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Britain Unveils £210m Plan to Revive Struggling High Streets

Officials said councils can reuse derelict sites, with £65m earmarked for pubs, clubs and other community assets.

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The British government said Monday it will put £210m into a new package aimed at helping revive struggling high streets, with part of the money set aside to support pubs and other community venues at risk of closing.

The funding was announced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and is meant to bring empty and derelict buildings back into use across England. Officials said the plan is designed to tackle the long decline of many town centers, where vacant shops and boarded-up buildings have become more common.

The largest share, £125m, will go to a Derelict Buildings Fund. The government said local authorities will be able to use that money to turn empty shopping centers, disused movie theaters and other vacant sites into new spaces such as workplaces, cafes, community hubs, health centers and civic buildings.

Another £65m will be directed to communities seeking to rescue and restore valued buildings and businesses that are at risk of closure. The government said that group includes pubs and sports clubs, both of which often play a central role in local life but have faced sustained financial pressure from rising costs, weaker foot traffic and broader shifts in consumer habits.

That part of the package could matter beyond property and local development policy. Pubs remain an important sales channel for beer, wine and spirits, and support that slows closures or helps venues reopen could provide some stability for drinks suppliers and related businesses that depend on the on-trade market.

A further £20m will be divided between two programs. One is the High Street Rental Auctions scheme, which is intended to bring properties that have stood empty for 12 months or longer back into use. The other is a new Co-operative Development Programme.

Under the co-operative plan, £10m will be made available to mayors and strategic authorities to help expand businesses that are owned and run by workers, customers or local communities. The government said the measure is intended to give more communities a direct stake in businesses that serve their areas.

Officials said the new package builds on existing efforts, including the Pride in Place program, which has supported local groups taking over community assets. The latest funding is coming from money that had already been allocated for high street support and regeneration, according to the government.

In comments released with the announcement, Andy Burnham said people often judge economic progress by what they see on their local high street. He said residents notice whether stores are opening, whether shutters are down and whether a place feels like it is moving forward or being left behind. He said too many high streets had been allowed to hollow out, leaving town centers far weaker than they once were, and said the new funding would help return power to local people who know their areas best.

Angela Rayner, the secretary of state for housing, communities and local government, said the money would help turn boarded-up buildings into places that residents are proud to visit again. She said the aim was to help pubs and clubs that matter to local communities thrive once more while supporting business growth and job creation.

The announcement comes as many British pubs continue to face a difficult operating environment. Rising labor, energy and borrowing costs have added pressure to a sector that has already gone through years of disruption. In many towns and villages, the closure of a pub can also affect nearby small businesses by reducing foot traffic and weakening the local evening economy.

The wider regeneration plan suggests ministers see local venues not only as businesses but also as part of the social fabric of town centers. By linking support for pubs and clubs with efforts to reuse derelict properties, the government is trying to address both empty real estate and the loss of community institutions in the same policy push.

The High Street Rental Auctions measure is also aimed at a long-running complaint from local authorities and business groups that some commercial landlords leave units vacant for extended periods. The government’s approach would give councils another tool to try to bring those sites back into active use more quickly. Supporters argue that reducing the number of empty storefronts can improve confidence among residents, attract more visitors and encourage private investment in nearby properties.

For pubs, the direct effect of the package will likely depend on how local councils and community groups use the available money and how quickly projects move from approval to delivery. Some venues may benefit through community rescue and refurbishment efforts, while others could gain indirectly if broader high street improvements increase customer traffic in surrounding areas.

The government said a full high streets strategy will be published later this year, setting out a broader plan for town center renewal.