

High streets open doors to community projects

Empty shops are turning into vibrant community centres under new plans to take back control of vacant high streets as a government-backed scheme goes live in 5 towns across the country.

The [Open Doors project](#) supports landlords and communities to transform empty shops into vibrant community hubs making the high street a space to address the issues that matter to them.

Working with [Meanwhile Space](#), an organisation bettering unused spaces for communities, the scheme has matched public and private landlords of commercial properties, with community groups offering vital services to local people. Opportunities range from well-being classes, to business support sessions, to mentoring for social enterprises. The sites are available free of charge to local community groups to use.

Former retail units taking part in the scheme are located in Stoke-on-Trent, Bradford, Rochford, Kettering and Slough. This week, community hubs have opened in Stoke-on-Trent, Bradford and Kettering.

The launch follows the UK's second ever Great British High Street Week, held last week, which celebrated the high street and people working to revive, adapt and diversify town centres. The pilot scheme is part of a wider agenda of tackling social problems which are linked to declining high streets such as crime, unemployment and loneliness.

High Streets Minister Jake Berry MP said:

With landlords, organisations and the government working together, we have given unused spaces a boost and created fresh opportunities for projects which benefit local communities.

Local hubs and social projects bring people together and can play an important role in tackling the social and economic challenges we face, like loneliness and unemployment.

The Open Doors project is just one of the ways the government is working to transform our high streets. We are committed to helping local high streets adapt to the challenges they face and want communities to engage, to thrive and to enjoy their vibrant town centres and high streets.

Chief Executive of Meanwhile Foundation, Emily Berwyn said:

The Meanwhile Foundation exists to support community groups to

bring facilities and services into more visible spaces on an interim basis.

This process can be daunting, but Open Doors is showing how supporting community meanwhile uses on high streets all over the country can bring vibrancy to underused spaces and a reason for people to come together and enjoy activities.

Funded by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Open Doors is a pilot scheme taking place in 5 areas, matching landlords struggling to find tenants for their empty properties with community groups looking for space.

Each site chosen as part of the pilot has undergone remedial works, interior design, and the provision of flexible furnishings to ensure they are fit for purpose as community hubs.

The pilots are directly managed by the independent charity, Meanwhile Foundation in partnership with Meanwhile Space CIC, chosen for its existing work and experience in operating a brokerage service matching vacant premises with community groups looking for spaces to work.

The spaces are available free of charge to local community groups. Applications to use the spaces are being accepted on a rolling basis throughout the pilot period.

The government has launched a new forward-thinking [High Streets Task Force](#) supporting local leaders to revitalise high streets and town centres, on 2 July 2019.

On 1 July 2019, the government announced that 4 local communities are to receive a funding boost of a share of over £100,000 to create Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) that will deliver additional local services and transform commercial areas. The successful applicants to the BIDs Loan Fund are: Armley, Leeds; Beverley, East Riding of Yorkshire; Christchurch, Dorset; and Digbeth, Birmingham

The government also recently announced £9.75 million to local authorities in England to champion community-led clean-ups of high streets and town centres across the country, ensuring they look their best.

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