

### **East-West Northern Growth Corridor Programme Board Reinvigorating Town Centres**

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#### **Letter highlighting the impact of changes to permitted development rights on the Re-invigorating Town Centres programme and wider growth ambitions, to be sent to HM Government on behalf of the HGB**

Dear Minister

#### **Permitted Development Rights in Town Centres**

We write to share our deep concern over the impact of the new Permitted Development Rights which are taking effect in towns and high streets across Hertfordshire and the rest of the country.

Working together through Hertfordshire Growth Board, we are passionate and committed to supporting our town centres and high streets to thrive beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

We recognise the world around us is changing greatly, affecting communities throughout the county. Almost one in five shops in England now lie empty, with continued growth of online shopping and different customer trends presenting challenges for traditional retail and many cities, towns and villages. Working with communities, retailers, property owners, and developers, it is vital that we create bright, vibrant and sustainable plans for the future.

No two places are the same. Some high streets are adapting well to meet changing needs. Others need greater transformation to meet the needs and aspirations of our communities. Through our 'Transforming Town Centres' programme, we will engage with communities and partners in local town centres and high streets – harnessing local leadership, ideas, energy and investment to create a brighter future.

As you and your new Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities develop plans for the future, we welcome the focus on local leadership being empowered to drive change and the focus on the need to enhance pride in place, particularly in town centres.

However, we are concerned that the introduction of new Permitted Development Rights in town centres could have a destructive effect in Hertfordshire. The local shops and facilities treasured by our communities must continue to play a prominent role in our towns and villages, and we are

concerned that broad powers to convert retail premises to residential use may lead to lasting damage.

New residential accommodation can make a positive contribution to high streets and town centres, bringing life, vibrancy and footfall for retailers. However, we firmly believe that new residential accommodation should be attractive, sustainable, and in the right location. Developments should make appropriate contributions for local infrastructure and make a positive contribution to local communities.

At heart, we uphold our belief that planning works best when the local community, councillors and developers work together to shape local areas and deliver the new homes that are necessary.

We trust you agree with our views on localism and will ensure that any emerging policy protects the rights of our local communities.