



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission

Government response to the Living with Beauty report



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Ministerial foreword

At the official launch of the Commission's report last year, I thanked the Commissioners for producing such a thorough examination of the many issues that need to be addressed if we are to build more beautiful places. Since that time, the country has of course been facing great challenges as a result of COVID-19. The Government has put a bold package of economic support in place during the crisis, and the steps we are taking in the short-term also support our longer-term vision for a stronger, fairer, greener economy.

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, planting 30,000 hectares of trees every year, whilst creating and retaining thousands of jobs. These are themes that were highlighted in the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's report and which are given a strong emphasis in this response and the National Model Design Code.

We will continue to collaborate with local partners to understand the particular local challenges across the country and respond accordingly. The pandemic has only sharpened our focus on the need to secure good quality homes, communities and places. We need to build more homes – but as the Commission reminds us, there should not be a choice between quantity and quality; we want and need both.

The Government has carefully examined the many recommendations in the *Living with Beauty* report, and I am pleased to confirm that we are taking forward the great majority of the Commission's proposals.

I welcome the report as a bold and meaningful challenge to government, local authorities and the development industry. I was struck by its three principal aims: to ask for beauty, to refuse ugliness and to promote stewardship. We need to collectively demand beauty, so that high-quality homes become the norm in this country, not the exception. We must also have the confidence to say no to schemes which we know are bad for the people destined to live in and near them. And we need to do everything we can to encourage everyone to take a longer-term, sustainable view of communities as places that must grow and evolve, in a way that works well for people.

A number of the Commission's propositions will be key to making these changes happen. In particular, we have proposed updates to the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure that high quality design is an everyday outcome from the planning system and we have published a consultation on proposed revisions alongside this response; the National Model Design Code, also published alongside this document, more clearly articulates key design principles, and empowers communities to set out the detail of what beauty means in their areas; our manifesto commitment on street trees will bring about a fundamental improvement in the environmental quality of developments across the country; and high quality design will be further embedded at the core of Homes England's objectives.

In August 2020, we set out proposals for fundamental reform of the planning system in our White Paper, *Planning for the Future*. The work of the Commission played an invaluable role, not just in highlighting the shortcomings of the current system, but in setting out a wide range of recommendations for addressing them. The White Paper includes some key aspects of the Commission's thinking. At the time of publishing this response, we are in the process of analysing responses from the White Paper consultation before setting out our next steps on wider planning reform.

There are many more detailed recommendations that we will take forward, and we have set out our proposed course of action in this response. Together, these measures provide a more effective route to creating the new homes that our communities need. It is clear that significant changes to the planning system are overdue – so that it functions effectively for the 21st century as well as fostering beautiful places – and the Commission's proposals make an important and timely contribution to that work.

I would like to thank the co-chair of the Commission, Nicholas Boys Smith and his fellow Commissioners – Gail Mayhew, Mary Parsons and Adrian Penfold – for their tremendous contribution in leading this work. It is clear that it was a major undertaking, and I would like to put on record my gratitude for all they have done. I would also like to thank the Commission's team of advisers who contributed their vast expertise in support of this work and all those who provided evidence to the Commission. Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the late Sir Roger Scruton, who as co-chair played a major role in this work, not least in articulating with precision the nature of the challenge we face and illuminating the way forward with such clarity.

I am determined to work towards the goal the Commission has set in the report's conclusion - that we should aspire to pass our heritage to our successors, not depleted but enhanced, and that we oversee a profound and lasting improvement in our built environment. Indeed, this is a challenge that everyone involved in the planning and development process should embrace. This document sets out how the Government will play its part in leading the way.

Introduction

Background to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission

The Government convened the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission with the aim of championing beauty in the built environment, as an integral part of the drive to build the homes that our communities need. Addressing the housing shortage remains one of the central challenges that we face as a country, but we must ensure that we are building homes in the right places, and of high quality, in order to gain the support of local people and deliver beautiful and sustainable environments in which to live.

Part of making the housing market work for everyone is ensuring that what we build is built to last, and that it respects the integrity of our existing towns, villages and cities. Ultimately, building better and beautiful will help us build more.

The Government asked the Commission to develop a range of practical measures that would help ensure new housing developments meet the needs and expectations of communities, making them more likely to be welcomed, rather than resisted, by existing communities. The Commission had three primary aims: to promote better design and style of homes, villages, towns and high streets, to reflect what communities want, building on the knowledge and tradition of what they know works for their area; to explore how new settlements can be developed with greater community consent; and to make the planning system work in support of better design and style, not against it.

The Commission was asked to gather evidence from both the public and private sector to develop practical policy solutions to ensure the design and style of new developments, including new settlements and the country's high streets, helps to grow a sense of community and place, not undermine it.

Summary of the Commission's recommendations

The Commission's report has proposed three overall aims for reforming the planning and development process, as follows:

Ask for Beauty. Beauty includes everything that promotes a healthy and happy life, everything that makes a collection of buildings into a place, everything that turns anywhere into somewhere, and nowhere into home. It is not merely a visual characteristic, but is revealed in the deep harmony between a place and those who settle there. So understood, beauty should be an essential condition for planning permission.

Refuse Ugliness. Ugly buildings present a social cost that everyone is forced to bear. They destroy the sense of place, undermine the spirit of community, and ensure that we are not at home in our world. Ugliness means buildings that are unadaptable, unhealthy and unsightly and which violate the context in which they are placed. Preventing ugliness should be a primary purpose of the planning system.

Promote Stewardship. Our built environment and our natural environment belong together. Both should be protected and enhanced for the long-term benefit of the communities that depend on them. Settlements should be renewed, regenerated and cared for, and we should end the scandal of abandoned places, where derelict buildings and vandalised public spaces drive people away. New developments should enhance the environment in which they occur, adding to the health, sustainability and biodiversity of their context.

Building on this, the Commission set out 45 detailed policy propositions under the following eight themes:

1. Planning: create a predictable level playing field

This theme asks that beautiful placemaking should be enshrined as a fundamental aim of the planning system, along with greater certainty of planning outcomes, and increased diversity of developers.

2. Communities: bring the democracy forward

To improve community engagement in the planning process, in particular on local plans, including use of a co-design approach, assisted by greater use of digital technology.

3. Stewardship: incentivise responsibility to the future

To encourage an approach to development that aims for long-term investment rather than quick profit, in which the values that matter to people – beauty, community, history, landscape – are safeguarded.

4. Regeneration: end the scandal of left behind places

The Government should commit to ending the scandal of 'left-behind' places and ask 'what will help make these good places to live?' and encourage development to be regenerative not parasitic.

5. Neighbourhoods: create places not just houses

To develop more homes within mixed-use real places at 'gentle density', and change the model of development from 'building units' to 'making places'.

6. Nature: re-green our towns and cities

Green spaces, waterways and wildlife habitats should be seen as integral to the urban fabric. The Government should commit to a radical plan to plant two million street trees within five years, and place a greater focus on access to nature and green spaces.

7. Education: promote a wider understanding of placemaking

The need to invest in and improve the understanding and confidence of professionals and local councillors in design and placemaking.

8. Management: value planning, count happiness, procure properly

To change the corporate performance and procurement targets of public bodies to take adequate account of quality.

Overview of the Government's response to the report

The Government strongly welcomes the Commission's findings, which set out a broad and important range of actions for the Government, local authorities and the development industry. The Commission has identified a number of areas where the Government can take a stronger lead, and we propose to implement the vast majority of these proposals as set out in this response. These recommendations have informed proposals set out in our planning White Paper *Planning for the Future*, however many apply to the current planning system and it is critical that local authorities continue to advance local plans, taking into account any changes to planning policy and guidance which are made in response to this report.

The Commission also highlighted themes that are reflected in the Prime Minister's ambitious ten point plan for a green industrial revolution, such as making cycling and walking more attractive ways to travel, making our homes greener, warmer and more energy efficient and protecting and restoring our natural environment, planting 30,000 hectares of trees every year, whilst creating and retaining thousands of jobs. These themes are given a strong emphasis in this response and the National Model Design Code.

The most significant measures that we intend to take forward are as follows:

National Planning Policy Framework

We accept the Commission's recommendation for a stronger focus on beauty in national planning policy, to ensure the system helps to foster more attractive buildings and places, while also helping to prevent ugliness. To do this, we have made beauty, design quality and placemaking a strategic theme in proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework, positively supported design quality as a key issue in consenting schemes, made it clearer that poor quality schemes should be refused, and where appropriate extended references to 'good design' to 'good design and beautiful places'. Several other aspects of the National Planning Policy Framework have also been updated to reflect the Committee's recommendations, and we have published a draft of these changes for consultation alongside this document.

National Model Design Code

There is a compelling case – which the Commission's findings reinforce – for more certainty about design principles and what is likely to be accepted. This can benefit applicants, communities and planning authorities alike, and it is clear that more can be done to embed this in practice. To support this work, we intend to build on the success of our National Design Guide and so have issued the National Model Design Code which reflects the Commission's suggestions. Local planning authorities will be expected to produce local design guides and codes using the guidance provided in these documents. We are seeking views on the draft National Model Design Code alongside our proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, with a view to publishing the final version in the spring. Furthermore, we are putting in place an interim Office for Place, with

a transition board, to explore options for establishing a new expert design body which we want to set up in the next year. Drawing on Britain's world-class design expertise, they will inspire and support communities to turn their visions of beautiful design into local standards that all new buildings will be required to meet and they will pilot the National Model Design Code with 20 communities in the next year.

Street trees

Street trees are a core part of our vision for enhancing the quality of urban development, and we are pleased that the Commission's findings endorse their importance, as well as highlighting many other ways in which we can make our urban environments greener, healthier and more sustainable. Our response sets out how we plan to take these findings forward. On street trees specifically, revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework make clear that new streets should be tree lined unless there are very clear, justifiable and compelling reasons not to. The National Model Design Code includes guidance on landscaping and how trees can be incorporated into the design of new development, and we are working across government departments and agencies to identify and overcome any practical barriers to securing and maintaining street trees. The Government has committed to funding the planting of 40 million trees before the end of this parliament and we will continue to explore how some of this funding can be used to support local authorities, charities and communities to plant more street trees and other urban trees.

Stewardship

We agree with the Commission's view that fostering long-term stewardship of land can play an important role in creating and maintaining places that are beautiful and durable, and which provide a diversity of building types and tenures within a cohesive framework. The National Design Guide refers specifically to the importance of long-term management and stewardship as one of the 10 characteristics of well-designed places, and the Commission's proposals set out how a stewardship model could be embedded in housing delivery. The Government is grateful to the Commission for these proposals. It is important that their overall costs and benefits, and their means of implementation, is fully explored before commitments can be made to take them further. Where they relate to tax, HM Treasury and HMRC will consider this carefully.

Homes England

Homes England's Corporate Plan sets out that it has an important role in influencing change in the sector, through leadership on design, diversity and modernisation. As such, Homes England has taken steps to champion design quality in their land disposals programme through implementation of a Design Quality Assessment, with a minimum standard which must be achieved for a proposal to progress. Since the Commission was convened, Homes England has continued to consider how this commitment can be further embedded through their processes and across the organisation's work, including the establishment of a masterplanning / design framework panel. They have initiated a cross-agency project to develop a strategic vision and framework for sustainability and design quality. We agree with the Commission's recommendation that Homes England should give greater weight to design quality in land disposals and consider how a design quality assessment process could be applied to its other programmes. As set out in our planning

White Paper, *Planning for the Future*, we intend to strengthen Homes England's objectives to give greater weight to design quality, and more deeply embed it in all of Homes England's activities and programmes of work. Objectives will form the basis of Homes England's Strategic Plan and their Annual Business Plan.

Detailed response to the recommendations

Planning: create a predictable, level playing field

Policy Proposition 1 - ask for beauty

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines the planning system's purpose as 'to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.'

- 1a. References to the importance of 'placemaking' and 'the creation of beautiful places' should be placed in chapter 2 as well as in chapter 12 of the NPPF, particularly in paragraphs 7 to 10, at the end of the first sentence of paragraph 17 and in paragraphs 72(c) on new settlement, 73 on buffers and 91 on green infrastructure. Beauty and placemaking should be strategic and cross-cutting themes.**
- 1b. References to 'good design' in the NPPF should be replaced with 'good design and beautiful places' particularly in the section on 'achieving sustainable development'.**

Government response

The Government strongly supports the Commission's recommendation for an overt focus on beauty in planning policy, to ensure the planning system can both encourage beauty and help to prevent ugliness, and we have brought forward changes to implement this. We are consulting on making beauty and place making strategic themes in the National Planning Policy Framework, and extending references to 'good design' to 'good design and beautiful places'. Draft changes to the National Planning Policy Framework reflecting these points and other recommendations made by the Commission have been published for consultation alongside this response.

- 1c. Beauty and placemaking should be embedded more widely across relevant Government strategies. They should also feature in relevant forthcoming Government legislation, such as the Environment Bill.**

Government response

The Government agrees that beauty and placemaking should be reflected in relevant strategies, and MHCLG will work with other government departments as policies are shaped to reflect this point. This will build on the way that beauty and placemaking are already being considered in a number of areas, such as in taking forward the response to the independent review of protected landscapes commissioned by DEFRA and led by Julian Glover with an experienced advisory group, and the Department for Transport's plans to revise its Manual for Streets guidance.

- 1d. We have heard much support for the government's recent guidance document Design: process and tools, as well as its new National Design Guide (one public**

sector planner told us it ‘would make things a lot easier’). We warmly endorse both the National Design Guide’s aim - to illustrate ‘how well-designed places that are beautiful, enduring and successful can be achieved in practice’ - and its contents. We particularly commend its focus on character and identity.

