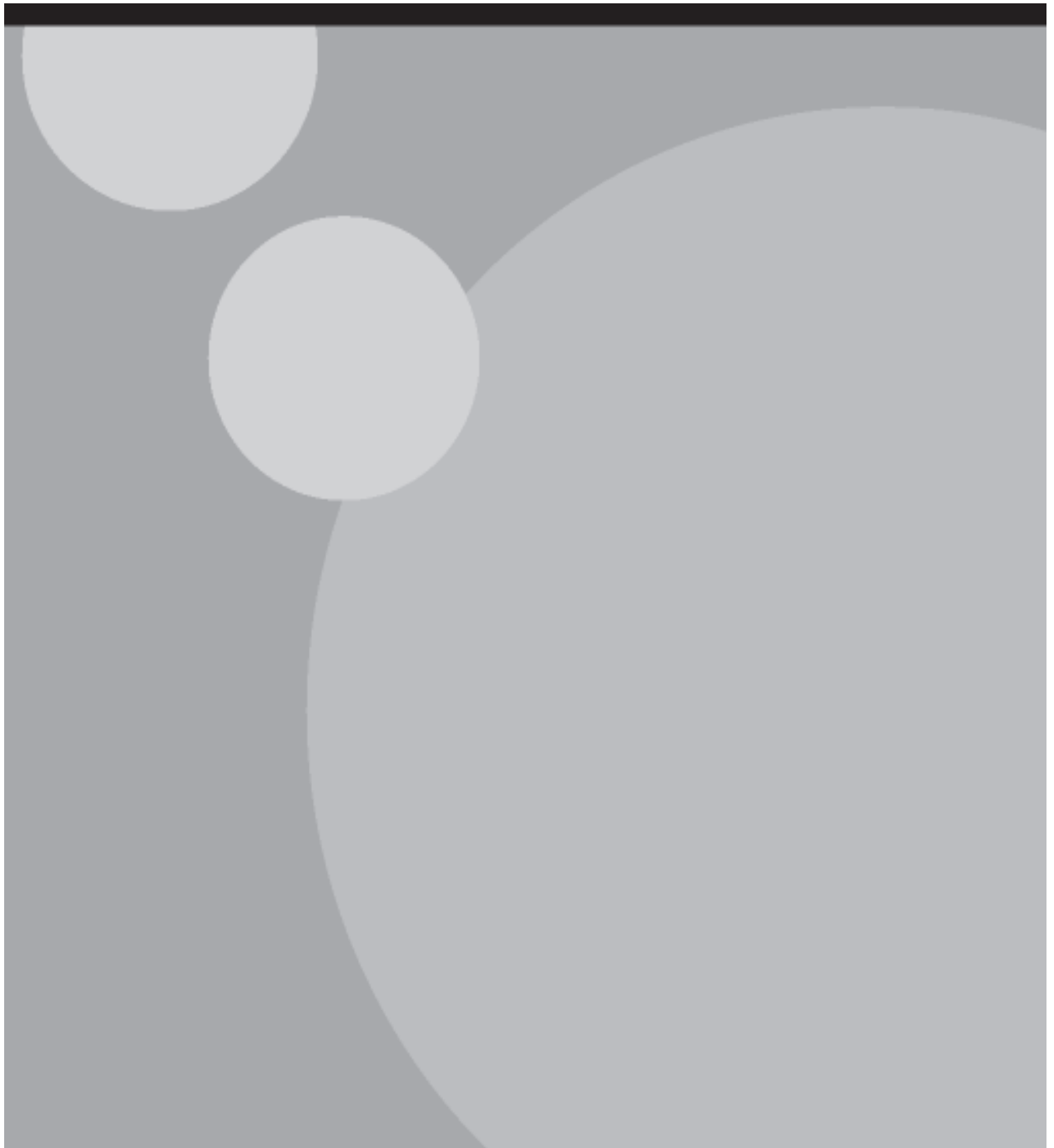




## High Streets at the Heart of our Communities: the Government's Response to the Mary Portas Review





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March 2012  
Department for Communities and Local Government

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## Prime Minister's foreword



The hard work that Mary Portas put into her Review of the High Street produced a set of useful and thought-provoking recommendations. I am hugely grateful to her for her time, and delighted that Mary wants to continue her involvement further.

