

PART ONE – PLANNING CHANGES ON THE HIGH STREET

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There are growing questions and concerns, about how public life will take place, post-pandemic.

High streets and town centres have traditionally been associated with a place of prosperity, and have been a necessity for successful economic growth across the UK.

In this four-part blog series, we aim to inform professionals who are interested in which practical methods are available to them – through the planning system. We will also delve into ‘meanwhile uses’ and other tactics for town centre stimulation.

Flexibility is seen as critical to achieving vibrant high streets, and there is a wealth of options available to landowners – namely through the proliferation of Permitted Development (PD) rights. This article focuses on some of the immediate Government responses and covers methods for achieving residential use.

Covid-19 Response:

Pubs and restaurants were immediately affected by the lockdown. The Government swiftly introduced PD rights in the form of Class DA to the [Order](#), allowing the change and use of A3, A5 and AA (drinking establishments with catering) uses to takeaways. This will stay in place until March 2021, meaning you won’t be able to buy a burger from your favourite pub for some time yet.

Achieving Residential Use:

PD rights for the change of use from A1 and A2 uses, to C3 (residential) under Class M, and mixed-use development (up to two flats) under Class G, remain a popular option. The latter has the benefit of being

possible in conservation areas.

Our team have recently adopted a strategy to utilise both Classes, receiving the optimal residential output for a site within a town centre. Whilst understandably Local Authorities may resist the loss of smaller retail units in their entirety, back-of-house areas are harder to resist. This is particularly the case if the application suitably evidences a surplus of space.

There are no floorspace restrictions for Class G, but the residential must be above the retail.

Class M permits the change of up to 150sqm of retail floorspace to residential. Where units have previously been amalgamated, but retained multiple shopfronts, there is an opportunity to subdivide without the need for planning permission – if no external works are carried out. In doing so, each becomes its own planning unit, and therefore each benefiting from Class M and Class G permitted development.

It should be considered whether upper floors are already separate planning units, due to separate access and different uses. In such circumstances, other prior approval options such as; B1a to C3 under Class O, may be relevant.

Our conclusions:

As the news that the country has fallen into recession darkened our doors earlier this week, versatile strategies are necessary.

Planning Insight have always been strong advocates of varied town centres, with a greater focus on employment, community and leisure uses. Planning policy supports mixed-use, high-density development, in town centres. However, unlocking viable sites can prove challenging.

Increasing residential densities, coupled with an emphasis on facilitating increased visitors, seems part of the solution. Perhaps to the distaste of some, permitted development rights will no doubt play a role in this.

Some of the tools outlined above can be critical in taking the first steps to achieve rationalisation of a town centre asset.

Our team has employed innovative solutions to achieve outcomes, exceeding client's expectations.

Our team of experts are always happy to take a look at sites, and giving constructive feedback. Contact a member of our team today on; 020 7993 4539