

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

June 2023

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for your email about the CAMRA campaign on high street rental auctions.

Like you, I recognise how valuable our pubs are to the many people who enjoy them. Not only are they important parts of local economies, but they also bring people together and are the very lifeblood of our communities.

It is always disheartening to see a pub forced to close its doors permanently. I completely understand that closures can be hard for owners and communities. I also recognise the very real wider persistent issue of vacant high street units which the proposed new high street rental auction process is aiming to address. Shops and buildings being left vacant for prolonged periods of time is a blight on our high streets, has a direct and negative impact on footfall and risks businesses shutting down.

As you will know, the Government is consulting on the design of high street rental auctions, including a new permitted development right to allow buildings which do not fall under the Commercial, Business and Service Use Class (such as pubs) to change use as part of the new high street rental auctions process. I would encourage you to share your views. You can do this by searching: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/high-street-rental-auctions>

I want to assure you that the Government has been clear that the permitted development right if introduced, would not allow for physical works to be carried out to the premises that amount to development. The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has said that: “Where such building works are necessary, a planning application or listed building consent would be required. The premises will revert to its former use at the end of the period of the lease unless otherwise agreed and planning permission obtained...”.

It will be for individual local authorities – who know their area best – to use their discretion when it comes to using the new powers for high street rental auctions. I want to be clear that the intention of these new auctions is not to interfere with properties whose landlords are actively seeking to fill their premises, but rather to provide a tool to local authorities where vacancy rates are a significant issue and landlord cooperation is low.

There are existing mechanisms to support community groups to step in where pubs are at risk of being lost without intervention. Listing a pub as an Asset of Community Value allows communities to have up to six months to bid to buy it if it has been put for sale. In addition, the Government’s £150 million Community Ownership Fund is helping community groups buy assets such as pubs so that they can continue to serve their local area.

Member of Parliament for Darlington

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I do hope that this response has provided you with some assurance. Please be assured that I will be carefully scrutinising the outcome of the Government's consultation.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again. If you would like to keep up to date with my activities as your Member of Parliament then please subscribe to my Darlington Matters newsletter using this link: www.petergibson.org/signup

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Gibson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

PETER GIBSON MP