Mary's review made the challenge crystal clear. Internet shopping and out-of-town shopping centres are not going to go away – they offer the convenience and choice that customers welcome. So for our high streets to thrive they must offer something new and different.

But for this to happen it is local people who must take control, developing the vision for the future of their high streets and putting their energy and enthusiasm into making it a reality.

That's why in February, just weeks after the review was published, we accepted Mary's two recommendations to set up Town Teams and to give communities the opportunity to pilot the creative plans they have for the future of their high streets. Each of the twelve "Portas Pilot" towns selected will receive a share of £1million, as well as support from Mary and the Government.

The response across the country has been phenomenal, with communities working hard to put their bids together and really decide for themselves what they want to do to breathe new life into their high streets. We have been keen to capitalise on that excitement and ensure that not just the twelve Portas Pilots but all communities get a chance to secure the future of their town centres.

That is why our wider response to Mary Portas's review is designed not to prescribe to communities what they should do – but to give them the power to decide what's right for their town centres. So today we're announcing:

- **More Portas Pilots** – in response to overwhelming interest and demand, we will fund a further twelve pilots, as well as workshops and toolkits so

other towns can learn from their experiences;

- **A £500,000 investment** to help Business Improvement Districts access loans for their set-up costs;
- **A High Street Innovation Fund** - £10million to councils in areas blighted by empty shops and recovering from the riots to help bring entrepreneurs back to their communities; and
- **A £1m Future High Street X-Fund** – to reward the areas delivering the most effective and innovative plans to bring their town centres back to life.

We have also just published our new national planning guidance – which recognises the importance of putting town centres first in planning decisions. But this is not the end of the Government’s response to Mary’s review – it is the beginning. These measures give people the incentive and encouragement to take the lead and work together to put their creative ideas into practice. We look forward to seeing high streets across the country becoming the hearts of their communities once again.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Cameron', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Rt. Hon David Cameron MP, Prime Minister**

## High Streets at the heart of our communities



Over the past few decades, the way we shop has changed dramatically. Far from the high street being our first choice, we now have the option to visit out-of-town centres offering free parking and a range of outlets under one roof, and to buy our goods and services online from the comfort of our sofas.

These two key challenges have left our high streets in a fragile state, and all too often the closure of one key store can trigger the downfall of a whole town centre. So our high streets cannot simply rely on retail – they have to offer something new and different that neither shopping centres nor the internet can match. Supporting local co-operatives and social enterprises, for example, should be part of an approach to ensure diverse and competitive high streets. We also want our high streets to be clean and inviting, so the Keep Britain Tidy *Love Where You Live* campaign is bringing together everyone to change attitudes and behaviour towards littering and graffiti. But there are other things we can do, which is why we have accepted the vast majority of Mary's recommendations – and have also gone further, including:

- Backing not only a National Market Day on Saturday 23 June, but the fortnight it launches – from 23 June to 8 July. The National Association of British Market Authorities, supported by the whole markets sector, will hold a “Love Your Local Market” Fortnight which will, among other things, enable “tables for a tenner” for aspiring entrepreneurs looking to try out their ideas by running a stall;
- Taking firm action by doubling the level of small business rate relief in England for two and a half years. We have made it easier for businesses to access the small business rate relief by removing the legal requirement for them to submit an application form; given them the option to spread the Retail Price Index increase on their rates bill over three years; and, through the Localism Act 2011, we have provided councils with new powers to introduce and fund local business rates discounts as they see fit;
- Consulting on proposals to abolish the centrally-set minimum parking penalty charge, giving councils the flexibility they need to levy parking penalty notices at a lower rate if they choose;

- Putting in place a streamlined process to revoke out-of-date, archaic and unnecessary byelaws that hinder efforts to get new markets and businesses up and running;
- Allowing the conversion of space above shops to two flats, without the need for planning permission, rather than the current limit of one – encouraging more people to live in their town centres and maintain them as vibrant places to be; and
- Providing up to £306,000 match funding for an Enterprise Business Connectors mentoring scheme, run by Business in the Community, to support those looking to run their own business.

