

New Bill to level up the nation

- Levelling Up Missions, such as eradicating child illiteracy and closing gaps in life expectancy and living standards, to be enshrined in law
- Local communities get extra powers to tackle scourge of boarded up shops and empty homes
- Legislation to underpin biggest shift of power from Whitehall in modern times

The government has today (11 May 2022) introduced plans to transform struggling towns and cities, supporting local leaders to take back control of regeneration, ending the blight of empty shops on their high streets and delivering the quality homes that communities need.

The [Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#) will enshrine in law the government's commitment to long-term missions to spread opportunity, drive productivity and boost local pride in every corner of the country.

Levelling Up Secretary Rt Hon Michael Gove MP said:

As a country, we need to be firing on all cylinders. That is why we must level up the UK; spread prosperity and opportunity, and make sure everyone can share in our nation's success.

This Bill puts in place the reforms we need to level up. It enshrines our levelling up missions in law, which will shift resources and focus throughout this decade to the parts and people of the country who need it most. It enables every part of England which wants a London-style mayor to have one. It empowers local people, not the big developers, to take back control of regeneration in their community.

It shifts power out of Whitehall by giving local leaders the powers they need to tackle the blight of empty shops on high streets and to regenerate their communities. This is underpinned by a firm belief that by far the best placed people to level up communities are the people who live there.

We want everyone to be given the opportunity to stay local but go far.

Levelling Up

The government's defining mission is to level up the UK; to increase and spread prosperity and opportunity across the UK, and break the link between geography and destiny. The Bill puts the legal foundations needed to deliver this mission in place, so that all parts of the country will be able to share equally in our nation's success.

Measures include:

- Creating a legal duty for the government to set and report on a number of missions for levelling up the country.
- These missions will include: closing the gap in pay and productivity between the richest and poorest areas, effectively eradicating child illiteracy and innumeracy, closing gaps in healthy life expectancy, getting the rest of the country's transport connectivity much closer to the standards of London's, and making sure everyone has a local community they can be proud of.
- The deadline for each mission is 2030, but the Levelling Up Bill will create a duty for the government to report on progress annually.
- The legislation needed so that every part of England that wants a strong devolution deal can have one.
- Enabling more areas to have the kinds of devolved powers which currently only the largest cities enjoy, helping drive improvements on local priorities such as transport and skills.
- New provisions on council borrowing to protect taxpayers' money while enabling local areas to make much needed investment.

Regeneration

The Bill will also directly give local leaders the powers they need to regenerate their communities, and transform their high streets and town centres. A new infrastructure levy will see the big developers contribute more towards better local roads, schools, hospitals, and genuinely affordable housing. Communities will also receive a share of the Levy revenue raised – as long as they have a parish or town council – and we are exploring how this could be expanded.

Measures include:

- New powers for local leaders to run High Street Rental Auctions, where they can auction off tenancies in shops that have been vacant for over a year. This will help to end the plague of empty shops that blight so many high streets.
- Councils will also be able to double council tax on empty and second homes, ensuring everyone pays their fair share towards local services and boost levelling up.
- The 'al-fresco dining revolution' will be made permanent, injecting new life into the high street through creating a sustainable process for communities, business and local authorities, making it permanently cheaper and quicker to get a licence for outdoor dining.
- A new, locally set infrastructure levy, charged on the final value of property when its sold, will replace much of the broken S106 payments system. This will see the big developers contribute far more of the money they make from development towards building better local roads, rail, schools, hospitals, and more affordable housing.
- Legislation to make it easier for councils to regenerate their town centres through Compulsory Purchase Orders, making the process quicker and easier to use.

Right homes in the right places

The Bill will also deliver new reforms to the planning system, ensuring new development is more beautiful, produces more local Infrastructure, is shaped by local people's democratic wishes, improves environmental outcomes, and occurs with neighbourhoods very much in mind.

Measures include:

- Local plans – the way in which councils set the vision for future development in their area and decide whether to give planning permission – will gain stronger legal weight and be made simpler to produce. Communities will have a major say in these plans giving them more opportunity to shape what happens in their areas. Currently 61% of councils do not have an up to date local plan, which leaves communities exposed to development on which they haven't had a meaningful say.
- A digitised planning system making plans and planning applications fully available on your smartphone.
- Stronger protections for the environment in local plans, empowering councils to make better use of brownfield land and protect precious greenbelt land.
- Local design codes will be made mandatory so that developers have to respect styles drawn up and favoured locally – from the layout or materials used, to how it provides green space.

The government has today also outlined a new deal for millions of renters in private and social housing.

By ending Section 21 evictions and extending the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector, all renters can expect a decent, safe, and secure home. At the same time, these measures deliver a fairer system for good landlords who can struggle to recover their properties when faced with anti-social behaviour or wilful non-payment of rent.

Details on further support for tenants in social housing will be unveiled later this year which will include a review of the Decent Homes Standard, new consumer regulation and regular inspections of the largest landlords.

Further information

The planning measures have been informed by over 40,000 responses made to the government's 2020 'Planning for the Future' White Paper, and inquiry by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee.

In order to continue to support the hospitality sector, we will also extend the temporary pavement licence process for one further year while we seek to make permanent these provisions through the Bill, subject to Parliamentary approval.