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The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP  
Secretary of State for Housing,  
Communities and Local Government  
and The Rt Hon Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London

23rd August 2024

Dear Secretary of State and Mayor Khan,

Just Space is an informal alliance of London-based community groups, campaigns and independent organisations aiming to improve public participation in planning and ensure policy is fairer towards communities. We published our [Manifesto](#) in April. We have been working closely this year with CPRE London and other groups on housing issues to produce a [Housing Charter](#).

We're heartened to see the new government's more collaborative approach to London's governance, which is essential if our housing crisis is to be addressed. A more realistic approach to housing targets in the capital is a great first step, and we understand conversations are underway as to how central government could help the London Mayor address the scale of the housing crisis.

London's unique crisis is getting worse, with affordability the critical issue: last week's ONS figures show rents increasing by 12% p.a. For those in the private rented sector, rent now accounts for 31.7% of income in London - and it is even worse at the lower end of the market. Furthermore, London has lost the largest amount of social housing in the country through RTB, whilst as a capital and world city we attract an extraordinary and increasing demand for land used primarily as an investment asset, rather than to provide the affordable homes we desperately need.

We propose three key things which should happen urgently:

- The Mayor of London has fewer powers than any other leader of a major city in the Western world. There is a range of devolved powers which the strategic authority needs to address its unique problems, including the regulation of the rapidly growing private rented sector in terms of rents, conditions and evictions. The Mayor also needs the flexibility to direct government housing grant towards the highest need, which is for genuinely affordable housing in the form of social rented homes. The particular conditions specific to London also need the Mayor to have power to suspend or end

the Right to Buy, which continues to erode the social stock and discourage councils from adding new council homes. The necessary devolution of powers could be enacted relatively speedily, while we await provisions in the proposed Housing Bill coming into force.

- The proposed Housing and Infrastructure Bill needs to address urgently the ongoing scandal of s21 'no fault' evictions as well as provide other basic renters' rights, standards and controls. It also needs provisions to address the growing abuse of homes being kept deliberately vacant, which currently stands at over one million across the UK<sup>1</sup>. It needs powers to address over one million housing permissions which have not been built out<sup>2</sup> (particularly those where implementation has been technically triggered through the expedient of digging a trench): a so-called 'Use it or Lose it' approach to planning permissions. And, as part of resolving the crisis in local government finance, the Bill needs to address the absurdity of the average householder in Oldham paying more in council tax than the residents of Buckingham Palace.
- We understand that the Mayor is likely to instigate a full review of the London Plan later this year, and would strongly urge that communities traditionally excluded from the process of developing the strategic housing needs assessment and strategic housing land assessment are fully engaged from the outset.

We look forward to working together to resolve the housing crisis.

Best wishes,

Michael Ball, co-ordinator, Just Space

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.actiononemptyhomes.org/why-empty-homes-matter>

<sup>2</sup> <https://blog.planningportal.co.uk/2024/06/26/gain-early-market-insight-direct-from-the-application-source/>