The Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP

The Prime Minister

10 Downing Street

London

SW1A 2AA

27th October 2026

Dear Andy,

Congratulations on becoming Prime Minister and your first 100 days in office.

In your Labour party conference speech on the 29th September you said that people are looking for more substantial change and that Britain is not where any of us would wish to be. We agree.

The planning system does not work, and has not worked, for women and their neighbourhoods in England.

Women are the weavers of the social fabric. The mothers, carers, knitters, natterers, growers, pickers up of the pieces, and shoulders to cry on. Our voices are frequently those most excluded from decision-making; while our lives are those most acutely impacted at the neighbourhood scale by those decisions.

We know what we need to “Live Well” locally. We need the power to make better decisions: for homes that are decent, appropriate to actual needs, and truly affordable; sanctuary for women and children fleeing violence in all its forms, and for our most marginalised; clean air, space to grow nutritious food, and a nature rich environment; and the power to plan with and for the next generation including rights to play and opportunities to thrive.

Successive planning reforms have reduced public participation and local democratic accountability, and marginalised community concerns in favour of deregulation intended to drive “economic growth”. This has not delivered the homes, health, climate action, and youth and community infrastructure we need. It also undermines our ability to bring diverse people into common purpose motivated by genuine power to make decisions; fuelling narratives of blame and division.

The evidence is clear. Women and children are among those worst affected by the intersecting cost of living, health, housing and climate crises. It is time our voices are heard.

Work with us to create a new system that refocuses planning on what it was originally created to do: deliver public benefit to people and places in a democratically accountable and participative way.

We have developed three asks that would ensure women's voices are heard across England. These will benefit all of us:

1. Create a new legal right for resident participation in local area planning at council ward scale including requirements for gender balance, equality, and diversity; participatory budgeting for services, community facilities, and infrastructure; and a meaningful role in land use planning.
2. Establish a national community-led planning fund to invest in the capacity building, civic education, and support required to enable residents to engage in participatory planning from an empowered and informed position.
3. Strengthen and restore our democratic right to challenge new developments with significant environmental and social impacts.

We invite you to meet a delegation from our *Women's Manifesto for Just Neighbourhoods* coalition on Friday 5th March at No.10 North in advance of International Women's Day and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Naomi Luhde-Thompson, CEO, Rights Community Action & Senior Lecturer, School of the Built Environment, Oxford Brookes University

Dr Sophie King, CEO, Community Led Action and Savings Support

Annie Buxton, Chair, Arbourthorne Community Network, Sheffield

Anthony Waddington, CEO, Participate Projects, Bradford

Catrina Pickering, Head of England, Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Claire Harris, Strategic Lead, The Pankhurst Trust inc Manchester Women's Aid

Clare Wightman, CEO, Grapevine, Coventry and Warwickshire Ltd

Deacon Debs Brazier, Methodist Minister for Brownley Green Methodist Church, St Andrews Methodist Church and Lawton Moor Methodist Church, Wythenshawe, Manchester

Professor Diana Mitlin FRSA, FAcSS, Global Development Institute, University of Manchester

Emma Gerrard, CEO, Lifted Carers Manchester

Erin Mansell, Deputy Director of the Women's Budget Group

Jason Tetley, Director, Greater Manchester Law Centre

Jessica McFarland, Facilitator, Greater Manchester Women & Girl's Equality Panel.

John Ryan, Strategic Lead, Shelter GM

Julia Savage, Campaigns Manager, Asylum Matters

Kate Maggs, CEO, Better Things

Laura Fisher, Founder, Survivor Sanctuary, Coventry

Lily Axworthy, CEO, Greater Together Manchester

Dr Melanie Lombard, Senior Lecturer, School of Geography and Planning, University of Sheffield

Neil Frackleton, CEO, Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit

Nic Prescott, Chair, Greater Manchester Tenants Union

Nnenna Belia Onwuka, Feminist Climate Justice Policy Campaigner, Women's Environmental Network (Wen)

Rachel Elm, Director, Square Peg, Hull

Rachel Summerscales, CEO, Greater Manchester Community Led Homes

Ramatoulie Saidykhan, Chair, Creative Minds Middlesbrough

Revd Dr Kate Gray, The United Reformed Church, Manchester (East, West & South).

Reverend Canon Ellie Trimble, Rector of the Church of the Apostles with St Cuthberts, Miles Platting, Diocese of Manchester

Rose Ssali, Founder/Director, Mama Women's Health and Poverty Partnership GM & CEO, Support and Action for Women's Network (SAWN), Oldham

Sharon Davis, Community Savers Leadership Team, Community Savers Network

Dr Stuart Hodkinson, Associate Professor in Urban Geography, University of Leeds

Sue Anya and Sheila Davis, Co-Chairs, Miles Platting Community and Age-friendly Network, Manchester

Tanu Patel, Managing Director, Yorkshire Women's Forum

Veronika Susedkova, Development Lead, Middleton Cooperating

Vicky Marsh, Campaign Coordinator, Fuel Poverty Action Manchester

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