There are also some things areas can already do – particularly in reducing planning red tape to make it easier to fill empty premises; offering business rate discounts to small and start-up businesses; and reducing parking charges to encourage people back to the town centres. We will also take steps ourselves to ensure greater transparency on parking charges, to introduce greater competition between town centres.

But we also want areas to think even more creatively, to look beyond Mary's 28 recommendations and consider how the town centre looks and operates to see how reform in these areas could entice people back. This could include:

### **Redesigning the High Street**

In re-imagining their town centres, communities should look to see how a redesign and more creative shared use of public spaces could reinvigorate their area and encourage many more people to visit. Accessibility is key: a less polluted, cleaner high street, with greener local transport and better access for cycling and walking to help improve air quality and reduce congestion, encouraging local shoppers back to the high street.

For example, Exhibition Road in South Kensington has been completely redesigned to remove unnecessary signs and barriers, as well as the narrow and congested pavements. This action has made it easier to navigate for both pedestrians and drivers. And in Brentwood, food markets and arts events have been drawing crowds who otherwise would not have visited.

We have written to councils encouraging them to rethink the numbers of signs, advertising hoardings and railings that all too often clutter our streets making them unsightly and confusing for the public. But our response to Mary's Review shows how Town Teams could also be the driving force for making this a reality, and we would encourage them to look closely at shared space as a way of bringing life back to their public spaces.

## Evening and night time economy

Our town centres often become no-go zones when shops close and pubs open, leading to the blight of anti-social behaviour that keeps people away and causing the high street to go into a spiral of decline.

Town teams will want to see how this gap could be bridged by, for example, encouraging shops to open later, or hosting entertainment and events so more people want to visit in the evening.

We have taken a range of measures that can help Town Teams achieve this – including supporting community pubs, and doubling business rate relief. But Town Teams should not restrict their imagination to encouraging people to visit during the day – high streets can also prove inviting places for friends to meet and socialise in the evening too.

Mary Portas' Review has sparked a renewed interest in securing the future of high streets – the Government's response is designed to help those wanting to transform their town centres and reclaim their role at the heart of their communities. Change will not happen overnight, and some ideas will succeed while others may miss the mark. But the measures we are putting in place are designed to support Town Teams across the country, from Newcastle to Newquay, as they find their own solution to the challenges their local areas face.



**Rt. Hon Grant Shapps MP, Minister for Housing and Local Government**



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## Government Response to Recommendations

1. Put in place a Town Team: a visionary, strategic and strong operational management team for high streets.

28. Run a number of High Street Pilots to test proof of concept.

We fully support these recommendations. **On 4 February, we launched a competition to identify 12 pilot areas with the best ideas to breathe new life into their town centres, high streets and local areas. The pilot areas will build new relationships that will include local community groups and reflect local needs.**

**From the interest shown, we know there is a huge appetite to create Town Teams. We will, therefore, fund a further twelve pilots and evaluate all twenty four so they can share their learning and success can be replicated across the country. There will be a second round of bidding in 2012/13, with a closing date of 30 June. Unsuccessful round one bidders will be considered automatically.**

The Association of Town Centre Management, British Council of Shopping Centres, the British Retail Consortium and the British Property Foundation are working together to offer advice and mentoring of the successful Town Team pilots. The Local Government Association will offer both successful and unsuccessful areas access to a single online platform - <https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk> - to share information and knowledge. And the Association of Town Centre Management has a free First Impression tool, which is a simple mechanism to provide feedback to a community from a "first time" visitor.

Even if not selected to be a pilot, we hope the new partnerships that have come together to make their application will continue to build on the work they have done, and create their own Town Team to support their high street.

2. Empower successful Business Improvement Districts to take on more responsibilities and powers and become "Super-BIDs".

3. Legislate to allow landlords to become high street investors by contributing to their Business Improvement District.

**We welcome the focus on Business Improvement Districts as a force for good on the high street. We will invest £0.5million in ensuring that prospective new Business Improvement Districts can access loans to support their set-up.**

On the issue of Super BIDs, Business Improvement Districts are private companies and, as such, it would be difficult to give them, for example, Compulsory Purchase Order powers. However many Business Improvement Districts are already fully involved in issues beyond public realm and services such as business development and support, and we will consider what more

can be achieved through better cooperation with the local authority, with the latter exercising their powers on issues like enforcement or Compulsory Purchase Order where appropriate.

On landlords' involvement, there are already examples where landlords are effectively engaged in Business Improvement District activity. **We will build on this knowledge to explore how a property owner Business Improvement District could be delivered, with the support of the industry.** We will also look at the model developed in Scotland to learn from their experience. **We also intend to consult on regulations to speed up the development of cross-boundary and tourism Business Improvement Districts.**

4. Establish a new "National Market Day" where budding shopkeepers can try their hand at operating a low-cost retail business.

5. Make it easier for people to become market traders by removing unnecessary regulations so that anyone can trade on the high street unless there is a valid reason why not.

**We support both these recommendations. We are pleased the markets sector has announced a "Love Your Local Market" fortnight from 23 June to 8 July this year, to be launched by a National Markets Day on Saturday, 23 June. Having a dedicated fortnight goes even further than Mary Portas' recommendation, enabling the involvement of markets that only run on specific days. And we have encouraged councils to consider how they could help support markets during this special fortnight.**



Local authorities should view markets as an integral part of the vision for their town centres and they should remove unnecessary barriers that may hinder or deter potential traders. The National Planning Policy Framework includes specific policies to retain, enhance and promote new markets in town centres. **The Government plans to issue a consultation on draft regulations to make it easier for street traders to set up and conduct legitimate business on the streets.**

**6.** Government should consider whether business rates can better support small businesses and independent retailers.

**7.** Local authorities should use their new discretionary powers to give business rate concessions to new local businesses.

**The Government recognises the importance of business rates to small businesses and independent retailers, which is why we have taken firm action by doubling the level of small business rate relief in England for two and a half years.** This means, for example, an eligible property with a £9,000 rateable value will get an extra £1,000 in rate relief. The higher level of relief will apply throughout 2012-13. Over half a million businesses in England are expected to benefit, with approximately a third of a million businesses paying no rates at all for that period. And we have made it easier for businesses to get the small business rate relief to which they are entitled by removing the legal requirement for them to submit an application form.

Through the Localism Act 2011, we have provided councils with new powers to introduce and fund local business rates discounts as they see fit.<sup>1</sup> **We strongly urge local authorities to look at using their new powers to provide business rate discounts to small businesses and independent retailers.**

Local authorities should be the leaders on, and drivers of, economic growth and high street improvement, and, **through the Local Government Finance Bill, we are taking action to allow local authorities to keep a proportion of the business rates they collect, providing a strong, new financial incentive for local authorities to go for growth, support their high streets and create an environment attractive to business.**

We have listened to concerns about the Retail Price Index increase in business rates bills for 2012-13. We are, therefore, giving businesses the option to spread the increase over three years. Businesses will be able to defer payment of 60% of the RPI increase in their 2012-13 rates bills until 2013-14 and 2014-15, giving them flexibility to manage their rates bills, help their cashflow, and give them time to adjust to the impact of inflation.

**8.** Make business rates work for business by reviewing the use of the Retail Price Index with a view to changing the calculation to Consumer Price Index.

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<sup>1</sup> Subject to European rules on state aid.

We are committed to review the use of the Retail Price Index for business rates once our fiscal consolidation plans have been implemented and the duty increases inherited from the previous Government have come to an end.

