

Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill: Briefing for Commons Committee

New clause 44: Environmental equality mission

This briefing is on behalf the [Better Planning Coalition](#), representing 29 organisations across the housing, planning, environmental, transport and heritage sectors. It covers [new clause 44](#) on environmental equality, which has been tabled by Rachael Maskell MP.

The inclusion of levelling up missions is a welcome part of the Bill. A new legal duty on the Secretary of State to publish objectives to tackle geographic disparities has the potential to drive forward the levelling up agenda, and ensure more communities are given the tools they need to thrive. However, the potential of an overlooked levelling up tool, equitable access to the environment, also needs to be recognised on the face of the Bill through a specified mission.

The environment someone lives in helps determine the quality of their life, with environments with more accessible nature-rich spaces leading to healthier, happier lives. 70% of UK adults report that being close to nature improves their mood¹. These wellbeing benefits result in improved health outcomes - current green space provision results in estimated savings for the NHS of at least £100 million a year from fewer GP visits.²

These benefits are however concentrated in the wealthier areas where access to nature is highest. One in three people in England, mainly in economically deprived communities, do not have access to a greenspace within 15 minutes' walk of home.³ People on low incomes are less likely to live within a 5-minute walk of a green space (46% of those with an annual household income under £15,000 compared to 70% of people with an annual household income over £35,000), less likely to live somewhere where the streets are green (27% compared to 53%), and less likely to report that there are good walking routes where they live (42% compared to 59%).⁴

For levelling up to be successful, these environmental disparities must be rectified, so that more communities can enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits that access to high quality nature-rich spaces provides. This is the main ask of Link's [Nature for Everyone](#) campaign, backed by 80 nature, health and community organisations.

Despite this significant levelling up potential, environmental equality was not included as one of the levelling up missions published in February's Levelling Up White Paper. To safeguard against further omissions and to ensure that the full potential of this powerful levelling up tool is realised, new clause 44 establishes an environmental equality levelling up mission to provide equitable access to high quality natural spaces. This specified mission would secure and maintain a ministerial focus on increasing nature on people's doorsteps, enriching lives and improving health outcomes

¹ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/nature/nature-research>

² <https://www.fieldsintrust.org/revaluing>

³ <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2021/12/07/how-natural-englands-green-infrastructure-framework-can-help-create-better-places-to-live/>

⁴ <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Out-of-Bounds-equity-in-access-to-urban-nature.pdf>

About the Better Planning Coalition

The Better Planning Coalition represents 29 organisations across the environment, housing, planning, heritage and transport sectors with one common goal: a planning system fit for people, nature and the climate. The Coalition is working to improve the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill.

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