



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP**  
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**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local  
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To: all MPs in England

1 February 2021

Dear colleague,

### **Government Response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission Report**

In late 2018, the Government established the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission. Under the leadership of Nicholas Boys Smith and the late Sir Roger Scruton, it was tasked with championing beauty in the built environment and advising the government on the reforms needed to ensure new homes are built to much higher, locally popular design standards and reflect local character and preferences.

The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's report, 'Living with Beauty', set out 45 policy propositions, for government and industry, on ways the planning and development process needed to change to provide the conditions for building more beautiful places. The report set out three principle aims: to 'ask for beauty', to 'refuse ugliness' and to 'promote stewardship'.

When the report was published, we welcomed the Commission's recommendations and committed to taking forward as many of them as possible. We agreed with the Commission's assessment that the design quality of new development is too often mediocre and that systemic change would be needed to ensure design and beauty were a core part of the planning process, not an afterthought.

Over the past 12 months, we have undertaken a review of the existing planning system to consider what changes the government could make to deliver on the Commission's ambitions. As part of this, on 6 August we published 'Planning for the Future' which included proposals for putting beauty at the heart of the planning system. This set out the importance of setting local expectations on design, ensuring communities have their say and promoting more widespread use of digital technologies to open up the design and planning processes to communities and encourage more participation in the planning system.

### **Overview of the government's response**

Following this work, on 30 January 2021, we published a comprehensive response to the Commission's report setting out clear steps the government is taking to embed beauty, design and placemaking in the planning system.

- First, we are proposing significant revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework to put a greater emphasis on design and beauty. For the first time in the modern planning system, beauty and placemaking will be strategic policies in their own right. This will put an emphasis on granting permission for well-designed buildings and refusing it for poor quality schemes. To ensure local preferences are reflected, we are asking all local authorities to work with their communities to produce local design codes or guides, setting out the design standards new buildings will be expected to meet. These reforms will empower communities to expect and demand beauty in the built environment.
- Second, we are also introducing a new expectation that all new streets should be tree-lined. This will deliver on the government's manifesto commitment for tree-lined streets, improve biodiversity and

support the government's wider ambitions to plant 40 million trees. The updated National Planning Policy Framework will also include wider changes to address environmental issues, including on managing the risk of floods, supporting heritage listings and amend the rules for the application of Article 4 Directions. The consultation on the revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework was launched on the 30 January 2021 and will close on 27 March 2021.

- Third, in line with the Commission's recommendations, we have produced the first National Model Design Code. We agree with the Commission that the use of local design codes, in which communities have a say, is an effective way of setting design expectations that will shape and deliver beautiful homes and places. Whereas a design guide sets out high level principles of good design, a design code sets out illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters or constraints for the physical development of a site or area. The National Model Design Code provides a clear framework setting out the parameters that contribute to good design and a step-by-step process for local authorities to follow to produce their own local codes and guides. We have made clear in the National Planning Policy Framework that all areas should produce their own codes or guides, based on the principles set out in the Design Code. The Prime Minister also recently set out his ten point plan for a green industrial revolution, which will create, support and protect hundreds of thousands of green jobs, whilst making strides towards net zero by 2050. This includes plans to make cycling and walking more attractive ways to travel, making our homes, schools and hospitals greener, warmer and more energy efficient and protecting and restoring our natural environment, whilst creating and retaining thousands of jobs. This vision is at the heart of the National Model Design Code which puts a strong emphasis on building greener and more energy-efficient developments.
- Fourth, to ensure communities understand the principles and vision set out in the National Model Design Code and to support them to apply it, we intend to establish a new Office for Place within the next year. This organisation will draw on Britain's world-class design expertise to support communities to turn their visions of beautiful design into local standards all new buildings will be required to meet. We will be establishing an interim Office for Place within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, with a transition board chaired by Nicholas Boys Smith tasked with considering what form the organisation should take, informed by responses to the 'Planning for the Future' consultation. The interim Office for Place will begin the work to drive up design standards now. This year it will be piloting the Design Code with 20 communities and empowering local authorities to demand beauty, design quality and placemaking, through training on the principles outlined in the Code. We have launched an expression of interest for local authorities to apply to be one of the first ten pilot areas and the recipients of a share of £500,000 to support this work. I would ask you to encourage local authorities in your constituencies to apply to partake in these pilots.
- Fifth, the Government is also relaunching the Community Housing Fund, making £4 million available to help Community Land Trusts bid for funds to support them to prepare bids for the £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme. This programme is the largest investment in affordable housing in a decade and will leverage £38 billion of private finance, providing up to 180,000 new homes across England, should economic conditions allow.


### **Further changes to promote design, beauty and heritage**

Looking forward, the government's 'Planning for the Future' White Paper published on 6 August 2020 outlined a set of reforms that are intended to lay the foundations for future housebuilding and economic development, whilst meeting our commitments to design, the environment and climate. As more homes are delivered under the new system, they will be built to higher standards, placing a clear emphasis on design, beauty, heritage and sustainability and ensuring that communities are at the heart of the planning system. We are currently analysing the 40,000 consultation responses and will publish a response in due course.

Finally, the Government is also encouraging local communities to nominate historic buildings, monuments, parks and gardens and other heritage assets they value so they can be protected through the planning system. Following an overwhelmingly positive response to the expressions of interest, funding has been doubled to £1.5 million, allowing 22 areas to develop and update their local heritage lists, instead of the ten originally announced.

The response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's report, along with the reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework, the National Design Code, the intention to establish the Office for Place

and our wider proposals to reform the planning system, will ensure that for the first time design is established as a core pillar of the planning process. They will encourage a more diverse and competitive building industry. They will make the planning process more digital and accessible for everyone, not just those with planning expertise or with the time to attend late night meetings. They will support communities to define their visions of good design and empower them to demand these standards are met in all new developments. Ultimately, they will ensure that beautiful homes and places become the expectation and the norm.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Jenrick." The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underneath the name.

**RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP**