

Customers could lose out in merger between window blind companies

Hunter Douglas is a leading global supplier of blinds and other window coverings, which generated global sales of \$3.6 billion in 2018. It already owns established online and in-home UK providers of window coverings, Blinds2Go and Hillarys. 247 Home Furnishings (247) operates online and sells a range of window coverings, including curtains, shutters and blinds, across the UK.

Hunter Douglas originally obtained a minority interest in 247 in 2013, although this was not publicly disclosed at the time. It then went on to purchase 100% of the shareholding last year.

The CMA's in-depth investigation has concluded that the companies are close competitors in online sales of made to measure market blinds, with few effective alternative providers remaining after the merger. Most other specialist retailers are much smaller and less well-established than the merging businesses, and competition from large retailers of window coverings, like Next, Dunelm and John Lewis, is limited. The CMA therefore provisionally found that the merger will leave customers for online made-to-measure blinds with few alternative suppliers, likely leading to less choice, higher prices, and lower quality.

While Hunter Douglas already had a minority interest in 247 before the merger, the CMA has provisionally found that the purchase last year will bring the Blinds2Go and 247 brands under the same ownership and significantly reduce the incentive to operate as independent competitors.

Kirstin Baker, Inquiry Group Chair, said:

"The CMA is concerned that this merger will negatively affect customers in the UK looking to buy custom blinds online. We have provisionally found that Hunter Douglas' ownership of Blinds2Go combined with the full purchase of 247 would give it control of a very large share of the market for online made to measure blinds – this would be bad for consumers, reducing choice and quality, and increasing prices."

All interested parties now have until 29 July 2020 to submit views on possible remedies to address the CMA's concerns, which may include selling part or all of Hunter Douglas' interest in 247, and until 5 August 2020 to submit views on the CMA's provisional findings.

For more information, visit the [Hunter Douglas N.V. / 247 Home Furnishings Ltd merger inquiry](#) web page.

For media enquiries, contact the CMA press office on 020 3738 6460 or press@cma.gov.uk.

A19 Downhill Lane Junction Scheme granted development consent

Press release

Today, Thursday 16 July 2020, the application for the A19 Downhill Junction Scheme has been given development consent by the Secretary of State for Transport.



Development consent has been given to significantly enhance the capacity of the junction between the A19 and A1290 in Sunderland/South Tyneside, supporting local plans for an International Advanced Manufacturing Park (IAMP) to the north of the existing Nissan plant.

It involves the construction of a new bridge to the south of the existing (A1290) bridge across the A19. Together with the existing bridge this will form a more traditional roundabout layout above the A19. New slip roads will connect the A19 to the south. To the north, link roads will tie into the consented A19/A184 Testo's Junction Alteration.

The application was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration by Highways England on the 25 January 2019 and accepted for examination on 22 February 2019. Following an examination during which the public, statutory consultees and interested parties were given the opportunity to give evidence to the Examining Authority, a recommendation was made to the Secretary of State on 17 April 2020.

The Planning Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Sarah Richards said:

This is the 91st nationally significant infrastructure project to have been examined and decided within the timescales laid down in the Planning Act 2008. The Planning Inspectorate is committed to giving local communities the opportunity of being involved in the examination of projects that may affect them. Local people, the

local authority and other interested parties were able to participate in a 6-month long examination. The Examining Authority listened and gave full consideration to local views before making their recommendation.

The decision, the recommendation made by the Examining Authority to the Secretary of State and the evidence considered by the Examining Authority in reaching its recommendation is publicly available on the [National Infrastructure Planning website](#).

Journalists wanting further information should contact the Planning Inspectorate Press Office, on: 0303 444 5004 or 0303 444 5005 or email: Press.office@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Notes to editors:

The Planning Inspectorate, [National Infrastructure Programme of Projects](#) details the proposals which are anticipated to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate as applications in the coming months.

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[Government scheme to help universities in financial difficulties](#)

Universities facing severe financial difficulties as a result of the coronavirus will now be able to apply for further Government support, the Education Secretary announced today (Thursday 16 July).

Gavin Williamson has announced details of a new restructuring regime, specifically for higher education providers, such as universities and colleges in England, that could be at risk of insolvency. The scheme aims to support the important role universities play in their local economies, and preserve the country's science base.

Eligible providers will be able to seek this additional support to develop cost effective restructuring plans with conditions designed to focus the sector towards the future needs of the country, such as delivering high quality courses with good graduate outcomes.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

"We understand the challenges universities are facing, which is why we have already provided a range of support to ease financial pressures. This new scheme will help those who are still facing financial difficulty as a result

of COVID-19.

“As the country recovers from the pandemic we must look to the future, and our world-leading higher education has an important role to play in our success.

“We need our universities to achieve great value for money – delivering the skills and a workforce that will drive our economy and nation to thrive in the years ahead. My priority is student welfare, not vice-chancellor salaries.”

The plan builds on the higher education support packages announced in May and June, by the Department for Education and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, as well as the range of business support measures the Government has put in place to support our whole economy.

This included confirming higher education providers are eligible to access the Coronavirus Job Retention scheme and business loan schemes, as well as bringing forward tuition fee and research funding. The Restructuring Regime will only provide support after all other finance options have been exhausted and when there is a case to do so.

As a condition for taking part in the scheme, universities will be required to make changes that meet wider Government objectives, depending on the individual provider’s circumstances. This could include ensuring they deliver high quality courses with strong graduate outcomes, improving their offer of qualifications available, and focusing resources on the front line by reducing administrative costs, including vice-chancellor pay.

An independently-chaired Higher Education Restructuring Regime Board will be established, which will include input from members with specialist knowledge external to Government. The Education Secretary will draw on the expertise of the Board on individual cases before making a decision on whether to intervene.

Financial support in the form of repayable loans will only be provided if there is a case to do so, and this is not a guarantee that no organisation will go into insolvency. It will only be offered as a last resort measure and with specific conditions that align with wider Government objectives. It would also require assurance that providers are fully complying with their legal duties to secure freedom of speech.

Further details on the regime, including support and conditions can be found [here](#).

New compensation scheme for victims of terrorism

- government to consult on new compensation process for victims of terror
- part of wider proposed reforms to simplify and improve criminal injuries compensation
- increased pay-outs for bereaved families

The proposals aim to better address the particular needs of victims and their families following a terrorist incident, and ensure applications are processed as rapidly as possible. The changes follow a commitment to improve the compensation process following the Manchester Arena Terror Attack, and support the government's wider review of the support available to terror victims, including families and loved ones, to ensure more victims get the support and advice they need, faster.

The plans form part of a package of reforms Ministers are pursuing through a consultation launched today (16 July 2020) which seeks to improve the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (CICS) – making the scheme simpler and more transparent, while ensuring it keeps pace with the changing nature of crime.

The Scheme provides compensation to victims injured by violent crime as public acknowledgement of their suffering, paying out more than £130 million last year – making it one of the most generous of its kind in the world. This includes £11 million to victims who were previously barred from accessing compensation under the pre-1979 'same roof' rule after the government scrapped the unfair rule last year.

The key proposals in the consultation include:

- Creating a standalone scheme for victims of domestic and overseas terrorism to improve awareness of the support on offer and ensure applications are processed as rapidly as possible.
- Scrapping completely the 'same roof' rule which blocks victims from receiving compensation if the attacker was a family member they were living with at the time of the incident. Ministers abolished part of the rule in 2019, which has led to £11 million being paid to victims previously denied compensation.
- Simplifying the list of injuries included in the CICS and the tariff of payments associated to them.
- Giving a single payment to bereaved families of £8,000 – an increase of £2,500 for the majority of applicants while speeding up the claims process.
- Increasing support for funeral costs to a single payment of £4,500 – from the previous basic sum of £2,500 to reflect the rise in funeral costs.
- Seeking views on whether families bereaved by homicide abroad should

have access to compensation.

Justice Minister Alex Chalk said:

All too recently we've witnessed the devastating effects of terrorism, which is why this government is determined that victims get the support they need to rebuild their lives.

While no amount of compensation can ever make up for the suffering they've endured, our reforms will ensure the system for claiming awards better reflects the needs of victims, and that applications are processed as rapidly as possible.

But this is only one part of our plans to boost the support available for people injured by violent crime. We are simplifying the Scheme making it easier to understand, as well as increasing pay-outs for bereaved families.

Today's announcement follows a comprehensive review which found that for the vast majority of applicants the Scheme is working well, with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) which operates the Scheme reporting a 95% customer satisfaction rating.

The review concluded that the principles underpinning the Scheme must be maintained – that it exists to support all eligible victims of violent crime who have suffered the most serious injuries, and that compensation is an important and public recognition of their ordeal. It carefully considered the Scheme's scope and eligibility criteria, and while it recognised concerns around application time limits and the unspent conviction rule, it found that any change would undermine the Scheme's ethos of treating all victims in a fair and consistent manner.

However, the review revealed some areas where improvements could be made, including to reduce the complexity of the process – which can deter some from applying – as well as enhancing the support offered to victims. Ministers are therefore consulting on package of changes which would inform the detail of a new and improved Scheme.

The move builds on commitments to improve the support on offer at every stage of the justice system outlined in the first-ever cross-government Victims Strategy as well as a raft of reforms to protect victims and pursue perpetrators. This includes:

- a 50 per cent increase in funding for victims of sexual violence.
- abolishing the pre-1979 'same roof rule' which has paid out £11 million to new and past applicants.
- consulting on a new Victims Code setting out what support victims should expect from the justice system.
- Improving court environments, with new victim-friendly waiting areas and an emphasis on accessibility for the most vulnerable.
- Extending the Unduly Lenient Sentence so more victims and the public can

have sentences reconsidered by the Court of Appeal.

Notes to editors

- The Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (the Scheme) is a statutory scheme that exists to compensate victims of violent crime in Great Britain where no other option of financial redress is available.
- A [consultation will run from 16 July to 9 October 2020](#).
- The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) deals with over 30,000 applications a year, and has a high satisfaction rating of 95% from applicants who had been in contact in 2018/19.
- In 2018/19 the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) paid out more than £130 million to victims.
- The review examined whether the Scheme remains fit for purpose, reflects the changing nature of violent crime and effectively supports victims in their recovery.
- It considered:
 - The scope of the Scheme, including the definition of violent crime for the purposes of compensation for injury, and the type of injuries that are covered by the Scheme.
 - The eligibility rules including, among other things, concerns about time limits for making applications, unspent convictions, and consent in sexual offences cases.
 - The requirements of the Scheme in relation to decision-making, including issues such as the level of evidence required for compensation claims, and the timeframes for accepting or rejecting awards.
 - The value and composition of awards available through the Scheme, including the balance struck between serious and less serious physical and mental injuries.
 - The impact of the Scheme on particular groups, including victims of child sexual abuse and victims of terrorism.
 - Opportunities to simplify the Scheme.
 - The affordability and financial sustainability of the Scheme.
- The Scheme operates a tariff-based system for determining injury awards which describes the qualifying injuries and the associated awards. Our proposals will simplify this list of injuries and awards to achieve more transparency and consistency for victims.
- 'Same roof' rule
 - The rule was intended to ensure perpetrators would not benefit from compensation paid to victims they lived with.
 - In 2019 the pre-1979 'same roof' rule was abolished. This meant victims of violent crimes which took place before 1979 were blocked from receiving compensation if the attacker was someone they were living with at the time of the incident.
 - However, the post 1979 'same roof' rule remained intact. The changes recommend abolishing this rule completely, so that familial relationships will not prevent victims from accessing compensation to which they would otherwise be entitled, provided that there is no possibility of the assailant benefitting.
 - An amended Scheme coming into force on 13 June 2019. The changes

allow victims previously denied criminal injuries compensation under the rule, or who have never applied, to make fresh applications; applications must be received by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) within two years, by 13 June 2021.

- Victims of domestic terrorism can already claim from CICS and Victims of FCO-designated terrorist attacks abroad can claim compensation from the Victims of Overseas Terrorism Compensation Scheme.
- A standalone scheme for victims of terrorism would require primary legislation.
- The consultation also explains rationales for not changing certain aspects of the Scheme. This includes:
 - The scope of the Scheme and whether it could be extended to include crimes of grooming, online exploitation and grooming.
 - The review found that expanding to such crimes could present operational difficulties given the wide range of other offences that may also have similar harmful impacts and operation difficulties in establishing evidence.
- The government is also reviewing the wider support available to victims of terrorism, including families and loved ones, and investing £500,000 to increase the support provided, to ensure more victims get the support and advice they need, faster.
- The Home Secretary made an announcement on the 26 March regarding a competed grant, available to organisations who want to provide support to victims of terrorism. Organisations were able to bid for up to £500,000, to provide advice and support to individuals and their families affected by terrorist attacks. The outcome will be announced shortly.
- The government has committed to an internal review of the wider support package available to victims of terrorism. The review is currently being scoped and we will take forward its recommendations in due course.

[GCA welcomes findings of second statutory review](#)



Christine Tacon, the Groceries Code Adjudicator, has warmly welcomed the [findings of the Government's Statutory Review](#) of the GCA's work between April 2016 and March 2019.

She said: "This is a highly positive report that recognises the importance of the GCA in creating a more level playing field for the groceries sector.

"I am grateful for the acknowledgement that my pro-active approach as well as the knowledge and experience I brought to the role have led to fairer practices across all the regulated retailers. This was the mission I set myself when I became GCA 2013 and it good to see that recognised by those individuals and organisations that responded to this statutory review.

I am particularly grateful for the comments that my team and I have been approachable, professional and influential in driving the culture change that has achieved progress. We all take great pride in being able to have made a difference."

The government report concludes that:

- the GCA continues to be highly effective in enforcing the Code and in exercising its powers
- the government will not amend or replace the Groceries Code Adjudicator (Permitted Maximum Financial Penalty) Order 2015 which provides the maximum financial penalty the GCA may impose
- no order will be made to restrict the information the GCA may consider in deciding whether to carry out an investigation

The overall evidence from the review also suggested there is still a need for the GCA to ensure retailers comply with the requirements of the Groceries Code. Some responses to the review indicated that some suppliers are still reluctant to raise issues with the GCA. The government report recognises the steps the current GCA has taken to encourage suppliers to raise issues. It makes a commitment to work with the next GCA to help suppliers feel empowered to raise issues with the GCA and their retailers directly.

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Additional information added – extract from government report

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