- **Local planning authorities should take up the strong encouragement in paragraph 34 to use the National Design Guide to prepare their own local plan policy, guidance and area-wide or site-specific codes in line with clear evidence of local preferences (see chapter 7).**
- **Where relevant, a similar aim should be embedded in other planning policy guidance.**
- **The National Design Guide could be improved further with even more emphasis and more visual explanation on façade quality and materials (the importance of elevational proportions, symmetry, window treatment, storey heights and a façade with both complexity and composure are not mentioned). The guide could illustrate more the importance of block size, type and structure (above all blocks with clear backs and fronts and the way in which houses face the street so that boundaries contain façades). The guide could also focus more on height to width (or enclosure) ratio and street proportions, grain and plot size and effective ways to meet the challenges of parking provision. It should contain even more on street trees and the need for a hierarchy of public squares, streets and green spaces.**

Government response

The Government agrees that more can be done to ensure that local planning authorities produce local design guides and codes, to apply the principles in the National Design Guide locally, and to further develop the principles which it contains. To address this, we have produced the National Model Design Code to supplement the National Design Guide, and local planning authorities will be expected to produce local design guides and codes based on this guidance.

The National Model Design Code sets out design parameters to be included in local codes, and sections of the National Design Guide have also been updated in line with the National Model Design Code. It includes further detail on block structure, enclosure ratios of successful streets, urban grain, ratio and hierarchy of public spaces and guidance on successful parking arrangements and placement of street trees. This is also reflected in the proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework which has been published for consultation. We are seeking views on the draft National Model Design Code alongside our proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Government also agrees that the importance of local design policies, guidance and codes should be reflected in other planning guidance, where relevant, and will reflect this as the guidance is updated.

1e. Paragraph 79e of the NPPF states that planning permission can be given for isolated houses in the countryside where design is ‘truly outstanding or

innovative’. This opens a loophole for designs that are not outstanding, but that are in some way innovative, in these precious sites. The words ‘or innovative’ should be removed. In cases like these, we should always insist on outstanding quality.

Government response

The Government agrees with this suggested amendment, on the basis that it will help ensure that outstanding quality can always be demanded, even if an innovative approach is taken. We have set out this change in revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework, published alongside this response for consultation, and would like to hear views on taking this forward.

Policy Proposition 2 - expect net gain not just ‘no net harm’

The planning system operates on the principle of minimising harm. The important paragraph 130 of the NPPF should be reworded to say:

‘Development that is not well designed should be refused. Well-designed development will take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, be properly served by infrastructure and will contribute towards meeting the needs of the wider community. It will also take into account...’

Government response

The Government agrees that the wording in the NPPF can be revised to make clear the need for well-designed development to improve the quality and attractiveness of places, and that poor quality schemes should be refused. This has been reflected in changes to the Framework which has been published for consultation.

Policy Proposition 3 - say no to ugliness

We have found good examples of schemes being turned down by the Planning Inspectorate on well-argued design grounds after developers appealed against rulings from local authorities. Such examples should be publicised, celebrated and used to encourage beautiful and popular placemaking and they should encourage neighbourhoods or local media to argue for less unpleasant development. Local planning authorities should feel the full support of government when they reject ugliness. Government and the Planning Inspectorate should have a consistent message about placemaking.

Government response

The Government agrees that planning appeal decisions should reflect strengthened policy on design, and promote a consistent message about the importance of securing beautiful places. We will work with the Planning Inspectorate, as well as organisations involved in promoting good design, to identify the most effective ways of publicising the lessons learnt from good examples of high quality schemes, as well as ones which have not secured approval.

Policy Proposition 4 - discover beauty locally

Local authorities, neighbourhood forums and parishes should be strongly encouraged to embed the national requirement for beauty and placemaking from the outset, before any decisions are made about allocating land or making development control decisions. What beauty means and the local ‘spirit of place’ should be discovered and defined empirically and visually by surveying local views on objective criteria as well as from deliberative engagement with the wider local population. Where appropriate, more detailed design codes should also be included in local plan documents, supplementary planning documents or neighbourhood plans. (See Policy Proposition 6 for more details).

These local codes should be living documents, able gradually to evolve, informed by ongoing engagement with residents on local preferences and desires. (See Policy Proposition 12). To affect this, the ‘achieving well-designed places’ section of the NPPF should, at paragraph 125, be more specific about what level of design detail is required and how local preferences are empirically understood. Paragraph 127 is helpful in defining some characteristics of good design. A requirement to apply this approach to policy for allocated sites would take it a step further.

Government response

The Government agrees that design expectations which reflect local preferences should be set out early and clearly in the planning process, and are consulting on amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework that clarify the way design principles and standards can be used in conjunction with site allocation policies.

Many local authorities and communities already use tools to influence design in their areas, such as design statements and character appraisals. Our National Model Design Code, which includes a model community engagement process, provides a framework for local authorities and communities to develop a more consistent approach, which reflects the character of each place and local design preferences. We have convened a new steering group to explore options for establishing a new expert design body to support local authorities and communities to make effective use of design guidance and codes, and monitor their application. The Government will continue to support neighbourhood planning to deliver beautiful places, including through the use of design codes.

Policy Proposition 5 - master-plan, don’t plan by appeal

Local planning authorities should be encouraged to take a more strategic and less reactive approach to their local plans. Steps to incorporate this would include:

- **More clarity on what and where. The ‘plan-making’ section of the NPPF should make it clear in paragraph 16 that plan proposals should provide a clear indication of the scale and design features of development that is proposed, particularly on strategic sites. This could be elaborated in paragraph 23 (which deals with broad locations for development) and in the ‘non-strategic policies’ section in paragraphs 28-30. The soundness test in paragraph 35 should be reworded to read ‘d) consistent with national policy - enabling the delivery of sustainable development, including the creation of beautiful places..’;**

Government response

The Government agrees that local design expectations can be used more effectively to support site allocation policies by making clear what is envisaged for each site, and have reflected this in proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework which has been published for consultation. The soundness test in paragraph 35 has been amended to reflect the importance of considering 'other statements of National Planning policies where relevant'. This is to allow more recent policy statements, such as Written Ministerial Statements, to be taken into account, including those which relate to the creation of more beautiful places.

- **Thinking more broadly about optimisation. We recommend the addition of text in paragraph 123 of the NPPF on the importance of area-based masterplanning in assessing and meeting the need to optimise, whilst also creating beautiful places. The piecemeal site by site approach leads to poor outcomes.**

Government response

The Government agrees that area-based masterplanning can play an important role in considering how to achieve a sensitive and effective approach to density, and this has been reflected in changes to the National Planning Policy Framework which have been published for consultation.

- **A process review. We recommend a review of the way in which sites are identified including the 'call for sites' process. The review should consider which process changes could reduce the adversarial consequences of the current approach, reduce the resource-pressure on local authorities and better encourage 'the right growth in the right place.'**
- **A timescale review. It takes too long to prepare local plans, supplementary planning documents and area action plans. We recommend a detailed review of how the process of creating local plans can be speeded up. Ultimately, local plans should be quicker to write and 'living documents' which can be updated more readily when circumstances change.**

Government response

The Government agrees that the ways in which land is identified for development, and that plans are prepared, is often inefficient, and that too many plans take too long to prepare and update. In our White Paper, *Planning for the Future*, we set out proposals to streamline the planning process by simplifying the role of local plans to focus on identifying land in three categories: areas for growth, renewal and protection. We proposed that general development management policies should be set nationally to allow local plans to focus on identifying site and area specific requirements, alongside locally produced design codes. We anticipate that this would lead to plans being significantly shorter in length, and quicker to produce (the White Paper proposes a 30 month timescale for plan production). Our proposals highlighted the importance of democratising the planning process by putting a new emphasis on effective engagement at the plan-making stage. We have consulted on these proposed reforms and will be responding soon.

- **Thinking long-term as well as medium-term. We understand and respect why the government has increased the focus on five year land supply. This has had the very welcome consequence of obliging councils to have local plans in place. However, a longer time frame is necessary when thinking about new settlements, urban extensions and infrastructure investment. We recommend that the phrase ‘within the context of a longer 30-year vision is’ added to paragraph 22 of the NPPF.**

Government response

The Government agrees that councils who wish to plan for new settlements and major urban extensions will need to look over a longer time frame, such as 30 years. We have reflected this in proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, which has been published for consultation.

Policy Proposition 6 - use provably popular form-based codes

Local planning authorities should develop more detailed design policy interventions, such as provably popular form-based codes and pattern books, as a basis for considering planning applications. We believe that form-based codes and non-negotiable infrastructure including green infrastructure (as with the Community Infrastructure Levy) are often appropriate ways to embed quality in a popular and predictable way. In time, this should also help making some policies more machine-readable, so that we can use new technology efficiently to support the robust assessment of development quality. A series of changes to guidance documents would encourage this.

- **The government’s July 2019 guidance on plan-making in the ‘What should a plan look like’ section states that:
‘Where sites are proposed for allocation, sufficient detail should be given to provide clarity to developers, local communities and other interested parties about the nature and scale of development.’ This should be more specific, requiring a minimum level of detail.**
- **The local plan should apply the approach taken in the national planning practice guidance on design at the local level, reflecting local circumstances, by setting clear area-wide design criteria, and local planning authorities should consider adopting a co-ordinating code approach in the local plan, particularly for strategic sites. It should also define the requirement for masterplanned area action plans in order to coordinate development across sites in any defined growth area, as well as the application of a co-ordinating code or similar approach to allocated non-strategic sites. These should be prepared as supplementary planning documents or in Neighbourhood Plans prior to the commencement of any planning application process.**
- **Pages 23 to 28 of the government’s July 2019 guidance on plan making deal with the evidence required when preparing a local plan. Other than ‘conservation and**

the historic environment' there is no section which deals with evidence that might support design policies, such as character assessment. This should be included.

Government response

The Government strongly agrees that more specific expectations for design should be set out locally, drawing on local character and popular forms of development, and is taking steps to implement this approach. The National Model Design Code, which we are seeking views on, provides a stronger and more consistent basis for using local design codes in all parts of the country. We are also consulting on amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure that design guides and codes are used more comprehensively (including as a co-ordinating mechanism across sites), and updating planning guidance to be clearer about the types of information that can be used to support plan allocations, and which should inform plan policies on design.

In proposals set out in *Planning for the Future* we highlight the importance of detailed design tools, including design codes and the use of pattern books, to reflect this higher regard for design quality. It also proposes that for growth areas a masterplan and site-specific code should be agreed as a condition of the permission being granted through the local plan. We also set out proposals to allow the pre-approval of popular and replicable designs through a new form of permitted development. We have consulted on these proposals and will be responding soon.

- **The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out the legal requirements for local planning authorities when preparing local plans and supplementary planning documents. They specify their form and content very generally. There is no specific reference to design. There is scope to specify the minimum design policy level for different types of site.**
- **The government's Design: process and tools guidance gives helpful and positive advice to local planning authorities on design policy and its associated tools. It also provides useful advice on assessment frameworks, design review and effective community engagement on design. The 'What role can non-strategic policies play?' section refers specifically to the establishment of local and/or detailed design principles for an area, including design requirements for site specific allocations. The wording might however be strengthened to move from encouragement ('can') to something closer to requirement, ('should' or, in some circumstances, 'must').**

Government response

The Government agrees with the intentions behind these recommendations, but does not intend to take forward the specific proposals. Planning policy and guidance are more suitable than regulations for setting out how plans and supplementary documents can deal with design for different types of site. As explained above, we intend to use a combination of strengthened policy and guidance to address this point in the short term, ahead of wider changes to the planning system set out in our White Paper, *Planning for the Future*.

Policy Proposition 7: make the National Model Design Code local

We support the government’s proposal to publish a National Model Design Code, which will function as a template for local authorities to develop, their own codes in accordance with local needs and preferences and to support better urbanism and mixed use as described in Policy Proposition 27. The model code should include the following elements:

- **Design guidance relying on numbers, specifications and images more than words. The model code should define the segments, ratios, façade patterns or cross-sections that make for popular and well-designed places. Local authorities would not be required to accept these definitions in their own codes, but they would form a template to help local planning authorities understand what they need to define. The national code should provide measured and illustrated exemplars of how all these good principles come together in street segments, public space segments, building and street patterns. These can be stylistically neutral and should take account of parking and servicing.**
- **Guidance on what goes where. A street hierarchy, and the difference between a good central, urban or suburban street (including levels of mixed use), needs to be set out and illustrated so that it is clear where different elements of guidance are most relevant in different types of place.**
- **Guidance on scales of development. The National Model Design Code should give examples of what is relevant for various scales of development so that local authorities are helped to be clear about what is (and is not) being scrutinised.**
- **Guidance on turning The National Model Design Code into a local code. The national code should contain a clear and straightforward suggested process to help turn it into local policy. This will need to include surveying local preferences empirically and should lay great weight on harmonising with local vernaculars. A way to trial the approach might include only applying it to land allocated in the development plan, so that we can ensure the right development in the right place. Pilot design codes could initially be created deliberately in a community-led supplementary planning document. They might also be subject to a ‘prior approval’ procedure for layout and external appearance. In this way, beauty is used as a mechanism to shape, rather than prevent, development.**

Government response

The Government welcomes the Commission’s support for a National Model Design Code, on which we are seeking the public’s views. The Code establishes a template for local authorities to develop their own codes based on local character and preferences. The supporting illustrations may be applied as a default set of standards, as appropriate, in the absence of locally produced codes.