**9. Local areas should implement free controlled parking schemes that work for their town centres and we should have a new parking league table.**

We agree parking charges can have a real impact on the success of the high street. We encourage local authorities to look closely at their parking provisions and charges, ensuring they deliver the best outcomes locally. We have already:

- removed Whitehall restrictions imposing maximum numbers of parking places in new residential developments;
- removed the policy of setting charges to discourage the use of cars;
- introduced a policy that parking enforcement should be proportionate;
- changed a policy inhibiting competition between council areas to one which says parking charges should not undermine the vitality of town centres;
- encouraged cycling and walking into town, reducing air pollution, noise and congestion;
- increased support for electric car power-charging infrastructure in parking areas; and
- invested £560m through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund to support locally designed sustainable transport schemes that deliver local economic growth and reduce carbon emissions.

The Government recognises that creating more opportunities for people to make sustainable travel choices can bring many local economic benefits. Additionally, sustainable transport measures frequently offer public realm improvements and bring wider societal benefits relating to health, well-being, and safety.

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework goes even further by removing restrictions which impose maximum numbers of parking spaces in new non-residential developments. The Framework also makes clear that local authorities should set appropriate parking charges that do not undermine the vitality of town centres. Permitted development rights also provide flexibility for shops and offices to undertake certain types of development, including parking and electric vehicle recharging posts, without the need for planning permission.

We would encourage local authorities to consider the case for the provision of free parking spaces where plug-in vehicles could be recharged. Not only would this encourage the take-up of these new technologies and support the revival of the high street, but it could also contribute to local authorities' sustainability and environmental aspirations.

While the setting of parking charges and all decisions relating to the operation of parking are a matter for the local authority, there are clear legal restrictions preventing councils from using on-street parking charges as a way of raising general revenue or as a local tax. Where there is evidence that parking charges are having an adverse impact on the high street, we will consider issuing formal guidance for local authorities so they can support the high street, businesses and local communities more effectively.

As part of the Red Tape Challenge the Department for Transport will consult on proposals to abolish the centrally set minimum penalty charge, which will give local authorities the flexibility to levy penalty charge notices at a lower rate.

We encourage all local authorities to be transparent and publish parking costs. We will also take steps to ensure greater transparency on parking charges to introduce greater competition between town centres, and will look closely at how parking information could be made available when we review the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency.

<p><b>10.</b> Town Teams should focus on making high streets accessible, attractive and safe.</p>
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**We support this recommendation.** Between shops' closing times and the pubs opening, a no-go zone can develop, allowing anti-social behaviour to take over, keeping people away and causing the high street to go into a spiral of decline. Town Teams will be free to select the issues relevant to their high street but we would encourage them to consider how to tackle this problem, as well as the health and wellbeing of local residents and visitors, by, for example, allowing shops to open later, or hosting entertainment and events to encourage more people to visit.

We recognise the evening and night time economy as increasingly important both for employment and entertainment and to the high street. So we are supporting community pubs as important assets, and the beer industry generally, through a range of financial measures.

It is only fair, though, that late night retailers who profit from the late night sale of alcohol, should contribute towards policing costs, so we have also committed to allow councils to charge more for late night licences, reducing the burden on the taxpayer. Many country or community-run pubs will not be affected by the late night levy, as premises not licensed beyond midnight or before 6am will not pay it.

Business Crime Reduction Partnerships, encompassing business and commercial community, law enforcement agencies and the voluntary sector, focus on tackling crime and anti-social behaviour. They should be working closely with existing local partnerships, including Town Teams, to look at the issues raised by the evening and night time economy and at making high streets safe and attractive places to visit.





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We actively promote good design which is crucial to improving the high street, the evening and night time economy, and the quality of life in general. Town Teams could play a crucial role in bringing partners together to encourage more creative shared use of public spaces, making these places more attractive, and bringing more people to the high street. We have already written to local authorities highlighting our commitment to reducing street clutter, urging them to get rid of unnecessary signs, railings, and so on, to make streets tidier and less confusing for motorists and pedestrians.

