

Accessible Retail (AR) believes there are compelling reasons to rescind the 2006 decision requiring planning permission for mezzanines over 200m<sup>2</sup>.

The recession left the retail parks and warehouses sector with voids of 9% in 2009. As a percentage of total rental value, the value of these voids is well below total value percentages, indicating that the majority is of lower than average quality located in secondary and tertiary trading locations. Retailers now want to occupy these properties, but only if they are brought up to modern trading requirements including a mezzanine floor as part of the space configuration.

Without this they will remain vacant which is in no one's interests. The out of town sector comprises the largest part of investment quality retail commercial property (36%), leaving millions of pensioners, insurance policy holders and savers dependent on it delivering good returns. Nor, in the current economic situation, can any source of growth be ignored. The virtual cessation of new major retail developments in town centres for the next 5-10 years leaves the out of town sector as the main hope for a significant contribution.

The justification for a threshold of 200m<sup>2</sup> was that A1 shop units of up to 400m<sup>2</sup> accounted for 92.9 % of all shop units. However, while 79% of retail units in shopping centres were indeed 400m<sup>2</sup> or less, they accounted for only 22% of floor space and in the retail parks and warehouse sector for only 14% of all units occupying 2% of floor space. The threshold, therefore, could be increased to 1000m<sup>2</sup> without prejudicing town centres

Further, AR thinks the new controls should not apply to ancillary floor space. The use of mezzanines for these purposes was much more efficient and unlikely to increase the amount of sales floor space elsewhere. However, restrictions on adding mezzanines for these purposes would lead to retailers giving over the whole of the ground floor to sales and taking storage functions off site leading to a loss of efficiency and the need for increased large vehicular deliveries.

AR believes permitted development rights should be extended to include the development of mezzanines used for ancillary purposes without any size limit. To meet the qualitative improvement needed, all retail units over 1000m<sup>2</sup> should have permitted development rights to add a mezzanine of up to 400m<sup>2</sup>. After all, the restrictions were never needed; the Tamworth decision which started the outcry was reversed by the Court of Appeal.

The current Chairman (John Maddison) and I will be taking this up with the coalition government on behalf of our membership as it represents a key issue for our sector.

**Will McKee is Chief Executive of Accessible Retail**