

PM to reveal plans to revive struggling town centres in Queen's Speech

Plans to revive struggling town centres will form a key part of the Queen's Speech next week as the prime minister tries to move on after his party's poor local election performance.

Boris Johnson will say on Tuesday that he wants to rid high streets of derelict shopfronts and restore "neighbourhood pride", with councils given extra powers to make it happen.

The Levelling Up And Regeneration Bill would give England's councils the power to hold compulsory rental auctions to make sure shops that have been vacant for more than a year are available to prospective tenants.

One in seven shops are vacant, according to figures from the British Retail Consortium, with as many as a fifth empty in the North East.

Many have lost tenants due to high rental and business rates, as well as a fall in demand as shoppers move online.

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Councils will also have greater power to use compulsory purchase orders to deliver housing, regeneration schemes and infrastructure.

Other ideas include making pavement cafes a permanent part of town centres.

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The cafes became popular during the coronavirus pandemic as restaurants, pubs and bars were given temporary permission to serve guests on pavements rather than indoors.

This permission would be made permanent under the plans.

Mr Johnson said: "High streets up and down the country have long been blighted by derelict shopfronts, because they've been neglected, stripping opportunity from local areas.

“We are putting that right by placing power back in the hands of local leaders and the community so our towns can be rejuvenated, levelling up opportunity and restoring neighbourhood pride.”

Levelling Up Secretary, Michael Gove, said: “By empowering local communities to rent out shops which have been sat empty for a year or longer, we will end the scourge of boarded up shops that have blighted some of our great towns across the country for far too long.”

Other measures expected in the package include a Brexit Freedoms Bill to make it easier to scrap EU laws, and a Bill of Rights to replace the Human Rights Act.