

Converting Office / Retail space into Residential Accommodation

New measures will make it easier to turn underused office buildings into new homes.



Housing and Planning Minister Brandon Lewis today (13 October 2015) announced new measures that will make it easier to turn underused office buildings into new homes.

The move will provide thousands of new homes, and make the best use of existing buildings including some that are underused and neglected – while at the same time protecting the green belt.

Brandon Lewis said:

We're determined that, both in Whitehall and in town halls, everything is done to get the homes we need built.

Today's measures will mean we can tap into the potential of underused buildings to offer

new homes for first-time buyers and families long into the future, breathing new life into neighbourhoods and at the same time protecting our precious green belt.

First introduced in 2013, temporary permitted development rights have enabled offices to be converted to new homes without having to apply for planning permission. It has meant that between April 2014 and June this year, almost 4,000 conversions were given the go-ahead.

However, these rights were set to expire on 30 May 2016 – potentially introducing a raft of unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy that would have hampered the conversion of underused office buildings and slowed down the delivery of thousands of new homes.

Today, Mr Lewis announced that these permitted development rights will now be made permanent. In addition those who already have permission will have 3 years in which to complete the change of use – ending potential uncertainty for developers and enabling the development of much needed homes.

To further support the delivery of new homes, the rights will in future allow the demolition of office buildings and new building for residential use.

In addition, new permitted development rights will enable the change of use of light industrial buildings and launderettes to new homes.

Further information

Those areas that are currently exempt from the office to residential permitted development rights will have until May 2019 to make an Article 4 direction if they wish to continue determining planning applications for the change of use.

There are areas in 17 local authorities in England consisting of individual buildings, roads or zones that are currently exempt from the rights, including:

- The City of London
- The London Central Activities Zone, which covers parts of the boroughs of Camden, Islington, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Lambeth, Wandsworth, Westminster, Newham, and Kensington and Chelsea
- Areas in the borough councils of Stevenage, and Ashford (Kent)
- Areas in the district councils of Sevenoaks and East Hampshire
- Manchester City Centre

These exemptions will remain in place until May 2019, providing time for local authorities to consider making an Article 4 direction to remove the rights and require a planning application for any proposed change of use.

Those who already have prior approval or who secure permission will have 3 years in which to complete the change of use.

The rights to allow for demolition of offices and new build as residential use will be subject to limitations and prior approval by the local planning authority. Further details will be provided in due course.

The new permitted development rights for the change of use of light industrial buildings and launderettes to residential use will be subject to prior approval by the local planning authority. Further details will be provided in due course.