



National Planning Forum

INSPIRING PLANNING

2020 Vision

Planning in a post-COVID world

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www.natplanforum.org

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2020 Vision

Introduction



The National Planning Forum is delighted to be publishing this collection of essays under the title ‘2020 Vision’. The Forum brings together organisations representing those working in planning, in business, local government, the professions, the third sector and planners in government, to explore both agreement and differences across the sectors in developing a “fit for purpose” spatial planning system. The Forum is not a consultative body, because its individual members are themselves consultees, advocates and lobbyists; and, although it has on occasions advocated particular positions, its principle role is to foster and explore cross-sectoral experience and issues.

Over the last fourteen years, the Forum has covered a huge range of topics at its meetings, often engaging with government ministers and civil servants; and has commissioned a number of reports addressing, for example, the potential role of mediation in resolving planning disputes. More recently its “Supporting Planning” programme has funded important research work with the Royal Town Planning Institute on “Local authority direct provision of housing”.

The Forum was established for the principle purpose of *enabling its members to evaluate, explore and exchange information about town and country planning in England to achieve quality outcomes that enhance productivity, well-being, the environment and sustainability for the benefit of the wider public.*

Planning in a post-COVID world needs to be very different to be able to respond to post COVID challenges and opportunities, e.g. support and boost the economy, respond to new ways of working and travelling, create places that work for the new normal and address health and wellbeing.

We asked organisations from each of the five sectors we embrace, to set out the changes they consider necessary to respond to the challenges and opportunities we face, taking into account the recently published Planning White Paper. We encouraged organisations to think holistically and both inside and outside their own ‘box’. As a Forum we are particularly interested in ideas that help to deliver simultaneously on some of the issues facing the planning and development sectors, such as the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis, air quality issues, housing crisis (including the crisis of affordability), social cohesion and so on, as well as responding to COVID-related issues, or that help to resolve any real or perceived conflicts between these objectives.

We would like to thank all the organisations who contributed their essays as well our esteemed range of commentators who were asked to consider and respond to the submissions made. We hope that this timely collection of essays adds to the debate around planning changes and helps to achieve quality outcomes that enhance productivity, well-being, the environment and sustainability for the benefit of the wider public.

Andrew Taylor
Chair, NPF Management Committee
September 2020

The Forum is grateful to the following organisations and individuals who have contributed to the 2020 Vision project



Contributors

Academy of Urbanism	Historic Houses
Alan Law	Home Builders Federation
Association of Consultant Architects	Institute of Historic Building Conservation
British Chambers of Commerce	Landscape Institute
British Property Federation	Locality
British Retail Consortium	National Farmers Union
Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation	National Federation of Builders
Country Land & Business Association	Place Alliance
County Councils Network	RSPB
CPRE	Royal Town Planning Institute
Create Streets	Theatres Trust
Design Council	Town & Country Planning Association
District Councils Network	Urban Design Group
Friends of the Earth	Woodland Trust

Commentators

Jan Bessell	Steve Quartermain CBE
Professor Sir Malcolm Grant CBE	Dame Fiona Reynolds
Hashi Mohammed	Mark Southgate
Liz Peace CBE	

Jan Bessell

comments from an infrastructure and large scale development perspective



Introductory Thoughts

There is wide consensus across the range of contributions that this is a moment for disruption and change – or even revolution! That planning is important, even an essential key part of the solution to problems of health, climate, biodiversity and housing crisis – to which I would also add resilience, social and economic wellbeing and delivery, but there is room for improvement and ambition.

The range of contributions from the micro to macro level shows the need for agile and diverse planning that considers and seeks to understand and be informed on the issues and opportunities that seek to deliver certainty and beneficial and effective outcomes at all scales and for all people, needs and environments – no small ask. However, just because something is complex or in the difficult or challenging box does not mean we should not have ambition or invest time and resource and overwhelmingly the contributions are aspirational and striving for beneficial change.

The National Level

A number of the contributions identify the need for coordination at the national level and a move away from silos to a joined-up Government. They also call for delivery of new national planning policy to recognise both urban and rural environments, economy and specialist matters such as mineral and wider resource planning. This really emphasises the need to unlock the potential of planning particularly at the national and strategic level. The Academy of Urbanism, County Land and Business Association, Royal Town Planning Institute and even the Institute of Historic Building Conservation make these recommendations and calls at the national and overarching strategic level.

Joined up Government and fully integrated working, vision and leadership across departments such as MHCLG, BEIS, DfT, DEFRA, DCMS and of course fully integrated with Treasury and Cabinet Office will be absolutely essential to embedding planning and delivery at the heart of Government, legislative delivery framework and national policy with weight and effect. This is particularly true if we are to deliver strategic spatial planning and performance of net zero commitments as well as speed of delivery and good sustainable economic, health, wellbeing and environmental outcomes which must be at the heart of modern planning and the desired effective delivery at ‘speed’.

Strategic Spatial Planning

There are a range of strategic spatial planning asks and recommendations from a wide range of contributors including Friends of the Earth, Natural England’s Deputy Chief Executive, Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation, RTPi, TCPA and County Councils Network who all particularly focus on this as a long term spatial position and vision. They recognise and call for the creation and reinforcement of joined up national strategies and powerful and effective structures for cross boundary strategic planning across the UK and Ireland and at the County or regional level. The TCPA specifically identifies the need for a National Sustainable Development Plan and this is an area that I have talked about before in terms of the need for an overarching National Policy Statement and a strengthened National Planning Policy Framework and Policy Guidance.

For me these are important and essential elements of an effective well framed planning system that works at the right spatial and development scale, geographies and environments, such as water catchment and resilience, economic markets and natural, resource and essential utility strategic national networks and landscapes and are right to be identified by many.

Infrastructure and Large Scale Development

Although there is generally less focus on infrastructure and large scale development from many contributors than might be expected there are important elements and themes brought out in nearly every contribution and some repeated themes and references include:

- Healthy sustainable accessible transport and active travel and connectivity
- Blue and Green infrastructure
- Net gain and resilience and environmental infrastructure and networks
- Participation and transparency in identifying needs and delivery
- Harnessing the power of data and technology
- Carbon and net zero
- Equity and social justice
- Investment

To pick up on just one of these themes in a little more detail I looked at and considered the exploration and proposals for *Sustainable transport*. Shifts in travel patterns, modes and needs, particularly as a result of the disruption and changes in behaviour and influences of Covid 19 are widely reported. Initiatives and outcomes are sought that incentivise and deliver significant moves to pedestrian and cycle journeys with contributors such as the Chartered Institute of Highways & Transportation and Design Council on the opportunity and need for a transport and mobility revolution are particularly noted.

In terms of major Infrastructure and large-scale development references are made to a national approach and the Planning Act 2008 and its effective operation for this scale of development, whilst noting the need for democratic accountability and engagement. The use of Local Development Orders as a wider delivery vehicle for more complex schemes at scale are also floated particularly by the British Property Federation.

In Conclusion

Covid 19 has brought some matters into sharp focus, accelerated our consideration of others such as technological and data revolution and how we live, work, travel and experience and use our environments, resources and homes. There has already been disruption that has changed behaviour and this provides a unique opportunity to deliver effective change that must be grasped if we are to meet, social, economic, health, wellbeing, resource and environmental challenges.

As the contribution from Historic Houses rightly observes we must take the time to find the solutions. If we do not analyse and respond to the challenges and poorly performing parts of planning delivery for all we will fail in delivering a joined up effective planning process with sound, sustainable, effective outcomes for both our established built and natural environment. This will involve use of evidence and evaluation, design of tested solutions in a managed and planned transition to ensure continuity and avoid unintended delay and uncertainty.

It is clear that the coordinated national level and vision and leadership are of great importance to good effective planning and outcomes particularly when dealing with significant infrastructure and development at scale.

Jan Bessell is Strategic Planning Adviser, Pinsent Masons.

Professor Sir Malcolm Grant

*reflects on health and well-being measures
promoted in the 2020 Vision*



I applaud the ambition of the National Planning Forum in commissioning these papers, which I have been asked to review from primarily a health and well-being perspective (though without prejudice to my natural tendency to stray across the broader terrain). As the NPF 2020 Vision argues, the post-Covid planning world needs to be very different if it is to be able to respond to the new challenges and opportunities thrown up by the pandemic. As examples it suggests: new ways of working and travelling, creating places that work for the new normal and address health and wellbeing; plus climate emergency, biodiversity crisis, air quality issues, housing crisis, social cohesion and so on.

There are three major hurdles here.

First, we don't know how long the pandemic is going to continue in its present form and how successful our containment arrangements will be. Even if all were to be over by the end of 2020, there will be a long-lasting impact on how we live; but the greater likelihood is that the virus will be with us for a long time, most likely forever, and that there will be other similar outbreaks that will visit us in coming years. What affect that has on how we live – and hence on the planning system – will depend on the rate of development and dissemination of reliable testing, diagnostics, effective vaccines and effective therapies. The complexity and scale of these challenges means that none can be rushed. There is no silver bullet.