The Government is committed to improving transport access and infrastructure. The Department for Transport is giving £1.8 billion to local authorities for transport measures, including improving roads and support for walking and cycling. £560 million is also being provided over this Parliament

for the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, delivering up to 90 projects. The Department for Transport also announced £15 million in February 2012 for better cycle routes and facilities.

**11. Government should include high street deregulation as part of their ongoing work on freeing up red tape.**



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We welcome this recommendation. Local authorities should look at locally imposed red tape and byelaws that have an adverse impact on the high street. **To support them, we will put in place a streamlined, deregulated process to reduce burdens on local authorities, including parish and town councils, making it easier to revoke out-of-date, archaic or unnecessary byelaws that hinder the effective operation of traders, businesses or markets.**

The Red Tape Challenge is looking at various regulations identified by high street businesses as creating significant burdens. It has looked at retail regulations, where, in 2011, we announced plans to scrap or simplify over 160 of 257 retail regulations, such as age verification on some restricted goods and poisons licensing for low-risk products. We have also committed to replacing over twelve pieces of legislation on consumer information, consumer protection, sales of goods and services and supply of services etc, with a single Consumer Rights Bill (details can be found at: [www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/2011/07/rtc-retail-announcement/](http://www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/2011/07/rtc-retail-announcement/)).

As part of the Transforming Regulatory Enforcement Strategy, the Primary Authority scheme is changing the way high street businesses work with local authority regulators. Over 48,000 business premises are so far covered by a Primary Authority partnership providing high quality, expert advice, reducing inconsistent enforcement. We are also working with two pathfinder Local Enterprise Partnerships, in Leicestershire and Greater Birmingham and Solihull, to improve collaborative working between regulators and businesses.

The Government has also supported trials of quiet night-time deliveries. We will work with partners to develop a best practice toolkit, which will take account of all the implications of deliveries at that time.

**12.** Address the restrictive aspects of the 'Use Class' system to make it easier to change the uses of key properties on the high street.

**13.** Put betting shops into a separate 'use class' of their own.

Mary's Review recognises that, through the Use Classes Order, there is already an effective national deregulatory tool which allows changes between uses that have similar land use impacts without having to apply for planning permission.

Local authorities can go further and will want to ensure the local development plan sets out a robust strategy for managing local needs and improving their high streets. Local planning authorities and communities can develop Local Development Orders to deregulate particular uses in a defined area, making it easier to start a new business. Additionally, Neighbourhood Development Orders will enable communities to require local authorities to introduce proposals for greater permitted development for change of use.

The planning system also provides a tool (Article 4 directions), to help local authorities and communities control certain uses, such as betting shops, by removing permitted development rights, and requiring a planning application to be made. Article 4 directions no longer need to be approved by the Secretary of State, making them more responsive to the needs of the local community.

The Government is committed to deregulation and we have undertaken a wider review of how change of use is handled in the planning system. **We worked with external partners and published an issues paper during 2011, which invited views and evidence from a range of organisations and individuals. This review will also form part of our thinking. We intend to consult on the emerging findings shortly.**

Currently, anyone can convert space above a shop into a flat without planning permission. **To encourage more people to live in town centres and promote regeneration we propose to double this, allowing conversions to two flats without permission.**



**14.** Make explicit the presumption in favour of town centre development in the wording of the National Planning Policy Framework.

**We support this recommendation.** We are determined that the planning system does everything it can to ensure the viability and vitality of our town centres. That is why the National Planning Policy Framework, published on 27 March 2012, reflects the concerns raised by Mary and others, and clearly sets out strong policies for promoting town centres. The Framework contains a sequential approach to planning for town centres that directs retail, leisure and office development to town centre locations first. Proposals for main town centre uses that come forward, that are not included in the Local Plan, will need to demonstrate there are no suitable sites in the town centre, and that they will not have a detrimental impact on town centres in the catchment area. The Framework is quite clear that proposals that fail either of these policies should be refused.

**15.** Introduce Secretary of State “exceptional sign off” for all new out-of-town developments and require all large new developments to have an “affordable shops” quota.

As we have overhauled the planning system, our changes will help to address this concern as local plans will be in place that reflect community wishes, with less need for central intervention. When a planning application is called in it takes responsibility for decision making away from the local planning authority, which is best placed to understand local needs, adds costs and delays to the process, and is contrary to our ethos of devolving power to the local level. We will continue to use the call-in power sparingly.

The Government supports affordability but we are concerned that to require all large new developments to have an “affordable shops” quota could increase the adverse impact of that development on town centres.

**16.** Large retailers should support and mentor local businesses and independent retailers.

**We welcome this recommendation.** The Department for Communities and Local Government is providing up to £306,000 match funding for the Enterprise Business Connectors scheme, run by Business in the Community, to help small businesses in disadvantaged communities survive and to thrive by encouraging partnerships with local large firms.

We are also working with the National Town Team and others to increase provision of mentors and raise demand for mentoring through other high profile activities, including:

- Mentorsme.co.uk - the national mentoring portal operated by the British Bankers Association;
- the Get Mentoring initiative - which aims to recruit and train 15,000 volunteer business mentors from Small and Medium Enterprises; and

- calling on large companies to play their part through corporate business mentoring programmes that enable their staff to volunteer to be mentors.

The National Skills Academy for Retail is also rolling out a national mentoring scheme for retail Small and Medium Enterprises.

**17.** Retailers should report on their support of local high streets in their annual report.

We welcome this recommendation and encourage retailers to volunteer to report on their support of the local high-street in their annual report. Retailers could also look at other ways to provide mentoring support to local enterprises with which they share the high street or town centre.

**18.** Encourage a contract of care between landlords and their commercial tenants by promoting the leasing code, and supporting the use of lease structures other than upward only rent reviews, especially for small businesses.

**We support this recommendation and have written to all local authorities to encourage the formal take up of the Code and its terms, offering information and support to those signing up to the Code.**

The Code advocates the provision of alternatives to Upward Only Rent Reviews. We recognise the market has moved to shorter, more flexible lease arrangements, but we will continue to work with the industry to ensure these progressive measures become firmly embedded across the market and smaller businesses are armed with information to help them get the best terms they can. The Leasing Code recommends landlords offer alternative rent review options as part of the lease terms if requested by the tenant.

We are currently working on various options for disseminating the Code, targeting small businesses and landlords who could benefit most from the guidance offered by the Code. **We have written to key industry players such as the British Property Federation, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Law Society, to urge greater promotion of the Code. We are already discussing a dedicated awareness-raising event with the British Property Federation and The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors will also undertake a campaign to communicate the Code, and the need to abide by it, to its 60,000 members. And we will be working with the “Rightmove” property search website to provide information on the Code and Code related events through their commercial property pages.**

**19.** Explore further disincentives to prevent landlords from leaving units vacant.

**20.** Banks who own empty property on the high street should either administer these assets well or be required to sell them.

**21.** Local authorities should make more proactive use of Compulsory Purchase Order powers to encourage the redevelopment of key high street retail space.

**22.** Empower local authorities to step in when landlords are negligent with new 'Empty Shop Management Orders'.

**23.** Introduce a public register of high street landlords.

**We recognise the importance of these recommendations.** Empty properties can visibly bring down the attractiveness and prosperity of a high street but may reflect the changing nature of the high street. There are disincentives to leaving properties empty, in addition to loss of income and disrepair to the premises, and we do not want to add pressure to struggling businesses and prevent much-needed investment in the premises. Central and local government should lead by example with their vacant properties, and, on 23 January at the launch of the "Business in You" campaign, the Prime Minister announced a scheme to give short-term lets on empty and under-used parts of its estate for use by business start-ups. And the Government's "Giving White Paper" identified the potential for using its estate for the voluntary sector. Relate is trialling the use of rooms at the Department for Education.



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Local authorities should be more proactive in using Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 which gives the planning authority power to take action to require land to be cleaned up when its condition adversely affects the amenity of the area. Under Section 219 they can undertake the clean up works and recover the costs from the landowner. Local authorities

can already use their Compulsory Purchase Order powers on their own account or on behalf of a development partner, provided the powers are required to undertake a development scheme.

