

Rt Hon Simon Clarke MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

4 October 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

The Better Planning Coalition is a broad coalition of organisations representing the housing, planning, environment, transport and heritage sectors. We are deeply concerned by the indications coming from the government about how it intends to reform the planning system.

We agree it is due an update, but tearing up established protections that exist currently won't deliver sustainable growth. Policy makers and legislators must raise the bar, not lower the ceiling.

That means increasing protection for local voices, nature, heritage and our climate. It means building the social homes we need, protecting our environment and promoting healthy and active travel. It means expecting more, not accepting less.

We all want to see the system improved and made more user-friendly. We all want to see thriving local economies and good quality jobs but these should and must go hand in hand with a healthy environment, genuinely affordable housing, and a safe climate.

Deregulation in the way it has been proposed in the Growth Plan, including but not limited to weakening the Habitats Regulations, is wrongheaded and short sighted. It could lead to car-dependent, nature-free zones. It could damage nature's recovery, risk lowering social housing delivery, destroy cherished community green spaces and allow important urban and rural landscapes to be irrevocably damaged by badly located development.

It can also risk a spatially fragmented nation with effectively a two tiered planning system and the confusion and delay that would bring.

Investment Zones risk removing safeguards for communities and their representatives and inhibit good decision-making. Zonal planning was a monumentally unpopular policy, which has already been rejected once by MPs across all parties, including Conservative backbenchers. It could allow developers to build ugly, unaffordable, soulless buildings and commercial estates that scar the landscape and damage the natural and historic environment, while missing opportunities to invest in green jobs, genuinely affordable housing, and growth and doing nothing to protect communities from the worst impacts of climate change.

We need increased protections for nature and green spaces across the whole country, embedding good placemaking in our planning system so it encourages active travel and creates new walking, cycling and wheeling routes, networks and natural spaces. We should build beautiful, genuinely affordable homes, which meet the highest standards, contribute to net zero, enhance biodiversity and acknowledge the role of local authorities in their delivery.

We also need to protect and enhance the historic character of places, and protect our archaeologically rich landscapes across every part of the country.

All of these aims are essential for our wellbeing and compatible with healthy and sustainable local economies.

A planning system which lets communities participate will be faster and fairer. It must work with local people, not just impose poor development on them. This would be good for nature, people and the economy, as last year's Dasgupta Review made clear.

Yours sincerely,



The
Heritage
Alliance