Second, the government has brought forward proposals for the reform of the planning system. This is a predictable objective of every newly elected government. There is a natural British cycle of attempts at planning reform, yet surprisingly little learning is ever derived from it. It is easy to express the ambitions in agreeably abstract terms and without understanding the complexity of the central-local politics and the vested property interests that will resist it. The lesson from 70 years of planning reform is that the system enjoys deep immunity to disruption. If we take reform of the planning system alongside the proposed restructuring of local government, there is a recipe for years of argument and uncertainty. There is no silver bullet.

Third, there is an underlying question which is what the pandemic has taught us about the state of health of the British people, and from there to understand better the social determinants of health capable of being addressed through the planning system. I hope NPF will forgive me if, rather than drawing together the themes of the excellent papers in this collection, I venture beyond them into an area which is both intellectually and operationally particularly challenging. True, the health of the population figures in all the papers in this collection, but never directly. Indirectly, we see it in the renewed focus on the post-Covid regeneration of local economies and responding to the urgent need for jobs, housing, services, transport and leisure in urban and rural areas (CLA); of improved access

to green space and the open countryside (CPRE; Landscape Institute) “providing vital health and well-being opportunities closer to home” (Natural England); reallocation of road space away from the car, congestion and dangerous air pollution levels (Academy of Urbanism). The TCPA come closest in their definition of the purpose of planning as “positively promoting the long-term sustainable development of the nation and the health and well-being of individuals”.

Covid-19 has proved to be a terrifying infectious disease which, despite unprecedented government interventions, has taken a heavy toll on morbidity and mortality of populations around the world. At the time of writing, total deaths in the UK attributable to the virus are over 42,000, and we anticipate further lockdowns and restrictions on how we live.

This mortality rate is serious and unforeseen, yet a far greater toll continues to come from non-communicable diseases. In the UK, cardiovascular disease counts for around 170,000 deaths annually and cancer around 165,000. While some who have died from Covid might have otherwise died from these conditions, it would be unwise simply to regard this as an offset. Covid has led to a significant reduction in clinical interventions for sick patients and is expected to lead to an increase in other deaths as a result, and the overall consequences for population health of the successive restraints imposed by governments will compound these effects.

Around the globe, according to the World Health Organisation, cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths, or 17.9 million people annually, followed by cancers (9.0 million), respiratory diseases (3.9 million), and diabetes (1.6 million). These four groups of diseases account for over 80% of all premature NCD deaths. Tobacco use, drug addiction, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol, and unhealthy diets all increase the risk of dying from a NCD. One of the consequences is a steady rise in the proportion of the population that is overweight or obese.

Close to 30% of the world’s population today are in that category, which is more than twice as many as are undernourished. The UK ranks amongst the worst in Europe, and in 2016/2017, 617,000 admissions to NHS hospitals recorded obesity as a primary or secondary diagnosis. Childhood obesity is today a national scandal and a health time bomb, with a marked socio-economic correlation. Obesity and poor diet are linked with type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and increased risk of respiratory, musculoskeletal and liver diseases. Obese people are also at increased risk of certain cancers. Medical advances mean that people are more likely to survive a heart attack today, yet heart disease remains the biggest killer worldwide.

Although in the UK we have experienced over the past 7 decades and until recently a steady increase in life expectancy, it has not been reflected by a similar increase in *healthy* life expectancy – more people than ever are living out their later years with long-term, painful and disabling conditions.

The Covid crisis has highlighted what we already knew – that the poor state of health of the British population rendered it more susceptible to the effects of the virus. Virus-related mortality has been greatest in those populations with pre-existing poor health and compromised immune systems.

The improvement of population health was one of the driving forces behind the development of a system of town planning in Britain. The context was of course different: particularly the Victorian legacy of a working class living in overcrowded housing; congested slums; air pollution from domestic coal fires and unregulated industrial emissions; and lack of green spaces. Hence the policy response around new and expanded towns, space norms, green belts and green space.

What is missing today is a clear focus in planning on the contemporary health needs of the population, in light not only of Covid but also of the dramatic demographic and social changes that have

occurred since the birth of comprehensive planning in 1947: of greater life expectancy yet longer ill-health; of growing social inequality reflected in health outcomes; of fragmented families and the care home crisis where elderly people are too often abandoned to die; of the health consequences of poor nutrition and physical inactivity; and of unaffordable housing for those most in need.

All of the papers in this collection argue powerfully for changes in how we produce planning, such as more development permitted as-of-right; once-only decision-making; more power for county councils; greater local autonomy and tax-raising powers; better design; planning more positively for renewable energy, green infrastructure; more public engagement; a third party right of appeal against grants of planning permission; and better design codes. We can all agree, as the papers do, that there are many reforms that should be made to simplify and improve the planning system.

But the starting point must be vision and substance, not process. Improvement of the health of the population and protection from illness and disease has to become the prime focus of the planning system, not just a flag to be waved occasionally. It provides a framing for all the other issues touched on in this collection of papers. True, the built environment is but one of the many variables contributing to the ill-health of the nation, but the planning system offers a powerful spur to action. As I have argued elsewhere, town planning, transport planning and house building have inadvertently contributed to the lifestyle associated diseases that are such a feature of modern Britain: many of our modern high streets are dominated by fast food takeaways; driving is often the only or at least the most convenient way to get around; and we have a legacy of poorly maintained parks and green spaces that do little to invite walking or play. UK school children are amongst the least active in the world and amongst the most overweight or obese. My fear is that without decisive and focused action, Covid will have a long-term negative effect on all of these factors.

There is no silver bullet here, either. The planning system is not the answer to the complex issues of population health, and it would be naive to suggest that there is a model of planning determinism that can ensure people live healthier lives. But planning is all about future opportunity, and I suggest that as a starting point we assess the value of every one of the recommendations in this collection entirely in terms of this one question: what contribution could this make to improving the physical and mental health of the population of Britain?

Malcolm Grant was chair of NHS England 2011-18; previously President and Provost of UCL; Chair and Head of Land Economy at Cambridge; Editor of the Planning Encyclopedia for 23 years and chair of the Local Government Commission for England.

Hashi Mohamed

*considers the legal implications of proposals in
the 2020 Vision*



Introduction

On **22 December 1969**, *The Times* of London editorial carried the following commentary:

"It is essential to have not only more houses, but more houses of the required type in the right place. There are technical difficulties that have to be overcome over land, financing and the organisation of the building industry. But there is also the question of will. Housing has not yet achieved the place of priority in official policy justified both by the social suffering involved and by the public concern that has been aroused."

More than half a century later, if this statement was published in *The Times* of today, many of us would consider it as equally applicable to the predicament we face at such a defining moment for a multitude of reasons. Many changes are afoot in the world today generally, and in England at least one of the most discussed proposals for change is housing and planning. At the same time, many are cynical about what these changes mean; are they properly thought through, or are they just the same as before, what will actually come of them?

To my mind, the contributions made by distinguished people in their field to this publication show a real appetite for change. I commend them for their generosity of spirit, vision and imagination - albeit with some seeing things bleaker than others. However, it is right to acknowledge that many of what is proposed we have either seen before, or is likely to be in competition with other proposals 'seeking change'. The challenges we face are immense, and the time it will take to tackle them is likely to be quite long.

Here I reflect on the legal implications of what some of these recommendations mean.

The Bigger Picture

One of the big themes in the contributions across the sectors is the need to move away from the over-centralisation of the process in planning. The trouble with this is that ever since the Localism Act 2011 was introduced, *local* involvement has been given more emphasis, not less; see how neighbourhood plans have been used in many places as an example. And yet there is the perceived (and real) perception that there has been too much central government involvement. The notion was that *localism* was to give power to 'the local people'. And so in the mind of central government, a lot of power has already been handed back, but in reality the instinct of those who think it's too centralised are correct. The politics of it is still centrally driven. This is a major fault line. For some, local democracy brings accountability, whilst for others it enables barriers against sustainable development.

The Association of Consultant Architects make the astute observation that,

'Big things, like airports and nuclear power stations, are for consultation White Papers and parliament to decide, while government policy should dictate regional things like motorways, housing allocations and national parks.'

This is a good idea, albeit not exactly new, and this is indeed what happens in many European jurisdictions. Sadly politicians will never be able to resist the temptation to get involved in such 'big projects' (see Heathrow, HS2) because the political dividends are just too great. Of course, legally, one Parliament cannot bind another which means it would inevitably be politically expedient to say you will overturn an unpopular project if it means guaranteed power. Sadly I don't see this becoming a reality anytime soon.

The New Reforms: too radical or not radical enough?

In the White Paper which is currently out for consultation, we are told that, *"The role of land use plans should be simplified. We propose that Local Plans should identify three types of land – **Growth areas** suitable for substantial development, **Renewal areas** suitable for development, and areas that are **Protected**."* [emphasis added]

As ever, this is the attempt to 'simplify' the system. To streamline it in such a way as to effectively give 'permission in principle' in some areas, and to protect others. Once again, in order to ensure that this is legally effective, administratively accessible and easily executed will very much depend on the details. It will depend on the legal definitions around what is an area that is to be designated for *growth* and how we do *protect* other areas. How does this relate to the government's desire to **BUILD! BUILD! BUILD!**

As many have pointed out in the contributions, there is yet another ducking of the Green Belt issue which desperately needs a modern update. As the *County Councils Network* points out strategic planning at a county level (remember those?) and control over how contributions are spent will go some way to addressing major issues. I would add perhaps the need to allow authorities to actually borrow money and then build more social housing, and the resourcing of planning departments with more staff and expertise to be able to tackle the challenges they face. Businesses have to play a part in helping this happen. It's too easy to simply say – as many of the contributors have – that LPAs have to *change*; they need help from central government *and* private stakeholders who still rely on them to do a good and efficient job.

Development vs the environment

Numerous contributions raise concerns around the protection of the environment, rural areas and generally avoiding unsustainable growth and expansion. This naturally has to be squared with the acute need for more housing and the universally unchallenged position that economies 'must grow'. To this end, it is perhaps a feature of our legal system that the environment generally, and the historic environment in particular will continue to enjoy the protection of legal duties¹ and the Framework. However, if we are to square this circle, some major compromises will have to be made, and we will have to accept that – if we are to make in-roads into these issues, compromises must be forthcoming. To this end, I think it is too simplistic to conclude that what is happening is a major 'de-regulation', or indeed that *more* laws and legislation are required to protect the environment. The truth is that the answer is somewhere in between.

In her lecture to the 2020 virtual Joint Planning Law Conference, Baroness Brown, the Deputy Chair of the Climate Change Committee, recently pointed out that whilst permitted development rights were being relaxed, the implications on our built environment, climate change ramifications and water needs have not been properly thought through. She is right; but yet again, how do we then reach a sustainable compromise in these areas is a much harder task. As an example, in the same conference, Lord Kerslake, the former head of the Civil Service who led DCLG (2010-2015) pointed out the lack of any radical reforms in the White Paper to address the acute need for affordable housing in the recently published White Paper. How do we achieve all this together?

To my mind, the biggest challenge we face in this country, which crosses across all these sectors, is the need to balance so many competing interests. It is hard to imagine the *House Builders Federation* agreeing to *Friends of the Earth's* proposal to 'scrap permitted development rights.' From a legal perspective, on the one hand, we are under an obligation to protect our environment, our wildlife, the flora and the fauna. And yet our demographic make-up shows us how so many young people are going to struggle to get on the property ladder. On the other of course there is a moral duty to ensure that the next generation is able to enjoy the benefits and opportunities afforded to their parents and grandparents; and central to this is the chance to own a new home and live in a safe and environmentally sustainable world.

Conclusion

If some of us are lucky enough to see 2069, a mere 50 years away, are we really going to be in a place that's so far away from that *Times* editorial piece from 1969? Judging by the challenges we face, and the contributions received, I fear the road we have yet to travel may yet continue to be long and uncertain.

Reference

1. See for example the Habitats Directive, and Section 66 and Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Hashi Mohamed is a Barrister at No 5 Chambers.

Liz Peace CBE

provides a public/private viewpoint in reviewing suggestions in the 2020 Vision



I guess that when I started reading these I was hoping for some startling revelation that would cut through all the writing and commentary on planning and lead us into a brave new world. But in some ways I was relieved that that didn't turn out to be the case since it would have been a damning indictment on all of us involved in the planning world for the last 20-30 years if we had missed the obvious silver bullet - the answer to everything! Instead, the contributors to this exercise have reminded us of a range of possible solutions and perhaps prove, once and for all – and as No10 and Mr Jenrick are about to find out - that there is no straightforward answer and what may appear to be a simple solution brings with it many problems and pitfalls!

I was pleased to see strong support for local plans (from HBF, BPF, Create Streets, CCN) since it has always seemed to me that if we want to limit the scope for subjective intervention at the individual scheme stage then there needs to be a strong framework against which those schemes should be judged. But it has always staggered me how reluctant central Government seems to be to penalise those local authorities who fail to meet this very basic requirement. If a company CEO failed to produce a strategic plan, the Board and shareholders would have him out in a shot!

I was also pleased to see plenty of comment (from BPF, AofU, Locality, DC CABE, Urban Design Group) about the role of local authorities and the planning system in re-thinking our damaged high streets and town centres. With very few exceptions (and those come where there is a large single ownership of property such as on the Howard de Walden estate), it is the local authorities who are best placed to act as the ringmasters in driving change of use, using their CPO powers where necessary. The Waltham Forest story is a really good example of what is possible. I think we also need to focus on what other uses could be brought into a high street to replace the retail, and by this I don't mean a blunt application of PDR to allow shops to be converted into poor quality residential but rather a strategic look at the sort of services – health centres, local services, cultural activities - that should all have a place in our town and village centres. AoU and Locality have some excellent thoughts on this.

I think only AoU mentioned Anne Hidalgo's 15 minute city idea which has been doing the rounds of late. It might not be practical for many places but in the light of Covid and the discovery that an awful lot of workers would rather not spend 3 hours a day travelling to their place of work, it is an idea I would like to see explored further. It is, I guess, just a repackaging of John Prescott's 'sustainable communities' concept - everything you need for life and leisure in one sustainable community. And there were plenty of sustainable communities even before Prescott – I grew up in one called Bournville! Planning has a huge role to play in this – and getting the mix of uses right is important (BCC mentioned the problems caused by getting it wrong). And that means focussing on more than just housing which is the obsession of most politicians. Planning should be about commerce and jobs as well as providing homes!

The question of design quality is a fairly common thread running through many of the contributions (see Place Alliance) – not just the horrors that have been produced as a result of PDR – but the overall failure to ensure that development generally and housing in particular does contribute to quality of place. Of course, ‘beauty’ is deeply subjective but there are some basic rules that need to be observed. Good quality open space/green space for one – as noted, not surprisingly, by RSPB and NFB. There was perhaps less comment than I thought there would be on the role of planning in delivering the net zero carbon agenda although the IHBC, quite rightly in my view, did raise that old chestnut of VAT on refurbishment. Preserving existing buildings where possible saves all that embedded carbon – and where there is a ‘heritage’ bonus, then the advantages of refurb over redevelopment are even greater. But nobody mentioned heritage!

As I said at the start, there weren’t many new ideas in these commentaries though I was interested in the BPF’s suggestion of a ‘presumption in favour of logistic development’. The problem with that is that there may well be some places which, on first glance, look ideal for lots of big new shiny sheds but actually would for the longer term be better served by a more mixed use planning approach – the area round the HS2 station at Old Oak Common is one where logistical development might seem an obvious extension to the Park Royal commercial complex but would actually represent a failure to seize the opportunity offered by a new rail interchange to create a genuinely mixed use sustainable community not reliant on the car.

But that leads me back to the where I started – namely the importance of a clear, comprehensible, preferably not too long, local plan. And the mechanism for producing that already exists – it just needs to be made to work and enforced more rigorously. As the RSPB note, ‘planning problems are usually down to implementation’; in other words, we have the frameworks we need, we just don’t use them properly. And may be that comes down to resources, mentioned surprisingly by only BCC and NFU. It is certainly true that if planning departments are going to do all the things that the commentaries suggest (and many of which I would second), then we are going to have to look at a more creative way of paying for them in a post Covid world of cash strapped local authorities. But I haven’t seen any good suggestions so far.....

Liz Peace is the Chairman of Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation. She is writing here in a personal capacity.

Steve Quartermain CBE

reviews the 2020 Vision responses received from the local government sector



Having spent a good proportion of my career working for Local Councils , I know that the voice of central government calling for a reform to the planning system can have a familiar ring, and perhaps one might expect a slightly jaundiced view from Councils on yet another attempt to fix something when no one can agree quite what is broken.

But both the CCN and the DCN recognise and emphasise the importance of good planning. Indeed, have a common aim of having a planning system that has at its heart the delivery of high quality and affordable housing, with thriving economic opportunities, planned infrastructure and a resilient place making approach which responds to the challenges of climate change.

The DCN, in particular, stress that in a post-Covid world we may well need to plan for a different future. It is not just the availability of mortgages, finance and building supplies that might change, but the way we live our lives may require a rethink. More open space, larger gardens, wider pavements, more cycle lanes. Where we work and how the town centres and high streets operate needs reimagining and are challenges for now.

Beyond the immediate, short term economic impacts, what are the opportunities that are arising as a result of this rethink?

The CCN is clear that there is an opportunity to promote more collaboration, but also for greater powers to be given to County and Unitary Authorities to both plan strategically and deliver the necessary infrastructure. This would require changes in the way finances are managed. perhaps not surprisingly the DCN also sees a power shift, with District Councils given more power to kick start delivery and to retain finances at a local level. Their role in overseeing the delivery of social housing and the benefits to the wider economy are highlighted as positive opportunities, but the DCN do not miss the opportunity themselves to emphasise that more permitted development rights are not the answer in this regard. Both the DCN and CCN ask for a planning system that can rise to the challenge of a low carbon future

There are shared concerns whether the White Paper currently sets out with enough clarity the details of a new planning system, so doubts remain as to whether this will lead to an acceleration of development and meaningful community engagement; its all a bit top down!

What conclusions can we draw from this? Well there is certainly a commonly held view that planning is important , it does make people's lives better and without it the delivery of great places to live and work is more speculative .However while the Chief officer status of the place maker is welcome , the service as a whole needs resourcing with the right skills and numbers , and in this regard the role of digital innovation is key. It is vital that local communities establish a clear and influential role in plan making and the rhetoric of a front loaded system (which echoes that following the 2004 Act) needs to be backed by clear detailed proposals that may need to accept that speed of plan making is not the only measure of its importance

Overall these essays illustrate the challenge of creating a planning system that will defy the rhetoric of "delay and complexity" and will become a concept we'll admire and are equally responsible for.

Steve Quartermain has recently stepped down as Chief Planner at MHCLG following a career in public service planning and is currently enjoying a portfolio of activity including working for Cratus, Town Legal, and HGH consulting as well as pro bono work for MOBIE, the Academy of Urbanism and the University of Kent where he is an Honorary Professor. The views expressed here are his own.

Dame Fiona Reynolds

offers a view on the non governmental organisation responses received



At a time of huge strain for our country, fears about the future of our cities and countryside, and huge uncertainties about how and whether we can plan our way sustainably out of the COVID-19 pandemic, one might expect huge disagreements to break out.

Far from it. The non governmental organisations who have responded to the National Planning Forum's request for ideas for a 2020 Vision are remarkably aligned, coherent and – yes – visionary. The fact that the call for ideas coincided with the Government issuing its White Paper *Planning for the Future* simply invigorated further the call for a reaffirmed belief, and investment, in the land use planning system.

We need more planning, not less, is their united call. A rejection of crude zoning policies (emphasised by The Place Alliance among others) in favour of sustainable, sensitive, place-based solutions is another. The need for place-making not just housebuilding (stressed by Locality and others), achieved through genuine community engagement, runs like a thread through the submissions, as does the need to plan at a level larger than local (the TCPA says nationally) to get out of the silos and achieve joined up policies and delivery. There is no shortage of creative vision for the revival of town and city centres, whether from the Theatres Trust or the Academy of Urbanism; and there are repeated calls (for example by RSPB, FOE, CPRE and The Landscape Institute) for addressing the climate, nature, health and housing crises in an integrated way. Above all, these third sector organisations want to make local places matter, for people to feel valued and engaged in their future; nurtured rather than dictated to.

In truth, the Government's stated objectives for their reforms include a lot of these things. The consultation paper talks about clearer Local Plans, community involvement, access to green space, protecting the historic environment, and beauty – all admirable goals. And no-one suggests that the current planning system is perfect. But the Government's proposed reforms are accompanied by some deeply unfortunate and disparaging language from the top, and some overly simplistic solutions, particularly the effective zoning of land into *Growth, Recovery and Protected* categories, an idea which has never before had any traction or support within England's complex environment.

The Place Alliance explains why the zoning systems in Japan, some other European countries and the USA are very different from what is proposed here, concluding that it will not offer the 'fast track to beauty' – or even good building outcomes – claimed by the Government. The Academy of Urbanism regrets that the vision and long term certainty that underpins positive planning in many European cities contrasts with the constant unpicking that happens here. Our Government's emphasis on speed, it is agreed, is an illusory goal if it leads to the wrong, or poorer outcomes.

As the non governmental organisations agree, and explain with real clarity, we need to bolster not decry the planning system; invest in skills, people and engagement rather than rush for speed and simplicity; and accept that good planning operates at a range of different geographical skills and needs sophisticated integration of all policies affecting land use, not just those controlled by the land use planning system. Why else are we still struggling to take the advice of the Environment Agency about not building on flood plains? Why else are we failing to energise nature recovery and appropriate tree planting? Why else do we give planning permission to hundreds of thousands of houses only never to see them built?

The non governmental organisations are clear, and united. They stress that we need clear goals to tackle the multi-pronged and inter-connected crises we face; and we need joined up policies to deliver a vision for sustainability that spans town and country. More and better planning, not less, is the solution they advocate, but this is not a recipe for obfuscation and delay. Rather it is a proper call for the up-front investment of time, discussion and understanding, in our *whole environment*, so that we can deploy with confidence the planning tools that will help us live within our environmental means, revive nature, and create meaningful, joyous, walkable places to live. And *please*, they say, let us stop talking about housebuilding targets and start talking about place-making. It's not planning that is stopping development, but problems with the delivery of our current development model. And the centralised housing targets proposed by the consultation papers will only exacerbate current problems.

There's such energy and creativity in the non governmental organisations who have submitted their ideas that I'd be tempted to turn the reform of the planning system over to them. None denies the need for development, and change, for infrastructure and, yes, housing, including affordable housing. But the *way* they would go about delivering these goals feels different: energising, engaging, exciting and visionary. And they believe, profoundly, that planners have the skills, capability and rigour to do it well, whether 'it' is reviving town centres, remodelling places for people and good living, creating green nature networks or protecting precious natural resources.

The Government is right to argue for change, but according to these commentators its ideas are flawed. Beauty is so much more than how a place looks; it is about how a place *feels*, whether it *thrives*, and whether it offers a good life to its inhabitants, including nature, whether urban or rural. And above all that zoning is too crude and simplistic a tool to enable the outcomes we all seek and need.

The Government would be wise to listen to these non governmental organisations, and reframe its thinking rather than racing ahead with a Planning Bill. The potential to improve people's lives all around the country is certainly a priority, but it needs more care, sophistication and long term thinking and investment than is currently evident.

Fiona Reynolds is Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge and a former Director-General of the National Trust. She is writing here in a personal capacity.

Photo credit
David Levinson

Mark Southgate

shares his thoughts on the suggestions for housing outlined in the 2020 Vision



Reading the thoughtful contributions from different sectors for this project I am struck that despite quite different perspectives and members' interests common themes frequently arise:

- the world we are planning in and for is changing markedly and rapidly – Covid-19 is just a new lens on existing crises in housing - both in supply and affordability - climate and biodiversity;
- it is exacerbating existing radical shifts in, for example, retail, and creating new ones in how our cities and towns function – but it also creating new perspectives and some opportunities;
- Covid-19 has highlighted social and spatial inequalities – it has shone a very bright light on inequalities that we knew were there already, but now we can see them even more clearly – we need place-based solutions to help solve them and to 'level up';
- we *do* need to improve our planning outcomes and some of our processes;
- two tier local government, coupled with small geographical units, often results in a lack of joining up, so that difficult but necessary strategic decisions in the public interest are fudged, delayed or shelved;
- the need for effective strategic planning to deal with more than local issues, such as housing need and infrastructure, is widely recognised and an effective plan-led system is seen as a logical way to coherently address some of the problems we face, but plan making is regarded as too slow, and there is disagreement on the right model to use;
- despite this support for a plan led approach, many can't shake off a desire for some flexibility, often in the interests of sectoral interests;
- there is widespread recognition of the need for plans to be more visionary and for the necessary resource and skills to make better plans; and
- some call for better integration of land use and transport planning and a move away from car dominated cities, while others argue for more green infrastructure and the need to bring nature closer to people.

Many of these problems are deep rooted and successive planning reforms have failed to address them. There is scepticism amongst some commentators whether the Planning White Paper will really address them now. There is, however, some convergence on the need to;

- produce faster, more visionary and more realistic plans;
- fund local authorities to plan better;
- improve the quality of housing - *"Lockdown has brought home to us the importance of good quality housing and neighbourhoods. Housing standards relating to floor area and environmental performance must be mandatory"* (Academy of Urbanism)

- use Local Development Orders more widely – to be bold, by weaning ourselves off some of the small-scale detail of decision making to free ourselves to tackle really big issues like housing, climate change, the future of the high street, spatial inequality, biodiversity loss, etc.
- find effective mechanisms to fund critical infrastructure;
- radically improve our digital planning capacity and capability and to ‘harness the power of data’ (RTPI)

The prescriptions and proposals for reform in the commentaries are many, varied and wide ranging, as you can read for yourself.

Some traditional ‘battle grounds’ of reform remain, such as whether Green Belt should be sacrosanct or reform be considered, and some new ones are emerging, such as whether permitted development rights are a useful means to free up resources to plan better, or whether they threaten to undermine core objectives such as building quality places, communities and homes. There is much support for the White Paper’s proposals for digitisation, and the use of pattern books and design codes.

Personally, I believe the discretionary approach in the UK system has meant that we have never truly realised a plan-led approach. The Home Builders’ Federation also questions whether we really have a plan-led system and it makes an impassioned plea for ‘one touch planning’ – to decide the principle of development in the plan and not to return to it again at planning application stage.

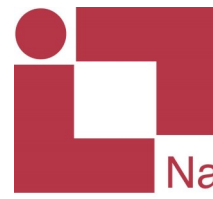
Zoning in some other countries does give a primacy to the plan in setting the development agenda and turns what we call development management into a much more compliance focussed process – ‘is the proposal in accordance with the plan or not?’ If we focussed on plan making as the ‘be all and end all’ and we removed the ‘wriggle room’ that is in our current system, then I believe we would be headed in the right direction.

Create Streets describes the discretion in the system as the ‘smoking gun’ when it comes to explaining the difference in house prices and affordability in the UK compared to other parts of Europe and calls for a more rule-based system instead of the discretionary case-by-case approach. In the words of the Academy of Urbanism *“We need to move from ‘predict and provide’ towards ‘decide and provide’. Away from the mere allocation of land, and towards a positive vision of the sort of towns and cities we want to live in”*. If this is what the Government meant by its zoning approach then it might be onto something, but I don’t think the White Paper’s proposals for growth, renewal and protection zones really amount to this!

The reality that we must confront is that we need to produce better plans – many take far too long to prepare and they do not adequately address today’s problems. The conundrum is how can we create plans that accommodate and recognise increasingly rapid changes in society and how can we do that more quickly? This is a very hard nut, but it one we must crack. It does not help that we have lost much of our past plan making skills.

In the end the clue to reform of the planning system and the way forward lies in a single word – we are ‘planners’, not ‘development managers’. In the words of the Academy of Urbanism *“we would not wish to defend the delay and bureaucracy that has become associated with parts of the system, but planning is crucial to creating decent homes and good places; the certainty that it brings is good for the economy”*. So now more than ever, we need more and better planning please!

Mark Southgate is Chief Executive of MOBIE—Ministry of Building Innovation & Education.



National Planning Forum

INSPIRING PLANNING

The 2020 Visions

Academy of Urbanism

The Academy of Urbanism exists to promote good urbanism, by which we mean mixed-use, sustainable, diverse, walkable, liveable towns and cities. We do this through our awards scheme looking at five levels of urbanism: Cities, Towns, Neighbourhoods, Streets and Places, as well as a programme of events, visits and publications.

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**THE ACADEMY
OF URBANISM**

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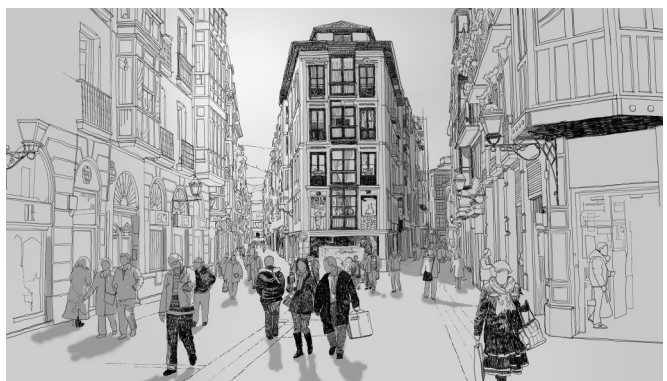
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The Academy believes that good towns and cities are essential if we are to address the climate emergency, social inequality, health, wellbeing and economic development post Covid-19. Our vision of towns and cities is shared by many other organisations including government ¹. The question is not what the good town or city looks like, but how it is achieved and why this is so difficult in the UK compared to the cities that the Academy works with elsewhere in Europe?

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated what urban areas could be like when traffic disappears, pollution levels fall and streets are reclaimed for people. Local communities have come together and local centres have benefitted because a lot of their customers are now working from home. On the other hand, mixed-use areas are under threat as shops, cafes, leisure uses, restaurants and venues struggle to survive lockdown. Office users are downsizing their requirements, estate agents report a surge of people seeking to move out of cities, public transport is being shunned and social distancing is making urban vitality impossible. We therefore need to harness the lockdown commitment to create a better world while being alive to the risks that towns and cities face.

The AoU organised two workshops to discuss these issues from which three main themes emerged relating to the planning system:

- **Planning is important:** This needs re-stating at a time when Permitted Development Rights are seen as a way of kickstarting the economy. We would not wish to defend the delay and bureaucracy that has become associated with parts of the system, but planning is crucial to creating decent homes and good places; the certainty that it brings is good for the economy.
- **We need to plan!** It seems obvious but it is not what we do in the UK. We need to move from 'predict and provide' towards 'decide and provide'. Away from the mere allocation of land, and towards a positive vision of the sort of towns and cities we want to live in. This applies to all levels of a tiered planning system, from national policy to the crucial regional level (where we can coordinate planning and infrastructure investment) to strong form-based local plans. Elsewhere in Europe cities have a long-term vision which is not debated and unpicked every few years, as happens in the UK. Implementation should be incremental, but planning is long-term.



The European cities that the Academy works with like Bilbao have a long-term vision but implement incrementally (AoU Awards 2018)

- **We must break out of silos!** It is not a new slogan, but it is still necessary. From Government departments down, we deal with urban policy in a subject-based, technocratic way that fails to consider the impact on place. We continue to do this in response to Covid and we must stop. The Scottish Government's *Place Principle* Initiative is a good model for this enabling an integrated, place-based policy response where technical responses can be weighed and coordinated.

Four priorities for action emerged from our discussion:

The 15 Minute City: The most important urban policy response thus far to Covid-19 has been Mayor Anne Hidalgo's 15 Minute City plan in Paris. This is the notion that people should be able to access most of the things they need within 15 minutes of their home, thereby reducing pressure on public transport. This is a welcome initiative for re-localising urban life and giving power back to local communities. Practical measures will include investing in local shopping centres, promoting more decentralised employment and homeworking, reducing parking standards, providing public lavatories, promoting greening initiatives and developing guidelines for gentle density in housing design.



The 15 minute city is an opportunity to rethink the importance of the urban neighbourhood and the engagement with communities as in Hammarby in Stockholm (AoU Awards 2016)

The role of city centres: Trends in retailing, home working and urban living are likely to hit city centres hardest. It is important that we pre-empt this because city centres are vital as places of exchange and central to our cultural and commercial life. The support for arts organisations is welcome, but we must support commercial and cultural organisations as they emerge from lockdown or face losing clubs, music venues, independent cafes and shops etc... There is only so much direct support that is possible; we believe there is a role for structural change, such as the reform of business rates, VAT relief and a 'localised' tax on online retailers.

Housing and place and standards: Lockdown has brought home to us the importance of good quality housing and neighbourhoods. Housing standards relating to floor area and environmental performance must be mandatory, especially for Permitted Development schemes. We should also have place standards relating to neighbourhood design, connectivity and green space. These standards are vital to create decent living conditions and to address the climate emergency.



We need housing and placemaking standards, learning from UK developments like Hulme in Manchester (AOU Awards 2016)

Transport revolution: It is vital that we use the lockdown experience as a spur to reform so that we don't return to the car-clogged streets, congestion and dangerous air pollution levels that we experienced pre-Covid. This will include a strategy for public transport ownership and control. The mobility revolution will also include e-scooters, electric bikes, deliveries, walking and cycling (not so much driverless cars). Practical short-term measures should include the reallocation of road space away from the car, a review of Manual for Streets and indeed the Highway Code, to rebalance these towards active travel and a national 20mph speed limit.



We need to rethink mobility and re-appropriate road space for active travel like Elwick Street in Ashford (AoU Awards 2015)

This is not a comprehensive list and there are many other suggestions that came out of our discussions. The Academy of Urbanism believes that towns and cities are central to our national life and wellbeing; yet we are blind to the spatial consequences of policy (even planning policy). A positive place-based approach requires a partnership between local authorities and civil society (including universities, health authorities, housing associations and communities). It requires greater local autonomy, fiscal independence and tax raising powers, along with strong local leadership and vision. This is what we see in the best cities that the Academy visits across Europe and is the key to resolving the question about why good placemaking is so difficult in the UK.

Reference

¹ See: National Design Guide: Planning practice guidance for beautiful, enduring and successful places, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government 2019

A personal perspective from Alan Law Deputy Chief Executive, Natural England

(Please note this essay is not a reflection of Natural England's position or views)

For too long has there been a perceived tension between the needs of development and those of the environment. This tension stems from faults in both camps: a planning system that seeks largely to develop and mitigate/compensate environmental damage, leading to inevitable net loss, and; a conservation sector perspective that has focussed narrowly on protection of the site/individual species at the expense of seeking opportunities to achieve a net gain and build real nature recovery. This diagnosis is relatively easy, the solutions apparently complex; however some simple solution principles are needed (for all our sakes) if we are to change this unhelpful dynamic.

We need a planning system that can cater for the needs of the environment, in all its various forms, working to deliver truly sustainable development in a coherent way. This system needs to help rebuild fragmented habitats, reverse our continued net release of carbon, provide environmental infrastructure that serve peoples' immediate needs (health, education and recreation), whilst also providing fundamental natural services to communities in the form of clean air, water and flood risk management. In doing so the planning system must of course meet society's needs for housing, places to work and the infrastructure needed to support them, and do so in a manner that is efficient in terms of the time and costs required.

