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# Gove backs MPs' report that calls for 'universal' neighbourhood planning

4 October 2021 by Joey Gardiner

The new housing and communities secretary, Michael Gove, has appeared to cast his weight behind a report by a group of backbench Tory MPs that calls for a return to “localist” policies and recommends making neighbourhood planning “universal” across England.



Michael Gove at the Conservative Home and New Social Covenant Unit fringe event yesterday. Pic: Conservative Home/YouTube

The report, [entitled “Trusting the people”](#), called on the government to engage in a “double devolution” down to both councils and local communities, which would include “making neighbourhood planning universal” across the country and the “ultimate arbiter of local development”.

Gove, appointed to his post as secretary of state for levelling up, housing and communities in last month’s reshuffle, appeared at the [launch of the report at the Conservative Party conference](#) yesterday in Manchester.

The report was commissioned by a collaboration between localist campaign group New Local, and a new policy pressure group, The New Social Covenant Unit, set up early this year by Conservative MP Danny Kruger.

Kruger was last month appointed a junior minister in Gove's department, acting as the secretary of state's parliamentary private secretary.

The report called for local authorities to deliberately put "public services and local assets into the hands of mutuals, social enterprises and charities which are run by local people", including in the planning sphere.

It said: "It means making neighbourhood planning universal and the ultimate arbiter of local development".

This new approach will "require Whitehall to change the way it works and listen to local places about what support they need based", the report adds.

Jerome Mayhew, MP for Broadland and one of the document's authors, said community power was the "logical conclusion of Brexit".

He said: "People who voted Leave in 2016 voted to take back control not just of our borders and laws, but of our communities and society itself.

"We need to do more than pass power from Brussels to Whitehall to town halls. We need to empower the practical people who live, work and can make a difference in local places."

Speaking at the launch, Gove said the Brexit referendum had demonstrated a "desire by people to take back control".

"That's entirely right," he added. "There was a sense in which many people felt they had been disempowered. It's been particularly acute in areas of deprivation."

The endorsement of the "localist" report comes as Gove is [reported to have ordered a complete rethink of the reforms contained in last year's planning white paper](#), which have been criticised for being overtly centralising. The reforms proposed forcing local authorities to grant outline planning permission to schemes via stripped-back local plans, and centrally-set mandatory housing targets for every local authority.

Gove is due to give his first major speech in his new role at the party conference this afternoon.

At the report launch, Gove also said that typical development forms had alienated many local communities from development, echoing findings from the 2020 report of the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission.

He said: "I'm an optimist we can build the hundreds of thousands of new homes we need in this country. But I don't think it's unfair to say that some of those responsible for providing new homes in the past have built them in a way hasn't been sufficiently sensitive not just environmental concerns, but also the question of beauty, and community.

“Beauty doesn’t mean that every house has to be built in a Georgian style, but there are various human principles which mean the way streets are developed, have been neglected.

“Many of the services on which we rely should be walkable, and they’re not, and that creates an understandable resistance to new development, and they [local people] understand that’s not development they want to be part of or want their children to be part of.”

The paper was co-authored by backbench Conservative MPs Siobhan Baillie, Miriam Cates, Nick Fletcher, Jo Gideon, Jonathan Gullis, Paul Howell, Jerome Mayhew, Robin Millar, Kieran Mullan and Jane Stevenson.