

## Policy Brief: Revitalizing Rural Village Shops and Promoting Slow Tourism — A Competitive Pilot Initiative

### Rationale:

Rural communities across the UK face increasing challenges in accessing essential goods, social isolation, and economic decline. The closure of village shops, vital hubs for community life and local economy, exacerbates these issues, leading to diminished dignity and wellbeing. Revitalizing village shops can restore access to essentials, foster social connections, and stimulate local economies, enhancing rural resilience and pride.

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### Policy Overview:

The UK government will allocate **£15 million annually for five years** via a competitive grant process to one devolved government (Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland) to pilot a rural village shop revitalization program. The pilot will aim to improve access to affordable essential goods, promote social cohesion through community hubs, and support rural economic vitality including slow tourism development.

An **independent evaluation** will be conducted after **two years** to assess impact, cost-effectiveness, and potential for wider rollout.

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### Key Elements for Proposals:

- Target villages with populations between **200 and 500 inhabitants**, supporting one shop per village
  - Ensure availability of a core basket of essential items at affordable prices (targeting a price below the national essential goods price benchmark)
  - Facilitate the role of village shops as community hubs, encouraging provision of social spaces such as seating and refreshments
  - Promote slow tourism opportunities linked to village shops and local culture
  - Include mechanisms to sustain and grow rural employment and enterprise
  - Encourage innovative local solutions tailored to community needs
  - Proposals must include a clear plan for governance, sustainability, and community engagement
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### Evaluation Criteria:

Proposals will be assessed on:

- **Sustainability:** Viability of shops and funding model over time
  - **Access and Affordability:** Effectiveness in providing essential goods at reduced prices
  - **Community Impact:** Job creation, social inclusion, and contribution to rural dignity
  - **Innovation:** Integration of community services and tourism
  - **Scalability:** Potential for adaptation and replication in other regions
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#### **Funding Source:**

Financed by a **1% increase in import duty on foods transported by air** to the UK, estimated to generate approximately £15 million annually.

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#### **Governance and Implementation:**

- Devolved governments are invited to submit tailored proposals aligned with this framework and local priorities
  - The UK central government will manage the competitive grant process and evaluation
  - Annual reporting and a comprehensive evaluation after two years will guide future expansion decisions
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#### **Expected Impact:**

- Revival of village shops as sustainable service and community hubs
  - Improved access to affordable essential goods for rural residents
  - Strengthened social cohesion and rural dignity through community engagement
  - Job creation and enhanced local economic activity including slow tourism
  - Creation of a model for rural retail revitalization with potential national impact
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#### **Conclusion:**

This pilot initiative offers a strategic opportunity to empower rural communities by revitalizing village shops, fostering social connection, and supporting sustainable local economies. It places innovation and local knowledge at the forefront while ensuring dignity and access for rural populations.