



# Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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The Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP  
Minister of State  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

8 July 2020

Dear Christopher,

## **RE: THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (GENERAL PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT AND MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) (CORONAVIRUS) (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2020**

Thank you for your letter of 24 June 2020 regarding the laying of regulations introducing a new permitted development right (PDR) for up to two stories to be added to an existing purpose-built free standing block of flats, of three stories or more, to build new homes. The Committee also acknowledges the Government's intention, as set out by the Prime Minister on 30 June 2020, to create a PDR to convert vacant shops and commercial buildings into residential accommodation.

The Committee recognises the need to build more homes and supports the Government's ambition to do so. However, we are also aware that concerns have been raised regarding the use of existing PDRs. The Committee would like to know, therefore, what the Government will do to address these concerns as it implements new PDRs:

- **Quality of accommodation:** Some existing PDRs, particularly office to residential conversions, have been criticised for delivering very low quality 'rabbit hutch' homes. The Government's own Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission called for "meaningful local standards of design and placemaking" to apply in future to PDRs. *What will the Government do to ensure that basic standards, including minimum room sizes and guarantees of amenity space, will apply to new PDRs?*
- **Funding for infrastructure and affordable housing:** In May 2018, a Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) report sought to calculate the cost of PDRs to local authorities and their ability to provide infrastructure and affordable housing. Looking at just five local authorities, they found that they may have lost £10.8 million in planning obligations and 1,667 affordable housing units, as well as a further loss of £4.1 million from reduced planning fees. Research from Shelter estimated that, between 2015-16 and 2017-18, urban authorities lost out on over 10,000 potential affordable homes as a result of PDR. *What will the Government do to ensure that local authorities do not, as a consequence of new PDRs, miss out on the funding they need to provide vital infrastructure and affordable housing for their communities?*
- **Scope of the Building Safety Regulator:** The Government will soon implement a new fire safety regime for high-rise buildings through the Building Safety Bill. As

outlined in the Government's consultation response, the new regime will apply to all multi-occupied residential buildings of 18 metres or more in height, or more than six storeys. *Could you confirm, therefore, that where a building is extended in height above 18 metres (or six storeys) through the new PDR, that it will then fall under the scope of the new building safety regime?*

- **Respect for existing local architecture:** Local communities will be keen to ensure that any new development fits with the design of the existing streetscape. *What rights will local authorities have to object to a scheme which damages the existing streetscape?*
- **Respect for existing businesses:** Mixing residential and business development needs to respect both. *How will the rights of existing business, e.g. pubs and restaurants, be protected to ensure they can continue to operate in an area changing its mix of development?*
- **Protection for leaseholders:** While the right to extend existing blocks of flats could add considerably to freeholders' income, many leaseholders are concerned by the potential impact of building works on their homes, additional costs that might arise through their service charges as a consequence of maintaining a larger building, and the potential for higher enfranchisement costs. *What research has the Government undertaken into the potential impact on leaseholders of these changes and what protections will the Government put in place to ensure they are not financially disadvantaged as a consequence?*

I look forward to your response.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clive Betts', with a large, stylized initial 'C' at the start.

**Clive Betts MP**  
**Chair, Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee**