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PRESS RELEASE

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Planning Minister Greg Clark today said the Government could scrap red tape in order to encourage 'meanwhile uses' of empty buildings, transforming them into new shops, business start-ups, and community projects.

Empty properties can lead to a spiral of decline, spoil high streets, and act as a magnet for anti-social behaviour. Meanwhile uses are a way of putting a vacant space back into good use for the benefit of the whole community while a permanent solution is found.

In London's Exmouth Market, for example, a shop lying empty for two years has been transformed by social enterprise Meanwhile Space into a hub offering space to business start-ups and community-focused projects. Shop space has already been booked by a furniture business and a vintage wares store eager to try out their business idea.

Mr Clark believes that it should be easier for businesses and communities to arrange meanwhile uses for empty buildings without having to jump through unnecessary hoops in the planning system.

The Minister today signalled that the Government could scrap rules requiring costly and time consuming planning permission in order to temporarily change the use of empty buildings, as part of a future wider review on deregulating the used class orders system.

This could help reinvigorate local high streets, encourage community enterprises; support entrepreneurs to start-up, contribute to economic growth; and help build stronger, more vibrant communities.

Mr Clark said:

"Empty properties can drain the life away from town centres and are a waste of a valuable social and economic resource.

"We want to make it easier for businesses and community enterprises to reanimate vacant spaces, helping to revive struggling high streets and kick-start local growth.

"Removing bureaucratic barriers in the planning system could play a major part in encouraging meanwhile uses of empty buildings, transforming them into new shops, business start-ups and community projects."

Eddie Bridgeman from Meanwhile Space, a social enterprise which brings empty spaces back into use, said:

"We welcome the fact that the Government is considering getting rid of the need for planning permission for the temporary use of buildings.

"This could give a big boost to getting business and community enterprises into empty premises."

Removing the need for planning permission to temporarily change the use of empty buildings could be a key part of a future Government consultation on deregulating the use class order system. The Government wants to hear similar ideas and views on how the 'change of use' part of the planning system can be improved.

The Government is already working to cut down planning bureaucracy and has announced a full review of national planning policy by 2012. For example it is already consulting on allowing commercial property to be changed into residential property without needing planning permission. This could create 70,000 new homes over 10 years.

The Plan for Growth, published alongside the Budget in March, set out a radical plan of reform to help deliver strong, balanced and sustainable growth in the long term. Reform of the planning system is a key element of that, and today's announcement is another step to creating the right conditions for businesses, to start up, invest and grow.

Notes to editors

1. The Use Class Order review is being undertaken jointly by DCLG and BIS.
2. The outcomes of this review on how change of use is handled in the planning system through the Use Class Order, and permitted development rights will be announced later this year. Any proposals for changes to legislation will then be subject to formal public consultation.
3. Anyone interested in contributing proposals to drive the scope of the consultation can submit their ideas to ucoreview@communities.gsi.gov.uk. Further information on the Call for Evidence can be found at www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/changeuseis...
4. The Plan for Growth, published alongside the Budget in March, set out a detailed plan of action for the first part of the Growth Review. The Plan can be found at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/ukecon_growth_index.htm
5. The Growth Review invites business to take part in a fundamental assessment of what each part of Government is doing to create the best conditions for private sector growth. It is a rolling programme that will last the lifetime of this Parliament. More information about the Review can be found at www.bis.gov.uk/growth
6. Meanwhile Space launched its pop-up shop on Exmouth Market with the support of New Deal of the Mind, a charity which creates access to jobs and self-employment in the arts.