The Code builds on the National Design Guide by adding further detail to the ten characteristics of well-designed places, using exemplars, and reflects the Commission’s suggestions. For example, it includes illustrations of street hierarchy, block patterns, building patterns and forms, public space hierarchy, and building proportions. It is stylistically neutral and covers related issues such as car parking layouts. It covers design

parameters applicable to different scales and development typologies to cover central urban, urban, suburban and rural locations. It includes illustrations of good practice for typical conditions, that should be interpreted and applied locally. The scope of the Code, and how it will be applied as part of the planning process, will be developed further with input from local authorities, communities, consultants, developers, and industry experts. We are seeking views on a draft of the National Model Design Code, alongside changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

Policy Proposition 8 - require permitted development to have standards

There is scope for targeted and carefully drafted use of permitted development rights to free up the delivery of new development, whilst ensuring it achieves better placemaking. But we are not there yet. One way to keep the supply-side advantages of permitted development rights but with some basic standards, would be to move minimum home or room sizes into building regulations. This would prevent some of the worst excesses that have come to light in office to residential conversion. We support this but it is not enough.

The government should evolve a mechanism whereby meaningful local standards of design and placemaking can efficiently apply to permitted development rights. This is not possible at present under the current legal arrangement. It should be. Where it is appropriate, to build housing via permitted development rights or permission in principle should require strict adherence to a very clear (but limited) set of rules on betterment payment and design clearly set in the local plan, supplementary planning document or community code as set out above. If these rules are followed, then approval should be a matter of course. There are precedents for this. For example, permitted development rights for residential extensions requires matching materials.

The Commission recommends that adherence to established design guidance, coupled with a certification process, not unlike the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method ('BREEAM') but directed to the sense of place, is embedded into an overhauled 'prior approval' process. It is outside the scope of this report to undertake that drafting, but we consider it to be an important 'next step' following these recommendations.

Government response

The Government agrees that permitted development rights play an important role in enabling specific types of development to come forward easily, subject to appropriate limitations and conditions to control their impact and protect local amenity. We agree that the quality of design of these homes should not be disregarded. That is why we announced in September 2020 that from 6 April 2021, all new homes delivered through permitted development rights will be required to meet the Nationally Described Space Standard. This change builds on reforms introduced by the Government on 1 August 2020 to ensure that all new homes delivered through permitted development provide adequate natural light in all habitable rooms. All homes, whether granted permission through a national permitted development right or on a planning application, are required to meet Building Regulations.

The Government also agrees that the design of development is important to consider, whatever the route through which permission is granted. However, the degree of control needs to be balanced with the scale and nature of development, how it is brought forward and its likely impacts. With Permission in Principle, design matters are considered by the local planning authority at the Technical Details Consent stage, as they would be for an application for planning permission. As the report indicates, some permitted development rights for extensions or alterations to buildings require the use of similar materials to those in the existing buildings. The rights for change of use to residential, where building works are allowed, are subject to prior approval by the local planning authority with regard to the design or external appearance of the building. The Government are considering how design can be reflected appropriately as further permitted development rights are brought forward, in the context of its wider work on design and planning reform (including the introduction of the National Model Design Code).

Policy Proposition 9: permit a fast track for beauty

If a robust design policy, which is based on community engagement and which has been properly examined, has been established, the detailed planning application stage should be relatively straightforward. The focus should be on compliance with the site-specific design policy, whether contained in the local plan or in a supplementary planning document.

Building on Policy Proposition 8, the Commission sees a role for both development management policy, permitted development rights and local development orders to increase delivery of development, both in speed and amount, where it can demonstrate the achievement of beauty through building in a way which aligns with, rather than opposing, the locally distinctive sense of place. In this way, developers should be incentivised to deliver, indeed actively promote, beauty through their schemes. We believe that more will be achieved through a system that rewards beauty than one that seeks to impose it by regulation. Again, developing legislative and policy pathways to reward beauty, and place its achievement at an advantage, is an important ‘next step’ for the purposes of this report.

Government response

The Government strongly supports the idea that well-designed and beautiful schemes, which reflect local design guidance and standards, should be able to proceed swiftly through the planning system. To implement a ‘fast track for beauty’ in the first instance, we are consulting on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure that proposals which meet local design guidance and standards have a positive advantage and greater certainty about their prospects of swift approval. Going beyond this, proposals set out in the White Paper, *Planning for the Future*, suggested additional routes through which the planning process could be streamlined for schemes which meet recognised standards of good design: requiring the production of a masterplan and design code so that large sites (‘growth areas’) can be given permission through the plan with an agreed framework for securing design quality; and widening and changing the nature of permitted development, so that it enables popular and replicable forms of development to be approved easily and quickly. We have consulted on these proposals and will respond in due course.

To underpin these changes, the National Model Design Code and local design codes will play an important role in creating clear design expectations for local areas, providing greater clarity for developing proposals and decision making, and helping to speed up decisions by reducing delays caused by unclear policies.

Policy Proposition 10 - ensure enforcement

Where masterplans or designs are approved, it is those schemes that should be built - not a diluted version down the line. There should be more efficient management of conditions applications, of alterations and a greater probability of enforcement, with stricter sanctions where necessary. Clearer, shorter, more visual local plans should help, but additional ways to achieve this which we recommend include:

- **Encouraging specificity on issues such as materials in detailed planning applications.**
- **Supporting the use of centres of excellence to aid local planning authorities' enforcement teams.**
- **Strengthening enforcement penalties for a Breach of Conditions Notice from a maximum of £2,500 to perhaps ten times that. (Breach of Enforcement Notice is already unlimited). The government should also consider permitting authorities to obtain proceeds from a Process of Crime Act order in relation to breach of condition notices.**
- **Tightening the approach and digitising the process of signing off the discharge conditions and regulating non-material and minor alterations. Might it be a requirement that building control sign-off cannot be achieved without adherence to design quality requirements?**
- **Involving enforcement teams in early discussions about the scheme. This would permit them to understand the relative priorities of members and officers, and the importance of the design features of a scheme. This appears to happen very rarely, if at all, at present.**

Government response

The Government agrees that approved schemes should be carried through to completion, which is why we strengthened national planning policy in 2018 to make clear the importance of ensuring that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, for example through changes to approved details such as the materials.

Our planning guidance suggests agreeing key design details in initial permissions, as well as ensuring that when conditions are discharged these do not undermine the quality of a scheme. Planning authorities are also encouraged to develop strategies to maintain the design quality of significant schemes, such as by encouraging the retention of design consultants from the planning application team and the use of design review at appropriate intervals. It also makes clear the importance of site inspections in ensuring compliance.

Planning guidance is also clear that effective pre-application discussions can help to establish early in the process what issues may need to be the subject of conditions. Conditions imposed need to be proportionate to the development. Local planning authorities should ensure decisions to discharge conditions are made in a timely manner. We agree with the Commission that there is scope to improve the way that planning conditions are framed and discharged, and included proposals in the White Paper *Planning for the Future* to strengthen enforcement powers and sanctions so that as we move towards a more rules-based system, communities can have confidence that those rules will be upheld. We also set out options for further digitisation of the planning system and planning processes. However, we do not agree that building regulations compliance should be made subject to design quality requirements, as the purpose of the two regimes should remain distinct in this respect.

Effective planning enforcement is important to the integrity of the planning system, and the department has funded the RTPI to produce the first Planning Enforcement Handbook, published in May 2020. The Government has also committed to consulting on strengthening national planning policy on intentional unauthorised development and extending the effective period for temporary stop notices.

In the case of the most serious enforcement related offences – non-compliance with enforcement notices, temporary stop notices and stop notices and for giving false or misleading response to a planning contravention notice – the courts can impose an unlimited fine on conviction. As part of the consultation on enforcement, we will seek views on whether the current penalty for breach of condition notices should be increased. We are aware that some local planning authorities are using the Proceeds of Crime Act in relation to planning offences. We will explore how best to encourage further use of these powers where appropriate.

Enforcement activities are an integral and important part of local authorities' planning services, and we agree that it can be helpful to involve enforcement officers early in particular schemes to ensure that planning decisions and conditions are likely to be enforceable.

Communities: bring the democracy forward

Policy Proposition 11: ensure public engagement, is wide, deep and early using tried and tested tools for engagement such as ‘Enquiry by Design’ as well as testing place and visual preferences more widely by using surveys. Democracy needs to move forward to the local plan phase.

- **Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 sets out the minimum consultation requirements at the start of the local plan preparation process. Regulation 19 requires publication of the proposed submission documents, before submission to the Secretary of State. Neither stage is really appropriate for effective community engagement on general or site-specific design matters. This is effectively recognised by many local planning authorities who often carry out more informal consultation exercises. We need to strengthen community engagement requirements in the regulations.**
- **In addition, landowners and developers might be able to fund local authorities to run a strategic planning exercise to plan for the most appropriate areas for future growth, based on predicted housing numbers. As part of this process, landowners and developers could be encouraged to put forward representations on specific sites with commitments against place standards and mixed use, specified by the local authority, to give an objective and equitable assessment process that would level the playing field before a housing allocation is granted. That would put those landowners and developers prepared to commit to higher standards in a better position at the local plan stage. Very careful protocols would be necessary so that participating landowners or developers could not exert undue influence.**
- **On large sites, many landowners and developers already prepare their own design codes. This should be supported and use of the Model National Design Code structure as a template encouraged when published. In this case perhaps a smaller commuted sum could be paid to provide resource within the local authority to help with the coordination of engagement events where local urban, architectural, landscape types and building materials are collated to avoid the local community being consulted separately multiple times on individual sites, creating consultation fatigue. Centres of Excellence could help with this. (See policy proposal 39). This contribution to strategic planning and localised code making would create greater clarity and certainty for those sites being allocated and should permit greater speed through the planning process.**
- **Local planning authorities should follow a nationally recognised process for co-design (using for example Enquiry by Design or charrettes) to ensure that the right level of engagement is being carried out at the right time with the correct level of representation from statutory authorities, key stakeholders and professionals as well as local communities. This agreed process would make plan-making much more accessible to non-professionals and facilitate the transfer of best practice across the country.**

- **Much greater weight should be placed in planning applications on the criteria set out within the Statement of Community Involvement to demonstrate how proposals have evolved as a result of local feedback and how that information has been translated into local design codes and standards.**

Government response

The Government agrees that effective community involvement should play a central role in the planning process, both through plan-making (including neighbourhood planning) and in preparing and assessing development proposals. There is scope to improve community engagement, using existing tools as well as digital technology, and the Commission has highlighted a range of opportunities.

As part of our work to prepare the National Model Design Code, we have considered how it can be applied by landowners and developers on specific sites, as well as across wider areas by local authorities and neighbourhood planning groups.

The Government also agrees about the importance of using the right consultation tools and data for engaging communities early and meaningfully in the planning process. The planning practice guidance note on Design: Process and Tools supports this aim by expanding on what tools and methods, such as Enquiry by Design, charrettes, community panels and digital methods can be used to ensure the engagement with communities in the design process is inclusive, diverse and representative. The Statements of Community Involvement (SCI) prepared by local authorities can be used to set out clearly their aims and methods to engage with local communities.

However, the Government recognises the need to go further with greater, and more effective, engagement of communities in preparing local plans. In *Planning for the Future* we set out aspirations to move the democracy forward in the planning process and give neighbourhoods and communities an earlier and more meaningful voice in the future of their area as plans are made, harnessing digital technology to make it much easier to access and understand information about specific planning proposals. We have consulted on these proposals and will respond soon.

Policy Proposition 12: move public engagement from analogue to digital

Despite some improvements, there remain huge opportunities to use digital technology more effectively to improve decision making, option testing and to engage with a wider section of the community earlier in the plan-making and development process. The attractiveness or otherwise of the proposals should be an explicit topic for engagement. Government should encourage these for both plan-making and development control. Three years from now it should be required that fully digital massing models and images of proposed developments or local codes are routinely available online and in a machine-readable format to the general public for all-round visiting, feedback and voting. Planning needs to shift from being an analogue process to operate more effectively in a digital age. Clearer language and a lack of jargon should continue to be encouraged alongside greater use of imagery of possible development.

Government response

The Government agrees that there are considerable opportunities to use digital technology more widely to support community engagement in the planning process, and this need has been accelerated by social distancing introduced due to COVID-19. Underpinning this is the need to make all planning information more accessible and web-friendly. We therefore intend to accelerate our work on digitising planning data and promoting common standards, building on the work already done on local plans and planning applications. We have also been preparing guidance on how to create more effective digital planning notices and how we can make local plans more accessible.

Through our White Paper *Planning for the Future* we have explored how this can be taken further. The use of digital processes is essential to improve the user experience of the planning system, helping to make planning information easier to find and understand. New digital tools and apps can make it dramatically easier for people to engage and provide input regarding proposals; and do this on-the-go and on a range of devices. We have consulted on these proposals and will be responding soon.

Policy Proposition 13: empower communities

We believe that the government should continue to support community-led development and to consider what policy changes can help CLTs, neighbourhood groups and small businesses to deliver more new homes and improve places. Many of our proposals should help with this, but in addition we would specifically recommend:

- **Ongoing funding support for community housing projects, with a sensible long-term commitment, such as for the next five years;**
- **Considering how to align community housing, planning and regeneration funding alongside section 106 agreements and other resources to turbo-charge community-led development;**
- **Expanding the scope of the 2011 Localism Act's Community Right to Build Orders and strengthen and streamline community rights to buy assets of community value; and**
- **Empowering communities from council-owned estates with greater responsibility for their homes and their neighbourhoods' development by investigating the facilitation of stock transfers to CLT housing associations. CLTs have a 'discretion' not to sell homes via Right to Buy. It would be sensible for a Written Ministerial Statement to make this clearer and exempt CLTs from future tenure reforms so that they can remain community-led.**

Government response

The Government agrees that the community-led housing sector offers significant potential for helping people to meet their housing needs across England. Since its launch in 2018, the Community Housing Fund has been successful in building a pipeline of over 10,000 new homes. The Government will continue to support community housing projects and has made £4 million available from the National Home Building Fund to support community-

based organisations bringing forward local housebuilding projects. We will also be publishing an update to our self and custom-build planning practice guidance.

We will continue to help people who want to build their own homes find plots of land. Communities wishing to prepare Orders for development, which include an element of affordable housing for sale are now eligible for up to £50k in grant and technical planning support. We are committed to improving the Assets of Community Value scheme and making it easier for community groups to protect and take over local assets. We intend to increase the moratorium period from six months to nine months to give communities more time to prepare a bid and raise funds. We will also look at the effectiveness of the existing regime to ensure that any legislation the Government introduces will meet our objective of supporting communities to protect those assets that are under threat.

We also agree that communities from council-owned estates should be empowered and we have been clear that we will support communities living on council estates who want to take ownership of the land and buildings they live in. The Government has encouraged stock transfer where this represents good value for money and utilises additional private investment to deliver growth and a long-term future for estates and neighbourhoods. However, residents must be fully involved in any plans and decision-making over the future ownership of their homes.

We are committed to the Right to Buy for all council tenants and we are currently piloting in the Midlands the voluntary Right to Buy scheme for housing association tenants. As the Commission identifies, under the terms of the voluntary agreement with housing associations, community land trusts would have discretion over which properties they choose to sell. This was made clear both in the voluntary agreement and during the passage of the Housing and Planning Act 2016. We recognise the community-led sector's concerns (with the exception of housing co-operatives) that they would not have an exemption from the voluntary Right to Buy scheme.

Policy Proposition 14: permit intensification with consent

The Government should investigate ways of facilitating gentle suburban intensification and mixed use, with the consent of local communities. In particular, it should consider the possibility of allowing individual streets to vote to opt in to limited additional permissions, subject to design codes. The Government should investigate which types of streets this approach might work in, how to pilot it and what the challenges might be.

Government response

The Government agrees that gentle intensification and mixed uses in suburban areas can bring benefits, and the National Planning Policy Framework encourages this approach as part of making effective use of land. Communities that wish to develop a vision for their areas, or for specific sites, can engage in neighbourhood planning, whether through producing locally-specific policies or proposals for individual sites or groups of sites. We are continuing to support communities to achieve these aims through the provision of grant funding and technical support for neighbourhood planning. The grants can be used, for

example, for evidence gathering activities such as surveys and community engagement, while specific technical support packages are available for the preparation of design codes.

The Government has brought forward additional permitted development rights which will allow communities to pursue specific forms of intensification such as the construction of additional storeys to deliver new homes, subject to the local planning authority considering the external appearance of the development, without requiring a full planning application.

The Commission's proposal for enabling specific streets to opt in to additional rights, subject to design codes, is an interesting extension of these principles. In the White Paper *Planning for the Future* we included proposals to widen and change the nature of permitted development to enable popular and replicable forms of development to be approved easily and quickly, helping to support 'gentle intensification' of our towns and cities, but in accordance with important design principles. We have consulted on these proposals and will respond soon.

Stewardship

Policy Proposition 15: create a recognised ‘stewardship kitemark’ and associated training.

We recommend that industry bodies, landowners and the Government should co-operate to create a recognised ‘stewardship kitemark.’ This would reflect the quality developers and advisers’ previous projects and have a series of legal and management standards on the approach to land, mixed use, the pooling of risk and returns, governance, place standards and supply chain. Some level of independent monitoring of these would be necessary. It could make use of existing resources such as the Urban Design Compendium 2. Attainment of this ‘stewardship kitemark’ would come with costs but it would also provide access to benefits of finance and tax treatment as set out below. It could underpin new protocols of public and private partnership working. The skills required to deliver this would include planning, surveying, urban design, project management and knowledge of public/private partnership working and governance, corporate and project finance and community engagement. Industry, educational bodies and Government could co-operate on a new mid-career course (perhaps a specialist MBA or the like) to develop the right skills.

Policy Proposition 16: provide access to a patient capital fund for schemes meeting the ‘stewardship kitemark’.

For situations that meet the ‘stewardship kitemark’ the public sector should make available long-term funding to support infrastructure, stewardship and placemaking expenditure. This means not ‘competing’ with the banking sector on the same terms (as is currently happening with some Homes England support) but rather carefully assessing the ‘gap’ in the funding landscape and applying patient publicly sourced capital to plug the gap, and to demonstrate a new investment asset class in land and infrastructure. This could be structured in many ways. One might be for the Government to set up a thematic fund, conditioned specifically on a ‘stewardship kitemark’ to support high quality placemaking on a long-term, patient equity basis. Such a fund might be administered nationally, although deployed in partnership with local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships. If state aid rules no longer apply following Brexit, such a patient capital fund might provide long-term competitive rates, with flexible repayment options. This approach would probably require an important change in the strategic aims and focus of Homes England (see Policy Proposition 42).’

Policy Proposition 17: create a level tax playing field between long-term and short-term approaches to development above all for schemes meeting the recognised ‘stewardship kite mark’.

The accountancy firm Saffery Champness and the Chartered Institute of Taxation have suggested to us various ways to achieve this:

- One possibility is a land pooling vehicle that ‘freezes’ the tax status of the land at the point of entry into the pooling vehicle if it passes an agreed ‘stewardship kite

mark'. This would preserve the status of the land pre-pooling. As with the traditional model, tax would be charged at the point a tranche of land is sold and a pro rata share of the proceeds paid out. If the development does not proceed, the land would revert to the landowner without triggering a tax charge.

- A second possibility would be more discretion for the Government to grant case by case tax treatment for stewardship development schemes. This would require wider permissive statutory power to HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to grant particular tax treatment to landowners participating in a development that satisfies the defined requirements of a sustainable stewardship development. The costs of agreeing and exercising the power would need to be met, at least in part, out of the development. A range of different specific steps might make this possible.

These include:

- The timing of the taxation liabilities in true joint ventures could be addressed by amending the current relief which defers the capital gain into the trading stock cost;
- The vagaries in relation to the application of the transactions in land rules could be better set out in HMRC's guidance;
- Consideration should also be given to the extension of rollover relief and Entrepreneurs' Relief to receipts under building lease arrangements;
- The current land-pooling trust could be brought into the statute so there is no doubt about its taxation status. Consideration should also be given to extending rollover relief and Entrepreneurs' Relief to receipts from a land pooling trust, if the land in question would have qualified before the trust was established.
- This principle could be extended to the creation of a new Tax Transparent Vehicle to bring landowners, developers, investors and infrastructure expertise together along with funding from public sources, institutions or individuals.
- Consideration could also be given to introducing a tax credit system, similar to that enjoyed in the creative sector, for developments which adhere to strict criteria in relation to quality and sustainability.

Finally, consideration could also be given to extending the current replacement property provisions for agricultural property relief and business property relief to interest in land-pooling trusts, so that the current IHT consequences are mitigated. These are obviously technical issues of tax law and accountancy. Whilst we are confident that this is an important issue that needs resolution, more work is required together with HMRC to agree the optimum way forward. A short-term expert commission should be established to review these options in more detail working with HMRC, HM Treasury and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.'

Government response

Our ambitious ten point plan for a green industrial revolution marks the beginning of the UK's path to net zero. It 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, planting 30,000 hectares of trees every year, whilst creating and retaining thousands of jobs. These are themes that were highlighted in the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's report and which are given a strong emphasis in this response, and in our National Model Design Code.

The Government agrees that fostering long-term stewardship of land can play an important role in creating and maintaining places that are beautiful and durable, and which provide a diversity of building types and tenures within a cohesive framework. The National Design Guide refers specifically to the importance of long-term management and stewardship as one of the 10 characteristics of well-designed places, and the Commission's proposals set out how a stewardship model could be embedded in housing delivery.

The Government is grateful to the Commission for these proposals. It is important that their overall costs and benefits, and their means of implementation, is fully explored before commitments can be made to take them further. Where they relate to tax, HM Treasury and HMRC will consider this carefully.

Policy Proposition 18: support the right development in the right place.

We recommend that the government:

- **Investigates how county councils, unitary authorities and mayoralities might be further encouraged to work collaboratively, together with the Local Enterprise and Local Nature Partnerships (LEP and LNPs) – perhaps by extending the Duty to Co-operate to more public sector bodies in an area;**
- **Investigates whether in some cases county councils can be encouraged to produce spatial development strategies (without duplication of districts) as unitary authorities are required to do by paragraph 119 of the NPPF;**
- **Investigates the scope to increase modelling capacity and bring together datasets that sit within different government departments to help improve geospatial and market data to inform larger than local decision making; and**
- **Investigates more widely whether counties, city mayors and parishes should be taking a more material role in the strategic and spatial planning process. If there were to be a reduced role for districts in strategic planning, it may be appropriate in some circumstances to recreate counties lost in the 1974 reforms to help link decisions to local identity. Any changes of this nature should be phased in slowly.**

Government response

The Government agrees that effective collaboration between authorities – including planning at a strategic level – are important for helping to secure the right development in the right places. Through the White Paper *Planning for the Future* we have proposed abolishing the Duty to Cooperate. Local planning authorities, combined authorities and county councils should continue to work together and with other organisations (such as Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Nature Partnerships), notwithstanding any longer-term proposals set out in the *Planning for the Future* White Paper.

We will be developing detailed proposals over the coming months to ensure that the planning system operates more quickly, more openly and with more certainty and provides the homes, economic and environmental outcomes that are needed through good quality and well designed sustainable development.

The Government intends to provide more access to data in an open data format from both government itself and its agencies. We will work with partners towards providing key national and local datasets which support Local Plan preparation in an open data format. Furthermore, *Planning for the Future* places a digital approach at the heart of the new planning system.

Policy Proposition 19: end the disincentive to public sector involvement in stewardship schemes.

In the medium term the government should update guidance on when sales below highest value can take place in order to facilitate long-term schemes especially where it would further the goals of the Public Sector Equality Duty. In the long-term reform of S123 of the Local Government Act 1972 should be considered.

Government response

The Government agrees that public sector land has the potential to play an important role in developing a stewardship model. Government policy on the disposal of land starts from the principle that local authorities and other public bodies should sell surplus land for the best consideration that can be reasonably obtained. However, the Government also recognises that, in some instances, it may be appropriate for local authorities and the Greater London Authority to dispose of land at an undervalue because wider public benefits, economic, social or environmental, would be created by that disposal. This may, for example, help support local community initiatives and facilitate regeneration projects that deliver new housing, including the provision of affordable housing.

Local authorities have powers (including under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972) to dispose of land in any manner they wish, subject to complying with their legal obligations. If a disposal is for less than best consideration that can reasonably be obtained, the Secretary of State's consent is required. In October 2018, we published '*Planning Reform: Supporting the high street and increasing the delivery of new homes*', which consulted on proposals to give local authorities greater flexibility to dispose of their surplus land at an undervalue where doing so is considered to deliver wider economic, social or environmental benefits. We are considering the responses to that consultation and intend to make an announcement on the way forward shortly.

Regeneration: end the scandal of ‘left-behind’ places

Policy Proposition 20: appoint a Minister for Place

Placemaking and supporting the spatial quality of life of our citizens in villages, towns and cities should become a primary concern of government. Caring about people means caring about place, as up to 40 per cent of our personal health outcomes are a function of where we live, not who we are.

- **There should always be a member of Cabinet who is a ‘champion for place’ and whose responsibilities include the quality of place in England.**
- **This would at present be the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government but might in a future cabinet be the Deputy Prime Minister or Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.**
- **In addition, there should be a Minister for Place at the Minister of State level. We are not going to move away from necessary government specialisms (‘silos’) in housing, transport and other infrastructure. We are not suggesting organisational change. But the role of the Minister of Place is to help the unavoidable silos to work better strategically together so that issues of new housing and transport are better integrated.**

Government response

The Government agrees that creating and maintain places that offer a high quality of life should be a central goal of everyone involved in the planning and development process. The public health challenge posed by the COVID-19 virus has highlighted the vital role of our local environments for promoting health and wellbeing.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government is the member of Cabinet who is responsible for championing well-designed and maintained places, which includes national leadership on housing, planning, regeneration and local government. To fulfil this role, the Secretary of State works collaboratively with many other Cabinet Ministers to ensure successful placemaking, including with the Secretary of State for Transport, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and with relevant Ministers of State, in particular, the Minister for Housing and Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government.

Policy Proposition 21: appoint a Chief Place-maker in all local authorities to champion beautiful placemaking

Championing good design and placemaking should come from the top in each council and should include an understanding of the whole place and what necessarily distinct silos (housing, highways and infrastructure) are trying to achieve.

- **Quality of place should be a primary corporate responsibility of the Leader and Chief Executive of all local authorities.**
- **There should be a Cabinet Member responsible for place and a senior officer with this responsibility within the senior management team. This role will often (though not always) be the Chief Planning Officer, though they will need experience beyond planning, particularly in infrastructure or the environment.**
- **Quality of place needs to be understood in terms not of ‘good design’ but of provable relationships between urban form with health, well-being and sustainability, as well as empirical data on what local people like.**
- **This role should explicitly operate across departmental silos so that placemaking is used to enhance environment, social, economic and built capital.**
- **Placemakers should receive support to underpin their understanding of the relationship between urban design with wellbeing, health and sustainability.**

Government response

The Government agrees that each local authority should have clear political and official-level leads for placemaking, who can work across boundaries and galvanise corporate commitment to improving the design quality of homes and neighbourhoods. As the Commission recognises, this can be done in different ways, and so there needs to be flexibility in how the role is approached within individual authorities.

In the White Paper *Planning for the Future*, we proposed that in order ‘To drive a strong vision for what each place aspires to, and ensure this is integrated across council functions, we believe that each authority should appoint a chief officer for design and placemaking’. We have consulted on these proposals and will respond soon.

Policy Proposition 22: regenerate ‘regeneration’ to being place-led

It should become normal to expect both central government and local government to have very clear strategies and operating plans for places. Public sector equity and investment should be used to help share risk, and future rewards, over a longer time horizon than five years. In this context, we welcome some of the government’s recent spending announcements on towns and high streets.

For central government this will be about supporting local government. For local government, it will be about improving the bottom-up infrastructure of beautiful streets and buildings. Very often government support should stay focused on the core question: what improvements to ‘place quality’ can help improve the desire of people to live and work; start businesses and raise families in this settlement?

Government response

The Government agrees about the importance of a place-led approach to regeneration, including clear long-term strategies with a focus on quality of place at the local authority level. We encourage local authorities to set a clear vision for regeneration that meets local growth and residents' needs and aligns with the approach set out in their local plan.

In December 2018, the High Streets Expert Panel, led by Sir John Timpson, called for an 'Upside Down Government' approach which would empower local leaders to implement their plans to reinvent their town centres: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-high-street-report>.

Since then, the Government has:

- Set up the High Street Task Force to support local leadership in developing place-based strategies. This Task Force is providing a crucial role in working with local authorities to help them set their own vision for what is needed in their areas
- Continued to provide funding via the Business Improvement Districts (BID) Loan Fund which seeks to enable places to create BIDs within a local area, to provide additional placemaking and improvement services and provide high quality leadership for regeneration, including support for neighbourhood plans and wider planning matters
- Announced the £3.6bn Towns Fund to give local leadership the resources they need to start enacting our vision of 'levelling-up' by improving place quality so that left behind places become more desirable places in which to live and work
- Announced the launch of a new Levelling Up Fund worth £4bn for England, that will attract up to £800m for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the usual way. This will invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities and will support economic recovery
- Established the Urban Centre Recovery Task Force that will consider the impacts of Covid-19 over the short and medium term and offer recommendations on practical measures that government could take to help city centres to adapt and take advantage of new opportunities

Policy Proposition 23: align tax for existing and new places

We believe that the government should make bringing derelict buildings back into use VAT free, or charge at most a reduced VAT of 5%. It should do the same for core improvements to existing buildings, including reroofing, extensions, conversions and renewable heating. It is not necessary that VAT be reduced for DIY or interior decoration, which do not have corresponding environmental significance. We believe that it is possible that such a move could;

- **Provide a £15.1 billion stimulus to the wider UK economy and 95,480 extra jobs by 2020; and**
- **Lead to almost 240,000 tonnes of CO2 equivalent savings from 92,000 homes. Similar VAT reductions have resulted in an increase in consumer demand and employment in the Isle of Man and the Netherlands.**

Government response

The Government agrees that it is important to bring derelict buildings back into effective use, especially where this can help to meet local needs and maintain local character. Supplies used for residential renovations, such as building services and materials, can be liable for a reduced VAT rate of 5%, subject to certain conditions. This includes conversions of buildings from one residential use to another, and the renovation of properties that have been empty for two years or more prior to the renovation work. In 2018 the Structures and Building Allowance (SBA) was introduced, as a means of incentivising both the building of new, and renovating of old, commercial structures and buildings. Where renovations include revenue expenditure (which can be identified as repairs), such amounts can be fully deducted against taxable profits.

We do not intend to make further changes to the VAT treatment of renovations and environmentally friendly home improvements at present. However, we will continue to explore opportunities for incentives to support our economy. We will also encourage investment in repairs and maintenance and which reflect our commitment to levelling-up and net zero whilst balancing cost to the exchequer.

Policy Proposition 24: encourage the recycling of buildings

Government and local authorities should consider an ‘adaptability test’ embedded in the process of granting planning permission. We should take the measure one stage further, since adaptability is the sine qua non of durability, and therefore part of any long-term environmental success.

Government response

The Government agrees that creating buildings which are adaptable is important for environmental reasons and can also help to meet changing social and economic requirements in a cost-effective way. This is emphasised in the Lifetime section of the National Design Guide as a characteristic of well-designed places. Designing adaptability into buildings is a key objective of our reforms for how building regulations apply to existing buildings, including amending the Building Act 1984 and legislating through the Building Safety Bill, at the earliest opportunity. The Government is also developing the *Future Homes Standard* and led the *Home of 2030* initiative, which aimed to drive innovation in the provision of affordable, efficient, healthy, green homes that are built to last. Winners of the Home of 2030 competition were announced in December 2020. We will also consult shortly on how to make more new build homes accessible and adaptable, including proposals to raise the minimum adaptability standard of new build homes.

In addition, the National Planning Policy Framework promotes mixed use schemes, the flexible use of land and developments that will function well over their lifetime, while changes being made to permitted development rights and use classes both support more adaptability in how existing buildings and sites are used. We do not consider that a specific ‘adaptability test’ as part of the planning process would add usefully in this regard, or be straightforward to implement.

Policy Proposition 25: encourage resilient high streets

We recommend that central and local government strategy for high streets needs to be focused on the surrounding town centre streets, not just the high street itself, and should focus on helping town centres be attractive places to spend time, live and work, which can respond flexibly within a clear framework to changing demand.

Government response

The Government agrees that it is important to look at town centres and high streets in their wider context, that they should be attractive places to spend time, live and work, while also evolving to meet changing consumer demand. This is especially important in view of the pressures placed on the retail and hospitality sectors by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are providing support to local leadership to enable them to do this with a High Streets Task Force, which provides high streets and town centres expert advice to adapt and thrive. Over five years, this will provide hands-on support to local areas to develop data-driven innovative strategies and connect local areas to relevant experts. The High Street Task Force, hosted by a consortium led by the Institute of Place Management, is also providing training and help to improve coordination between different groups working to improve their high streets.

More broadly, we have from 1 September 2020 made changes to the Use Classes Order to support our high streets and town centres. The new broader Commercial, Business and Service use class “E” enables the types of premises currently found on the high street to quickly adapt to changing market demands by allowing movement between uses, such as shops, restaurants, offices, gyms, health centres and nurseries etc, without the need for a planning application. This provides for a mix of retail, commercial and leisure uses, supporting new and existing uses by bringing increased footfall to an area.

The Government has consulted on a new permitted development right for the change of use from Commercial, Business and Service use class to residential use to provide further flexibility, broadening the range of uses in such areas and generating footfall from new residents. The consultation closed on 28th January 2021 and we will respond in due course.

We need to rebalance the rating system to favour shops below a certain floorspace. A good approach would be zero rating for single outlet shops (or single in that settlement) below a certain size. This would encourage independent stores. (A corollary for this would be an empty stores penalty, to encourage reoccupation, or repurposing.)

Government response

The Government agrees that there are benefits in using the rating system to support smaller businesses to thrive, and is undertaking a fundamental review of business rates with the aim of reducing their burden.

Under the current business rates system, the Government provides 100% small business rate relief to businesses with a single property with a rateable value below £12,000. This means that almost 700,000 of the smallest businesses, such as independent shops, pay

no business rates at all. Furthermore, at the 2020 Budget the Chancellor announced that eligible businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors, with a rateable value of less than £51,000, would pay no business rates in 2020/21.

The Government has since gone further and announced that the £51,000 rateable value cap will no longer apply. Businesses are now expected to benefit from almost £10 billion in business rate relief as part of the Government's support for the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, when premises become vacant, empty property relief is normally granted to the owner of a newly vacated property for three months, with rates payable in full after that period. We believe this approach strikes the right balance between not penalising landlords who lose a tenant at short notice, whilst incentivising property owners and landlords to secure new tenants.

We support the use of local policy to permit the shrinkage of A1 space where appropriate. High streets will often get shorter, more concentrated and more diverse in their uses. However, this is a very delicate area. Given the systemic under-supply of homes in some parts of the country, there is a danger that an unregulated implementation of the current policy will see all shops converted to homes. This might be very hard to manage, with consequences for ground floor design and location of bin stores. This can lead to a 'disastrous impact on the beauty and character of local high streets and contribute further to their decline.'

To prevent this we, recommend the protection through what are known as Article 4 Directions of the 'core' of high streets and the very strict use of design codes through which change of use is facilitated. At present, it is not possible to insist on design codes when a permitted development right is the route being taken. As set out in Policy Proposition 8, this needs to be resolved.

Government response

The Government agrees about the importance of high streets being able to evolve in response to changing circumstances. The changes we have made to the Use Classes Order from 1 September will support varied and vibrant high streets and town centres. Permitted development rights for change of use support the diversification and modernisation of our high streets, helping them adapt to provide for a mix of retail, commercial and residential uses. Proposed revisions to the NPPF set out the policy relating to the circumstances in which local authorities can use Article 4 Directions, which disapply national permitted development rights at a local level. As set out in response to recommendation 8, existing permitted development rights for change of use to residential, from shops and other high street uses, are subject to prior approval by the local planning authority, with regard to design or external appearance of the building.

Local policy should encourage 'gentle density' style increased residential densities in and around high streets (many parades of shops were once houses, some can return now to being so). Offices should also be encouraged near high streets.

Government response

The Government agrees that a 'gentle density' approach and a greater mix of uses can help in making more effective use of land in and around high streets. The National

Planning Policy Framework encourages this type of approach, and this will be further supported by our reforms to the Use Classes Order. From 1 September, the Commercial, Business and Service use class provides for greater flexibility of movement between a broader range of uses, including offices and other commercial uses that may attract footfall, without the need for a planning application. The Government is currently consulting on a new permitted development right that would allow this broader range of uses to change to residential use.

Public sector investment into high streets should support public realm improvements (and sometimes the restoration of historic buildings) to encourage people to spend time in their high streets by making them more humane and attractive environments that are less dominated by cars.

Currently available funds for improving the physical fabric and occupation mix of high streets should be continued and reinforced and should be supported by Community Infrastructure Levy payments. As explored in other reports, another focus may be supporting less fragmented ownership so that a more strategic approach is possible.

Government response

The Government agrees that targeted investment in high streets can help to support their attractiveness and vitality. Our £3.6bn Towns Fund, of which £1bn is available to the Future High Streets Competition, aims to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in a way that improves experience, drives growth and ensures future sustainability. Of this £1 billion, £107 million has been allocated to DCMS to support improvements to public realm and historic buildings. This is split between the High Streets Heritage Action Zones programme (£92m) and Architectural Heritage Fund (£15m).

The commercial property and investment sector have proposed schemes such as Town Centre Investment Partnerships, to reduce fragmentation, without contravening property rights or personal yields. We will consider how and whether these models can be progressed. Around £6 billion a year is levied through developer contributions, of which around £1 billion are levied through the Community Infrastructure Levy. It is for local authorities to decide how best to spend these funds, although in 2019 we made it easier for local authorities to fund local infrastructure by removing the restriction on the number of planning obligations that can be used to fund a single infrastructure project. We are also improving the reporting on the receipt and spending of developer contributions so local communities can see how the money has been spent.

Local policy should recognise that façade quality really matters for high streets to thrive. As a statement of empirical reality, most people don't want to spend time in front of sheer glass walls and are more stressed and more rushed when they must do so. Local policy should insist on variegated 'walking architecture' in high streets with attractive ground floors, even if not every building is a shop.

Government response

The Government agrees that façade quality is an important aspect in increasing the attractiveness of high streets and helping them to thrive. We have encouraged high quality

facades for new buildings through enhancements to the National Design Guide and the new National Model Design Code, to reflect these suggestions.

Permitted development rights, carefully revised in line with our suggestions in Policy Propositions 8 and 9, will be a relevant tool in strengthening high streets.

Government response

The Government agrees that Permitted Development Rights can play an important role in helping high streets to adapt.

As set out earlier, a suite of national permitted development rights have been developed to support high streets providing for a mix of retail, leisure, and residential uses. The Government is currently consulting on plans to consolidate and simplify these rights following the changes to the Use Classes Order in September 2020.

Government should consider how to support the creation of community owned High Street Data Trusts. This could include providing a one-stop shop for local communities to access data, such as mapping, title deeds, planning approvals, and licenses.

Government response

The Government agrees that access to high quality, shared data is an important facilitator in enabling improvement of local high streets and town centres.

The High Street Task Force is a one-stop hub for localised data (e.g. footfall) and best practice guidance to inform regeneration proposals - and its online offer is open to communities free of charge: <https://www.highstreettaskforce.org.uk/>

Policy Proposition 26: banish 'boxland'

As long-term retail demand and shopping habits change, local policy should encourage authorities to work with investors on the redevelopment of low density single use commercial space, retail parks and large format supermarkets ('boxland') into mixed use 'finely grained' developments of homes, retail and commercial uses which can support, and benefit from, public transport.

This is a matter for local government, but should be strongly encouraged in guidance by the government for reasons of sustainability and well-being. This should be co-ordinated with guidance in the new design code and other proposals in chapter 6.

