

The voice of our sustainable
built environment



Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

CC. Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, and Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP - Secretaries of State
14 June 2023

Dear Prime Minister and Secretaries of State,

Re: Business coalition calling for the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill to deliver on net zero emissions and restore nature

As leading businesses from across the UK, we welcome the opportunity to reform the planning system in England through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and hope to support the Government in this process.

As part of this, we call on the Government to strengthen the Bill by including a new, clear legal duty for planning decisions and plan-making to explicitly align with the UK's carbon budgets and adaptation goals under the Climate Change Act, and nature restoration targets under the Environment Act. Both the Climate Change Committee and Chris Skidmore MP's Mission Zero Review have concluded that integrating climate goals into the planning system is critical to meeting our commitments.

We believe direct legal alignment is essential to underpin consistent policymaking, and provide the certainty needed to unlock cost-effective, reliable investment to deliver more high-quality, affordable new homes, enhance energy security, and all while delivering a range of wider economic benefits, and tackling the rising cost of living crisis.

Our experience is that the current planning system is not fit for purpose, in terms of providing a consistent approach to handling climate change and environmental considerations. Current legal duties and planning policies have proven insufficient for delivering action, as shown by the lack of consistent carbon auditing for local plans and headline decisions by the planning inspectorate. The lack of clarity risks delays, costs, and legal challenges. Meanwhile many local communities continue to see unsustainable, unpopular development built in unsuitable locations, with thousands of homes built on floodplains without sufficient mitigation.

We face bureaucratic restrictions on low carbon technology; uncertainty around the weight of climate and environmental issues in decision-making; and we urgently need to develop a means to consistently measure and integrate emissions and climate resilience factors when granting planning permission.

The changes we need cannot be achieved through the promised update of national planning policy and the Future Homes Standard alone. Both are necessary, but effective legislation is paramount. Without a new climate clause and clear legal alignment, planning policy could still risk going backwards, undermining vital investment.

A new legal duty would focus the mind of the Secretary of State and of local authority decision-makers not just on the general desirability of mitigating and adapting to climate change, but on a range of specific issues.

Plans to enhance nature's recovery in the Environment Act must also be directly supported throughout the planning system. Greater weight is needed for Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs) to ensure they are fully incorporated, and their objectives comprehensively supported, in both development plans and planning decision making.

Finally, resourcing and skills constraints in Local Planning Authorities must be addressed as a central priority, to ensure they can fundamentally support the delivery of these environmental objectives effectively.

We strongly support the Government's targets and ambitions on economic prosperity, energy security, cost of living, net zero emissions and nature restoration. We believe that it is only by having a comprehensive, holistic, and consistent planning system which integrates environmental sustainability at its heart will all these important targets and objectives be met efficiently.

Yours sincerely,

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Alexandra Bantock, Head of Marketing and Outreach, Preoptima
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Chris Oglesby, CEO & Alex Edwards, Sustainability Director, Bruntwood
Chris Twinn, Principal, Twinn Sustainability Innovation
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