

Member Briefing on Government White Paper

Planning for the Future

The Planning for the Future White Paper seeks any views on each part of a package of proposals for reform of the planning system covering plan-making, development management, development contributions, and other related policy proposals.

1. Local plans

a) The proposal is that Local Plans will be simplified so that they only identify land for development, the sites that should be protected and the development that can take place. There would be three categories of land:

1. Growth - sites suitable for comprehensive development which, once allocated, will have outline approval for development.

In the case of “substantial developments” (new developments and urban extensions), councils would be required to draw up a “masterplan and site-specific code” which would grant permission in principle to developments which comply with them

2. Renewal – Areas zoned for renewal will be seen as suitable for some development, such as increasing the density within built up areas and infill development, and will benefit from a statutory “presumption in favour” of development. Again a removal of local control as planning permission will be deemed to be acceptable within the zone.

Schemes that comply with the locally-drawn up design codes will also benefit from a “fast-track for beauty” recommended by the government’s Building Better Building Beautiful Commission

3. Protected – Areas zoned as “protected” will be able to remain within their current designations, such as Green Belt and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty etc. It is also proposed that some area of open countryside with no existing wildlife or landscape protections can be designated “protected”

b) Local plans will need to give clear area-specific requirements for land that is allocated for growth and renewal including design codes; they will not contain traditional development management policies or duplication of national policy and guidance.

c) Plans will be subject to a single test of achieving sustainable development instead of the current tests for soundness and the duty to co-operate. There

would be no Sustainability Appraisal and instead this would be replaced by a simplified process for assessing the environmental impact of plans.

- d) Local plans would have to be brought produced within a 30 month statutory timescale and be reviewed every 5 years.
- e) Neighbourhood Plans to be retained but with more focus on form of development to reflect the proposals for Local Plans.

Comment:

Local plans would be restricted to development allocations (through zoning) and specific design codes and standards to be applied to projects in the development zones. This will remove the ability of the Council to include strategic policies relevant to the local area.

There will be a requirement for more engagement with the public during the drawing up of local plans, due to the plans granting permission in principle, which will remove a stage of the planning permission process where the public can object to a development and ability of planning committees to consider the proposal.

Resources for planning departments – proper resourcing will be required to ensure the new local plans are fit for purpose and so that the plans and regulations that have been drawn up in collaboration with local communities and statutory consultees as part of the government’s reforms can be fully enforced.

There will also be a requirement for the plan should include “an interactive web-based map where data and policies are easily searchable”, to make the information more accessible to the public. This will require a considerable investment in new systems and the government is proposing that funding will be made available to local planning authorities following a trial of the new systems.

2. Developer Contributions

The existing system of developer contributions will end as part of the proposals. Section 106 agreements will no longer be used and our locally set Community Infrastructure Levy will be replaced by a nationally-set levy (based on development value). The levy would be paid at the point of occupation.

The collection of the levy in this way will require councils to pay for and deliver any infrastructure needed up front if necessary (rather than for example delivery of onsite affordable housing by the developer).

Comment: It is accepted that negotiating and agreeing Section 106 agreements, particularly on larger sites, remains a complex and challenging process and can cause delays. However, it is the only way to create a direct link between new

development and the infrastructure required to mitigate the effects of new proposals. Members of the public could be certain that the requirements for improvements to infrastructure in the local area – school places, investment in public transport, affordable housing, junction improvements etc. would be provided through Section 106 agreements at specific stages as part of the development. This will not be such transparent process should the linkages between development and developer investment be broken.

Concerns have been raised around the ability of the proposed system to provide the necessary funding for infrastructure and affordable housing given the proposed exemptions from the national levy. The nationally set levy may also put pressure on councils, should low value schemes be delivered, which are therefore exempt from the contributions reducing the ability to provide much needed affordable housing and infrastructure to support new growth.

3. Top down Housing Targets

The Government plans to re-impose top-down housing targets on local authorities. These will be fixed by a “standard method” for calculating housing need. The standard method will be based on how many existing homes are in an area, the projected rise in households, and changes in affordability.

Comment: The initial indications are that the housing requirement for the district will be significantly higher, rising the risk the Council may not be able to meet the annual housing delivery test. Further consideration needs to be given to this matter.

4. Environment

To assist with climate change, emergency improvements in the energy efficiency standards for buildings are proposed with the aim of helping to deliver the commitment to net-zero by 2050.

All new homes to be ‘zero carbon ready’, with no new homes delivered under the new system needed to be retrofitted to help deliver commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

5. New Design Code Body

A new body is to be set up to be given the role of supporting local authorities in the creation of local design codes. Every local planning authority will be required to employ a chief officer for design and place-making to oversee quality.

Local design codes to be drawn up as part of the local plan process will be required to demonstrate community input before they can be considered to be valid.

6. Further Permitted Development

Shorter and standardised planning applications are proposed with reduced or limited supporting material. Delegation of detailed planning decisions to planning officers where the principle of development has been established will be encouraged.

In addition to the recent changes to permitted development rights (see separate briefing note) which will come into force later this month, the areas zoned as “renewal” areas will allow additional permitted development on residential properties for example. These will be given automatic pre-approval, but will have to take account of local design codes

Comment : - the detail for development management is less clear in the document however the role of the planning application will be reduced and therefore the ability for the public and members to be involved at the application stage and through planning board is likely to be much reduced. The Government will build in penalties for slow decision making such as deemed approval of some applications or refunds of application fees

7. Digital Planning

Public involvement in local planning is proposed to be improved by requiring further digitising of the service, to allow much easier public access to planning documents.

Planning data will be required to be published online using standard formats that will be searchable and can interact with smartphones etc.

Local plans will also be required to be based on information displayed on a digital plan.

Emerging Comments:-

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), and the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) have written to the Housing Secretary urging against any further loosening of permitted development rules in order to avoid "social disasters" in the future.