Government response

The Government agrees with this recommendation, which is an approach promoted through the National Planning Policy Framework. We intend to update our national planning practice guidance to provide further advice and reinforce this message.

Neighbourhoods: create places not just houses

Policy Proposition 27: end the unintended bias against ‘gentle density’ neighbourhoods

The following change would make it easier to build more attractive, healthy and walkable settlements at ‘gentle-density.’

- **Strongly encouraging councils not to impose suburban parking requirements in non-suburban situations;**
- **Strongly encouraging councils not to impose minimum back to back or front to front distance between habitable room requirements which make it impossible to build more finely grained and popular traditional settlements;**
- **Making more explicit the existing guidance in the NPPF to councils not to use daylight and sunlight regulations to make it impossible to build more finely grained and popular traditional settlements;**

Government response

The Government agrees that unnecessary and unintended barriers to securing ‘gentle densities’ as proposed by the Commission should be addressed. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out what local authorities need to take into account if setting local parking standards, including the accessibility of the development, the type and mix of uses, public transport opportunities and local car ownership levels. Updates to the Framework in 2018 also made clear that maximum parking standards may be needed in locations where it is appropriate to optimise the density of development. Taken together, these principles should help to ensure that the right parking standards are used in the right places, but we will build on this by issuing updated guidance. The Department for Transport is updating Manual for Streets, which provides guidance on residential street design and includes a chapter on parking, and the National Model Design Code illustrates how parking can be accommodated in an appropriate way in different types of development.

The Government agrees that minimum back-to-back or front-to-front standards, if used inappropriately, can inhibit the creation of finely-grained and successful places. However, properly conceived and applied standards – in the form of contextually appropriate design codes – can also play a valuable role in creating successful places. The National Model Design Code provides a template that can be applied locally with this objective in mind.

In relation to daylight and sunlight standards, the National Planning Policy Framework is already clear that these should not be used in a way which inhibits making effective use of sites. However, the Government will give further consideration to this issue in terms of whether further advice can be provided in planning practice guidance.

- **Encouraging councils to consider what proportion of homes with above ground floor entrance require lifts so as not to impede viable infill in existing sites.**

Government response

The Government agrees that requirements for lift access can sometimes be in tension with wider objectives to promote denser forms of development. We intend to make clear in guidance that both of these issues, as well as the viability of development, need to be taken into consideration in making decisions about how optional technical standards are applied. We undertook a consultation on various options to raise the accessibility of new homes. We are now analysing responses to this consultation, which considered how standards with level access (M4(2) and M4(3)) are currently used as optional technical standards and views on technical standards have been sought through the *Planning for the Future* White Paper consultation.

Policy Proposition 28: create healthy streets for people

This is an important need to update and improve the government’s guidance on street design (known as Manual for Streets). Again, this should be co-ordinated with the government’s new National Design Code (see policy Policy Proposition 7).

- **Manual for Streets 1 (2007) and Manual for Streets 2 (2010) should be brought together into one combined Manual.**
- **More visual and measured detail and clarity and prescription should be provided on street layout for different street types such as tree lined avenues, lanes, courtyards, squares, variable width streets and other typologies. A framework should be provided nationally which councils can then adapt or amend locally.**
- **The government should consider and formally consult on upgrading all or part of Manual for Streets to become policy rather than guidance. This would require highways authorities to adopt it. Following the same logic as set out in chapter 6, this should remove a degree of speculation on negotiating down planning requirements. It also follows the success of (the Scottish) Designing for Streets whose strengths and weaknesses should be considered by the government.**
- **Previous guidance (known as DB32) which is unhelpful should be more firmly withdrawn and superseded by the Manual for Streets. At present some local councils continue to apply the poor DB32 layouts which were withdrawn (rightly) in 2007. They should stop. The Planning Inspectorate should reject any evidence for the design of schemes based on DB32.**

Government response

The Government agrees that Manual for Streets would benefit from updating and consolidating. The Department for Transport commissioned a project to update the Manual in late 2020, with the aim of publishing an updated Manual for Streets in early 2022. It also agrees that the Manual could be given strengthened support through policy and intend to

reference the revised Manual for Streets in the NPPF, once published. In proposed revisions to the NPPF, we have made it clear that the outdated guidance in DB32 should not be taken into account in planning decisions relating to highways design.

The Government also agrees that more prescriptive guidance on street design that is applied locally could play an important role in securing better-designed, more beautiful, places, and this is being taken forward through the work on the National Model Design Code and a revised Manual for Streets.

Policy Proposition 29: clean urban air

As the data on poor air quality in our towns and cities becomes clearer and as the effect this has on people's health becomes better understood, there is a seismic shift in attitudes taking place. We are encouraged by the recent Environment Bill and encourage the government to consider the full range of potential policies to improve urban air quality. In addition to re-greening actions (set out in chapter 11), these could include:

- **Supporting a National Car Free Day. Guidance and support for a programme of car free days across England's towns and cities;**
- **Supporting a denser network of air quality sensors with live monitoring available online (you can't act on what you can't measure)**

Government response

The Government shares the Commission's view that more can and should be done to improve urban air quality. Initiatives such as car free days can play an important role in demonstrating the benefits of reduced car use, and as well as supporting local car free schemes, we will consider whether this could be implemented at a national scale.

Understanding the scale and extent of the issue is vitally important. We have set up a national network of air quality monitors, currently comprising 270 sites across the UK, managed by the Environment Agency. Sites are organised into networks that gather information for a wide range of pollutants in cities, towns and rural areas. Information from this network is published on the UK-Air website, in near real time and is updated every hour. We keep our national monitoring network under review to ensure it remains fit for purpose and delivers value for money. We are undertaking a root and branch strategic review of the current monitoring network as well as setting up a new urban nitrogen dioxide monitoring network.

The Government also provides guidance and support to local authorities in England on local monitoring. Positioning of local monitors is expected to be in line with national and local priorities, which may include schools and other locations where there is high risk of public exposure to air pollutants. Local authorities in England operate over 700 local monitoring stations. In addition to the national monitoring network measurements already available on UK-Air, Defra have brought an estimated 80% of automatic monitoring stations operated by local authorities onto the UK-AIR website. This will provide hourly measurements of concentrations of air pollutants from these stations in near real-time.

National monitoring by the Government is supplemented by modelling. This gives greater spatial coverage than could be achieved by monitoring alone, and provides additional information about the sources of pollutants.

- **Supporting expanded cycle networks, car pools and station e-bike hire;**
- **Supporting more walking in towns and pedestrian neighbourhoods;**

Government response

The Government agrees that more support for walking, cycling and car sharing can play an important part in creating places that are more sustainable as well as more beautiful, with benefits extending well beyond improvements in urban air quality. A number of policies within the National Planning Policy Framework already support high quality walking and cycling networks and facilities such as cycle parking as part of new development. Our proposed changes to the Framework include a requirement that these facilities should be attractive and well-designed, to encourage their use.

To reinforce the priority which we are giving to active travel, in May 2020 we announced a £2 billion funding package for cycling and walking: the largest ever investment in active travel. This includes £250 million to be spent in the 2020/21 financial year on measures to get people cycling and walking, such as school streets, low-traffic neighbourhoods, wider pavements, more cycle lanes and a bike repair voucher scheme. The Prime Minister's Cycling and Walking Plan was launched this summer, outlining further measures to transform cycling and walking and builds on the Government's statutory Cycling and Walking Investment strategy target to double cycling and increase walking by 2025.

The plan also made a commitment to create a new commissioning body and inspectorate, Active Travel England, in the coming months led by a new national walking and cycling commissioner with the express objective of improving walking and cycling environments, sharing knowledge and best practice, but also funding and scrutinising the adequacy of walking and cycling schemes.

The Government has also published updated national Cycle Infrastructure Guidance design guidance (Local Transport Note 1/20) in the summer. This outlines that a condition of any future Government funding for new cycle infrastructure is that it is designed in a way that is consistent with this national guidance and that the opportunity to improve cycling infrastructure is considered within local highway infrastructure schemes.

In the coming months, the Government will be publishing their Transport Decarbonisation Plan which will set ambitious proposals for the decarbonisation of the transport network in the UK. Prioritising walking, cycling and public transport will be key for delivering truly sustainable patterns of development to support our growth agenda.

- **Imposing tougher emissions standards for cars, consulting on legalising e-scooters and encouraging small clean city cars;**

Government response

The Government agrees with this recommendation and has already taken a number of steps in this area. We are going further and faster to decarbonise transport by phasing out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030, and, from 2035, all new cars and vans must be zero emissions at the tailpipe. Between 2030 and 2035, any new cars and vans sold that emit from the tailpipe must have significant zero emission capability, which would include some plug-in and full hybrids. The meaning of 'significant zero emission capability' will be defined by consultation in 2021. We will continue to support industry and consumers to make the switch to cleaner vehicles and will publish a clear delivery plan in 2021. In addition the Government supports the roll out of EV charging infrastructure through the on-street residential charging scheme which provides funding for local authorities to install chargepoints for people with on-street parking. The fund is £20 million in the 2020/21 financial year (up from £5 million in 2019-2020).

We published a call for evidence in relation to the Future of Transport regulatory review in March 2020. This included a section about micromobility (e.g. e-scooters) and the considerations on whether to legalise this innovative form of transport. The government response to this consultation has now been issued. In May 2020 we announced that e-scooter trials would be brought forward to help encourage more people off public transport and onto greener alternatives. The consultation on legalising rental e-scooter trials ran between 18 May and 3 June 2020 and the government response to this consultation has now been published.

Following this, in July, the Government made regulations which allow rental e-scooter trials to begin in selected local areas across the country and will allow the Government to assess the benefits of e-scooters as well as their impact on public space. The trials will conclude on 30 November 2021.

- **Planning car routes away from schools; and**
- **Encouraging the restriction of lorries or highly polluting vehicles from towns and cities, particularly at peak hours.**

The Government agrees with the importance of planning for car routes away from schools. Local authorities already have discretionary powers to restrict car access to schools and to enforce anti-idling laws, and some authorities have taken action to reduce access to certain roads for the purpose of improving air quality. An increasing number of authorities are installing School Streets, many through their Active Travel Fund measures. These are access restrictions that operate during school pickup and drop-off times only, during term time, with access maintained for residents. The schemes can reduce the number of people driving their children to school by up to a third, which can improve air quality, increase the numbers of people walking and cycling, and make streets near schools safer.

The Prime Minister's Cycling and Walking Plan included a commitment to help authorities create more School Streets, as well as a commitment to enable effective enforcement of school streets outside London, by giving local authorities the powers in part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004.

Restricting lorries or highly polluting vehicles from towns and cities is also an important part of the strategy for improving air quality, and we have taken a number of steps in this area as part of our work on Clean Air Zones. These will deliver targeted action in air pollution hot spots to improve air quality, public health and support economic growth, encouraging the replacement of old, polluting vehicles with modern, cleaner technologies such as ultra-low emission vehicles. The first Clean Air Zone will be introduced in Bath on 15 March 2021 with Birmingham following with the second Clean Air Zone on 1 June.

However, while targeted action of this sort is important, children and other groups who are particularly vulnerable to poor air quality can be exposed to poor air at home, while travelling and during other activities. Therefore, action focused on vulnerable groups needs to be part of a wider programme, and our approach is intended to improve air quality for all. Through the Environment Bill, we are implementing action outlined in our Clean Air Strategy, the Environment Bill will deliver key aspects of the Strategy, specifically in committing to delivering an ambitious PM2.5 target, the pollutant of greatest harm to human health. Furthermore, we are mandating 5 yearly reviews of the Air Quality Strategy through the Environment Bill, and will consider including measures focused on protecting those most vulnerable to air pollution (including children) in the revised Air Quality Strategy.

Nature: re-green our towns and cities

Policy Proposition 30: ask for more access to greenery

The NPPF should be updated to place a greater focus on access to nature and green spaces – both existing and new – for all new and remodelled development. This must not be negotiated away on ‘viability grounds’. Policies such as those set out in policy G5 (‘Urban greening’) in the London Plan and the concept of the Urban Greening Factor should be applied more widely though adjusted as necessary for less urban environments.

Government response

The Government agrees that access to nature and greenspaces is vital for people’s health and wellbeing, as well as for biodiversity and climate change mitigation and adaptation, and we are taking a number of actions to improve this. The Environment Bill, due to achieve Royal Assent by mid-2021, introduces a mandatory requirement for biodiversity net gain in the planning system, to ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity and create new green spaces for local communities to enjoy. The Environment Bill also introduces provisions requiring the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) across England. LNRS will help local authorities identify priorities and opportunities for conserving and enhancing nature and will direct net gain investment so that it has the greatest benefit for local wildlife and people.

As part of delivering the commitments in the 25 Year Environment Plan, DEFRA is also developing a national framework of green infrastructure standards, due to be launched in 2022. Early release of some parts of the Standards is expected in 2021. The Framework will help local planning authorities and developers to identify priority locations for improving

green infrastructure; and to plan for and design good quality green infrastructure to address local needs, including parks, trees, woodlands and sustainable drainage systems at the earliest stages of the design process. This will help to deliver more good quality, accessible green infrastructure to local communities. The Green Infrastructure Standards Framework will include benchmarks including access to nature, and we are considering whether and how Urban Greening Factors, alongside other standards, could be reflected in these benchmarks for application more widely.

