

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

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Dear Secretary of State,

The 2010 Marmot Review [Fairer Society, Healthy Lives](#) highlighted the links between health and our built and natural environments. Since then, evidence about this relationship has only grown. Research by the Health Foundation shows that the unequal distribution of high-quality built environments and access to natural space contributes to health inequalities in England. In short, our physical environment can considerably affect the length, quality and happiness of our lives. Health inequalities are on the rise, and men in the most deprived areas of England on average have 18 fewer years in ‘good’ general health than men living in the least deprived areas, while for women this is 20 years. Improving the places people live and work has potential to considerably affect the length, quality and happiness of our lives.

Our planning system is a key lever to improve the built and natural environment and one of the main tools to support the levelling up of health. The National Planning Policy Framework has for some time referred to ‘enabling healthy lifestyles’ and Planning Policy Guidance notes have for many years supported action to promote walking and cycling and ensure good access to open space. However, new developments which do not get the basics right are still getting built. For example, many developments entrench car dependency and lack access to high-quality green space. CPRE and Place Alliance found that, of 142 recent developments in England, 64% had poor or mediocre access to green space.

Your department has an opportunity to address this. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill sets out proposals not only to address inequality but also to begin the process of reforming the planning system. We welcome the creation of two ‘missions’ on health and wellbeing, alongside targets to clearly measure movement on these missions. However, we believe that it is a missed opportunity that the Bill does not advance any measures which could meet these targets.

This gap can be addressed through Amendment 241 which has been put forward by Lord Stevens of Birmingham, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, Lord Young of Cookham and Lord Foster of Bath. The new clause creates a statutory duty to address health inequalities, to mirror the Government’s overarching missions. It gives the power to determine how these can best be addressed to those who understand their local areas best – planners in local authorities.

The amendment is supported by the [Better Planning Coalition](#), which brings together 33 organisations who want a planning system fit for people, nature and the climate. Planners told the coalition that, while they are determined to improve the quality of the places they are building, their options are limited without robust regulation, and we believe that this amendment strikes the right balance, embedding a duty to promote health while recognising local variation.

In a discretionary planning system where the National Planning Policy Framework is built upon a presumption for development, decision makers should be equipped with the legal

tools to embed health equity into design, and we urge the Government to accept this amendment. Enshrining a statutory duty to address health inequalities within the planning system would ensure a consistent and embedded approach, rather than relying on guidance such as the National Planning Policy Framework or upcoming National Development Management Policies. The first duty of Government – and prime purpose of the planning system – should be to ensure the health and wellbeing of the people it serves. Adding this clause would therefore complete this landmark Bill's aim to align local planning authorities and national Government better, to help people live happier, healthier lives.

Yours,



Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Professor of Epidemiology at University College London, Director of the UCL Institute of Health Equity, and Past President of the World Medical Association



Professor Tine Van Bortel, Professor of Global Health & Wellbeing at De Montfort University Leicester and Principle Investigator in Public Health & Wellbeing at University of Cambridge

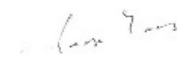
Dr Adrian Davis FFPH, Senior Fellow, University of the West of England



Jo Bibby, Director of Health, The Health Foundation



Dom Higgins, Head of Health and Education, The Wildlife Trusts



Lord Young of Cookham, former Planning Minister and Secretary of State for Transport

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, former CEO of the NHS Confederation



Lord Foster of Bath, former Planning Minister