A critical factor that planning needs to address, that has been given added emphasis through the Covid period, is the essential link between people and nature. As with development and nature, we need to understand that planning in the 21st Century is not there to keep people and nature apart, but rather to bring them together to mutual benefit. We need to find ways to enable greater and more diverse access to our highest quality landscapes and habitats; and we need to provide for a new generation of parks and greenspaces that are both rich in nature and cater for the more immediate needs of people in our towns and cities, providing vital health and wellbeing opportunities closer to home.

There are several factors in here that need to be drawn out: we need alignment across and between different environmental objectives; we need a clear plan in a place for the configuration of these aligned objectives in ways that secure real community ownership; we need to have clarity over the weight given to this plan through the planning system, and; we need to ensure that we have mechanisms in place that will put new habitat infrastructure in place before development activity leads to losses – ie we shift to a system that keeps the environment in net credit. There are several new measures required to make such a systemic shift possible and functional and I shall focus on each of these in the remaining space.

- Firstly, we need an effective evidence base of environmental features that enables us to both accurately determine what is currently on the ground and, critically, inform where and how we need to plan to restore, extend or link up, to enable overall recovery and provide for a more resilient landscape. Strategic investment in evidence of habitat and species distribution and quality will be at lower unit cost than bespoke site-based evidence gathering and will also inform how to avoid conflicts between development and nature rather than just mitigate them – by reducing the need for such mitigation.

- Then we need an agreed land use planning framework to secure alignment of policy objectives – where biodiversity, carbon, trees, landscape character, nature-based solutions, accessible greenspaces etc all come together to provide an essential foundation of green infrastructure. This can't be some prescriptive centrally based design, rather the principles that need to be followed. It should draw on the evidence base described above, and then be assembled and processed locally with developers, planners and local communities. The central component of a coherent land use framework needs to be the design of the Nature Recovery Network, the means by which we maintain system health and function in the face of pressures on our environment. This NRN represents the skeleton and vital organs of a healthy system, and as such it can't be retro-fitted around the rest. But building tree, carbon, water and other needs into the NRN will enable us to design nature based solutions that serve people and the economy to deliver long term value.
- A plan is only as good as the implementation it achieves. For us to secure sustainable development we need strategic environmental plans to have traction. This could mean they form part of the core statutory local planning system or, if in the form of a parallel document like a Local Nature Recovery Strategy, they would need to have real statutory status in steering both development categories and driving the deployment of public and private funding streams. The links to private funding sources, including the prospective Biodiversity Net Gain, make wide stakeholder ownership of the strategic plan all the more essential.
- This system needs to demonstrate that it is delivering environmental improvement at scale if it is to be credible and able to withstand the risk of legal challenge. Reversing 'traditional' practice and starting with investment in environmental infrastructure, with development following after environmental resilience has been improved, would be a profound step to build confidence in a new regime and shift our collective focus towards realising opportunities to enhance at plan scale rather than remain preoccupied with minimising damage at the project level. The former does not remove or replace the latter, but should serve to reduce the need.

Many aspects of this vision are not new, and some are under active exploration or consultation at the time of writing. The critical shift required is the focus on nature recovery and the contribution that planning can make. Strategic investments in better evidence, up-front environmental infrastructure and stronger provisions for strategic plans to build environmental resilience through their design would make for a profound and very welcome shift towards plan-led, lasting stewardship of our precious environment.

Association of Consultant Architects

The Association of Consultant Architects (ACA) is the national professional body representing architects in private practice – consultant architects – in the UK. Membership is free— at www.acarchitects.co.uk.



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Challenges and opportunities

It is generally agreed that the English planning system is no longer fit for purpose and therefore unable to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

A change in culture is necessary, from the present bureaucratic control and management of development to a forward-looking visionary emphasis.

This will require key revisions to process, but should retain the opportunity for better-focused stakeholder and community involvement.

The crucial challenge today is to replace what many see as an over-bearing centralism with a more logical, flexible and responsive regime for managing how infrastructure and buildings are produced.

"... the higher you go, the more incompetent institutions are: the opposite applies too ... the most competent people are in small villages. They know exactly what measures to take. We must move to localism."
Nassim Nicholas Taleb

Recommendations

Big things, like airports and nuclear power stations, are for consultation White Papers and parliament to decide, while government policy should dictate regional things like motorways, housing allocations and national parks. This is effectively the PINS National Infrastructure system and the régime already does this.

Mayors and local planning authorities should make plans and deal with locally strategic developments such as major sports stadia, transport interchanges, land releases for housing, green belt developments and new centres, all in accordance with the NPPF and a new land zoning system.

The GPDO should be completely rewritten, as suggested some years ago by the Householder Development Consents Review, to determine development rights only on the basis of measurable impacts, supported by 'deemed to satisfy' guidance. The Use Classes Order should be simplified to focus on impacts rather than specific uses, again within a nationally agreed zoning system.

The ACA has for many years promoted a Planning Manifesto with detailed reform proposals which we believe will change the system from a negative to a positive one and release skills and resources for a new injection of vision into planning.

The revised system would work like this:

- Development proposals that comply with Zoning Strategies, Local Neighbourhood Plans or the NPPF would be allowed as of right, with compliance certified by 'Approved Agents' who, as with building control, can be officers of local authorities or professionals, but are appointed and paid by applicants. [The government has proposed a pilot scheme for this, which has not been taken forward although the legislation to allow it is in place.] Only if a proposal does not comply, would application be made to the local planning authority for determination by officers. Their decision may be appealed and determined by the Planning Inspectorate as now. The expansion of PD rights using a basic Prior Notification system, whilst a blunt instrument, is effective and should be used more widely, but objective criteria such as space standards should always be enforced through the Building Regulations, etc, not by complicating prior

- Three levels of development would be considered: i] Outline, ii] Full, iii] Approved for Construction. All would be approved by agents as outlined above.
 - i] would involve a site plan and quantum statement to establish the principle of development and would in effect be an expansion of the Planning Permission in Principle (PiP) procedures already enacted;
 - ii] would involve sufficient detail to determine whether the proposed development is buildable on its site. Building control will have to be consulted either by the planning department or pre-consulted by the applicant to certify buildability in principle in accordance with building regulations. This consent may be subject to conditions and may call for the approval of reserved matters in the subsequent stage(s); and
 - iii] technical proposals would have to satisfy detailed planning and building regulations requirements, usually on a 'deemed-to-satisfy' basis which would rely on clear guidance with the option of a determination or appeal in exceptional cases (as now for Building Regulations approvals). [This works well in other countries, such as Spain.]
- Local development plans would not be allowed to duplicate matters covered by other legislation (public health, access requirements, building regulations, etc), except where special local conditions apply. Moving technical issues such as housing standards into the Building Regulations and out of local/neighbourhood plans, to be enforced through Building Control, is essential. Only strategic decisions and clearly non-compliant applications need be considered by elected members, all others being delegated. Planning resources would be focused on plan making, zoning and keeping adopted local design policies up to date.
- Approved Agents (who could be licenced by CIC, accepting qualifications used for PINS appeal inspectors or building control officers as now), in addition to planning authority officers, would be able to assess the impacts of proposals and only where these may harm other owners would they be obliged to follow a clear consultation procedure, modelled on the Party Wall Act (including provision for a 'third surveyor'). No such approval could override development plan policy. Planning officers or agents would deal with planning compliance, building and environmental regulations and party walls in an integrated way, with specialist input as necessary for matters like engineering, traffic impacts and biodiversity.
- On completion, Agents, Architects or other approved professionals *not* employed by the building contractor, would confirm that the development complies with certified proposals including the planning permission (which is not monitored today) and owners would have to notify the Land Registry with this information to be attached to the title deeds.

Summary

Adding more layers to the seventy-year old planning regime has been unhelpful, especially when politicians claim to be simplifying things. The July 2020 changes to the use classes order and GPDO demonstrate this.

The 2004 system for local plans has not worked out and needs to be fundamentally reviewed and updated, for example by the introduction of zoning, in the manner of the NPPF and national guidance. By contrast Neighbourhood Plans, Planning in Principle, Local Development Orders and Brownfield Registers have injected more local knowledge and sensitivity to the system: a new planning framework should be built around these existing structures.

Otherwise, a clean sweep is essential and the clear structure set out above offers a way forward: transitional arrangements will keep planning lawyers well entertained.

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A planning system that works for business

Planning manages the interrelationships between economic, community and environmental interests. One should not be favoured to the detriment of others.

The need to maintain a high-quality environment, in which communities and businesses can prosper together, is of crucial importance. Now, more than ever, as we adapt to the social and economic impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, we need a planning system that recognises the importance of sustainable economic growth and the social and environmental benefits it brings to local communities.

Provision should be made for both new and refurbished employment land and floorspace, in the same way as new housing and environmental protection and enhancement needs to be delivered. There is concern that insufficient employment land and premises will be available to meet future economic needs.

There is a clear need to deliver more homes, more quickly, where people want to live. Local communities also need access to good jobs, services and amenities. All of this relies on a successful and sustainable private sector and its ability to interact positively with the planning system. To help rebuild our economy, we have to reduce complexity and delay and provide the certainty, freedom and flexibility that firms need to invest, innovate and grow.

