

Social rent cap must not leave councils out of pocket, say Green Party councillors



12 October 2022

Green Party councillors who are members of ruling administrations in England have written to Simon Clarke, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, asking for a guarantee that councils will not be out of pocket as a result of the proposed cap on social rents. They also point to how local authorities would be undermined without a corresponding cap on private sector rents.

A government consultation ends today, which has sought views on proposals to cap social housing rent increases for the coming financial year, with options at 3%, 5% and 7% being considered [1].

In their letter to the Secretary of State [2], the councillors say:

“In our view, a government-imposed cap on social rents is not the way to address the cost of living without equivalent action on private rents. We are living through a housing crisis, with private sector rents becoming increasingly unaffordable in many parts of the country. To cap social rents while taking no action in the private sector and failing to provide local authorities with additional funding would undermine local authorities’ ability to build or purchase affordable homes, just when they are most needed to house those least able to afford inflated private sector rents.”

Councillor Douglas Johnson, who is Chair of Housing Policy Committee on Sheffield City Council, said:

“Without extra funding, the cost of any social rent cap will be borne by local councils and their tenants. This would mean less money for councils to spend on crucial services and maintenance; less support available to those in serious hardship and reductions in essential insulation work to reduce tenants’ bills. We need a guarantee that the government will stump up the extra cash needed to fund a rent freeze and a guarantee that councils will not be out of pocket.”

Notes

[1]

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/rent-cap-on-social-housing-to-protect-millions-of-tenants-from-rising-cost-of-living>

[2] **Letter to Simon Clarke, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities:**

Dear Simon,

Proposed Rent Cap on Social Housing

We are writing as Green Party chairs of committees, Cabinet members for housing responsibility and elected councillors in local government, about the proposed rent cap. Although the Association of Green councillors has responded directly to the formal consultation, we wanted to set out clearly our concerns about the impact on our tenants.

At a local level, we are acutely conscious of, and acting on, both the cost-of-living crisis and inflation in materials and labour. Our frustration is that we are yet to see a clear plan emerging from central government to do the same.

In our view, a government-imposed cap on social rents is not the way to address the cost of living without equivalent action on private rents. We are living through a housing crisis, with private sector rents becoming increasingly unaffordable in many parts of the country. To cap social rents while taking no action in the private sector and failing to provide local authorities with additional funding would undermine local authorities' ability to build or purchase affordable homes, just when they are most needed to house those least able to afford inflated private sector rents. This would, we feel, also undermine the laudable work achieved through "Everyone In." The government's proposal means a massive real-terms cut in the resources so desperately needed for social housing, to the detriment of all council and housing association tenants.

You will be aware, of course, that the majority of social housing tenants – those in receipt of benefits – would not be any better off as a result of your proposal. Those not in receipt of benefits would see cuts in services and maintenance, less support available to those in serious hardship; and reductions in essential insulation work to reduce tenants' bills. The only real beneficiary of this move is central government, who we estimate will save about £4.3 billion over five years in housing benefit payments. Effectively, this cost will be borne by local councils and their tenants.

We welcome the consultation but would like to see a clear proposal on the support measures for local councils and their tenants. We are frankly disappointed that this consultation is only being run after the decision on the social rent cap has been announced.

Most significantly, we need to remind you that the effect of a below-inflation cap is to have ongoing effects year-on-year. Our request therefore is for central government to guarantee that councils will not be out of pocket either in this year or subsequently as a result of this hasty intervention.

We look forward to hearing from you in due course and would welcome a meeting to discuss our concerns and your response.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Douglas Johnson, Chair of Housing Policy Committee, Sheffield City Council

Cllr Siriol Hugh-Jones, Deputy Leader and co-chair of Housing Committee, Brighton & Hove City Council

Cllr David Gibson, co-chair of Housing Committee, Brighton & Hove City Council

Cllr Lesley Whybrow, Cabinet Member for the Environment, Folkestone & Hythe District Council

Cllr Zoe Nicholson, Deputy Leader, Lewes District Council

Cllr Ellie Chowns, Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy, Herefordshire Council.

Cllr Robin Bennett, Deputy Leader, South Oxfordshire District Council

Cllr Andrew Cooper, Leader of the Green Group, Kirklees Council

Cllr Andrew Prosser, Cabinet Member, West Oxfordshire District Council

Cllr Steve Hynd, Housing Committee Member, Stroud District Council

Cllr Chris Jockel, Stroud District Council

Cllr Maleiki Haybe, Housing Policy Committee Member, Sheffield City Council

Cllr Denise Craghill, Executive Member for Housing, City of York Council

Cllr Gina Dowding, Cabinet Member, Lancaster City Council

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[Solar farm ban shows Tories are the 'anti-renewables coalition' say Greens](#)



10 October 2022

Responding to news that Liz Truss's ministers are planning to ban solar farms from most of England's farmland [1], Green Party co-leader Adrian Ramsay said:

"It is clear that the Tories and their fossil fuel friends have turned into

the anti-renewables coalition. The fact that this attack on solar farms has not been matched by a mandate to developers that all new housing developments must be fitted with roof top panels shows this is an ideologically driven policy that makes no economic or environmental sense.

“Solar panels can be deployed extremely quickly and offer some of the cheapest electricity, helping to tackle both the cost of living crisis and the climate emergency.

“Research has also shown that solar energy generation and food production can co-exist well together. Arranged in certain formations, solar panels have actually been found to boost agricultural production by helping with shading and water conservation during heatwaves, for example [2]. Rather than banning solar farms, the government should be advancing deployment of solar projects in a way that benefits local communities, farmers and biodiversity.”

Notes

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/10/ministers-hope-to-ban-solar-projects-from-most-english-farms>

2. [Agrivoltaic solar farms offer “shocking” benefits beyond producing energy \(dezeen.com\)](https://www.dezeen.com/2022/10/10/agrivoltaic-solar-farms-offer-shocking-benefits-beyond-producing-energy/)

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[Expanding North Sea oil and gas has no connection to reality of climate change, Greens warn](#)



7 October 2022

Responding to Business Secretary Jacob Rees Mogg’s opening up of a new North Sea Oil and Gas exploration round [1], Green Party co-leader Adrian Ramsay said:

“The government’s claim that burning ever more fossil fuels from the North Sea will help the UK meet its international obligations to become net zero by 2050 [2] has no connection to reality – we truly have stepped through the Looking Glass.

“The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the International Energy

Agency and the United Nations have each warned there can be no new fossil fuel projects if there is to be any chance of keeping global temperature rises under 1.5 degrees.

“Furthermore, Jacob Rees-Mogg’s claims that these new licences will increase energy security in the face of Russian aggression is also for the birds. The North Sea Transition Authority, which regulates them, says even the fast-tracked ones won’t come on stream for five years.

“The only people who benefit from this reckless decision are the fossil fuel companies and vested interests who have backed the Truss government and are now receiving their payback.

“The reality is, we can only hope to hold global warming to under 1.5 degrees if we leave fossil fuels in the ground.

“The most effective and sustainable way to ensure energy security is to invest in insulating houses and massively ramping up renewable energy [3]. New oil and gas exploration is an expensive and dangerous road to planetary destruction.”

ENDS

Notes

1

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-63163824>

2

[In her speech to the Conservative Party Autumn Conference](#), Prime Minister Liz Truss said: “We are opening more gas fields in the North Sea and delivering more renewables and nuclear energy. That is how we will protect the great British environment, deliver on our commitment to net zero and tackle climate change.”

3

At its Autumn Conference last weekend, the [Green Party presented its plan to tax the wealth of the richest 1% at a rate starting at 1% to raise at least £70bn to invest in insulating peoples’ homes and expanding renewables](#)

For more information or to arrange an interview contact the press office on press@greenparty.org.uk or call 0203 691 9401

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'Destructive' Investment Zones will fail to create fairer greener communities



6 October 2022

Green councillors across England and Wales are urging their councils to reject 'Investment Zones', which are a core element in the Conservatives' 'Growth Plan.[1]' Greens say the plans, which aim to accelerate housing and infrastructure through a new streamlined planning system, threaten both local democracy and the environment [2].

Green Party co-leader Adrian Ramsay said:

"Investment zones, as set out by the government, threaten to ride rough-shod over agreed local priorities, further damage the environment and nature, and reduce commitments to affordable homes and community facilities.

"By offering a liberalised planning process with tax breaks, this is a developers charter, that will mean local communities lose their rights to resist unsustainable development and allow developers to by-pass local objections entirely.

"The guidance wants to remove current legal requirements which provide the key tools for protecting nature during the planning process. Even worse, it suggests Investment Zones could be allowed in National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other protected environments. The legal requirement to achieve Net Zero by 2050 has also been completely ignored.

"As Greens we urge local councils to take a stand: to refuse to agree to a new streamlined overarching planning system; to make clear their commitment to local control of planning, and insist existing protections for the environment and for nature are retained.

"We do urgently need investment in our local communities. But Greens have a very different vision of how we can create prosperity.

"We desperately need to insulate our homes and workplaces, provide clean and cheap renewable energy, improve public transport, produce healthy local food and help nature thrive. We also need serious investment in our crumbling health and social care services. All of which will help create thousands of new jobs.

"We understand the desperate need many councils have for investment and funding. But we will resist harmful Investment Zones and continue to fight for fairer, greener communities."

Notes

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/investment-zones-in-england-expression-of-interest>
2. <https://www.wcl.org.uk/open-letter-to-pm-on-environmental-deregulation.aspx>

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[“This government is determined to wreck the climate”: Green Party response to Liz Truss conference speech](#)



5 October 2022

Responding to Prime Minister Liz Truss’ speech to the Conservative Party conference today, Green Party deputy leader Zack Polanski said:

“This government is determined to wreck the climate with a dangerous drive to growth that is based on greater investment in fossil fuels that are destroying the planet.

“Liz Truss used her speech today to try and build a coalition of ‘enemies’ that she claims are holding the country back. This is divisive and false.

“We stand for the planet and for the people. There is no climate justice without social justice, and no future for the planet with this dead-end government.

“We need to raise the funds needed to tackle rising poverty and inequality through a targeted wealth tax and to use these funds to drive massive investment in insulating peoples’ homes and rolling out renewable energy to lower bills, stabilise the economy and tackle climate change.”

ENDS

For more information or to arrange an interview contact the press office on press@greenparty.org.uk or call 0203 691 9401

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