In addition, the National Model Design Code, published alongside this response, includes guidance on landscaping and promotes the provision of accessible, high quality green spaces and green infrastructure, including trees. The Government has proposed changes to the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework to reflect the importance of providing high quality green spaces, infrastructure and trees. This includes an expectation that planning policies and decisions will ensure that new streets are tree-lined. These changes have been published for consultation alongside this response.

Policy Proposition 31: plant two million new street trees

The government working with city mayors and local government should set a target to plant two million street trees and provide the funding for their planting and maintenance. Achieving this will not just be a matter of top-down targets and central funding – though it will cost money. It will also mean helping councils change the whole way that they think about their role and their priorities.

- **Local councils should be further encouraged to change highways guidance so that in most situations, trees are considered as essential as the structure of a road or surface water drainage. If they are a non-negotiable, then planning will need to take place up-front with the presence of trees as a given.**
- **Given their provable health benefits, it should be considered whether other public budgets (above all health) should support their planting.**
- **Parishes, civic societies, neighbourhood forums and other local groups should be able to apply for funds to plant trees. It should be made much easier for neighbourhood groups to win local councils' support for new trees – particularly if there is a neighbourhood commitment to support their maintenance.**
- **Government, local government and fund-making bodies should fund charities and neighbourhood groups who wish to plant and maintain street trees. Work being done by Trees for Cities and Start with Local is of interest in this context.**
- **Government and local government should investigate whether it is feasible to remove or cap the commuted sums that councils require when street trees are planted.**

Government response

The Government is committed to increasing the number of trees on streets and in urban environments, in and around the places where most people live and work. New streets should be tree lined wherever possible, and this is reflected in proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework which includes an expectation that local planning policies and decisions will ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of street trees, and that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere (for example community orchards), retaining existing trees where possible. It also makes clear that local planning, highways and tree officers and applicants should work together to ensure that the right trees are planted in the right places, and solutions are compatible with highways standards and the needs of different users. The National Planning Policy Framework has been published for consultation alongside this document.

Furthermore, the National Model Design Code includes guidance on how trees can be incorporated into the design of new development, where they are located and how they can be used to soften the streetscape and public realm. We are currently seeking views on a draft of the National Model Design Code. The updated Manual for Streets will direct users towards the appropriate technical guidance. In addition, the Forestry Commission's Operations Note on Highway Street Tree Management (July 2019) demonstrates good practice and is being kept under active review.

This package of policy and guidance will ensure that appropriate tree species are incorporated into development layouts at the earliest possible stages of the planning process. The Government will also work with professional bodies to consider appropriate training for highways and utilities engineers to encourage greater recognition of the benefits of good design principles, including the provision of green infrastructure such as street trees.

A consultation on the proposed England Tree Strategy, which closed on 11th September 2020, sought views on the opportunities and barriers to securing and maintaining street trees. This included options relating to; appropriate standards and guidance, practical challenges such as street design and planting, the adoption of street trees by highways authorities (or alternative arrangements if not adopted), the skills and resources to deliver street trees, and funding to deliver new trees and for their ongoing maintenance. We will take the results of the consultation on the draft Strategy into account in developing our programme to support the delivery of street trees, including considering how we can leverage more private – as well as public – finance for planting and maintenance. The Forestry Commission is working with the sector to explore how guidance can be improved on making space for the right trees in the right places, for example, through the use of cost neutral engineered foundations for new homes that would allow for the planting of adjacent new trees. We will reference appropriate technical guidance in our own design guidance when published.

We have planted one million trees as part of the Trees for Schools programme in partnership with the Community Forest Trust and the Woodland Trust, and around 70% of these schools are based in urban areas. For community and voluntary groups, town councils and individuals who wish to plant trees, the Urban Tree Challenge Fund has allocated funding for 20,000 large trees and 134,000 trees across the country in total,

supporting projects which provide the greatest environmental and social benefit. £92 million for the Nature for Climate Fund has been allocated to contribute towards planting England's share of 30,000 hectares of trees a year by the end of this Parliament, and will include expansion of the Urban Trees Challenge Fund and new investment in Community Forests, to bring trees and woodlands closer to where people live. We will continue to explore how these funds can support local authorities, charities and communities to plant more street trees and other urban trees.

The Environment Bill introduces a 'Duty to Consult' on local highway authorities to consult with local communities before felling street trees, unless the trees qualify for certain exemptions. This will give the public the opportunity to understand why a street tree is proposed to be felled, and to express any points before action is decided.

The Government agrees that appropriate resources need to be in place to plant and maintain urban trees. Making clear in policy that street trees are expected as part of all new developments, and that appropriate measures are in place to secure their long-term maintenance, will help to ensure that the cost of planting and maintaining trees is factored into development costs at the outset, and reflected in section 106 agreements.

Beyond the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCf), as part of the Treasury's Shared Outcomes Fund, we have also announced £3.9 million to fund innovative tree planting schemes which will see hundreds of thousands of new trees planted, including in towns and cities and near rivers to reduce flood risk. In addition, the first round of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund will support planting of 800,000 trees including in towns and cities, with a second round due to open in early 2021.

The England Tree Strategy consultation gave consideration to funding issues by including the funding of planting and on-going maintenance of urban trees in new and existing developments. We will take the results of the consultation into account when considering how we can leverage more private – as well as public – finance for planting and maintenance.

Policy Proposition 32: plant urban orchards - one fruit tree per house

In addition to the wider benefits set out above, there is a need to reconnect children with nature and with the sources of their food. The government should:

- **Support a programme of urban orchards within our towns and cities;**
- **Encourage, via guidance, local councils to require one fruit tree per new house built; and**
- **Encourage housebuilders to plant one fruit tree per house.**

Government response

The Government agrees that fruit trees and other food producing plants should be encouraged in urban areas, and that they can contribute towards effective green infrastructure provision by providing opportunities for experiencing and caring for nature,

as well as having environmental benefits. Our Planning Practice Guidance for the Natural Environment recognises the importance of green infrastructure to promote healthy community food growing. We are also progressing targeted projects to support greater access to nature for improved health and wellbeing. The Children and Nature Programme aims to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds to have better access to natural environments during 2019-2023. The Department for Education, Natural England and Defra are working together to oversee the programme, which is backed by £10 million of funding.

The best form of planting within a local area needs to be determined on a project-by-project basis. Local authorities are best placed to determine appropriate green infrastructure provision locally, develop planning policies on green infrastructure and assess proposals on a case by case basis. The forthcoming national framework of green infrastructure standards, elements of which are expected to be release in 2021 in preparation for full launch in 2022, will provide guidance to local authorities and developers to help in the planning and design of green infrastructure to include a range of ecosystem services, including health and wellbeing. We are also consulting on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework to further promote green infrastructure provision and urban tree planting, including the provision of urban orchards where appropriate.

Policy Proposition 33: regreen streets and squares

Other actions which the government should support and encourage should include:

- **Bricks for bees and birds in new build homes;**
- **Greenery low to the ground to capture particulate matter;**
- **The retention of existing hedges in greenfield developments and planting of new hedges;**
- **The designation of some streets as ‘green corridors’;**
- **New garden squares to provide safe and easy-to-access greenery for residents; and**
- **Sustainable drainage systems (known as SUDS) to integrate urban drainage better into natural drainage systems**

Government response

The Government agrees that a range of green infrastructure and habitat features should be incorporated into new developments and existing urban areas to improve biodiversity, enhance the quality and enjoyment of green spaces and support climate change mitigation and adaptation. Our Planning Practice Guidance for the Natural Environment recognises that relatively small features such as incorporating swift bricks and bat boxes in developments can often achieve important benefits for wildlife. The National Planning

Policy Framework supports the use of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) in ways that provide multi-functional benefits.

The introduction of mandatory biodiversity net-gain to the planning system through the Environment Bill, due to achieve Royal Assent by mid-2021, will help to secure a range of measures to protect and enhance biodiversity and create opportunities for nature and green spaces through new development. These measures will encourage development to retain and enhance existing biodiversity features such as trees and hedges, as well as securing new green infrastructure.

The Environment Bill also introduces provisions requiring the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) across England. LNRS will be an important tool in driving coordinated, practical and focused action to help nature on a local level. These will form the national Nature Recovery Network that benefits people, wildlife and the economy and will pave the way to allow local authorities to establish if and where 'green corridors' will deliver the best outcomes for nature recovery in their areas.

Important though this is, there is more that can be done. The national framework of green infrastructure standards, which is being developed by DEFRA and Natural England, will provide advice to local authorities, developers and other stakeholders on how to ensure that green infrastructure provision is of a sufficient quantity, quality and accessibility to provide multiple social, environmental and economic benefits. In addition, the National Model Design Code includes guidance on landscaping and promotes the provision of accessible, high quality green spaces. It also provides guidance on habitat creation, including the need to consider strategies for enhancing natural habitats, such as through the use of bird boxes, bee bricks and hedgehog highways.

Education and skills

Policy Proposition 34 - promote planning excellence

The government should extend and fund professional training for highway engineers and planning officers and inspectors in urban design, its effects and public preferences and in public engagement. It should also support, both financially and by way of subsequent career advancement, planning officers who wish to take mid-career postgraduate qualifications in urban design. It should investigate the possibility of providing a short course on the relationship between urban design and well-being, health, sustainability and public preference for councillors on planning committees. We need to change the culture of planning, so that it reflects the seriousness of its task, and both the stress suffered and the devotion exercised by planning officers in their daily work. The planners and their role should be celebrated as part of the culture of placemaking, and all public bodies, such as Homes England, should be encouraged to emphasise the importance of planning in safeguarding the public interest in beauty.

Government response

The Government agrees that broader professional training in design must play a central part in implementing the Commission's recommendations, and is vital for taking forward the Government's commitment to better design and beautiful places more generally. We agree, as well, that this should be part of a broader change of focus and culture in planning, so that efforts are concentrated on what matters most for people, the environment and the economy, and the role of planners and allied professionals is positive and rewarding.

In the White Paper *Planning for the Future*, we proposed that 'To support the transition to a planning system which is more visual and rooted in local preferences and character, we will set up a body to support the delivery of provably locally-popular design codes, and propose that each authority should have a chief officer for design and placemaking.'

We want to create an Office for Place within the next year, which will pioneer design and beauty within the planning system. This new organisation will draw on Britain's world-class design expertise to support communities to turn their visions of beautiful design into local standards that 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 National Model Design Code with 20 communities and empowering local authorities to demand beauty, design quality and placemaking, through training on the principles outlined in the National Model Design Code.

In *Planning for the Future* we also proposed that, ‘As we develop our final proposals for this new planning system, we will develop a comprehensive resources and skills strategy for the planning sector to support the implementation of our reforms.’ We have consulted on proposals set out in the document and will be responding soon.

Policy Proposition 35 - promote a common understanding of place

Empirical research on the relationship between urban design and well-being, health and sustainability, as well as public visual preferences and preferences on urban form, should form a central component of all courses in architecture, planning and other built environment qualifications – particularly highways engineers. The RTPI should require this of validated programmes, as should the ARB once regulatory powers return to it. Also subsequent to Brexit, the government and the ARB should investigate the possibility of opening a route to validation as an architect based solely or primarily on professional experience rather than academic study. This should help aspiring architects with a more diverse range of backgrounds than at present.

Government response

The Government agrees that the relationship between urban design and well-being, health and sustainability is important in how we make better places and improve public health – something which has been highlighted starkly by action that had to be taken in response to COVID-19. Community expectations for design should also inform decisions about local design standards and the evolution of development schemes.

As our response to the previous recommendation indicates, proposals in *Planning for the Future* set out how we intend to further develop the planning and design skills needed to enable an increased focus on design quality and placemaking.

Policy Proposition 36 - support design review but not from ‘on high’

Design review is an important tool for bringing specialist assistance to local authorities that they are not able to maintain permanently. Design reviews need to be empirically grounded and should take advantage of community engagement, visual preference evidence and consultation with local civic societies and amenity groups. We advocate the proliferation of competing design review bodies, with none emerging as a final ‘court of appeal’. There may be the need for a design review to focus on national infrastructure.

Government response

The Government agrees that design review is a key tool which can support steps towards better designed places, but that it needs to be used in the right way. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises that, done well and at the appropriate time, design review can play an important role in shaping emerging development schemes, bringing professional expertise to bear in a way that supplements and supports the scrutiny by local authorities and communities. Our Planning Practice Guidance *Design: Process and Tools* provides guidance on its use, including the importance of design review being

representative, diverse and inclusive, with its outputs communicated in a transparent and accessible way.

We also encourage the use of design review within government backed programmes, such as the Garden Communities Programme, and Homes England is considering how design review can be used with consistency, and to best effect, across its procurement and delivery processes.

The transition board for the Office for Place, referred to in our response to recommendation 34, is exploring how local authorities and communities can be best supported in making use of design guidance and codes including looking at the effectiveness of existing approaches such as design review.

Management: value planning, count happiness, procure properly

Policy Proposition 37 - streamline planning and shift resources from development control to strategic planning partially, through revolutionising the use of digital technology

Local planning authorities need radically to improve the efficiency of the planning process. The government should:

- **Support local planning authorities moving from an analogue to a digital culture;**
- **Introduce digital building passports;**
- **Where possible write common policies, such as those governing householder-development, as machine readable code which can be visualised and shared easily;**
- **Encourage digital repositories of architectural knowledge; and**
- **Encourage digital feedback loops.**

As part of this transition, we are attracted to a regime in which local plans are living documents, regularly updated to capture and reflect changing trends. We recommend that the government sets this as their target, though it will take some years to achieve. We also recommend that as funding for investment becomes available, government support for better and more digitally enabled strategic planning should be a priority. Mechanisms to pay for improvements via developer contributions should also be considered.

