

Al Carns MP
House of Commons
Westminster, London
SW1A 0AA

4th April 2025

Re: Voluntary Removal of Letting Boards in Selly Oak

Dear Al Carns MP et al

I am writing in response to your recent letter regarding the voluntary removal of letting boards in Selly Oak. We fully support efforts to enhance the local environment and appreciate the concerns raised. However, we believe that the proposed voluntary removal of boards is not the most effective solution and, in its current form, risks creating an uneven playing field among agents and landlords.

Compliance with Town and Country Planning Regulations

We are fully aware of and strictly adhere to the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007. Our approach involves rotating a limited number of boards between properties as they are let, ensuring compliance with size, quantity, and removal timelines. We strongly support the enforcement of these regulations against those who breach them.

Safety and Security of Tenants

While we share your concerns about student safety, the presence of letting boards is unlikely to be a significant factor in burglary rates. The demographic of Selly Oak is well-known, and criminals do not rely on signage to identify student properties. We would welcome collaboration on more impactful security measures, such as improved CCTV, lighting or community policing.

Effectiveness of Letting Boards

Contrary to the assertion that boards are obsolete, they remain a vital part of our marketing strategy. Approximately half of our enquiries originate from calls to our office or directly from our website, the presence of our boards directs people to call us or visit our website directly. Online platforms are essential, but physical signage continues to drive meaningful tenant and landlord engagement.

Past Voluntary Initiatives & Their Pitfalls

We have previously participated in a local partnership involving agents, landlords, councillors, and the police, which successfully piloted initiatives like improved waste management. However, a previous voluntary scheme to restrict the number of board proved ineffective because non-compliant agents gained a competitive advantage, while those who cooperated lost visibility. A mandatory, enforceable solution—rather than a voluntary request—would ensure fairness.

Flaws in the Voluntary Approach: How It Penalises Compliant Agents

Your letter suggests that non-compliance with a voluntary removal request could lead to Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) and fines. While we appreciate the intent behind this approach, in practice it creates an unfair system that rewards bad actors, punishes those who comply with your request.

If boards fully comply with the Town and Country Planning Regulations (size, quantity, and 14-day removal), enforcement via CPNs would be legally questionable; so, I very much doubt you will be prosecuting those landlords and agents who retain their letting boards.

There will of course be agents and landlords who have been scared by your threats who remove all their boards and lose visibility; this replicates the past failed voluntary scheme where those who comply with voluntary measures will be put at a commercial disadvantage.

Proposed Solution: Article 4 Direction

I am surprised that an Article 4 Direction requiring planning permission for all boards in the area has not been pursued. A blanket policy would:

- Create a level playing field for all agents and landlords.
- Be straightforward to enforce.
- Remove the need for boards entirely, reducing costs for agents.

We would welcome such a measure and urge the council to consider it as a long-term resolution.

Conclusion

While we will not voluntarily remove compliant boards, we remain open to working with the council on structured, enforceable measures that address the issue fairly. We would be happy to discuss this further or provide evidence of the role boards play in our marketing.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Garratt', with a stylized, cursive script.

Patrick Garratt

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