

February 2021

The Right Hon Ranil Jayawardena MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Open Letter: Proposed New Permitted Development Rights (England)

I am writing to you on behalf of the Fleet Business Improvement District about the proposed deregulation of planning ([Supporting Housing Delivery and Public Space Infrastructure](#)).

COVID-19 has accelerated the decline in high streets as shopping destinations and, like other towns and cities up and down the country, Fleet's successful economic recovery will be dependent on a clear vision and coherent plan for regeneration. We believe that Fleet has a future as a thriving town centre providing services that local residents need. A strong business community with a mix of retail, cafes, bars, restaurants, health, beauty, wellbeing and service businesses as well as a vibrant events programme will provide employment and attract people to Fleet as a centre of the community.

There will also be more housing in town centres in the future. More residents bring a critical mass that can support our businesses. However, this has to be part of a longer term vision, planned and delivered in a coherent way. The proposed permitted development right that allows most commercial buildings to be converted to housing puts the long-term future of our town centre at risk. The nature of Fleet, as a long high street, means that Fleet could be a victim of piecemeal development as units become vacant, with housing and commercial premises mixed leading to further town centre decline. This will not increase footfall, does not support new businesses, reduces the potential for business growth and employment and will undermine the viability of existing retail, cultural and commercial activities on the high street.

Over 25 business groups including the Association of Town and City Management, the BID Foundation, British BIDs, British Independent Retailers Association, the British Property Federation, the Institute of Place Management, the Royal Institute of British Architects, RICS and the Town and Country Planning Association have already written to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to express serious concerns about these proposals.

We therefore urge you to support and protect our high street and to stop this deregulation which puts many businesses and our high street, already hard hit by the pandemic, at risk.

Yours sincerely



Bruce Bulgin
Chairman
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