

Dear Secretary of State,

'Larger than Local Planning'

This letter is signed by a uniquely wide-ranging group of twenty nine national bodies who have come together with a shared concern to ensure that the planning system (including its policies and practice) offers an effective framework to deliver the Government's objectives in terms of the economy, the environment, sustainable development and social policy.

Our particular focus is that level of planning which Ministers have called "democratic decision-making that is larger than the local, but smaller than the national". We are writing to seek a meeting between you and representatives of this group to establish how best we may work with Government to ensure that this level of planning can be developed jointly as an integral part of the Government's localism agenda and how its practice can be encouraged.

Our initiative is driven by twin concerns. First, we wish to ensure that any new Government policies truly improve the ability of the system to deliver positive outcomes for communities. Secondly, we wish to ensure that this larger than local planning and investment – which we term strategic planning – is carried out to address the most pressing issues facing the nation such as economic recovery, meeting housing need and demand, sustainable transport, regeneration, sustainable development and growth, investment in our infrastructure, biodiversity loss, climate change, and reducing inequality.

We support the drive to enable communities to contribute to, and take, those planning and investment decisions that are best taken at the neighbourhood level and to play a full role in implementing those decisions.

We feel that as part of this drive it is vital to develop new forms of inclusive strategic planning and investment. Strategic planning should be taken, in this context, to mean any form of planning – statutory or otherwise – which enables communities and groups of communities to express a vision for the future of an area wider than their own.

This level of planning is needed where there is the need to set out priorities for investment and solutions to problems which must, of necessity, be addressed beyond neighbourhood or district boundaries. It comes into play in order to ensure that investment in major infrastructure best serves both the needs of local communities and the wider area and is most cost-effective.

It is necessary to ensure an integrated approach to the protection and enhancement of the environment and to prevent loss of biodiversity and where any decisions taken locally have a wider than local impact. This level of planning is important to ensure that climate change is addressed at a level – such as water catchment areas – where intervention can be most effective.

Importantly, this level of planning can help to provide much needed certainty to investors, social and physical infrastructure providers, community initiatives, transport providers and operators, developers and local enterprises.

We recognise the initiatives that the Government has already taken on strategic planning and investment, including the encouragement for local authorities or other groups and bodies to come together to undertake joint planning and the announcements about Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Regional Growth Fund.

We are pleased to see a national planning framework announced in the Coalition

Agreement and the national infrastructure plan announced in the recent Budget.

We will engage with Government in this process in a positive, constructive manner and are committed to fresh thinking that may, on occasion, be challenging to all sides in this discussion. Part of this challenge will be in highlighting where aspects of planning reform may do damage to the longer term well-being of the nation.

We are already concerned that some aspects of the Government's proposals may potentially hinder solutions to providing much needed housing in appropriate locations, to investment in enterprise and to providing a lead on tackling climate change.

Therefore, we look forward to working with the Coalition Government, with other relevant private, voluntary and public sector bodies and groups and, importantly, with local government to develop policy and to provide thinking and advice on the ways that strategic planning and investment can achieve the outcomes that the Government desires.

We particularly wish to engage, as a matter of priority, with officials from your Department during the drafting of the Decentralisation and Localism Bill.

As a first step, we are writing to ask for an early meeting between you and representatives of the bodies signing this letter. Such a meeting is, we believe, particularly urgent now that RSSs have been revoked and there is the need to limit any adverse impacts that this may have on investment whilst communities consider and implement alternative approaches.

Yours sincerely,

*Association of Building Engineers
Association of Consultant Architects
Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport
British Property Federation
British Urban Regeneration Association
Campaign to Protect Rural England
Campaign for Better Transport
Chartered Institute of Housing
Construction Industry Council
Country Land and Business Association
Environmental Protection UK
Freight on Rail
Friends of the Earth
Institute of Historic Building Conservation
Institution of Civil Engineers
Institution of Structural Engineers
Landscape Institute
Local Government Technical Advisers Group
National Housing Federation
Planning Officers Society
Rail Freight Group
Royal Institute of British Architects
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Royal Town Planning Institute
Shelter
Sustrans
Town and Country Planning Association
UK Green Building Council
WWF-UK*

