

Ten Ways The Next Government Can Back Beauty



Our research over the course of the last Parliament demonstrated the importance of beauty in our built and natural environment. Beauty has intrinsic value as a quality which people naturally seek out; but it also provides vital public policy benefits, stimulating improved local public health, economic, and civic outcomes. However, our research also demonstrated that residents of poorer and more urban areas of the country are less likely to consider their surroundings attractive.

As we look forward to the General Election and beyond, policymakers should commit to a programme which can guarantee access to beauty for all regardless of income or geography. Based on our work from the last two years, we call on the next Government to prioritise promoting beauty in public policy by adopting our recommendations in the following ten areas:

Housebuilding: Establish new Design Advisory Panels along local authority boundaries, with membership drawn from local residents, developers, councillors, officials, and architects, to establish local design guidelines where there is no neighbourhood or local plan in place, and assist local authorities and communities in delivering on the Government's ambition that all local and neighbourhood plans set out such design guidelines.

Planning (national level): Amend the National Planning Policy Framework to make explicit the planning system's function and purpose in creating and protecting instances of beauty in the natural and built environment.

Planning (local level): Create a counterpart to AONBs in the urban built environment by allowing local planning authorities to nominate sites to be designated as Areas of Outstanding Urban Beauty. These nominations should be subject to ratification by the Planning Inspectorate. Allocate funding for the ongoing management of newly established AOUBs to the appropriate local authorities.

Neighbourhood Planning: Give communities with made neighbourhood plans first refusal to purchase (via a community land trust or similar), or select their preferred developer for, land earmarked for housebuilding in a local or neighbourhood plan.

Public Parks and Green Space: Recognise the contribution of parks and green space to positive physical and mental health outcomes by allocating dedicated funding to contribute towards their upkeep, as part of the broader push towards prevention and "social prescribing" within the NHS.

Public Realm: Charge local authorities with new powers to introduce levies on private firms whose work causes damage or degradation to the public realm, such as utilities companies, to fund subsequent repairs and compensatory public realm improvements.

Public Land: Place more emphasis on social value and securing a legacy of beauty, along with capital receipts, in the disposal of public land. For example, conditions attached to the disposal of NHS land should closely reflect the principles underlying its Healthy New Towns programme.

Infrastructure: Expand the National Infrastructure Commission's remit, to include promoting the beauty of major UK infrastructure as a key strategic objective.

Community Rights: Extend the Community Right to Reclaim Land to include derelict, void, or poorly maintained buildings and spaces, to enable communities to challenge local councils and other public bodies to improve these assets or release them into community ownership.

Agriculture and Rural Affairs: Establish Local Nature and Beauty Partnerships across the UK (redesignating existing Local Nature Partnerships in England), to protect and enhance the beauty of the natural landscapes within their boundary.