Government response

The Government agrees that digital technology can and should transform the way in which the planning system operates. In the White Paper, *Planning for the Future*, we set out specific proposals for improving the use of data and digital information, to help make the process easier for local authorities and developers to use, and for local people to engage with. This includes making local plans digital, so policies are easy to find and use, making it easier for potential applicants to understand what they can build and where, and to improve community involvement in the plan making stage. This could also allow for a certain level of automation through triaging, improving the speed and efficiency of decision making on simple applications. Greater use of digital tools, such as 3D models, virtual reality and co-creation platforms, have already shown the ability to improve the quality of local engagement in the planning process. We are also exploring the potential for new data standards for managing plans, developer contributions, brownfield sites and other aspects of planning, and have funded a number of pilot projects in support of this, including a platform that allows local authorities to write policies such as householder development as code.

Better and more consistent access to and use of data should allow the sort of 'digital feedback loops' envisaged by the Commission to be developed, where monitoring data is used more rapidly and effectively to update policy based on its impact on the ground. Homes England is also undertaking an ambitious programme of digital transformation that includes devising better ways to engage people in planning decisions and creating feedback loops between developers, planners, local authorities and residents.

In addition, we are undertaking research to better understand the data requirements to provide a baseline framework for digital building passports. A discovery project being taken forward as part of implementing the Hackitt Review, together with the wider work being undertaken on planning data and the opening up of unique property reference numbers, will form the basis from which to create data-rich digital building passports.

Policy Proposition 38 - limit the physical length of planning applications

Outline planning permission was initially created to provide a light-touch way of achieving more certainty. It has ended up becoming a complex process in itself, with needlessly long and verbose applications obscuring the key points. The government should consider issuing guidance on the maximum physical length and complexity of planning applications.

Government response

The Government agrees with the importance of being able to establish easily whether the principle of development is acceptable or not. Streamlined permission routes including Local and Neighbourhood Development Orders, Community Right to Build Orders and Permission in Principle have been developed with this end in mind. Going forward, recommendations from the Commission have informed proposals to streamline the planning process, set out in proposals in the White Paper *Planning for the Future*. These proposals include simplifying the role of local plans, to focus on identifying land in categories, and setting out general development management policies nationally, with a more focused role for local plans in identifying site and area-specific requirements, alongside locally produced design codes. These proposals would allow for the scaling back of detail and duplication contained in local plans, while encouraging a much greater focus on design quality at the local level. Plans could be significantly shorter in length with a core set of standards and requirements for development. We have consulted on these proposals and will be responding soon.

Policy Proposition 39 - support centres of excellence

The government should review whether they can more effectively help support public or third sector bodies that can act as centres of excellence. Government should consider a national expansion of these types of programmes to help build and support high quality planning, landscape and urban design skills within local authorities across the country. Expansion should be based on consultation. There is an unavoidable risk that such centres of excellence, at one remove from the democratic process, lose their link with genuine public preferences. It should be a condition of any government support that they can demonstrate how they are

effectively managing this risk, and ideally involving interested citizens as much as possible.

Government response

The Government agrees that centres of excellence can play an important role in supporting local authorities and communities through targeted expertise and facilitation in urban design, and that this can include work on identifying and harnessing public preferences.

We recognise that as well as being an effective way of responding to gaps in planning department resources, this support can lead to better quality and more efficient plan-making and planning consents. We will play a convening role in supporting organisations to form a network of centres of excellence, based on work already started by key organisations within the sector.

Policy Proposition 40 - count happiness and popularity

Council chief executives, chief placemakers, highways, infrastructure and planning teams should be set key targets and performance indicators which speak directly to the beauty and popularity of what is being permissioned, and to the effects on community well-being, health and sense of neighbourliness. Key targets and metrics which we would suggest for both residents of new developments, and for all residents, could include:

- **Standardised scores on local health, well-being and reported happiness;**
- **Standardised scores on place satisfaction;**
- **Local polling and visual preference surveys on local council new buildings, new development and investments in public realm;**
- **Average minutes walked per day and level of cycling;**
- **Local perceptions of community safety;**
- **Number of neighbours known;**
- **Local air quality; and**
- **Ratio of new trees to new homes.**

Government response

The Government agrees that it can be useful for local authorities to monitor a range of data which provide insights about the quality of places and impact of planning decisions. A range of locally-specific data is already available or collected, and the digital transformation of public service delivery – as well as the wealth of digital data available from other sources – provides new opportunities to deepen our understanding about the performance and popularity of places. We will consider further how effects on community

well-being, health and neighbourliness can be collected in a way which is efficient and relevant to the issues in different places. We also recognise the value of post-occupancy evaluation, and will continue to support its use as part of an effective feedback loop in the process of creating better homes and places.

Policy Proposition 41 - value design as well as price

Homes England (and other government agencies) should:

- **Ensure that the strategic focus on design in public sector land sales, or joint ventures, is real and is fully percolated throughout the organisation in decisions ‘on the ground’;**
- **Place a greater weighting on design quality in their scoring of land purchasers and development partners. This should be achieved through both weighting and scoring;**
- **Be more transparent and simpler about scoring and weighting mechanisms. One option might be to set a target price and encourage bidders to ‘solve’ to that price. Alternatively, only top scoring bids on quality might pass through to the final round;**
- **Evolve a wider framework for quality which goes beyond ‘Building for Life’.**

There do not appear to be clear qualitative standards or requirements for grant funded affordable housing. We do acknowledge that Homes England funding comes in many forms and programmes and, for example, where they are providing debt funding, often on challenged schemes, it would be difficult for them to impose additional standards that a bank or other funder would not. However, where grant or equity is provided, they should exert a much stronger influence on the outcomes.

Government response

The Government agrees that design quality should play an important part in procurement and funding decisions, to help demonstrate our commitment to beauty and lead by example. Homes England have refined their tender documents for their land disposals process to prevent bidders from taking a strategic approach to bidding and are considering further mechanisms for introducing site specific criteria to inform the bidding process. They have assessed the balance between quality and quantity across their Land Disposals processes, and are piloting a rebalance of the ratio of quantitative and quality assessment from 70:30 to 50:50, giving greater weighting to design quality in order to support and help pioneer the Government’s evolving design agenda. To promote transparency, an independent assessor has been appointed to audit the pilot bids and the findings will be reported and will inform next steps in 2021.

Homes England’s Design Quality Assessment (DQA) has been part of their Land Disposals Invitation to Tender process since May 2019. The process is based on Building for Life 12 principles (now Building for a Healthy Life), but with particular emphasis on

character and distinctiveness, using an illustrated tender document to ensure that good quality design, drawings and visual representations form the evidence base for tender disposals. The scoring approach restricts bidders from proceeding to the next round if they do not meet the required design standard. Whilst Building for Life plays a key role in the Design Quality Assessment process, Homes England consider it as just part of an end to end masterplanning process with a clear design delivery strategy, supported by design codes.

Quality assessment processes will be applied to all aspects of Homes England's business, as opportunities allow and programmes are renewed, supported by a Board-level champion for design quality. MHCLG will work with other departments and agencies to help ensure that processes are in place to embed design in decision-making across government.

Policy Proposition 42 - review Homes England's remit, targets and investment timeframes

To increase the focus on quality and long-term placemaking. To support this, Homes England will need longer-term business planning periods and targets – often 40 years is a better timeframe for planning places than 5 years. This will permit Homes England more flexibility to not have to reduce quality in order to manage cashflow challenges within the financial year. It would also make it easier for them to say 'no' to poor quality proposals in low-value areas.

We would like to see government supporting Homes England with a more balanced scorecard, demonstrating a wider definition of success that addresses the quality and sustainability of the places they invest in within their future Strategic Plans. This should also include reference to support for schemes meeting the 'stewardship kite mark' discussed in Policy Propositions 15 to 17.

HM Treasury may also need to give latitude to enable Homes England to be geographically agnostic, to ensure equitable outcomes and quality in all areas. This could allow a more creative approach to cross subsidise across their portfolio.

Government response

The Government agrees that there should be a long-term focus on quality and placemaking in Homes England's operations, building on what is currently incorporated in their strategic objectives and key performance indicators. As set out in *Planning for the Future*, the Government's proposals to reform the planning system, we intend to strengthen Homes England's objectives to give greater weight to design quality, and assess how design quality and environmental standards can be more deeply embedded in all Homes England's activities and programmes of work. The consultation on *Planning for the Future* has closed and responses to this proposition are being considered.

We will ask Homes England to continue to plan financially for five years, but for them to supplement this with a strategic outlook over a longer period of time, to demonstrate a sustained commitment to the effective planning of places. Homes England Board and Executive have initiated a cross-agency project to develop a strategic vision and

framework for sustainability and design quality. This will underpin specific interventions and actions that will be developed in early 2021.

In relation to Homes England being more geographically agnostic, the Government intends to revise the so-called “80/20” rule, which guides how much funding is available in local areas to help build homes, with 80% of funding being directed at areas of highest affordability pressure. This will establish a new principle to ensure new funding is not just concentrated in London and the South East.

Homes England currently use their Design Quality Assessment to ensure that stewardship is considered at an early stage in project development. Further work is being undertaken on the importance of stewardship and formulating strategies early on to ensure that the master planning process is effective in considering the long-term future of places.

Policy Proposition 43 - encourage Homes England to take a clearer master developer role

Consider establishing a code zone (‘permission in form’) approach to large sites to increase the role for smaller firms. Code Zones’ for larger sites would mean Homes England working to create a popular result, though a masterplan and form-based code. Development would then be possible ‘as of right’, via permission in principle, for buildings that met the masterplan and code.

Government response

The Government agrees that tools such as masterplanning, design coding and development orders have the potential to be used more widely to improve certainty and reflect local character, engage communities and improve opportunities for smaller firms to take forward parts of sites.

Site-specific masterplans and codes can already be used in combination with development orders to provide a design-led framework for granting consents. However, in *Planning for the Future*, we have also proposed that for areas of significant development, a masterplan and site-specific code could be agreed as a condition of permission in principle being granted through the plan. With this proposal, design codes and masterplans would need to be at a level commensurate with the size of the site and key principles to be established, which might be a set of simple co-ordinating codes to set key parameters for the site layout.

Within Homes England, consideration is being given to a Homes England approach to masterplanning and the creation of a Homes England blueprint and approach to all land holdings. This could incorporate: quality design and placemaking; design phasing and disposal to encourage pace of build and diversity of homes and developers; MMC as a priority; biodiversity and sustainability at the heart and a clear and robust approach to stewardship of public realm; and landscape for the long-term benefit of the community. Homes England are also considering ways to improve the commissioning of masterplans through their Development Partner Panel. A separate Masterplanning/Design Framework panel has been identified to ensure all commissions are design-led.

Policy Proposition 44 - re-discover civic pride in architecture

New public sector buildings should be popular, and beautiful sources of civic pride. In addition to the changes set out above, it should be routine for public sector procurement process for new buildings or public realm schemes to:

- **State clearly in their aims that beauty and popularity with the local population are key elements of the design brief;**
- **Involve charette co-design process following protocols described in chapter 7**
- **Involve polling on local popular design preferences; and**
- **Seek to make use of the emerging ‘science of place’ on the likely impact of different design approaches on metrics such as resident happiness, air quality and sustainable transport.**
- **Throughout, public engagement, citizen involvement in scheme selection and data on local preferences should clearly underpin the process to avoid some of the major errors of the last 50 years in public sector procurement.**

Public and third sector bodies should also consider publicly voted prizes for the most beautiful and popular public buildings every year and ‘sin bin’ prizes for the ugliest and least popular. An annual ‘celebration’ of the ugliest building paid for by the public purse, as voted for by the taxpayers who funded it, would certainly attract attention.

Government response

The Government agrees that public sector buildings should be a powerful source of civic pride. The recently published Government Standard for Property, GovS 004 sets out the expected approach to commissioning new buildings and infrastructure ensuring that government property is: procured, held and managed appropriately; well designed and constructed; safe, efficient, secure, fit for purpose, sustainable; and good value for money.

Public sector organisations should ensure their procurement processes balance design quality and value for money to achieve this, such as by taking a Government Soft Landings approach to all public building projects. This should take into account the interaction with the building’s surroundings and the impact on place as part of that process, thereby enabling quality design briefs to incorporate local context. We will continue to work across government and with public sector agencies to ensure that design quality is a consideration in public sector buildings and public realm schemes, as well as housing.

The Government has funded model charrettes (design workshops with communities) to demonstrate the benefits of early community engagement in the design process. Insight from these charrettes has informed how we can support local authorities to undertake more effective community engagement. For example, we have provided Civic Voice with funding to facilitate training for their members on the use of tools and processes to improve design quality.

We will also continue to support award programmes such as the Housing Design Awards in raising the profile of successful schemes. We are committed to hold a third national design conference with a focus on the work undertaken by the Commission, and as a further opportunity to celebrate good design.

Policy Proposition 45 - monitor the implementation of this report

The government should create a time-limited independent commission or ‘light touch’ body to monitor and report back publicly on the implementation of this report on a regular basis. It should also promote the growing public and professional discussion about how we evolve our villages, towns and cities in ways that are popular, beautiful and good for us. The wider views of the general public should be evident in such a body’s terms of reference.

Government response

The Government agrees that it is important to keep the implementation of the Commission’s report under review. The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission has made a significant and important contribution to the debate on how we build more successful, sustainable and beautiful places, and we will put in place a process to monitor progress against our response as we take forward our proposed reforms to the planning system.