**To support local authorities in their efforts to improve the look of their high streets, we will be allocating £10million as a High Street Innovation Fund to one hundred local authorities to help address the issues of riots and empty shops.** We are encouraging authorities to use the wide range of tools available – such as business rate discounts, planning and meanwhile uses – to do this, for example funding business rate discounts for new start up businesses taking on empty properties. Local authorities should also work collaboratively with landlords to encourage them to contribute to supporting their new occupiers - this could involve match funding or providing other resources, and is in the landlord's interest if it means their empty property becomes occupied. If this grant funding could be matched by the local authority and the landlord, the business rate discount could deliver a new business to the high street, filling an empty building and increasing choice for the local community. With all parties contributing, this has the potential for a £10million fund to generate £30million support for new businesses.

The banks will want to consider how best to support the proposal to improve their approaches to empty property. We are considering how to bring together landlords, high street partners and investors to work on this issue. **One such measure involves the establishment of an industry-led cross sector taskforce to look at a broad range of issues which have an impact on bringing commercial property into use or attracting investment to improve the prospects of high streets and town centres. We look forward to working with the task force on these key issues.**

We urge local authorities to compile a public register of high street landlords which could help Town Teams develop a collaborative approach among relevant partners. It could also help to make property owner Business Improvement Districts a reality, which we are committed to exploring.

Local authorities already have significant powers and we are not convinced there is a demand for Empty Shop Management Orders. We will evaluate the success of the High Street Innovation Fund and consider what more is needed.

**24.** Run a high profile campaign to get people involved in Neighbourhood Plans.

**25.** Promote the inclusion of the High Street in Neighbourhood Plans.

**We welcome these recommendations and can announce today that we will be providing funding of £1million for the development of high street Neighbourhood Plans as part of our neighbourhood planning programme.**

We have been working with Locality, The Prince's Foundation, the Royal Town Planning Institute with Planning Aid, and the Campaign to Protect Rural England with the National Association of Local Councils, who are helping communities and local councils to develop neighbourhood plans, and we have funded the Planning Advisory Service to run events on successful neighbourhood planning.

We have over 200 neighbourhood planning front-runner projects, where communities and local councils are testing the provisions of neighbourhood planning before the Localism Act comes into force. Six are business-led, including one developing a neighbourhood plan for Central Milton Keynes.

**26.** Developers should make a financial contribution to ensure that the local community has a strong voice in the planning system.

We agree communities should have a stronger role in the planning system. Through the Localism Act, developers will now have a duty to consult communities before submitting planning applications in certain circumstances.

**27.** Support imaginative community use of empty properties through Community Right to Buy, Meanwhile Use and a new "Community Right to Try".

We welcome this recommendation and are delivering significant support for communities on this issue. Model Meanwhile Lease documents are already available online to encourage all landlords to make empty shops and other property available for temporary, "meanwhile", use. The Right to Reclaim Land and the Community Right to Bid are also available to help communities make positive use of vacant space. The Right to Reclaim Land makes information about land owned by public bodies more easily available and the new Community Right to Bid, to be introduced later this year, gives communities the opportunity to identify assets of community value. When put up for sale, the community will be given more time to prepare to bid for them and raise the finance. We will explore the impact of these important new tools first before considering a Community Right to Try.

More broadly, we are supporting the development of social enterprises, through a range of financial and other business support. They are part of the business community, contributing to our economic prosperity: they employ 800,000 people and generate 1.5% of Gross Domestic Product, pioneer new markets and business models, and develop skills. Importantly, they **empower communities** to take control through owning and running their local shops or pub; **improve public services**, by shaping service design through engaging communities and users, pioneering new approaches, reaching those in the community that other providers don't; and **provide opportunities for greater social action and responsibility**, for example by helping citizens volunteer, donate their own time and expertise, and by acting as powerful advocates for citizens.