



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP
Minister of State for Housing

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local
Government**

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Clive Betts MP
Chair,
Housing, Communities and Local Government
Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Clive,

Planning Reforms to Support the Covid Recovery and the Reimagination of our High Streets

I am writing to let you know, in your role as chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, that on 21 July I laid regulations to implement measures announced by the Prime Minister in his speech on 30 June to drive economic recovery in our towns and cities and get Britain building again. These reforms will support the recovery and reimagination of our high streets and bring forward new planning freedoms to boost housing supply by gently densifying our urban areas.

It is time we reconsidered the way the planning system treats different uses for the High Street. The current Use Classes Order was drafted over 30 years ago and preserves a backward-looking model of retail on the high streets. Through reforming and simplifying the Use Classes Order we are giving greater freedom for small business owners in our town centres to change use without planning permission, allowing for businesses and services to locate freely and adapt to changing economic conditions.

To further support economic growth across England, we want to boost home building. Small and medium sized builders will benefit from greater freedoms to redevelop vacant and redundant buildings and build more home extensions. We are introducing two new permitted development rights. The first expands on the "building up" right, introduced on 24 June by allowing for more types of building, including homes, to build upwards to create new homes and to extend existing homes. The second introduces a new permitted development right to allow the demolition of vacant and redundant free-standing buildings in certain commercial uses and blocks of flats to be demolished and rebuilt, in some cases with additional storeys, to create new homes. There will be a requirement to carefully consider the impact on neighbours and the appearance of any extension before any works are started.

Supporting the High Street and Changes of Use

Our high streets and town centres have changed – they now seek to provide a wider range of facilities and services and to accommodate new and emerging uses. Diversification will make these areas viable now and in the future. To support the recovery of our town centres we are reforming the use classes order by creating a new broad category of "Commercial, Business and Service" uses which encompass a wide range of uses which attract people to town centres. The new Class allows for mixed uses to reflect changing retail and business models and supports, rather than restricts, innovation. This will allow for greater freedom for businesses to adapt to changing

circumstances, without the uncertainty and expense of a planning application. It will support the needs of local communities by enabling new services and businesses to locate in accessible locations and bring vitality to town centres.

A new class "Community and Learning" will ensure our community facilities are protected. We have introduced a new class, which includes isolated shops, schools and community halls, to ensure any changes from these uses requires a planning application. The residential use classes will remain the same, differentiating between homes, hotels, residential institutions and Homes in Multiple Occupation.

In undertaking this reform, we recognise that there are certain uses which give rise to important local considerations, for example, to ensure local pubs, live music performance venues and theatres are protected; or to prevent the proliferation of hot food takeaways or betting shops. It will remain the case that changes to and from these uses will still be subject to full consideration through the planning application process.

The new Use Classes will come into effect on 1st September 2020. Transitional arrangements will be in place until 31st July 2021 to ensure a smooth transfer to the new framework which will set out new permitted development rights to support greater housing supply in our town centres.

Building Upwards

We need to support our building industry, create jobs for construction workers, and deliver more homes for our communities. On 24 June we introduced a new permitted development right to allow the upward extension of free-standing blocks of flats to create new homes. To further support housing supply, we are now introducing permitted development rights to allow upwards extensions of buildings, to provide new homes and allow for home extensions. Existing buildings in commercial and residential uses will be allowed to construct up to 2 additional storeys to create new homes or to provide space for growing families to extend, making best use of our low-density locations. The new right will come into effect on 31 August 2020.

The right will provide greater certainty to developers and homeowners that their plans can be agreed. In return, there will be a requirement for local planning authorities to assess the impact on neighbours and the appearance of the proposed upwards extension. We recognise that development in certain locations requires individual consideration and therefore the right does not apply, for example, in national parks and conservation areas or to listed buildings.

Regeneration of Vacant and Redundant Buildings

We must make the best use of our brownfield land and underused buildings to enable our towns to grow in a sustainable way and provide the housing people need. We are therefore introducing an ambitious new permitted development right to encourage regeneration and bring empty buildings back to good use.

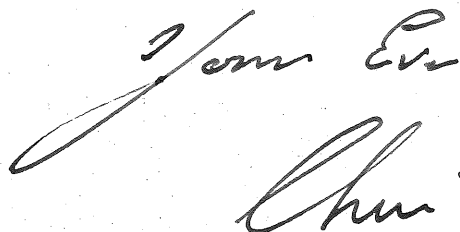
The new right will allow redundant commercial and residential buildings to be demolished and rebuilt as residential use within the footprint of the existing building. This will serve to bring forward additional much needed homes and boost investment opportunities for the construction industry. The right will apply to buildings built before 1990 and where the building has been vacant for a period of at least 6 months. The new right will come into effect on 31 August 2020.

To mitigate any local impacts, we will require that developers must submit their designs and landscaping plans to the local authority for approval and undertake appropriate surveys of the site. All new homes must meet our natural light standards and the impacts on the surrounding area must also be considered. Again, as development in certain locations requires individual consideration the right does not apply, for example, in national parks and conservation areas or to listed buildings.

I am sure you will welcome these measures which will help support the economic recovery of our town centres and provide much needed homes and jobs.

These amendments have been made through the following statutory instruments which are available at [legislation.gov.uk](https://www.legislation.gov.uk):

- The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2020
- The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) (No.3) Regulations 2020
- The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Pincher', written over a horizontal line.

RT HON CHRISTOPHER PINCHER MP