



Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

To: Council Leaders in England

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and
Communities
Minister for Intergovernmental Relations

**Department for Levelling Up, Housing and
Communities**

4th Floor, Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

1st December 2022

Dear Leader,

CREATING BEAUTIFUL, POPULAR, HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE PLACES

The Government considers that beauty and good design are central to levelling up and good place-making. In July 2021, the **National Planning Policy Framework** established beauty as an overarching objective alongside sustainable development and stated that all development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design. It asks all local planning authorities to prepare design guides or codes, taking into account guidance contained in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code. These updates were made to empower councils to set clear standards for what they and the local community find beautiful and to refuse what they find ugly.

To support you and your communities, we have set up the **Office for Place**, at present within my department, to champion design and beauty in placemaking by helping you and your communities turn your visions for beautiful towns, cities and neighbourhoods into local standards that all new development should meet.

As local leaders, you have a huge role to play in delivering these ambitions for creating better neighbourhoods for everyone, everywhere.

There are four things that I am asking you to do today, to support your communities.

- First, to **speed up permissions for well-designed places, and turn down applications for badly designed places**. I'm delighted that some local authorities and developers are reporting that the changes to national planning policy are helping, ensuring that the quality of development is considered, as well as the number of new homes. I urge you to act with similar confidence in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework. Developments that are not well-designed should be refused planning permission and housing targets should not be used as a justification to grant them permission. As Secretary of State, I will support you and your officials in this mission.
- Second, to **prepare design codes now**. The Office for Place will be launching a new website, to provide practical and helpful recommendations and guidance to local authorities and communities. This website is a starting point, and we will evolve it as the Office for Place's work grows.

- Third, to **appreciate the role of placemaking in levelling up by recognising the need for strong leadership within your council.** Having senior officials with a design and placemaking remit, and having officers who have the requisite urban design, conservation, and landscape skills has led to huge benefits in terms of the quality of placemaking and associated benefits including health, wellbeing and biodiversity. I'd encourage you to think about how you can make sure there is strong design capacity and leadership within your council and that officers are enabled to work productively and constructively with you as council leaders. Neighbourhoods where people can thrive are about more than just well-designed homes. It is about supporting the creation and stewardship of popular, healthy, beautiful and sustainable places.
- Fourth, to **make use of the tools you have available to you to promote beautiful and sustainable development in your area.** There have been examples of Local Development Orders or Neighbourhood Development Orders being created with a design code to enable development that is beautiful to come forward at a smaller scale. There is also an important role for neighbourhood planning.

If you do encounter aspects of process or policy which make it harder to achieve these ends, please do share them with my department or the Office for Place.

This country is creating some of the best places to live in the world. But it's too rare. We must do so far more often for the betterment of our neighbours, for the advancement of our economy and for the delicacy with which we tread upon the planet.

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Gove". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Michael" on the left and "Gove" on the right, connected by a single stroke.

RT HON MICHAEL GOVE MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations