

## Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill: health inequalities amendment (Amendment 198)

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### Key points

- The [Better Planning Coalition](#) brings together 34 organisations who want a planning system fit for people, nature and the climate. We're supporting Amendment 198, tabled by Baroness Willis of Summertown, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, Lord Foster of Bath, and the Lord Bishop of London. It addresses a significant gap in the Bill, which includes no targeted measures on levelling up missions 7 (health) and 8 (wellbeing).
- Our physical environment can considerably affect the length, quality and happiness of our lives. This clause would ensure local authorities **take this into account when exercising their planning functions**. It's supported by public health experts including **Professor Sir Michael Marmot**.
- **The clause seizes the opportunity to deliver on Government commitments** to boost active travel, ensure everyone lives within 15 minutes of green or blue space and to provide homes which meet local health needs. **It gives planners a mandate** to deliver on these aims: for example, 64% of planning officers said 'lack of robust planning guidance or regulation' currently prevented them from ensuring facilities were within walking, wheeling or cycling distance.<sup>1</sup>
- The levelling up agenda has been defined as ensuring that "geography is not destiny", and our health is crucial to that.<sup>2</sup> This clause will ensure planners can use the powerful levelling up tools at their disposal to help their communities.

### The role of planning in improving health and wellbeing

Research shows that the unequal distribution of high-quality built environments and green space contributes to health inequalities in England.<sup>3</sup> A 2016 review found that **"living in areas with higher amounts of green spaces reduces mortality"**.<sup>4</sup> Spatial planning can address these inequalities, shaping sustainable, healthy, thriving places which improve physical and mental health and well-being.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sustrans, 2022. [Walkable neighbourhoods: Building in the right places to reduce car dependency](#).

<sup>2</sup> 10 Downing Street, 2021. [The Prime Minister's Levelling Up Speech](#).

<sup>3</sup> PHE, 2018. Health Profile for England: [Wider determinants of health](#).

<sup>4</sup> Gascon, M, et al, 2016. 'Residential green spaces and mortality', *Environ Int.*, 86:60-7.

<sup>5</sup> PHE, 2017. [Spatial Planning for Health](#).

## The new clause

This clause creates a statutory objective to reduce health inequalities and improve people's wellbeing when exercising their planning powers. **The clause would require local planning authorities to have special regard to the following issues.**

### Increasing access to high-quality green infrastructure

A 2014 review found that people “who are more connected to nature tended to experience more positive affect, vitality, and life satisfaction”.<sup>6</sup> This reduces NHS pressures: **current green space results in estimated savings for the NHS of at least £100 million a year from fewer GP visits.**<sup>7</sup> This provision is, however, concentrated in wealthier areas. The Environmental Improvement Plan pledged that “everyone should live within 15 minutes’ walk of a green or blue space”, which one in three people in England, mainly in deprived communities, currently lack.<sup>8</sup>

### Providing housing which meets residents’ needs

The Government’s Sustainable Warmth strategy seeks to ensure safe, warm homes for all. Yet 6.5 million people currently live in poor quality housing, including dwellings which are damp, cold or in a state of disrepair.<sup>9</sup> People in the lowest quintile are five times more likely to experience this than those from the highest family income quintile. Living in poor quality housing makes people twice as likely to have poor general health than those who don’t. Affordability of housing also affects our health: living in overcrowded or unaffordable housing is linked with depression and anxiety.<sup>10</sup> Good quality, genuinely affordable homes are essential to addressing health inequalities.

### Opportunities to enable everyday physical activity

According to the Chief Medical Officers, “if physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure”.<sup>11</sup> The Government’s Gear Change vision sets out ambitions to increase cycling and walking by 2030. Walking, wheeling and cycling improve physical health and mental health *directly* through exercise and *indirectly* through reduced air pollution.<sup>12</sup> **In 2021, walking, wheeling and cycling prevented 138,000 serious long-term health conditions in the UK.**<sup>13</sup>

### Providing the services and amenities people need

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<sup>6</sup> Capaldi, C, Dopko, R, Zelenski, J., 2014. [‘The relationship between nature connectedness and happiness: a meta-analysis.’](#), *Front Psychol.*, 8:5:976.

<sup>7</sup> Fields in Trust, [Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces](#).

<sup>8</sup> DEFRA, Environmental Improvement Plan 2023; Groundwork, 2021. [Report finds severe inequalities in access to parks and greenspaces in communities across the UK](#); Natural England, 2021. [How Natural England’s Green Infrastructure Framework can help create better places to live](#).

<sup>9</sup> Resolution Foundation, 2023. [Trying Times: How people living in poor quality housing have fared during the cost of living crisis](#). The next two sentences are also based on this research.

<sup>10</sup> Marmot, Michael, 2010. [Fair Society, Healthy Lives](#).

<sup>11</sup> DHSC, 2019. [UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines](#).

<sup>12</sup> De Nazelle A, et al, 2011. ‘Improving health through policies that promote active travel’, *Environ Int.*, 37(4):766–77.

<sup>13</sup> Extrapolated from Sustrans, 2022. [Walking and Cycling Index 2021](#).

Research shows that most people will walk a 20-minute return walk to get to and from the places they need to go.<sup>14</sup> 65% agree that people should be able to meet most of their everyday needs within this same time frame.<sup>15</sup> Creating places which allow this will help significantly to reduce health inequalities and improve wellbeing.

## Amendment text

After Clause 94, insert the following new Clause—

### “Duty to reduce health inequalities and improve well-being

(1) For the purposes of this section “the general health and well-being objective” is the reduction of health inequalities and the improvement of well-being through the exercise of planning functions in relation to England.

(2) A local planning authority must ensure that the development plan for their area includes policies designed to secure that the development and use of land contribute to the general health and well-being objective.

(3) In considering whether to grant planning permission or permission in principle and related approvals, a local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State must ensure the decision is consistent with achieving the general health and well-being objective.

(4) In complying with this section, a local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State must have special regard to the desirability of—

- (a) ensuring that key destinations such as essential shops, schools, parks and open spaces, health facilities and public transport services are in safe and convenient proximity on foot to homes;
- (b) facilitating access to these key destinations and creating opportunities for everyone to be physically active by improving existing, and creating new, walking and cycling routes and networks;
- (c) increasing access to high-quality green infrastructure;
- (d) ensuring a supply of housing which is affordable to and meets the health, accessibility and well-being needs of people who live in the local planning authority's area.”

## Member's explanatory statement

This new clause would create a requirement for local planning authorities to include policies in their development plans which contribute to a new general health and well-being objective. It requires local planning authorities and the Secretary of State to ensure consistency with this objective when deciding whether to grant planning permission or permission in principle and related approvals, such as reserved matters.

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<sup>14</sup> 80% of journeys under a mile are walked – DfT, 2016. [National Travel Survey](#).

<sup>15</sup> Sustrans-commissioned YouGov Survey, 2019.