



10 things the Autumn Statement can do for beauty

As the Government commits to building more homes and investing in new infrastructure, the importance of beauty in our built and natural environment must be acknowledged in public policy. Beauty has intrinsic value as a quality which people naturally seek out, but it also stimulates improved local public health, economic, and civic outcomes. Residents of poorer areas of the country are less likely to consider their surroundings attractive however. New ideas are needed to open beauty to all regardless of income or location to realise Government's goal of a country that works for everyone. We call on the Government to prioritise beauty in the Autumn Statement by adopting our recommendations in the following ten areas:

Housebuilding: Require any scheme which receives funding under the Government's Home Building Fund to conform to principles set out by new local Design Advisory Panels, with representatives from local residents, developers, politicians, and architects, where there is no existing or emerging neighbourhood plan in place. Give communities with made neighbourhood plans first refusal to purchase, or select their preferred developer, for land earmarked for housebuilding in a local or neighbourhood plan.

National Planning Policy: Amend the National Planning Policy Framework to make explicit the planning system's function in creating and protecting instances of beauty in the natural and built environment. Ensure local authority planning departments are adequately resourced to support and enforce this.

Local Planning: 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: Commit to expanding the programme of measures, worth £22.5 million at present, to provide expert support and technical assistance to communities engaging in neighbourhood planning, and ensure new money is targeted at deprived areas to close the gap between more and less affluent areas in the uptake of neighbourhood planning.

Public Parks and Green Space: Respond to clear public concern over the future of public parks by establishing a cross-departmental parks and green spaces team to oversee the physical and financial future of these spaces, and to assist local authorities implementing new management approaches for these spaces.

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: More emphasis should be placed 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: In line with the Conservatives' 2015 manifesto commitment to build new infrastructure "in an environmentally-sensitive way", and the Transport Minister's recent call to make the aesthetics of new transport infrastructure "a matter of public policy", the National Infrastructure Commission should see its remit expanded, to include promoting the beauty of major UK infrastructure as a key objective.

Health: Councils and neighbourhood planning bodies should receive dedicated funding to allow them to integrate prevention of mental and physical ill health into their local and neighbourhood plans. This could include for instance a focus on promoting an active lifestyle among residents and access to spaces conducive to mental wellbeing, offering local medical professionals the capacity to engage in 'social prescribing'.

Agriculture and Rural Affairs: Government should put funding in place to prioritise the protection of natural beauty in DEFRA's forthcoming 25-year plan for the environment; and work with rural local authorities, parish councils, neighbourhood forums, national park authorities and others to improve the management and accessibility of natural beauty spots, especially for residents of nearby deprived and urban areas.