

Meeting of Full Council

Monday 20 October 2025

Agenda Item No. 19.0

TO NOTE NEW POWERS TO REVITALISE HIGH STREETS

1.0. Background

- 1.1. The UK Government announced plans to revitalise the UK's High Streets at the end of September with the following press release:

"People will be given the power to revitalise their neglected high streets, create new spaces for young people and take back control of derelict pubs, to breathe new life into neglected communities up and down the country.

Communities will be handed new powers to seize boarded up shops, save their treasured local pubs or libraries and clean up the eyesores in their area.

Local people will finally have the powers to put things right after years of decline – an inheritance the government is determined to fix through the Plan for Change.

This is about choosing a future where communities are empowered to come together, rather than be divided, and where renewal is chosen over decline.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer will unveil the Pride in Place programme – an unprecedented programme backed by record funding – that lets local people call the shots on where and how money is spent in their communities, restoring local pride and helping them reclaim their streets.

For far too long, communities have been dictated to rather than in control of their own destiny. This week marks a new way of governing. By choosing renewal over decline, this government is delivering lasting change working people will feel.

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Steve Reed said:

"When people step out of their front doors, they know their communities are struggling. They see shuttered pubs, fading high streets and their local areas in decline. "Yes, communities have been stretched – but they haven't given up. They're working hard to make things better, and we're backing them. "The Government is putting power into their hands so local people decide how best to restore pride in their neighbourhoods, not us in Westminster. "That's what real patriotism looks like: building up our communities and choosing renewal over division."

The nationwide Pride in Place programme – which will be unveiled by the Prime Minister (Thursday, 25 September) – will deliver a record investment and support over 330 communities in total. It will tackle deep-rooted deprivation and regional inequality through wide-ranging action, including:

- *Community Right to Buy: handing local people the power to buy beloved assets, helping them turn around derelict pubs, create new parks and regenerate treasured spaces in the heart of their communities.*

- *Compulsory Purchase powers: allowing communities in England to acquire assets and eyesores like boarded up shops and derelict abandoned businesses, allowing new local start-ups to thrive. For larger sites – like disused department stores or abandoned office blocks – it could even see new health centres opening up, or local housing to help reach our target of 1.5 million homes.*
- *Power to block unwanted shops: empowering councils in England to say no to new betting shops, vapes stores and fake barbers.*
- *Giving residents the power: we will only approve spending if community groups, local organisations and social clubs have been included in decisions on how the money should be spent – putting real power in local hands and giving them a proper say over their community.*

Further information

We are looking at new powers that would give communities more control over where betting shops can open, and how many there can be in one area. This is about giving people a say over their high street, particularly where there are high numbers of these types of shop already, not blocking these shops altogether.

We are also looking at accelerating ways communities can take ownership of empty shops - helping to give them a greater say over what's on their high streets, so they don't just end up with rows of vape shops, gambling shops and barbers. The government is already bringing in new laws to crack down on dodgy vape shops through the Tobacco and Vapes Bill.

We will only approve spending if Pride in Place Boards have genuinely engaged their communities, so that community groups, local organisations and social clubs have been included in decisions on how the money should be spent.

We are announcing a raft of new powers and programmes to empower communities across the UK. Please note that some powers and programmes will not apply in every nation of the UK."

- 1.2 The first stream of funding – the Pride in Place Impact Fund scheme's methodology focuses on areas of deprivation and the local authority areas allocated in the South East list those with the highest levels of deprivation - Croydon, Gravesham, Hastings, Swale, Thanet and Medway.
- 1.3 It is hoped however that further opportunities and associated initiatives will follow to provide greater power to a broader area of the UK. We therefore need to keep watch on further UK Government updates, and stress our interest in the programme here in Uckfield to see:
 - (i) the protection of key community assets, and;
 - (ii) improvements to grot spots in the High Street, and derelict properties within the town.

2.0. Recommendation

- 2.1. Members of Full Council are asked to recommend that the Town Clerk write to senior officers at Wealden District Council, to express our interest in this revitalisation programme and identify key areas of Uckfield which require attention, should further opportunities become available.

Contact Officer: Town Clerk