

Law News

Newsletter for commercial clients

Autumn/Winter 2020

What's in this issue?



- How brand protection can give you a competitive edge
- What to do next if your property requirements have changed
- Last-minute Brexit prep
- Equality Act update



Welcome to the Autumn/Winter 2020 edition of *Law News*, in which our lawyers give an overview of some of the latest topical issues for businesses (such as Brexit, changing property requirements and developments from Companies House) along with some interesting case law.

If we can assist you with any of the issues we explore in this edition, we'd be delighted to hear from you so please get in touch. We're here if you need legal advice or support during 'Lockdown 2' and look forward to seeing you again when it's safe to do so.

Bridget Redmond managing partner

A warm welcome to new commercial property partner



We are delighted to welcome a new partner to our *Legal 500*-rated commercial property team.

Thornton Allen joins with a wealth of experience in development land matters, and in particular provides specialist advice to residential, retirement village and solar farm developers.

Prior to joining Willans, Thornton was head of residential property development at BPE. He commented "Willans has an outstanding reputation for property law, and I am delighted to join as partner. I look forward to meeting a wide range of new clients and providing them with commercially-focused solutions and practical advice."

Managing partner, Bridget Redmond, added "Thornton is a highly-regarded practitioner in his field. He has an exceptional depth of knowledge of the residential development industry; we are delighted to have him on board, and know that clients will appreciate and value his first-class, commercially-focused advice." ■

Solid results in latest legal guides

We are celebrating a high number of ranked lawyers and departments in two independent legal guides - *The Legal 500 UK* and *Chambers UK*.

In the latest edition of *Chambers*, 5 departments are ranked in the guide, with 7 individual lawyers recommended; **Paul Gordon, Chris Wills, Paul Symes-Thompson, Robin Beckley, Jonathan Eager, Nigel Whittaker** and **Matthew Clayton**.

In *The Legal 500*, we are ranked across 11 departments and 16 lawyers are recommended; including three 'leading individuals' (**Paul Gordon, Matthew Clayton** and **Nigel Whittaker**) and two 'rising stars' (**Jenny Hawrot** and **Nick Southwell**).

Of the most recent *Chambers* results, managing partner, Bridget Redmond, commented: "This is an

excellent set of results for us, with a consistently strong number of ranked lawyers and departments. I'm pleased to see Willans ranked on a par with some significantly larger South West firms; our goal is always to deliver the technical expertise and quality of legal service that you'd expect from a regional heavyweight firm, whilst placing a firm emphasis on first-class client care, responsiveness and approachability.

"These rankings, which are based on independent, objective client feedback, show that our lawyers are consistently hitting the mark. I am really proud of all those who have been noted as key contacts and notable practitioners, and their respective departments."

[Read about these results in more detail.](#) ■



Messi wins again...(and you can, too)

The value of proper brand protection, and exploiting your intellectual property, is often underestimated. But it could be key to gaining a competitive edge, explains litigation & dispute resolution partner **Paul Gordon**.



The ECJ has recently dismissed an appeal from MASSI, a Spanish cycling company, to uphold the decision that Lionel Messi is able to register his name, "Messi", as a trade mark.

The law has operated to give a wide meaning to trade marks and has found that they may be words (e.g. KODAK), slogans (e.g. JUST DO IT), letters (e.g. RBS), designs (e.g. a harp for Guinness), internet domain names (e.g. amazon.com), the shape of packaging (e.g. the shape of Toblerone), smells (e.g. the registration by Sumitomo Rubber Industries of floral fragrance applied to tyres), sounds (e.g. the Intel four-note jingle), colours (e.g. Heinz registration of turquoise for their baked beans), gestures (e.g. the Asda double tap on the back pocket) and more.

A registration provides its owner a statutory right to the exclusive use of the mark in connection with his goods or services for which it is registered. Registration gives the owner the right to sue for trade mark infringement against anyone who uses an identical or similar mark without authorisation. The owner will also need to show that the use of another mark has or is likely to cause confusion, except when the marks are identical.

It is this exclusivity that may well give you the edge in a competitive market place, and the knowledge that competitors cannot come along and simply

take the benefit of the reputation that you have built up as a brand.

It is worth remembering that your brand is likely to be one of your most valuable commercial assets, and you should protect it.


For example, if you were to sell your business, the prospective purchaser will want to understand the IP protection you have in place.

Furthermore, if you have a strong brand, there may be opportunities to exploit it through licensing or other commercial arrangements.

Messi has his team of advisors around him to protect, enforce and exploit his brand. If your business could benefit from similar advice and brand protection, we can help.

Please get in touch with us if you require advice or assistance. ■

“It is this exclusivity that may well give you the edge in a competitive market place...”

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Paul Gordon

Partner, litigation & dispute resolution

Paul is recommended by *Chambers UK* and *The Legal 500 UK*. He handles a broad range of commercial and civil disputes for national and international clients, often working on complex commercial litigation and intellectual property cases.



Celebrating lifestyle businesses at virtual awards

With over 33,000 votes cast, and over 2,000 virtual attendees on the night, the SoGlos Gloucestershire Lifestyle Awards 2020 was a roaring success. 23 category winners, comprising the great and the good of the county's lifestyle businesses and leading individuals, were unveiled on the night. To watch the ceremony on catch-up and find out the winners, visit [willans.co.uk/soglos](https://www.willans.co.uk/soglos). ■

What we've been advising on...

Charity law and commercial property solicitor **Charlotte Brunsdon** acted for a well-known Gloucestershire-based youth work charity in its restructure as a CIO (charitable incorporated

organisation), which has involved preparing a new constitution for the charity and registering it with the Charity Commission. ■



Commercial landlords & tenants: What are your options?

Commercial property solicitor **Emma Thompson** answers some key pandemic-related questions for landlords and tenants in the commercial sphere.

I am a tenant, do I have to pay my rent?

If you can pay, even if only in part, you should. If you genuinely cannot pay as a result of the pandemic, you should speak with your landlord as they may be willing to agree concessions such as an alternative payment plan. It is important to remember that in the absence of any concession, rent and other payments are due as per the terms of your lease, regardless of the current legal restrictions.

I don't need my rented commercial property anymore. Can I just leave?

Unless you agree a surrender of your lease, you will still be liable under the terms of it, including the obligation to pay rent, even if you don't continue to occupy. Your lease may, however, contain a break clause allowing you to give notice to leave on a specific date or dates before the end of the term. Alternatively, if you can find someone else who wants to take the property, your lease may allow you to assign or underlet to them if certain conditions are met.

I'm a landlord. Can I force my tenant to leave if they haven't paid the rent?

Until 31 December 2020 at the earliest, a landlord cannot issue forfeiture proceedings against a tenant based on non-payment of rent. Whilst that means you can't force them to leave, if you want to take the property back and the tenant is struggling, they may be happy to agree a surrender. If they wish to stay, you may be able to agree on a payment plan so that you at least receive some rental income. Forfeiture proceedings for non-financial breaches of the lease are not affected.

Can I issue a statutory demand for rent and make a petition to wind up a tenant company if they fail to pay?

The Corporate Insolvency and Governance Act 2020 prevents winding-up petitions being presented where they rely on statutory demands served from 1 March to 31 December 2020. The provisions of the Act do not apply where a tenant's inability



to pay is not due to the pandemic. So, if you can prove that the tenant is merely taking advantage of the current situation and wouldn't have been able to pay anyway, the court can still wind up the company.

Can I use the commercial rent arrears recovery procedure if my tenant doesn't pay?

Although the current measures do not prevent a landlord using the commercial rent arrears recovery procedure, the minimum unpaid rent that must be outstanding before it can be utilised is currently 276 days to 24 December and then 366 days from 25 December.

My tenant has requested various concessions, do I have to agree?

There is no legal obligation on a landlord to agree to any concession requested by a tenant. However, the Government's voluntary 'Code of Practice for commercial property relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic' applies until 24 June 2021 and provides that landlords and tenants should endeavour to come to mutually acceptable alternative arrangements regarding payments due under leases.

Doing so might ultimately mean the tenant survives and the landlord won't end up with a vacant property, or have to invest time and money in finding a new tenant in difficult times. ■



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Emma Thompson

Solicitor, commercial property

Emma works with national and local clients, advising on all aspects of their commercial property legal needs, whether they're buying and selling, renting or need advice on property management.

Fixed-fee support for your property needs



We're offering advice at a fixed fee to support commercial tenants or landlords who may have questions hanging over them.

One of our property experts will review your lease and provide you with a 30-minute consultation to discuss your options for a **fixed fee of £250 + VAT**.

[Contact us to get started.](#)

Commercial property partner Alasdair Garbutt advised the charity **Young Gloucestershire** on the purchase of their new HQ at The Dock Office, Gloucester Quays. The HQ will be a

long term home for the charity, which provides opportunities and much-needed support to young people facing adverse circumstances. Alasdair commented "I was delighted to act for YG on the purchase of

this landmark building for them which will have a positive impact on the charity for many years to come".

CEO Tracy Clark commented: "YG has dreamed for a long time

of creating a space for young people, where they can gain support and feel safe. This purchase will allow us to achieve this for young people of our county and we are so grateful to the many

fundors and individuals who have helped make it happen.





Alasdair Garbutt
Partner, commercial property

Alasdair advises on sales & acquisitions, development transactions, landlord & tenant and property management matters, with particular expertise in the charity sector.

Jargon buster: What is a ‘licence to occupy’?

A ‘licence to occupy’ is a simple permission from a property owner allowing a business to use the property.

It is a useful and relatively straightforward way of allowing occupation in return for a fee or “rent”. A licence is a personal permission to the occupier for their personal use only, on the terms set out in the licence document itself.

The fact that a licence is a simple permission means that, by definition, it cannot be a lease, and therefore the user’s exclusive possession of the property is not permitted, nor has a legal grant of property being made. The user in occupation has a very tenuous right to occupy, as a genuine licence can be terminated by either side at any time.

Licences are usually only granted for short periods of time. This is to avoid the danger of the occupation inadvertently becoming a lease by way of long term occupation and exclusive occupation by a singular occupier.

Labelling an agreement as a licence does not make it a licence if the facts indicate otherwise. For example, if the occupier has exclusive possession, pays rent and the licence is for a fixed term, then even if the licence is labelled as such it is more likely to be a lease.

Therefore it is very important to be careful when using licences to occupy. Usually they are only used in certain limited circumstances, for example a ‘pop-up’ shop for a short-term basis, a concession agreement, or short-term serviced office space.

Licences can be a very useful tool commercially, but it is crucial that they are used with the full understanding of their implications.

If you have queries or would like to use a licence to occupy please do not hesitate to contact us. ■



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Location, Location, Reactivation – residential lettings post COVID-19

Buy-to-let properties are a popular investment for private individuals and large-scale investors alike. For many, those buy-to-let properties are an important part of their capital investments and regular income.

As part of this, it is vital for landlords to ensure that their rent is paid on time and that their properties are being correctly looked after by their tenants. During the current crisis, landlords have been prevented from taking any action to recover rent or possession of their properties.

That has all changed recently, as the recovery of rent and recovery of possession of property are now allowed to resume. However, the government have added numerous steps to be taken by landlords seeking to recover possession.

In addition to all the pre-existing requirements, landlords will now also need to consider many new obligations, including (but not limited to):

1. Has the tenant been impacted by COVID-19?
2. Has the landlord tried to resolve the matter with the tenant directly?
3. Has the correct updated notice been used?
4. If a claim had already been issued, has the

landlord correctly issued a re-activation notice?

5. Has the landlord provided a detailed rent schedule?

The government continue to prescribe increasingly onerous requirements on residential landlords, and it is understandably easy for landlords to fail to comply with some of these. ■



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Support with residential possessions

Whilst residential possessions become increasingly complicated, we are here to help. We can handle the process for you, minimise your time spent dealing with a claim and give you the best chance of success.

A variety of fixed-fee products are available to assist. Please [get in touch](#) for clear advice.



James Melvin-Bath
Solicitor-advocate

Litigation & dispute resolution

A solicitor-advocate in our *Legal 500*-rated dispute resolution team, James specialises in landlord and tenant, contentious probate and commercial disputes.

Dispute resolution partner **Nick Cox** acted for a public facilities provider in a contract dispute, which was resolved remotely at a mediation.

This is an example of technology allowing settlements to be reached even in the middle of a pandemic. ■



Our dispute resolution team have advised on numerous disputes concerning classic and collector cars, including a recent case which centred around a breach of contract and misrepresentation

of a classic car worth up to £1.5m, which was resolved at mediation. [Contact us](#) for help with a contract, misrepresentation or restoration dispute concerning a classic or collector car. ■



BREXIT SPECIAL

Step up your prep: Time is running out for EU exit

Whatever trading arrangements we end up with on 1 January 2021, there are certain actions all businesses must take in order to prepare. Here's a simple guide to some of the key steps:

- ✓ If you sell goods to the EU you must prepare for new customs procedures. (More information is available at [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) to check duties and customs procedures for exporting your goods worldwide from 1 January 2021.)
- ✓ If you travel to the EU for work purposes you will need to check if you need a visa or work permit and apply if necessary.
- ✓ If you employ overseas nationals, you will need to prepare your business for the implementation of the new immigration system. (Visit [willans.co.uk/pointsbasedsystem](https://www.willans.co.uk/pointsbasedsystem) for a useful FAQ.) From 1 January 2021, if you want to hire anyone from outside the UK, including from the EU, you must be a Home Office licensed sponsor.
- ✓ If you are a UK business or organisation that receives personal data from contacts in the EEA, you may need to take extra steps to ensure that the data can continue to flow legally at the end of the transition period. (Contact our sister company, [Willans Data Protection Services](#), for assistance with this).
- ✓ If you provide services in the EU, you must ensure that your qualifications are now recognised by EU regulations to be able to practise or service clients in the EU.

Businesses can get a personalised summary of the actions they need to take by using the simple tool on [gov.uk/transition](https://www.gov.uk/transition). And of course, we're here to help so please do get in touch. ■

Points-based system FAQ



The new points-based system effectively extends the current system. At the moment businesses only need to sponsor individuals they are employing from outside of the European Economic Area (the EU plus Switzerland, Norway and Liechtenstein) but from 1 January 2021 the scheme will be extended to include Europe. Visit [willans.co.uk/pointsbasedsystem](https://www.willans.co.uk/pointsbasedsystem) to read an in-depth FAQ for employers, from business immigration specialist Helen Howes.

Missed our Brexit webinar? Exclusive catch-up link for *Law News* readers

If you missed the chance to tune in to our free Brexit webinar, you can catch up for free at [willans.co.uk/brexitwebinar](https://www.willans.co.uk/brexitwebinar). Listen to our employment & corporate law team give a concise overview of how your business can prepare, the legal framework and what you can do in practice.



Time is ticking on - don't get caught out!

Additional data protection requirements will come into force from 1 January 2021, when the UK's transition period for leaving the EU ends. Failure to meet these requirements could result in a ban of your data processing activities by authorities if you are in breach – effectively putting your whole business on hold. Not many businesses are aware of this.

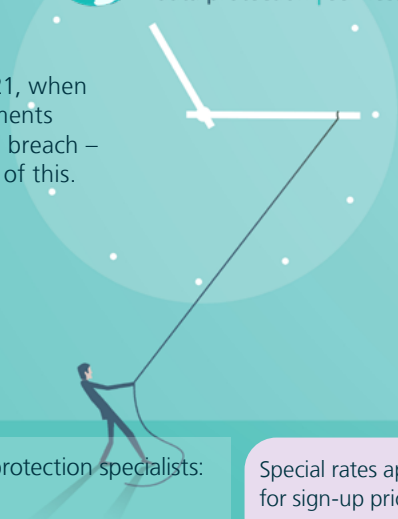
If you are...

1. based in the UK but selling directly to consumers in the EU;
2. based in the EU but selling directly to consumers in the UK; or
3. based outside the UK or EU, but selling directly to consumers in the UK or EU

...time is running out to appoint a data protection representative.

To find out more about what your business needs to do, please contact our data protection specialists:
matthew.clayton@willansdps.com | kym.fletcher@willansdps.com
 Tel: 01242 514000 | www.willansdataprotectionservices.com

Special rates apply for sign-up prior to 31 December 2020.



All change with reform at Companies House

Companies House has long been seen only as a source of information of businesses registered in the UK. From various filings and information posted, it is theoretically possible to find out information about ownership, control, financial health and directorship of a business. However, whilst this information is verifiable, it is not necessarily reliable as the information posted will rarely be checked for accuracy.

This looks set to change. Companies House has announced a new 5 year strategy which shall see the introduction of an intelligence and enforcement service focused on using technology to verify information, to identify false information on its register and campaign for legislative change to give it additional powers to challenge and remove incorrect data.

At this stage, there is not enough information to know if these changes will place additional burdens on businesses, but proposals include:

- additional information will be required in accounts, such as turnover, in an attempt to improve the 'accuracy and integrity' of accounts filings;
- submission of accounts will be aligned with HMRC and other government agencies;
- a process for checking accounts filed will be introduced;
- restrictions will be put in place so that a company can only shorten its accounting reference period once every five years; and

- directors will not be able to be appointed to a company until their identity has been verified by Companies House.

These changes are intended to increase the reliability of the data held to enable businesses to be able to do proper research into businesses they are considering doing business with, and to crack down on companies being created with fictional directors by criminal networks.

At the time of going to press, no precise timescales for the changes had been published. ■



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Helen Howes,
Solicitor, corporate & employment law

Helen advises clients on corporate and commercial contracts as well as advising on the full range of employment law issues. She has specialist expertise in business immigration matters.

Can company funds be used to pay for a shareholder dispute?

This question is often overlooked when shareholders find themselves in the unfortunate position of being in conflict with one another. However, as explained below, there can be serious implications if company funds are used inappropriately when there is a shareholder dispute.

A good starting point is the reminder that a private limited company or a limited liability partnership (LLP) is a separate legal entity and a legal person in its 'own right'. Many private limited companies in the UK are owned by less than five shareholders and in many, many cases those same shareholders are also directors of the business.

This inevitably means that boundaries between those roles become blurred. However, it is essential that those individuals are conscious of when they are acting in their capacity as a shareholder and when they are acting in their capacity as a director and also, potentially, an employee. Similarly, the company itself needs to be regarded as a separate 'person' to the proceedings, and its role should be that of a neutral and disinterested party; it is important that the dispute remains between the shareholders and that the company has no interest in it.

“...boundaries between those roles become blurred...”

Under the Companies Act 2006, a shareholder can, in certain circumstances, complain to a court that they have been unfairly prejudiced by the conduct of another shareholder(s). In these circumstances, it is essential that company funds are not used to pay legal or professional costs in disputes between shareholders.

This principle has been established again and again in case law (most recently in *Michael Gott v Rune Hauge and Ors [2020]*), so it is essential that it is observed. A failure to do so can carry serious consequences and severely damage your case and improve that of your opponent.

For example, if a company were to fund the defence of an allegation of unfairly prejudicial conduct against one of its shareholders, the shareholder bringing those allegations will have substantive grounds to apply for injunctive relief, be able to make an application to recoup those funds paid by the company, and even potentially apply to strike out the relevant paragraphs of the defence.

It is therefore imperative that, when a dispute arises, you seek advice immediately from our corporate & litigation teams to protect your position from the outset. ■

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Equality Act: gender fluid & non-binary individuals protected

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against individuals because of their 'protected characteristics'. There are nine protected characteristics in total, namely: age, race, sex, sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief, marital status, maternity and pregnancy, and gender reassignment.

The Equality Act 2010 stipulates that a person has the protected characteristic of gender reassignment if the person is:

"proposing to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone a process (or part of a process) for the purpose of reassigning the person's sex by changing physiological or other attributes of sex".

It requires that a person should have at least proposed to undergo gender reassignment and whilst no medical intervention is required for an individual to have the protected characteristic, it was accepted that the gender reassignment had to be permanent and longstanding (although not necessarily irrevocable) and therefore did not protect individuals who were gender fluid or non-binary.

However, this may no longer be the case following a landmark ruling at Birmingham Employment Tribunal in *Taylor v Jaguar Land Rover*. In this case, the tribunal found that a gender fluid engineer who suffered abuse and harassment at work was protected by the Equality Act 2010.

The employee, Rose Taylor, changed the way she presented in 2017. She began to identify as gender fluid and started to wear women's clothes in work. When she suffered insults and abusive jokes, and struggled with toilet arrangements in the workplace, management failed to support her. She resigned as a result and claimed she suffered harassment and direct discrimination because of gender reassignment and sexual orientation.

Jaguar Land Rover argued that being 'gender fluid

or non-binary' did not fall within the definition of the protected characteristic of 'gender reassignment' under the Equality Act.

The judge ruled that it was "clear ... that gender is a spectrum" and that it was "beyond any doubt" that being non-binary or gender fluid was covered by the protected characteristic of 'gender reassignment' under the Equality Act. Going further, the judge said gender reassignment "concerns a personal journey and moving a gender identity away from birth sex".

Jaguar Land Rover could appeal the decision, so it could be reversed, but we await confirmation of this.

As the case of *Taylor v Jaguar Land Rover* was heard at an employment tribunal it does not technically establish a legal precedent, so isn't binding, but it is bound to be influential in similar claims and the first step towards a future precedent.

This case is the first to extend the scope of protection afforded under the protected characteristic of gender reassignment under the Equality Act, but it is not the first time the protections of the Equality Act have been extended by case law.

In the case of *Tirkey v Chandok and another*, the Employment Appeal Tribunal confirmed that 'caste' could be protected by the protected characteristic of race, thus extending the scope of that protected characteristic. It serves as a reminder that equality legislation is not set in stone, and is constantly developing to accommodate and adapt to our ever changing society, and to protect those vulnerable to discrimination. ■



Jenny Hawrot

Senior associate,
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law

Jenny has an extensive track record in advising businesses ranging from SMEs to multi-national organisations, on the full range of employment-related matters - including TUPE, contractual issues and defending employee relations.



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Practical, clear insights for the road ahead

Free legal webinars for the remainder of 2020

Thurs 19 November | [Flexible working – is your business ready?](#) 10.00-11.00am

With the seismic shift in the numbers of the UK workforce now working from home, we look at the different types of flexible working, how to deal with requests, explore what are 'reasonable adjustments', and discuss how businesses can accommodate flexible working.

Weds 25 November | [Home working – what does it mean for employers?](#) 10.00-11.00am

Our employment lawyers answer your questions about the legal framework around homeworking, the special considerations you'll need to make as an employer, administrative changes, discrimination concerns and reasonable adjustments.

For more information and how to book, visit [willans.co.uk/events](https://www.willans.co.uk/events), email events@willans.co.uk, or call 01242 514000.

Planning use classes overhaul: COVID-19 sparks major change

It is hoped that the overhaul of planning use classes will aid the recovery of high streets in England, by reflecting the changing and diverse use of buildings in town centres following COVID-19.

From 1 September 2020, the categories under the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes Order) 1987 changed to create two new use classes.

To summarise, the changes have seen the use classes A1-A5 (inclusive), B1, D1 and D2 abolished and replaced with the following classes:

Class E – Commercial, business and service: this includes previous use classes A1 (shops), A2 (financial and professional services), A3 (restaurants and cafés), B1 (business), part of D1 (clinics, health centres, creches, day nurseries and centres) and part of D2 (indoor sport, recreation or fitness, gyms).

Class F.1 – Learning and non-residential institutions: this covers the remaining uses within previous use class D1 (schools, art galleries, museums, libraries, places of worship, church halls and law courts).

Class F.2 – Local community: this includes part of previous use class A1 (small corner shops) and part of previous use class D2 (community halls, outdoor sport and recreation areas, indoor or outdoor swimming pools and skating rinks).

These provisions mean that there is now much greater flexibility to change uses within the same

use class without the need to obtain planning permission.

Some uses which were previously given their own use class have also been moved into a ‘sui generis’ category, for example, public houses, wine bars and other drinking establishments (previously use class A4), hot food takeaways (previously use class A5) and cinemas, concert halls, bingo halls, dance halls and live music venues (previously within use class D2). This means that they will not belong to a specific class and changes to and from these uses will be subject to full consideration through the usual planning application process.

The general industrial (B2) and storage and distribution (B8) use classes remain unchanged, save for a cross reference in use class B2 to the new use class E.

To read more about how these changes may apply to new or existing leases, visit willans.co.uk/use-classes.



Charlotte Brunson

Solicitor, commercial property & charities

Charlotte advises a broad range of clients on all types of commercial property transactions and charity law issues. She has particular expertise in working with charities and not-for-profit organisations.



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Contact

For advice on any of the issues covered in *Law News* or any other area of law, these are the people to contact in the first instance.

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