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Prime Minister,
First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service,
10 Downing Street,
London,
SW1A 2AA

Via e-mail

01 April 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) and Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) represent a combined membership of over 175,000 skilled professionals

Yesterday's announcement aimed at allowing commercial premises to be converted into homes presents a risk for our nation's town centres and small businesses. Without the usual checks and balances through the normal planning process and without the facility for local communities to comment on proposals, this risks creating poor-quality housing.

Nobody can deny there is a looming crisis facing our high streets, but yesterday's pronouncement will do nothing to help. In fact, these measures will pull the rug out from under high street businesses that you have supported throughout unprecedented circumstances. Just as they prepare to reopen with our great unlocking, their future is put in peril.

It is counterproductive for the Government to commit to reviewing business rates— with the express goal of keeping more businesses on our high streets—while simultaneously incentivising property owners to push them out.

Businesses, developers, residents and the built environment sector have all had serious concerns about these proposals from the start. Attempting to engage productively, the RTPI, RIBA, CIOB and RICS set out safeguards that could at least minimise the harm. None of this evidence appears to have been given consideration. No basic impact assessment of how this might harm our communities appears to have been done. Additionally, the Government has ignored the responses to its own consultation to rush this substantial change to our highstreets during Parliamentary recess.



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This announcement fails to consider the public good and demonstrates a lack of any forethought for those who will be affected. This is not only a failure to “level up” but a threat to our local communities.

We ask you to urgently reconsider these measures.

Yours sincerely,

Victoria Hills MRTPI FICE
Chief Executive
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)

Caroline Gumble
Chief Executive
The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)

Alan Jones FRIBA FRSA RIAS
President
Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)

Matthew Howell
Managing Director UK & Ireland
Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)

CC: The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing
The RT Hon Christopher Pincher MP, Minister for Housing and Planning
The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer