
Report to the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

by Katie McDonald MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Date: 28 January 2026

Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007

Direction under Regulation 7 restricting deemed consent for the display of
To Let Boards relating to residential properties within nine areas of
Nottingham City.

Application by Nottingham City Council

Site visits made on 8 and 9 January 2026

File Ref: APP/PCU/ADV/Q3060

The Terms of the Direction

1. The proposed Direction under Regulation 7 would reintroduce the Council's control over the display of letting boards on residential properties within 9 areas in Nottingham City. The areas are to the north and west of the City centre, where most of the City's universities and campuses are located. The areas relating to the Direction are shown on the Plan titled 'Map 1', outlined in blue, in the Council's Statement. The areas comprise:
 - 1) Middleton Boulevard
 - 2) Faraday Road
 - 3) Lenton Triangle
 - 4) Forest Road West
 - 5) Mansfield Road
 - 6) The Drives
 - 7) Dunkirk and Lenton
 - 8) Derby Road
 - 9) University Boulevard
2. This request follows previous Directions approved by the Secretary of State in 2012 and 2018, the most recent Direction expiring in February 2023.

Relevant Planning Legislation, Policy and Guidance

3. The Direction would remove deemed consent rights applicable to the display of estate agents' lettings boards falling within Class 3A Schedule 3 Part 1 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007.
4. A Direction does not forbid display, it merely requires express consent to be obtained.
5. Paragraph 141 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed.

The Reasons of the Council for Seeking the Direction

6. The Council seeks to reintroduce the previous Directions under Regulation 7, including a small extension to Area 3 (Lenton Triangle). The Council originally applied for the Direction in 2012, and again in 2017, because there was a proliferation of lettings boards throughout the area. This is because many properties comprise student accommodation due to the proximity to the University of Nottingham Park Campus, Jubilee Campus, the University Hospital and Medical School (especially areas 1, 2, 7, 8 & 9), and The Nottingham Trent University City Campus (especially areas 4 & 5).
7. It is my understanding that following the approval of the original restrictions (2012) and the corresponding guidance, the amenity within the controlled areas improved with the number of letting boards significantly reducing – almost eliminating the original type of signs being used and the problems they caused. Thus, a renewal was granted by the Secretary of State in 2018.
8. However, due to resourcing pressures and the need to establish if letting boards were still likely to be an issue 10 years on from the original restrictions being imposed, a request to renew the restrictions was not submitted by the Council and the restrictions lapsed in February 2023. The Council report that since the restrictions ended, the number of letting boards has noticeably increased, having a negative impact again on

the character, amenity and appearance of the areas, in particular the Conservation Areas. Several complaints have also been received. Thus the application to reintroduce the Direction has been submitted, along with updated guidance produced by the Council (Appendix 2 in the Council's Statement). The guidance sets out requirements for the size and location of boards and length of time for which they can be displayed.

9. The Council has requested that the Direction is imposed in perpetuity. This is because of the enduring nature of the issues, the stable character of the affected areas, and the consistent support for restrictions over more than a decade. It would also provide long term certainty, reduce the need for repeated consultation and reapplication, and reflect the sustained and cumulative impact of letting boards on local amenity. If the Secretary of State disagrees, the Council seeks a minimum period of 10 years.

Consultation and Responses

10. The Council carried out the necessary consultations for 4 weeks in April to May 2025. A summary of responses is provided in Appendix 1 of the Council's Statement. The consultation included residents, local members, universities, student unions, Councillors, local MPs, Nottinghamshire Police, landlords, estate and letting agents operating in the city, and other relevant organisations. A total of 100 responses were received, with there being support from the University of Nottingham, Nottingham Trent University, the Student Unions, Unipol, Nottinghamshire Police, Lilian Greenwood MP and Nadia Whittome MP, along with 96% of resident responses being in support of reintroducing the restrictions.
11. Residential supporters refer to the letting boards creating visual clutter, making streets look unsightly, contributing to a sense of neglect. This is particularly concerning in the conservation areas, where feature fine Victorian houses. Letting boards undermine the residential character of neighbourhoods, making them appear transient and potentially increasing crime rates by signalling vacant properties. Many residents believe that physical letting boards are obsolete due to the prevalence of online property searches. Residents recall the positive impact of previous restrictions, which significantly improved the appearance of neighbourhoods. Letting boards are seen as environmentally unfriendly and potentially hazardous if not maintained properly.
12. Residents' associations support the restrictions, detailing that the letting boards are unsightly and poorly managed, contributing to the transient feel of the area. They say they are unnecessary as many people search online for accommodation. Both residents' associations supported the regulations in perpetuity.
13. The Nottingham Action Group on HMOs detailed an all-year-round proliferation of 'to let' boards on predominantly student-occupied HMOs was one of the most visually, environmentally and socially detrimental issues. They detail that the concentration of these boards, very often several on the same property, resulted in what was described in the national press as 'Nottingham's Forest of Letting Boards'. They detail of the impact on the local street-scene, places being immediately recognisable to everyone as 'student areas' and very often, and wrongly, labelled as 'undesirable places to live'. The letting boards enable the HMOs to be identifiable by burglars. The success of the Regulations was quite rapidly evident, and worked well. However, agents and landlords are taking advantage of the lapse, and the number of letting

- boards has been increasing rapidly. The proposal to re-introduce the Regulations has overwhelming support. Apart from any other consideration, it will remove the costly burden on limited resources needed to put together a submission. It will also give all parties a degree of confidence and certainty in what can and cannot be done.
14. Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and The University of Nottingham (UofN) both support the restrictions. NTU said the regulation had a positive impact by making Nottingham's neighbourhoods a safer and more attractive place to live, and supported the regulations in perpetuity. UofN detailed that the regulations would enhance the visual amenities and community cohesion, contributing to a more pleasant environment for all residents. They also said that students primarily use the internet to find accommodation, and the absence of letting boards does not hinder their ability to secure housing. They supported the regulations for 10 years.
 15. Lillian Greenwood MP supports the continuation of letting restrictions in perpetuity, detailing the restrictions have successfully addressed long-standing issues in various neighbourhoods, significantly reducing street clutter and the feeling of transience.
 16. Nadia Whittome MP supports the directions, detailing that the regulations have been effective in reducing the visual impact of letting boards and preventing areas from being perceived solely as 'student areas,' thus encouraging families and other residents to rent or buy in the area. The removal of letting boards has also reduced the risk of burglaries, contributing to safer neighbourhoods for students, families, and residents.
 17. Individual property business detailed support, stating that letting (or for sale) boards are redundant in the current marketing era, suggesting that a small QR code is sufficient, and suggests extending the restrictions to commercial buildings, as they believe these boards serve no purpose other than advertising for agents.
 18. Councillor Kotsonis supports the restrictions in perpetuity, detailing that there is a reduction of visual clutter and feeling of transience, fairness of advertising, enforceability of removal of "To Let" boards by community protection, and the regulations protect historic and precious views such as Wollaton Park Estate. There is also a potential positive impact on land values.
 19. Landlords, property and estate agents were mixed in response. Two supporters detailed that letting boards are often forgotten, are a blight on the urban view in high turnover areas and they are considered an outdated form of marketing, with many boards being an eyesore and detrimental to the security of properties with signage. Three objectors acknowledge that there was a problem in 2011 but assert that this is no longer the case, the guidance on letting boards is unnecessary, and landlords are already facing many restrictions and additional guidance would create more difficulties. They also consider the guidance a waste of council resources.
 20. Various departments in Nottingham City Council support the regulations, with there being a reduction in carbon emissions from the reduction in boards, along with a high concentration of letting boards having a negative visual impact and advertising entire streets as Private Rented Sector may make them more vulnerable.
 21. Nottinghamshire Police support the restrictions for 5 years, detailing the presence of numerous letting boards can signal transient populations, attracting criminal activities such as burglary, vandalism, and anti-social behaviour.

