

MCC Interview bid: Transforming Towns Loans announcement (Park House visit)

Date and time	Monday 19th February 2024 at 10am – 11am
Interviewer and organisation	Global – Interviewer TBC
Length	5-10 minutes.
Format	Pre-recorded.
Location	Outside Park House (20 Park Place, Cardiff, Wales, CF10 3DQ)
Press officer	Redacted – Section 40
Brief summary	<p>Following the Transforming Towns Loans announcement on Monday, February 19, a visit to one of Cardiff Council's regeneration projects (Park House) has been arranged.</p> <p>The Minister will attend alongside the Cardiff Council Leader to meet with Tom Simmons and tour the building he's renovating into a 5* wedding and events venue.</p> <p>No photos or videos are to be taken inside the venue as requested by Tom Simmons and his team.</p> <p>Photographs and interviews will take place outside.</p>

Transforming Towns

Lines to take

- I am pleased to announce the latest round of the **Transforming Towns Loan programme**, which will provide a further **£8m** of loan support to Wrexham, Cardiff, Caerphilly, Gwynedd, and Swansea local authorities.
- This latest round builds on the success of the current programme, which has already brought **over 600 empty** or underutilised properties and sites back into use and delivered **over 100 projects** across Wales.
- We have previously invested **£73m** in loans across 17 local authorities since the programme started in 2014, and I have committed to a further **£5m** for next financial year.

- I appreciate the opportunity to visit **Park House** today in Cardiff, to be able to see the positive impact that Transforming Towns loan funding is going to have in the city.
- The Loans programme aims to support regeneration projects that revitalise town and city centres and bring life back into high streets by renovating and repurposing empty buildings.
- Our **Transforming Towns programme** has already begun to deliver real change, and our commitment of an additional **£125 million** over three years will further benefit communities across Wales.
- All of the towns and cities we invest in are underpinned by a **Placemaking Plan** which has been developed locally across all sectors and considers a range of factors affecting the needs of a town, including transport, environment, education and health.
- Our **Town Centre First** policy is embedded in Planning Policy through Future Wales and prioritises all new developments to be considered in town centres. It recognises that town centres remain important focal points of communities and are increasingly places to live, centres of community and cultural activity and a focus for public services such as health and education.
- It is so important that communities are sustainable over the longer term, and this programme will help improve job opportunities, economic growth, and the quality of life for people who live and work in and around these towns.
- A collective and concerted effort is needed to help address the challenges many towns face and we will continue to work with our local authorities and stakeholders to take forward the actions set out in the **Town Centre Position Statement**.

Defensive lines *(if asked why those/only five local authorities receiving funding)*

- The Transforming Towns Loans programme has been operating since 2014, and is delivered across 17 of the 22 local authorities. Each year, authorities are offered the chance to apply for additional funding, however, given the **fund is recycled, not all authorities need additional funding each year.**

Background

Redacted – not in scope for relating to misinformation, public messaging strategy, or reputational risk

Empty properties

Lines to take

- Tackling **empty properties** is a key priority for us, and alongside this loan funding, we have given authorities nearly **£43m** to provide interest-free **property loans** for landlords and homeowners to improve properties, and bring them back into use. Over **3,500 units** have been brought back into use or improved under this scheme so far.
- **Empty homes** can be a blight and nuisance on our communities. Not only can they attract anti-social behaviour, pose environmental health problems, and contribute to a general decline in their neighbourhoods, but they are also a wasted resource. This is particularly frustrating when housing is in short supply.
- We are investing up to **£50m** through our **Empty Homes Grant scheme** to bring up to **2,000 long-term empty properties** back into use.
- We have a Programme for Government commitment to **support the development of a register of empty buildings and help small businesses move into vacant shops**.
- We are successfully delivering against our **Enforcement Agenda** and continue to support local authorities to use the full range of legislative powers at their disposal to tackle **empty properties**, as we realise what a negative impact they have on our town centres and local communities.
- We have provided **enforcement training** to more than 850 councillors and officials across all local authorities in Wales on using measures to deal with **empty properties**. This covered the broad range of powers and legislation available to deal with poor condition and empty properties.
- We have established an **Empty Property Enforcement Fund** to de-risk enforcement action for local authorities. This fund means that local authorities can take appropriate enforcement action without fear of losing out financially. We have also assisted them in developing **Empty Property Enforcement Action Plans**.
- We remain committed to supporting local authorities with their enforcement powers, and have an **Industry Expert** available to provide bespoke and specialised advice on individual cases.