House building creates opportunities for many sectors in the economy and helps to provide homes in local communities for skilled employees. But a policy focus on housing must be balanced with other demands for land use. In recent years, there has been growing tension between building more homes and the need for business to have access to quality and affordable employment land and premises. In local communities across the country, businesses believe there is now a critical imbalance in the supply of land for jobs and homes. Many are concerned about the impact this will have on future business investment, productivity and local growth.

Increasingly, prime employment land with good transport and communication links is being given over to residential uses. Offices and shops are being converted to homes. And long-established firms have seen legitimate operations interrupted, and expansion plans curtailed, when new housing is developed too close to their boundary. Three years ago, BCC research revealed that only 28% of firms were able to access the land or premises they needed. The main barriers were a lack of sites and premises at affordable prices, sites in the wrong location, local opposition, and poor physical infrastructure. Firms tell us that the situation is worsening in many regions.

Will the pandemic reduce business need for employment land? There is no doubt that it has accelerated the adoption of digital communications across the public and private sector. Employers are gaining confidence in managing remote teams and we are likely to see greater use of agile and flexible working practices, helping to attract and retain a skilled and diverse workforce. At the same time, social distancing and public health requirements have prompted employers to re-think how they use buildings to ensure a safe workplace environment. While firms may use their space differently - and may choose to relocate to support new business models - it doesn't necessarily mean that they will need less space. Access to affordable employment land and premises will remain essential for business innovation, expansion and long-term competitiveness. So, it is critical that the planning system recognises and implements the needs and aspirations of businesses and does more to ensure they are on an equal footing with other stakeholders.

At a project-specific level, planners, investors and developers need to recognise that there has to be a re-assessment of the functionality of space in new housing, commercial, retail and recreational premises to meet public health safety and security imperatives. To make best use of all the assets available, this also needs to be done in connection with refurbishment of older premises, particularly for employment purposes in situations where heritage issues are involved - such as the reuse of disused industrial buildings that offer huge space and height, but stand idle in many parts of the Midlands and the North.

Planning for jobs and homes, together with up-front government investment in modern, smart infrastructure, will give businesses the platform to compete globally and the strategic certainty to make their own investment decisions.

Recommendations

- As well as better resourcing, local planning authorities need expertise to promote an understanding of how business now operates in a global economic environment.
- New housing must not come at the expense of employment. Councils need to objectively plan for employment land, and for a variety of employment types, to ensure that the imperative to meet demand for housing does not force out other uses and create problems for the future.
- If it is necessary to release vacant employment land for housing, alternative quality employment sites must be identified and released.
- Councils need to ensure there is an adequate supply of commercial office space to mitigate the conversion to residential uses of vacant space in towns and city centres.
- Employment land and uses should be given equal priority to housing in all spatial planning, transport planning and area master planning initiatives.
- Business supports the need for the protection of environmental assets in the interests of sustainable development and the prevention of urban sprawl. However, there needs to be a structured and intelligent release of such areas, including the green belt, to facilitate sustainable development including housing and employment uses.
- Building houses on employment land adjacent to existing businesses still has the potential to create problems for business and residents. Where existing business occupants are, and should be, complying with environmental standards and imperatives, their legitimate operations and growth potential must not be restricted by the needs and expectations of new residents.

British Property Federation

The British Property Federation (BPF) represents the commercial real estate sector—an industry with a market value of approximately £1tn¹ which contributed more than £101.2bn². We promote the interests of those with a stake in the UK built environment, and our membership comprises a broad range of owners, managers and developers of real estate as well as those who support them. Their investments help drive the UK's economic success, provide essential infrastructure and create great places where people can live, work and relax.

www.bpf.org.uk



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NOTE: This essay was prepared prior to the publication of the Planning White Paper

Introduction

This paper provides a short summary of BPF ideas for reforming the planning system to feed into the NPF's 2020 Vision workstream. These recommendations have been developed in consultation with our membership and focus mainly on reforms that will help with the post Covid-19 economic recovery.

Strengthen the presumption in favour of sustainable development in national planning policy and for decision making

A key test for large swathes of government activity as we move out of the current period will be the extent to which the precise action is directly supporting the economic recovery. Such a principle is already incorporated in the planning system via the NPPF and presumption in favour of sustainable development. The industry considers that the presumption has been weakened since its introduction in 2012 and needs strengthening, whereby great weight should be given to the contribution that development can make to meeting the country's social and economic needs.

This could be done quickly through a Ministerial Statement or, if necessary, through a review of NPPF, to ensure that all parts of the country and all communities play their part by meeting development needs in full. The same principle should also be applied for the plan-making process.

Local plan delivery and speed

Local plans are the signals which give investors clarity of direction. Without a local plan, the planning system is direction-less and therefore a barrier to economic decisions.

It is vital Government continues to put pressure on all local authorities to have up-to-date plans by the deadline of December 2023 (as stated in [Planning for the Future](#))

Government should also consider reform of the local plan-making process making it single-stage. In terms of implementation, this would take some officials' time within MHCLG and some additional local authority resource, although it should have deregulatory benefits in the longer term.

More use of Local Development Orders to free up LPA resources

The greater use of local development orders is an opportunity to free up local planning officers' time to deal with more complex schemes. One option would be for authorities to issue local development orders that allow the standard typologies combined with some form of deemed consent.

Local authorities could be encouraged to prepare design guides to address the vast majority of extensions and works to what are often uniform residential areas, compliance with which provides deemed consent. There is scope to explore whether there is a role for Neighbourhood Plans in this process.

Local Development Orders and town centres

There is also an opportunity for the greater use of Local Development Orders (LDOs) in a town centre context to encourage greater flexibility on the high street. This would require a more bottom-up approach and as LDOs are still quite rare it may require some incentive to promote their greater use.

To encourage more use of LDOs, Government could make it a condition of granting High Street Fund or Towns Fund allocations, that a local authority must show how it is using LDOs or similar planning flexibilities to promote a modernisation of its High Street.

This would require some resource at a local authority level to produce the LDO but would be a one-off and therefore deregulatory for businesses and local authorities in the long term.

Embed remote ways of working in the planning system

Current conditions have forced new ways for the planning system to work and brought broader digitalisation into sharper focus. It is important such progress is embraced and embedded into future work practices.

There must be proper evaluation of the new ways of working with the planning system. We do not wish to circumvent individuals' rights, but there would be benefits to a more flexible and multi-channel approach, allowing greater participation for the public, and a speedier service for applicants.

A presumption in favour of logistics development where a clear set of 'logistics criteria' are met

Written ministerial statement on the importance of the logistics sector to the UK's economic recovery

The importance of the logistics sector as an essential part of our national infrastructure underpinning all aspects of our day-to-day lives has been brought starkly into focus by the Covid-19 outbreak. To ensure that its full potential is harnessed, we need a planning framework that acknowledges its importance, its locational requirements and responds positively to its clearly identified needs now so that the sector can play its full part in the economic recovery.

Logistics is an integral component of the manufacturing sector and underpins a significant sector of the construction industry during the development stage. Throughout the pandemic, the sector has continued to perform strongly, and there has been exponential growth in the rate of online retail sales.

The local plan process is simply not reacting quickly enough to the logistic sector's identified needs, and delivering the number of sites to satisfy this demand. Local authorities, at present, do not uniformly recognise the benefits that logistics operations provide, nor the need for a resilient and national supply chain network.

Clear direction from central government is therefore needed through the introduction of a 'presumption in favour' of logistics development when a precise set of 'logistics criteria' are met. Such a presumption could be introduced through an amendment to the NPPF or be delivered through the forthcoming planning white paper.

Logistics criteria:

- Easy access and proximity to the strategic highway network
- Ability to provide effective access by non private car to suit shift working patterns
- Located away from residential development/where no unacceptable impact on residential amenity to allow for uninterrupted 24 hour working
- Capable of accommodating large scale buildings in terms of both footprint and height
- Sites which suit location for future occupiers

It is worth noting that North West Leicestershire District Council (through Plan Policy EC2 Para 2) operate a similar policy at a local level.

British Retail Consortium

The BRC's purpose is to make a positive difference to the retail industry and the customers it serves, today and in the future. We tell the story of retail, work with our members to drive positive change and use our expertise and influence to create an economic and policy environment that enables retail businesses to thrive and consumers to benefit. Our membership comprises over 5,000 businesses delivering £180bn of retail sales and employing over one and half million employees.

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Schumpeter's High Street – how to manage creative destruction through planning

A gale of transformation is ripping through the nation's high streets. It was blowing well before March but the Coronavirus crisis has put rocket boosters under it. Demand for retail space on high streets has been declining for years, but it fell off a cliff thanks to lockdown, and the changed attitudes of shoppers and necessary restrictions on capacity in stores for many months (years?) to come don't augur well for demand for retail space.

