Back design to deliver good growth in every postcode

To: Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP, Prime Minister

10 Downing Street
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cc: Rt Hon John Healey MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer;
Rt Hon Jonathan Reynolds, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade and President of the Board of Trade;
Rt Hon Lisa Nandy, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing as leaders from across the UK's design economy to urge the government to use the 2026 Autumn Budget to **announce a National Design Policy**, placing design at the heart of the UK's growth agenda.

This is an agenda you have long understood. Through your support for design-led regeneration in Greater Manchester and your backing of the 2024 Design for Planet Festival, you have helped demonstrate how design can create better places, support innovation, strengthen communities and drive sustainable growth.

At a time when government is focused on productivity, innovation, regional growth and the adoption of transformative technologies such as AI, design has an essential role to play. It turns ideas into products, technologies into businesses, investment into better services and innovation into growth, helping organisations solve complex problems and ensuring new technologies such as AI can be adopted effectively and deliver value in practice. It is also how innovation becomes meaningful in people's everyday lives, helping individuals access services more easily, navigate complex systems and benefit from new technologies.

Yet while the UK is a global design leader, design remains largely absent from national economic strategy. Countries such as Singapore have shown how a national framework can maximise design's contribution to innovation, productivity and growth. The UK should develop a National Design Policy that brings together government, business and the public sector around a shared vision for design-led growth. The foundations already exist: the Design Council has convened leaders from across industry, education, government and the design sector to develop a delivery plan setting out five actions to strengthen the economy, build a skilled workforce and enhance international competitiveness.

The Design Council's latest Design Economy research illustrates the extent to which design is already one of the UK's great economic strengths. The design economy contributes £136.7 billion to the UK economy, supports more than 2.27 million jobs and is growing faster than the wider economy. Around 80% of designers work outside specialist design industries, embedded within manufacturing, healthcare, engineering, finance, technology and public services, demonstrating how design drives growth across every nation and region of the UK.

The UK's design strengths are visible across the economy. Your recent support for McLaren's investment in British design, engineering and manufacturing recognised the importance of these capabilities in creating jobs, supporting supply chains and helping communities prosper. Similar examples can be found across the economy and across design disciplines, from digital public services developed through Government Digital Service to customer-centred innovation at organisations such as Lloyds, Specsavers, Octopus Energy and Google DeepMind.

While our design economy is a national asset, it is not one we can take for granted. Entries to Design and Technology GCSE have fallen by 68% since 2010, barriers to entry continue to limit access to design careers, and while 71% of designers expect demand for green design skills to grow, fewer than half feel equipped to meet that demand. At the same time, countries across Europe and Asia increasingly recognise design as a strategic asset within innovation and industrial policy. Without a clearer framework to support design, the UK risks constraining the talent and capabilities needed to drive future growth and falling behind international competitors.

Many of the government's priorities depend on effective and inclusive design. Whether improving passenger experiences through Great British Railways, encouraging adoption of low-carbon technologies, modernising public services or helping businesses make use of AI, success depends not only on innovation itself but on designing products and services that people trust, understand and use.

A National Design Policy would embed design within innovation, skills, economic development and public service reform. Given that most designers now work outside the design sector, it should recognise design as a cross-cutting economic capability, comparable to digital, engineering and management capability. In doing so, it would help ensure the UK fully captures the economic and social value of design while advancing the Government's ambition to make Britain an innovation nation.

Alongside the development of a National Design Policy, we encourage you to champion design more visibly as a driver of regional economic growth, inclusive innovation and place-based renewal. Leadership from the Prime Minister would help elevate design as a national priority and demonstrate its contribution to the Government's missions on growth, public service reform and opportunity.

Through visible leadership from the centre of government, including visits, convening power and public advocacy, design can be championed as a key contributor to growth in every nation and region of the UK. Government also has an opportunity to support mayors and regional leaders who are already using design to drive growth, regeneration and innovation, helping spread successful approaches across the country and enabling more places to benefit from these lessons. This would help showcase the innovation already happening across the country while giving regional leaders, businesses, universities and institutions a stronger platform to attract investment, talent and partnerships, ensuring the benefits of growth are felt in every part of the UK.

Design is already helping to deliver growth in every postcode. With a National Design Policy, the UK can build on that success, creating the conditions for greater innovation, stronger communities and wider prosperity. We stand ready to work with you to make it happen.

Yours sincerely,

Mat Hunter
Chief Executive Officer, Design Council

Cat Drew
Chief Design Officer, Design Council

Co-signed Organisations

Birmingham Design	The Engine Room	Post Carbon Lab	RTC North Ltd	The Blooming Platypus
Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE)	Food Democracy CIC	WOD (Women in Office Design)	SDC (Sustainable Design Collective)	In Agency
National Society for Education In Art & Design (NSEAD)	Neo	Andthen	Nonon Limited	Design Network North

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