can be designed into high streets. Stockton Council, which is receiving support through government's Future High Streets Fund, has ambitious plans to demolish a failing shopping arcade in Stockton-on-Tees and replace it with a new riverside park. The park will include an extension of the market square at the northern end, with space for adjacent restaurants and cafes to spill out on to and for outdoor events.







# 35%

The opening of Sheffield Peace Gardens and other public space improvements was shown to increase shopping visits by 35%, increasing spending by £4.2 million.

## Investing in and designing green infrastructure.

52. Green infrastructure can help drive more footfall to high streets, improving air quality, increasing opportunities for active travel, and driving economic recovery. For example, the opening of **Sheffield Peace Gardens** and other public space improvements was shown to increase shopping visits by 35%, increasing spending by £4.2 million. In Piccadilly, **Stoke-on-Trent**, a **£10 million investment** to make the area more pedestrian-friendly led to 30% more footfall.
53. Existing funding includes commitments to improvements to the public space, such as greening our towns and making sure that there are high quality, accessible, natural spaces. MHCLG provided over £1 million to create 68 new pocket parks in 2020, breathing new, green life into small urban spaces.
54. We want to go further and ensure that green infrastructure and public space improvements help level up our high streets. **The new Levelling Up Fund and UK Community Renewal Fund** provide an opportunity for places across the UK to bid for projects that can fund green infrastructure and improvements to public space and cycle lanes where this is likely to increase visitor numbers and contribute to successful high streets.

55. This will be seen both through large-scale and structural improvements such as road improvements as well as through improvements on design, heritage and beauty, and communities will see the benefits of these investments on their high streets over the next few years. The government is working with local councils to make towns and high streets more competitive, and we want to increase green infrastructure, active travel, parking and accessibility.
56. Where high streets are being repurposed for homes, green infrastructure and improved public space should be integral. **We will explore how reforms to the planning system can ensure green infrastructure is better incorporated into new development.** Development of homes, businesses and community space could be intensified on parts of sites to free up land for green infrastructure provision.
57. To help local authorities, developers and communities improve green infrastructure provision in their areas, **a National Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards will be launched in 2022.** The framework will include a design guide with advice on how green infrastructure can best be incorporated into high streets to provide multiple benefits for people and the environment.
58. **We will publish a revised Manual For Streets in early 2022,** and consider how existing funding pots reference Manual for Streets' principles. We want to see the Manual for Streets properly embedded in the design process, so that more high streets are designed with a sense of place and to be attractive to people walking, cycling and using public transport.
59. We want to see a grand programme of tree planting on high streets, supported both by our schemes and by local communities taking the initiative. Our £80 million Green Recovery Challenge Fund is supporting Trees for Cities, a charity, to create a new National Street Tree Sponsorship Scheme and the England Trees Action Plan sets out how we intend to deliver our ambition to treble tree planting rates by the end of this Parliament, including plans for many more trees in our urban areas and high streets.

## Creating more safe spaces for Active Travel

60. The Prime Minister's long-term cycling and walking plan (Gear Change), published in July 2020 committed to investing £2 billion over five years, with a vision for half of all journeys in towns and cities to be cycled or walked by 2030. During 2020/21, over £220 million of investment initially focused on creating temporary infrastructure to mitigate capacity constraints on public transport, before focusing on more permanent schemes aimed at embedding cycling and walking habits into long term travel behaviour. Many of these Active Travel Fund schemes were focused on improving access to high streets, such as through the provision of more direct walking routes, road crossings and cycle lanes.
61. **The government will choose up to 12 further willing non-London local authority areas to benefit from intensive investment in mini-Holland schemes.** This builds on the ambitious plans to boost walking and cycling announced by the Prime Minister in summer 2020.
62. In March 2021, the government launched England's long-term National Bus Strategy, setting out a bold vision for bus services across England. The Strategy is backed by £3 billion of transformational funding over the current Parliament. The Strategy aims to make buses more frequent, more reliable, easier to understand and use, better co-ordinated and cheaper. Improved services will strengthen communities and sustain town centres.
63. As part of this strategy, the government has asked local transport authorities to produce Bus Service Improvement Plans by the end of October this year. These plans will be developed in collaboration with communities and businesses. As such, they will play a crucial role in connecting people with high streets.



