

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

10<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

***Supporting the evolution of town and city centres***

As representatives from across the economy and society, we are writing following your welcome comments at the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee session on 8 November. As you recognised, the nature of cities is changing over time, and there is a need to think again about how high streets can be 'lively and attractive'. We believe passionately that, if we want our town centres to thrive, their development must be guided by local authorities working alongside business and the community.

Many of us wrote jointly to your predecessor raising our concerns about the potential that blanket permitted development rights for E Use Class to residential would undermine the objectives of the High Streets Task Force and the guidance for both the Towns Fund and the Future High Streets Fund. As we set out in that letter, we remain concerned that allowing ground floor housing to proliferate in uncontrolled manner along high streets does not draw footfall, does not support new businesses, reduces the potential for business growth, and will undermine the viability of existing retail, cultural and commercial activities on the high street. It will also risks the loss of convenience stores, which often provide crucial local services to communities, and undermining the 'sequential test'.

As you acknowledged in your evidence to the Committee, there can be unintended consequences of relaxation, and we understand and welcome your desire to look at the planning system in the round. We also know that in relation to levelling up you have spoken about the importance of empowering local leaders and communities and restoring local pride.

The expanded use of permitted development rights has removed one of the levers local authorities had at their disposal to shape their local area and has, therefore, disempowered local leaders and communities.

We therefore ask that within the levelling up white paper you set out how the department will support local authorities to develop their own renewal plans and the resources to enable their implementation.

We all agree on the importance of thriving town and city centres and the need to empower local leaders and communities. While we recognise your desire to consider permitted development rights

carefully in the context of the future of high streets, we urge you to commit to returning the necessary powers to local authorities to achieve these shared aims.

Your sincerely,

Fiona Howie, Chief Executive, TCPA

Mike Kiely, Chair, Planning Officers Society

Corinne Stuart, Chief Executive, National Craft Butchers

Peter Eversden MBE, Chairman, London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies

Neil Sinden, Director, CPRE London

Melanie Leech CBE, Chief Executive, British Property Federation

Andrew Goodacre, Chief Executive, The British Independent Retailers Association

Chris Turner, Chief Executive, British BIDS

Bill Addy, Chair, The BID Foundation

Ojay McDonald, Chief Executive, Association of Town & City Management

Steve Dowling, Public Affairs Manager, Association of Convenience Stores