4. RENEW OUR TOWN CENTRES

WHAT’S THE OPPORTUNITY?

Our town centres could be hubs of the community which bring people together in vibrant, healthy and sustainable places. But far too many areas across the country are in decline with empty premises and uncared-for spaces.

We have a chance to breathe new life into our town centres by upgrading commercial and public buildings and repurposing under-used spaces. Improved energy efficiency and low-carbon measures will help make commercial and public buildings healthy, vibrant and enjoyable to use. Empty and under-used buildings can be restored, repurposed and adapted for new uses, to make our local neighbourhoods more attractive with community at the core.

This is an opportunity for the incoming government to create places where communities can thrive, and people love living and visiting.

CURRENT POLICIES

The Government’s strategy to regenerate high streets through [the Towns Fund has not worked](#), with less than 20% of projects completed and plans shelved or stalled.

The lack of clarity around how and when minimum energy efficiency standards for large commercial buildings may kick in, is leading to uncertainty among tenants. [Tenants and small businesses have minimal support](#) to implement energy efficiency and low-carbon measures. This has led to hesitancy or delayed investment into the sustainable, healthy solutions needed for buildings like offices, shops, and warehouses.

The public estate – our schools, hospitals and government buildings - now receive more investment for sustainability, but not on the scale needed.

Current regulations for properties undergoing material change of use, or repurposed under permitted development rights, have various loopholes which result in terrible outcomes in terms of build quality and consequent health of occupants.
GAME-CHANGING POLICIES
WE’RE CALLING FOR:

**HIGHER ENERGY PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS**

The next government should act to bring large commercial buildings to an Energy Performance Certificate B rating, or equivalent, up from the current minimum standard of E, in line with the 2021 Government consultation.

This should be accompanied by a mandated in-use performance-based rating system to ensure installations of efficiency and low carbon heating measures are actually effective.

**A MODERNISED LANDLORD AND TENANT ACT**

The next government should reform the Landlord and Tenant Act to require new business leases to include ‘green lease clauses’ which ensure owners and occupiers collaborate on environmental and social upgrades, distributing the responsibilities and benefits.

The Act should also enable quick and easy lease renewal to ensure spaces aren’t left empty, and are instead attractive to shops, businesses, and services enjoyed by communities.

**TAX INCENTIVES FOR SMALLER BUSINESSES**

Modernising Stamp Duty Land Tax to reflect the energy performance of commercial premises would help kick start a market shift – especially in the small business sector - to better value investments in insulation and low carbon heating.

The next government should reform business rates to support smaller businesses with less capital to take up vacant units and improve the energy performance of buildings they rent.

**HIGHER STANDARDS FOR REPURPOSED BUILDINGS**

The next government should reform planning rules to prioritise reuse of existing buildings and update the VAT framework, which currently favours new build. This will encourage regeneration of existing properties and avoid wasted high street buildings. Regulations should ensure high standards for buildings undergoing change of use, reversing the current trend to deregulation.

This regeneration approach will breathe new life into our town centres whilst maintaining their heritage value, creating places which are meaningful to communities, healthy, and sustainable.

**GET INVOLVED**

- Visit our website, a central hub for the general election and beyond.
- Read our 4 point policy platform ‘Building Britain’s Future’ and our other policy guides.
- Contact us at policy@ukgbc.org.

**FURTHER RESOURCES**

- Building the Case for Net Zero: Retrofitting Office Buildings
- Local Area Retrofit Accelerator Toolkit
- Regenerative Places Programme
- BUILD UPON Framework

The UK Green Building Council represents the unified voice of the UK’s sustainable built environment industry. It is a charity powered by more than 700 members from banks, large estate owners, housebuilders, and manufacturers to innovative startups, universities, local councils and government departments - all working to transform the built environment in the face of the climate, nature and cost-of-living crises.