## A fairer deal for motorists

64. Parking is a crucial part of our transport infrastructure. We all have an interest in how car parks are managed, especially given the important link between transport accessibility and the vitality of our high streets and town centres. In 2015, the government delivered a series of reforms to support shoppers with municipal parking <sup>3</sup> and is introducing new measures to stop rip-off practices in private parking <sup>4</sup>. **We will shortly be launching a further technical consultation on proposed changes to parking charges**, seeking views from motorists, parking operators and landowners on the level of private parking charges, to help deliver a fair, proportionate and consistent system across England <sup>5</sup>.
65. We will consider what further reforms can be made to the municipal parking regime to make high streets more accessible to shoppers, including working with councils to ensure that parking space supply and parking tariffs support high streets strategies, and are joined up with local transport plans. We want to see data on parking demand and income published openly, in accordance with a data standard, as part of 'Annual Parking Reports', so that citizens can engage more closely in the process of developing parking policies. And we want to make sure the public is aware of the 'Right to challenge parking' policies.

# Tackling air pollution

At least £9 million will be awarded for the 2021/22 scheme year for new projects to improve air quality as part of DEFRA's Air Quality Grant Programme. The programme provides funding to local authorities for local communities to tackle local air pollution and reduce emissions affecting schools, businesses and residents. Nearly £70 million has been awarded since the scheme started in 1997. Projects that have received funding over the last year (2020/21) include:

- Installing electric charging points for licenced ice cream vans in London Borough of Camden;
- Trialling a Pay as You Go electric Cargo Bike Club in Colchester;
- A study on ways to reduce air pollution from deliveries in York; and
- Projects to encourage take up of electric taxis in Spelthorne and Slough.

<sup>3</sup> Government delivers on parking promises to help local shops - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk))

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drivers-to-receive-greater-protection-against-rogue-private-parking-operators>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-open-technical-consultation-on-fairer-parking-charges>

# Creating safer and cleaner spaces

66. Government has set a world-leading climate change target, and is proud to be hosting COP 26 in Glasgow later this year. We recognise that a clean environment is good for our wellbeing, and good for the economy – and that delivering this on high streets is a vital part of delivering this ambition as well as contributing to our vision of building green, clean, high streets which attract visitors and make them feel safe and welcome, increasing footfall and appetite for new business.
67. We have already invested significantly in cleaning up our high streets: last year, on behalf of Defra and MHCLG, the Waste and Resources Action Programme [published guidance](#) for local authorities and Business Improvement Districts in England on the provision of litter bins, including smart bins. In support of this guidance, **the government has recently funded a grant scheme for local authorities in England to apply for grants of between £10,000 and £25,000 to purchase new litter bins.** In total, 44 local authorities were granted funding worth almost a million pounds.
68. In 2019 we published guidance on using enforcement powers for littering and graffiti offences, and are going further through legislation: **the landmark Environment Bill will allow us to put this guidance on a firm statutory footing and help ensure that authorised officers take a consistent and proportionate approach to enforcement.** The Bill will also allow us to increase the level of fixed penalty notices for fly-tipping and ensure that agencies and authorities can work more effectively to combat waste crime.
69. We are aware of public concern around the levels of litter outside fast food outlets. To address these concerns, **we will review planning practice guidance in relation to litter, to provide further advice on how planning conditions can reasonably be applied to prevent and clean up litter caused by the fast food outlets which are most likely to generate it.**
70. Defra, in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy and chewing gum producers, have established a voluntary producer responsibility scheme through which gum producers will take greater responsibility for the litter and staining caused by their products. **Gum producers will invest up to £10m in the scheme over the next 5 years,** which will include financial support for councils this summer to help them remove gum litter and staining as they prepare to welcome back people to their high streets. The scheme also aims to significantly reduce littering of gum by facilitating long term, demonstrable behaviour change that we want to see on our high streets.
71. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we have an opportunity to improve the quality of our high streets by tackling litter, graffiti and gum staining with a renewed focus. **We will celebrate clean high streets through a National High Streets Day:** a day where we can ensure our high streets are as clean as possible and will help to provide vibrant high streets that communities can be proud of, increasing footfall in the process.

**We will celebrate clean high streets through a National High Streets Day: a day where we can ensure our high streets are as clean as possible and will help to provide vibrant high streets that communities can be proud of, increasing footfall in the process.**



## Binrastructure on high streets

Having undertaken an audit of bin provision as recommended in our Binrastructure guidance, Warrington Borough council identified that over 90% of their roadside and pedestrian area bins were in need of replacement. Some crucial town areas were also missing bin provision, resulting in litter issues. Funded by Defra, Warrington Borough Council are installing 123 colourful new bins in these locations, improving the streetscape for their citizens and making it easier for visually impaired people to find a bin.

In South Tyneside, the council has been granted funding to install 30 new bins in the town centre, including 240L 'smart bins' with sensors which alert the council when bins are nearly full. This will allow the council to plan their collection routes efficiently and to prevent bins from overflowing at peak times.

## Tackling graffiti

72. We want to enable and encourage local authorities to take a consistent approach by tackling graffiti in line with their duties on litter and fly-tipping, and to make the most of their powers to take enforcement action. **We will publish new guidance on tackling graffiti for local authorities and business owners.** This will give examples of good practice, draw on the latest research and professional expertise in this area and highlight the importance of keeping high-street infrastructure clean and clear of graffiti. We will support this new guidance with a new £2m graffiti war chest, to help councils fight back against the menace of graffiti. Councils awarded funding under this scheme will be encouraged to use social media to highlight the changes that the strategy is delivering in local areas.
73. **We will work with a range of stakeholders to consider public perceptions of graffiti, including the role of street art, and how available digital tools and data can be leveraged to improve local environmental quality.**

## Building safer spaces

74. Crime and related disorder undermine the amenity and quality of life in the public realm. It can cause individuals and families to shop or engage in leisure activity elsewhere, and can make locations less attractive to new and existing businesses, creating a cycle of decline. The government is committed to tackling crime, with 20,000 additional police officers being recruited and Safer Streets Funding being used to prevent crime at a local level.
75. Community Payback can clean up our streets whilst cutting crime using some of the five million community payback hours delivered every year for offenders to give back to the communities that they live in. This can be through litter-picking, clearing fly-tipping, and removing graffiti.
76. **Probation will be moving to a new delivery model this summer which is an opportunity for us to focus on visible community payback that makes a genuine difference to local people.** For example, in Yorkshire offenders are removing graffiti on high streets. In Birmingham, work with the Canal and River Trust has supported lock maintenance ahead of the 2022 Commonwealth Games. In Staffordshire, probation have worked with the County Council's 'Green Teams' so that offenders clear riverbeds, litter pick and support planting schemes.
77. This is a real opportunity for probation to work with Police and Crime Commissioners, councils, and local organisations to use Community Payback to keep our streets and parks tidy – allowing us to better enjoy everyday life while offenders give back to their communities. We will also ensure local people and organisations can report online the locations and problems that they would like to see cleaned up by Community Payback teams.



## Safer Streets Funding for High Streets

78. The government wants to go further with Safer Streets Funding that helps prevent crime and disorder – with £70m already allocated to help tackle neighbourhood crime, improve the safety of public spaces for all and help combat violence against women and girls.
79. We encourage Police and Crime Commissioners and their police forces to make greater use of the tools available to them to tackle crime and disorder in the high street. The proposed statutory measures of Diversionary and Community Cautions contained within the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, plus the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) led Community Resolution provide methods to the Police of ensuring that those who engage in crime and disorder in the high street (and admit their offending) have opportunities to help clean up the damage or harm they cause via conditions aimed at one of three objectives: rehabilitation, reparation or punishment. This builds on the same principles and activity that sit at the heart of Community Payback.
80. Similarly, there are a range of tools and powers that support local authorities and others to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour that afflicts communities and can be concentrated in public spaces and high streets. At a local level we expect to see Business Crime Reduction Partnerships and Business Improvement Districts receive the full support of local partners to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, to help make our high streets safer and cleaner.
81. The first two rounds of Safer Streets Funding focused on preventing acquisitive and neighbourhood crimes. The third round of funding aims to increase and ensure the safety of public spaces for all. **It also has a particular focus on improving the safety of public places for women and girls and improving women and girls' feelings of safety in these places.**

# Celebrating pride in local communities

82. High streets are often the heartbeat of local community life – where people go to meet, eat, drink, shop. They are also patchworks of local heritage that have evolved over time in line with trends in technology and the way we live. Above all, high streets are beacons of civic pride that we want to protect, and to thrive.
83. Many of the measures set out here will give high streets a new lease of life by supporting and enabling them to adapt. But this will only go so far – the real measure of success is whether people feel emotionally connected to these places. We want to encourage communities to celebrate and feel pride in their local high street, for instance by bringing back events that may have been lost over the years and restoring beautiful old buildings that have fallen into disrepair.
84. The heritage of the built environment in the United Kingdom is like nowhere else in the world, and the best of it is often seen just walking through town centres. Investing in the historic environment makes economic, as well as emotional, sense. It can increase the attractiveness and uniqueness of high streets, and has been shown to increase footfall, reduce vacancies and increase business turnover <sup>6</sup>. Research shows that heritage is a pull factor for business location. In a study of English local authorities, heritage density is positively and strongly related to the overall movement of businesses into an area <sup>7</sup>. And in a survey across twelve National Lottery Heritage Fund locations across the UK, 80% stated heritage makes their area a better place to live.



# 80%

**Investing in the historic environment makes sense. It can increase the attractiveness and uniqueness of high streets, and has been shown to increase footfall, reduce vacancies and increase business turnover.<sup>6</sup>**

**In a survey across twelve National Lottery Heritage Fund locations across the UK, 80% stated heritage makes their area a better place to live.**

<sup>6</sup> [Heritage and the Economy](#)

<sup>7</sup> [The role of culture, sport and heritage in place shaping](#)

85. Many libraries and civic museums are also on or close to high streets - sometimes in heritage buildings themselves - and offer opportunities to actively learn about local heritage, history and communities, such as through library-led projects like Sheffield's walking app that offers a heritage tour around the historic footballing hotspots that shaped not just Sheffield football, but football worldwide. The **Cultural Investment Fund** is helping to ensure that people have access to local museums and libraries. With £18.8 million going to museum estates in 2021/22, we are ensuring museums stay open, many in local landmark buildings with prominent high street locations, with support also going to upgrade library buildings and improve their digital infrastructure.
86. Government is already investing in heritage on our high streets: the £95 million High Street Heritage Action Zone programme aims to regenerate high streets to turn them into places where local people want to spend time visiting and are proud of. It does this by making improvements to the public realm, supporting new uses for neglected or empty premises and improving the face of 68 high streets across England. This summer, an early demonstrator to the other 67 places, The Burges in Coventry won a Future Cities Forum Award under the 'High Streets' category.
87. As part of High Street Heritage Action Zones, Historic England in partnership with the National Lottery Heritage Fund is working to deliver the £7.4 million high street Cultural Programme, which is delivering the biggest ever community-led arts and heritage programme celebrating the high street. The Cultural Programme features new digital and physical artworks inspired by our nation's high streets, with artists commissioned to work with communities across England to co-produce artworks.
88. The Architectural Heritage Fund's £15 million **Transforming Places Through Heritage** Programme is regenerating historic high streets in England. Part of the Future High Streets Fund, this programme will restore heritage buildings in, or transfer them into, community ownership. It supports social enterprises and charities to take advantage of those heritage buildings, helping to bring high streets back to life.
89. **Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas** (PSiCAs) are managed by local authorities and target funding for the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas. These partnerships between Historic England and local areas focus on securing the long-term, sustainable future of conservation areas, in particular through supporting heritage-based regeneration initiatives. In 2016, Derby's high street-focused Partnership Schemes in Conservation Areas won the annual Great British High Street Award.
90. We want to support high streets to attract visitors, who make a significant contribution to local economies - from large city centres to market towns and rural and coastal villages. The government has recently published the Tourism Recovery Plan which sets out a number of measures intended to support the return of domestic and, in due course, international tourism. These include marketing campaigns led by VisitBritain and VisitEngland worth at least £19 million; a new £10 million consumer promotion with the National Lottery to encourage off-season trips to tourist destinations; and the development of a new domestic rail tourism product to accelerate the return of domestic tourism across the country.

## Improving design

91. We know that the planning system provides a framework for local areas to design popular, pretty and sustainable high streets, which are attractive places to live, work and meet. **The Planning White Paper set the ambition for local authorities to have clear design codes produced with communities that provide clarity over the design standards for new development.** This applies to new housing as well as wider regeneration opportunities that could form part of the renewal of a high street.
92. The government has already published the National Model Design Code setting out key criteria for developing successful local design codes. **In 2021, 20 pilots on the National Model Design Code will be held with local areas - empowering local authorities to demand beauty, design quality and place-making, through training on the principles outlined in the National Model Design Code.**
93. To help local areas set expectations of design quality in their area, the government intends to establish an 'Office for Place' within the next year, to pioneer design and beauty within the planning system. An interim Office for Place will be established by MHCLG, advised by a Transition Board and chaired by Nicholas Boys Smith, which will consider what form the organisation should take, informed by responses to the planning reform consultation.

## Supporting local celebrations

94. Creating **local moments of celebration** can be a great way to empower communities and to boost people's pride in their area as well as the local economy. As we build back better from the pandemic, and with our national celebrations next year of **Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee, Festival UK\* 2022** and the **Birmingham Commonwealth Games**, there is an opportunity for people to come together in a safe way, to celebrate the place that they live and to take pride in the achievements of their community.

**We will use key moments in 2022 such as Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrate places and to take pride in the achievements of our communities.**



95. Over the coming months, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will work with MHCLG to maximise the opportunity of the Jubilee celebration for local places, encouraging local events so that people all across the UK get together and celebrate. As well as the traditional street parties loved by communities, many other local organisations and individuals will be free to plan events and celebrations to take place in a range of civic venues and locations. Local authorities are invited to plan and encourage diverse and exciting community events that will engage local communities and boost local high streets.





Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government