



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate publication

PLANNING “FREE FOR ALL” PROPOSALS SLAMMED

Proposals to allow shops, offices and other commercial premises to be converted to residential accommodation without planning permission have been criticised by Chester Civic Trust. These “permitted development rights” would even apply in historic Conservation Areas like Chester City Centre. Responding to a government consultation on the matter, the Trust say:

This proposal is all about deregulation of planning to allow free market forces to dictate the quality of the built environment and the vitality and vibrancy of town centres. This loosening of controls does nothing to concentrate retail uses in the high street. It allows a dilution of shopping streets into an amalgam of business, recreation and residential uses, many of which do not attract customer footfall and present inactive and blank frontages at street level.

The Chair of Chester Civic Trust, Christine Russell, commented:

We recognise that there is a need to act with urgency to respond to the loss of retail in our town centres but this is not the way to do it. This simply takes democratic control away from our city and gives developers power to convert any building they like into flats. If this happens without proper controls, experience shows that the homes created are of poor quality and risk becoming the slums of the future. If the government want to preserve the integrity, vibrancy and viability of town centres then a more holistic policy is required. This should involve combining planning controls with development plans, effective town centre management, environmental and transport improvements, together with public support for new investment.

For further information contact: