

FROM DECLINE TO RENEWAL: BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO BRITAIN'S HIGH STREETS

 **Digital Conference**

 **Thursday 29th January 2026**



Key Speakers



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government
Theo Heren

bira
British Independent Retailers Association
Andrew Goodacre

UKH
UKHOSPITALITY
Jim Cathcart



Department for
Business & Trade
Edward Perchard



Ojay McDonald



**Liverpool
Nightlife CIC**
John Hughes

Overview

High streets across the UK are facing profound challenges. Once the beating heart of towns and cities, many now struggle with long-term vacancies, declining retail footfall and changing consumer habits compounded by the growth of online shopping. The impacts of the pandemic, inflationary pressures and shifting employment patterns have left visible scars, with vacancy rates in some places such as Bradford and Newport nearing 20%, compared to under 8% in London and Cambridge. This uneven performance reflects deeper structural inequalities in local economies, with weaker high streets often linked to lower spending power, over-supply of retail space and leakage of demand to stronger nearby centres.

In response, the Government has made revitalising high streets and neighbourhoods a key priority for this Parliament. **High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs)** now give councils new powers to tackle vacancy by repurposing long-empty premises for local businesses, social enterprises and community hubs. The **Plan for Neighbourhoods** will channel £1.5bn into 75 areas over the next decade, placing control in the hands of locally-led Neighbourhood Boards to drive regeneration in line with community priorities. In September, the Government announced the **Pride in Place Programme**, which will provide £5bn of investment for 339 "overlooked" communities across the UK to spend on boosting high streets, parks and public spaces. This alongside the new **National Licensing Policy Framework** is opening the door for cafés, bars, music venues and cultural centres to thrive in designated hospitality zones. Together, these measures are focused on creating vibrant, resilient and inclusive high streets.

This Policy Foresight digital conference will bring together policymakers, local licensing authorities, planners, heritage specialists, business representatives, and community organisations to explore how these reforms and investments can be translated into thriving, resilient high streets. The conference provides a timely platform to gain practical insights into tackling vacancy, strengthening local economies, repurposing high street spaces and embedding community voice in regeneration strategies to breathe new life into Britain's high streets.

Why Attend?

- Digital Conference featuring presentations and panel discussions with key policymakers, local authority leaders, planners, heritage specialists, BID managers, business voices and community organisations
- Understand the national picture – the impact of the *Plan for Change*, the forthcoming *Small Business Plan*, and the new *Pride in Place Programme* on high street regeneration
- Tackle vacancy and strengthen the daytime economy – Supporting SMEs, independents and community enterprises, while bringing long-term empty premises back into use
- Embed culture and heritage – Using planning reforms, cultural investment, and heritage-led renewal to create inclusive, resilient high streets
- Harness the night-time economy – Boosting vitality through hospitality, cultural venues and safe, inclusive late-night economies
- Share ideas and best practice across local government, planning, housing, the private sector and community groups
- Interactive *Question Time* sessions with opportunities to engage with all speakers
- On demand – Exclusive access to speaker presentations and post-event resources

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Programme

09:30 AM	Delegate Online Login
10:00 AM	Introduction by Conference Organiser
10:05 AM	Chair's Welcome and Opening Remarks
10:10 AM	Keynote Address: Revitalising Britain's High Streets – The National Strategy ➤ Driving local economic renewal through the <i>Plan for Change</i>, forthcoming <i>Small Business Plan</i> and exploring the potential impact of the <i>Pride in Place Programme</i> ➤ <i>High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs)</i> – Repurposing long-vacant shops into community hubs, cultural venues, and affordable spaces for SMEs and social enterprises ➤ Exploring the <i>Plan for Neighbourhoods</i> areas – Driving regeneration through local control, collaboration and empowerment ➤ Slashing red tape – Simplifying planning and licensing for new cafés, bars, music venues and cultural centres • Theo Heren, Head of High Streets Policy, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government
10:30 AM	Keynote Session: Questions and Discussion
10:50 AM	Comfort Break
11:00 AM	Panel Session One: Reviving Our Town Centres – Tackling Vacancy and Strengthening the Daytime Economy ➤ <i>High Street Rental Auctions (HSRAs)</i> in action – Using new powers to bring long-term vacant shops back into use ➤ Re-energising the daytime economy – Supporting independent retailers, SMEs and community enterprises as anchors of high street activity ➤ Examining the role of Neighbourhood Boards in linking physical regeneration with social infrastructure and community priorities ➤ Balancing stakeholders – Engaging landlords, BIDs, businesses and community groups to secure fair, sustainable occupancy of vacant units ➤ Broadening high street use – Diversifying beyond retail to include services, co-working, housing and civic hubs that attract people into town centres during the day • Edward Perchard, High Streets Lead, Small Business Growth Directorate, Department for Business and Trade • Andrew Goodacre, Chief Executive, British Independent Retailers Association
11:50 AM	Panel Session One: Questions and Discussion
12:15 PM	Comfort Break

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1:00 PM	Programme Cont'd Panel Session Two: Shaping the Future – Planning, Culture and Heritage in High Street Regeneration ➤ Planning reforms and high streets – Using local powers, simplifying processes and aligning planning with regeneration outcomes ➤ Culture as a driver of regeneration – Embedding creative industries, cultural venues and public art to boost high street vitality and footfall ➤ Heritage-led renewal – Protecting town centre identity while enabling modern uses ➤ Designing inclusive, accessible and climate-resilient places – Shaping high streets that are welcoming, sustainable, and future-proof ➤ Examining the role of Historic England, local planners and cultural leaders in delivering place-based transformation • Oscar Selby, <i>Researcher, Centre for Cities</i> • <i>Senior Representative, Historic England</i> • Lydia Rusling, <i>Director of Place & Prosperity, Melton Borough Council</i>
1:50 PM	Panel Session Two: Questions and Discussion
2:15 PM	Comfort Break
2:30 PM	Panel Session Three: Lighting Up Our High Streets – Culture, Hospitality and the Night-Time Economy ➤ Hospitality as a catalyst for renewal – Leveraging cafés, restaurants, pubs and bars to animate high streets and boost local economies ➤ <i>National Licensing Policy Framework</i> – Simplifying planning, enabling hospitality zones and cutting red tape for growth ➤ Culture after dark – Embedding live music, theatre and events into regeneration strategies to extend high street activity beyond retail hours ➤ Delivering safe, inclusive and diverse night-time economies – Ensuring accessibility, safety and appeal for all age groups and communities ➤ Partnerships for success – Driving collaboration between councils, BID's, the hospitality sector, and community stakeholders to build thriving, inclusive evening economies • Ojay McDonald, <i>Chief Executive, Association of Town & City Management</i> • Jim Cathcart, <i>Policy Director, UK Hospitality</i> • John Hughes, <i>Chief Executive, Liverpool Nightlife CiC</i>
3:20 PM	Panel Session Three: Questions and Discussion
3:40 PM	Final Questions and Chair's Summary & Closing Comments
3:45 PM	End of Digital Conference



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DELEGATE FEES [price per place]					
BOOKING & PAYMENT OPTIONS:	1 PLACE		2-4 PLACES		5+ PLACES
Online Registration with Card Payment – CLICK HERE	☐	£ 245 + vat	☐	£ 215 + vat	☐ £ 175 + vat
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Total no. places:		

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Name of Key Contact:		Job Title:	
Organisation Name:		Department:	
Address:		Postcode:	
Email Address:		Telephone No:	
Accounts Dept. Contact:		Telephone No:	
Purchase Order No:		Cost Centre Code (if applicable):	

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Government Procurement Card (GPC) ☐	MasterCard ☐	VISA / VISA Debit ☐	
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