22. The Student Union and Student House Charity, along with 2 students, support the restrictions, detailing that constant letting signs increase the risk of burglary and antisocial behaviour, and they also make the area look messy. Students primarily use online searches to find properties, which offer flexibility to compare options. There is also frustration when properties advertised on boards are not available, causing distress to current and prospective tenants.
23. Objectors to the direction (total of 3 residents) said the restrictions are overly stringent and that visual advertising is necessary for property sales. Some residents feel it is reasonable to erect a "to let" sign and that prohibiting signs during certain periods is unfair. They also believe signs should be visible from a distance to avoid road traffic accidents. A few residents do not see "to let" signs as an issue and believe the Council should focus on other problems like fly-tipping and student overcrowding.
24. A request to include an additional area, Forest Road East, was submitted by a resident. However, as this has not been proposed by the Council, nor consulted on, I have not considered this any further.
25. The majority of those in support of the Direction favoured restrictions in perpetuity, with most others suggesting a duration of 10 years, and a small minority suggesting 5 years.

Appraisal by the Inspector

26. Nottingham is a university city, with 2 large universities being located proximate to the city centre. Additionally, the University Hospital and Medical School are in the city. The number of students enrolled in the 2 universities has significantly increased since the original restrictions. Between 2016/17 academic year and 2022/23 academic year an additional 13,200 students needed housing in the City. Whilst the Council has promoted purpose built student accommodation, many returning students (years 2 onwards) prefer to live in shared accommodation (Houses in Multiple Occupation). There is a concentration of shared accommodation in the areas near to the universities, which led to the proliferation of letting boards, and thus the original restrictions. The areas where the Direction is sought are the areas where students have a preference to live, due to their proximity to the campuses.
27. The character of the areas varies considerably, given it covers an extensive area. There are rows of Victorian terraces, large Victorian and Edwardian villa style houses on larger plots around the Arboretum. There is early 20th century house around Middleton Boulevard, which takes on 'garden city' movement principles, along with terrace rows in The Drive. There are also modern developments in the Mansfield Road area and Lenton Triangle. Based on the evidence the Council has presented and based on my visits, the character of the areas has not changed considerably in the past 14 years. However, the clear common feature was that there is a high number of residential properties that are occupied by students or medical staff in shared spaces.
28. Whilst the restrictions lapsed back in 2023, there still appeared to be general adherence to the principles, and I noted several letting boards following the Council's guidance, such as Ednaston Road in Area 9. That said, in some areas, there was a proliferation of letting boards on certain streets, and certain agents were taking advantage of exercising their deemed consent. In these areas, the impact on the amenity of the area was poor, with the letting boards featuring heavily and prominently in the street scene. They were generally brightly coloured, and clearly

intended to be visible. For example, I noted a proliferation of boards on Balfour Road, Albert Grove and Teversal Avenue in Area 3, Johnson Road and Dunlop Avenue in Area 2, and Gloucester Avenue and Hart Street in Area 7. The observations of my visit, together with the Council's evidence demonstrates that a return to the proliferation of letting boards in all these areas would be harmful to the amenity, character and appearance of the areas.

29. Therefore, without the Direction, it is likely that there would be a significant increase in lettings boards leading to a proliferation, which would adversely affect the character and historic significance of the areas. This would be particularly harmful due to the number of dwellings in the area and the likelihood of the frequency with which they would become available due to their use as student properties.
30. There is no evidence before me to suggest that the residential letting market has been adversely affected because of the previous Directions. Although the appearance of some letting boards within the area demonstrates that traditional marketing methods are still employed, there did not appear to be many properties within the area which were unoccupied. From this I conclude that the prohibition on traditional marketing methods and the enforcement of the Direction by the Council has not adversely impacted upon letting agents' businesses or their ability to attract tenants to their properties.

Conclusions

31. Consequently, it appears that the previous Directions have been successful in restricting the introduction of most lettings boards, which would be likely to be displayed on a regular basis otherwise. There are compelling reasons as to why the control over the display of letting agent's advertisement boards should be re-introduced.
32. The Council have requested the Direction is imposed in perpetuity. The Direction has been renewed three times since it was originally made, including this occasion, and I consider that the situation within this area is unlikely to change. The number of HMOs and flats are unlikely to reduce, if anything, they are likely to increase, and therefore the Direction should be in perpetuity.

Recommendation

33. I recommend that the Secretary of State should make the Regulation 7 Direction in the form proposed by the Council in perpetuity, and that it should cover the full extent of the area shown on the plan submitted by the Council.

Katie McDonald

INSPECTOR