



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP**  
*Minister of State for Housing*

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local  
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Our Ref: 10066771

Your Ref: DW/jj

3 February 2021

Cllr James Mallinder  
East Suffolk Council  
By email

Dear Cllr Mallinder,

Thank you for your letter of 10 December to Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, on behalf of East Suffolk Council's Environment Task Group and the East Suffolk Greenprint Forum about delivering action on climate change. I am replying as Minister of State for Housing. Please accept my sincerest apologies for the delay in responding to you.

This is a critical year for the future of our planet. The Government has announced plans for a Net Zero Strategy, building on the Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan, which will set out our vision for transitioning to a net zero economy by 2050. This will make the most of new growth and employment opportunities across the United Kingdom.

As we continue to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to ensure that our recovery plans support our climate change response. By building back greener and better, we can achieve our climate goals, protect our biodiversity and natural capital and sustain climate-resilient economic development, all in a fair and inclusive way. I am pleased to hear about the ambitious work of East Suffolk Council in committing to carbon neutrality.

The Government remains committed to meeting its target of net zero emissions by 2050 and recognises the important contribution that energy efficiency of buildings will make in meeting net zero by that date. Ongoing reforms will ensure policies support climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as creating places which are better designed and more beautiful. We intend to review the roadmap for improving the environmental performance of buildings through the Future Homes Standard to ensure that implementation takes place in the shortest time possible. We will also explore options for the future of energy efficiency standards beyond 2025. In doing so, we will want to clarify the role that local authorities can play in setting standards.

We intend to bring forward a quicker and simpler framework for assessing environmental effects, one which does not compromise on environmental standards. Instead it will encourage opportunities for environmental enhancements to be identified and pursued early in the development process. The planning reforms will support the ambition of the 25-year Environment Plan to ensure that we are the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

We will do this through:

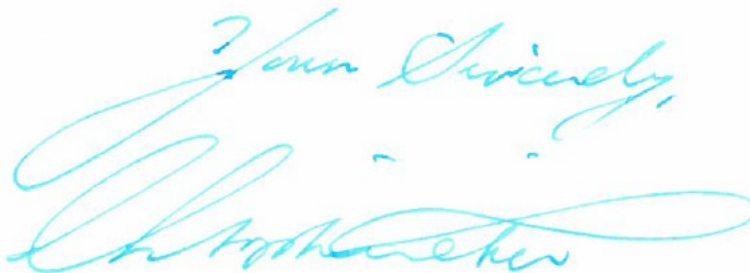
- Protection through planning: demonstrating how reforms will not erode existing protections but strengthen the environment wherever possible;
- Securing biodiversity net gain through planning;
- Building beautiful, building green: empowering local communities to demand beautiful development, carried out in an environmentally sensitive manner.

A significant amount of support has been made available for councils to act on climate change, from heat networks to cycle paths to flood defences. We will continue to work with councils to enable them to build back greener and better locally, through an effective planning framework and devolution. Environmental principles are embedded in growth funds and the national planning framework, however there is currently no statutory duty on councils to act locally on climate change. For those who recognise the urgency of the climate emergency a great deal of funding is available.

Ultimately, tax policies, like those you suggested, are reserved to HM Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Consumers already benefit from a reduced VAT rate of 5 per cent on residential construction under certain conditions. This includes conversions of buildings from one use to another, and the renovation of properties that have been empty for two years or more prior to the renovation work. Going further would be very expensive; reducing VAT on all property renovation, repairs and improvements would cost the Exchequer approximately £4 billion per year. Although all taxes are kept under review, the Government has no plans to review the treatment of construction at this time.

Finally, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is supporting clean growth initiatives through existing funding pots, including the Towns Fund and Local Growth Fund. Local institutions are using strategic plans to support the United Kingdom's net zero by 2050 commitment. My officials are working with other departments including the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ensure that green recovery and clean growth form a key part of our emerging local economic recovery planning.

Thank you again for your email. I hope you find this information helpful.



**RT HON CHRISTOPHER PINCHER MP**