Retail has always been a core purpose of high streets and town centres, and I don't think that this will fundamentally change for many places. However, the trend suggests that this purpose will be supplemented rather than supplanted, with a greater mix of leisure, housing and other uses filling the gaps left by empty stores in the coming years.

The questions for retailers are whether the planning system is ready and able to support this retail transformation, and whether local authorities are ready to recognise and deliver it.

While the market is changing demand for physical space, it's up to local authorities to manage that process. This should happen through a plan-led approach. But it isn't acceptable that it takes seven years on average to adopt a plan, and even less so when studies of retail needs underpinning those plans are based on even more outdated market trends. We support the Government's objective to speed up the process. Decisions must be made on the basis of an agreed and realistic local vision based on up-to-date information and sound understanding of economic trends.

Within the plan-led system, individual decisions are often based on the Use Classes Order: a central tool for defining and allocating land uses. Over time it has had to adapt to the changing nature of uses – A1 can now mean a coffee shop and music venue with a majority of the floorspace given over to storage space for online order fulfilment, as much as a shop purely selling goods. Whilst there have been changes to various uses, mostly in the direction of greater flexibility through permitted development rights, we think that the Use Classes Order is ripe for a more fundamental review to make sure it's fit for purpose today.

The second question is whether local authorities can recognise this change and deliver it. While there are many great examples of proactive, and progressive councils investing in their high streets and town centres to create fantastic offers for their residents, many of our members say that there are still too many councils who have, to paraphrase the 1950's US Secretary of State Dean Acheson, lost a high street but not yet found a role.

In a context of retail contraction, many smaller and secondary shopping locations are seeing declining footfall as residents vote with their smartphones, or visit larger retail parks and shopping locations that offer a wider range of stores and convenient parking. The reality is that many of these locations will never return to their retail-focused heyday.

However, some places will have a natural USP that could be developed, whether a particular historical role or local characteristics such as a centre for speciality food or crafts production. That role would be complementary to the functions of other settlements in the region, and so needs the understanding and engagement of local authorities in the wider economic area. In that way, it's not so much planning tools that are needed to revive high street fortunes, but an understanding by decision makers of what a repurposed economic role for those places might look like, and then the desire to drive that vision forward using the tools at hand.

Of course, not all places will so easily find new role, and where that's the case, that also needs to be recognised by decision makers. Although some communities may understandably mourn the loss of local services, beyond protected planning status or community ownership, options are limited to retain them. Some retailers have noted that in a minority of councils there's too much desire to hold on to the past, to grasp a vision of a shopping location that has gone and won't return. In those circumstances, local leaders need to be honest with communities about the loss of the retail offer and its replacement with other uses.

Once the new role of 'old' retail locations is determined, opportunities to enable that transformation can be grasped. Local plans can direct appropriate investment and support development of new uses. All of that requires vision and capacity. In the context of cuts to planning services over the past decade that can be a challenge. That's why permissive planning tools, whether nationally set permitted development rights, or bespoke Local Development Orders, are welcome tools, and it's good to see uptake of the latter in recent years after a very slow start.

Retail is changing in the face of technology and changing consumer expectations, accelerated by habits formed in the heat of the pandemic. While there will always be a role for actual shops selling actual things that you can see, touch and smell, we need a planning system that recognises the difference between the functions and consumer expectations of shops in 2020 compared to 1990. We also need local leaders to recognise and re-evaluate the role of areas where shops are no longer the main or even a significant part of their economic purpose. While greater national flexibilities and local tools are generally welcome, they should never be so prevalent that they undermine an area's ability to produce and stick to a coherent and timely local plan. Only through a dedicated and determined vision will larger retail centres prosper, and smaller ones find a productive new role.

Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation



The Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT) is a charity, learned society and membership body with 12 UK regions and a number of international groups. CIHT represents and qualifies professionals who plan, design, build, manage and operate transport and infrastructure

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The challenges and opportunities created by the impacts of the Covid means we should consider and plan for a New Future for Transport vision.

We need an efficient and integrated planning and transport system to not only support a strong and prosperous economy but to reduce carbon emissions. This requires us to challenge how we integrate planning and transport and how we view the local highway network.

Current planning practice is not delivering the best outcomes. New developments frequently fail to achieve sustainability because of their locations, the approaches taken to provide access, or the attitudes of everyone involved in their planning and delivery

Planning in a post covid-19 world needs to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by covid-19 as well as delivering on the climate crisis, air quality issues and the housing crisis. **CIHT's better planning, better transport, better places advice¹** makes a series of recommendations that world to deliver on these goals, even in a post covid-19 world. The highways and transportation sector can deliver on restarting the economy after covid-19, but this needs to be in line with the government's own decarbonisation targets.

For the last 20 years, governments have attempted to encourage a more sustainable approach to transport within spatial planning but have made limited progress. Sustainable access to local services is poor. The way we currently travel and the continued growth in road traffic are damaging our health, harming our towns, and contributing to climate change.

CIHT Recommends:

Create a clear vision

1. Local plans must commit to a compelling and clearly expressed place-based vision that has sustainable transport as well as health, climate change and environmental needs integrated from the start.
2. Strategic and Local Plan producers must create collaborative partnerships with strategic stakeholders, transport service providers, and local communities that go far beyond statutory consultation.
3. Local Plans must include clear accessibility and mode sharing requirements. A clear statement of the minimum quality of accessibility by sustainable modes to offer a credible choice must be made.

4. Local Plans must make the best use of existing planning policy to develop a sustainable planning strategy. This includes effectively exploiting the NPPF and securing support from Highways England, Network Rail, and subnational transport bodies.
5. Local Plans must be capable of evolution and flexibility when delivering larger or innovative schemes but must always maintain consistency with the vision and objectives.
6. We must fully abandon predict and provide models of transport planning, and assess the Local Plan against health and well-being, lifestyle, and environmental criteria (including carbon emissions) – not just standard demographic and transport information.
7. We must use robust scenario testing to ensure site allocations are viable and deliverable in terms of meeting sustainability and mode share targets.
8. Our supporting evidence base must demonstrate where the transport capacity presents opportunities as well as constraints to the Strategic and Local Plan.

Deliver the Plan

9. Local authorities should be prepared to drive and manage the implementation of the Plan rather than simply reacting to planning applications. This will require establishing clear ongoing collaborative mechanisms for the management and monitoring processes required.
10. The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) accompanying the Local Plan should set out what is required, when, and (for at least the first five years) how it could be funded where this is practical.
11. The IDP should be developed in collaboration with a wider range of stakeholders. It should be reviewed and updated as required but maintain consistency with the vision and objectives.
12. The Statements of Common Ground prepared by plan makers should include the extent and duration of joint work with the transport authorities and providers to inform and evidence collaboration throughout the plan-making process, in particular agreement on what transport investments and interventions are required and deliverable in support of the plan strategy.
13. Community Infrastructure Levies and Section 106 policies should support strategic elements of the sustainable transport network, and these must be prioritised over additional road capacity. Manage new developments
14. Development proposals should describe how they support the Local Plan's place-based vision for access and movement, taking account of viability, deliverability, resilience to changes, and explicit sustainable development outcomes.
15. Development proposals should recognise that the level of accessibility to existing or potential transport services and the opportunity to include new services in large development areas are key determining factors.
16. Development proposals should assess alternative land-use and transport options to define the optimum sustainable transport strategy. They should also present evidence to demonstrate a reasonable prospect that the preferred option can be delivered.
17. The government and the Planning Inspectorate should put greater weight on transport- and movement-related evidence and more consistently regard how access and movement are facilitated by more sustainable means.

The local highway network (LHN) will be at the heart of the above reform. CIHT's review, **Improving Local Highways** ² outlined a 4-point strategy in its review earlier this year, including the following:

Creating a new focus for the network

- Establish an improved system of monitoring that (a) gives clarity on how the LHN is performing, and (b) includes comparisons of efficiency, effectiveness, and innovation in delivery
- Encourage greater collaboration through providing an appropriate incentive funding regime
- Define how local highways meet the economic and social requirements of local areas: roads for places, roads for distribution, roads for access (both rural and suburban), and roads for sustainable and active transport
- Show how the highway network will support the delivery of a carbon-neutral system, create sustainable, green, resilient, and accessible places, make transport healthier, and help the economy grow
- Define what people can expect from the LHN, underpinned by an outcome-based service specification and guidance for local authorities and other practitioners
- Review regulations and legislation relevant to the LHN

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Country Land and Business Association

The CLA (Country Land and Business Association) is a membership organization for the owners of land, property and businesses in rural England and Wales. The CLA exists to champion, protect and enhance our rural economy, environment and way of life.

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CLA Rural Powerhouse - A planning system designed for the rural economy in England

The CLA launched its Rural Powerhouse campaign during the 2019 general election on the basis that with the right policy platform, the economy in rural areas has real potential for economic growth, job creation and wider prosperity. It contains five themes¹.

This paper provides a summary of the second theme - *A planning system designed for the rural economy* - which was published in July 2020. The CLA policy report can be found [here](#).

Many reports on the planning system have been commissioned over the decades. Practically all of them have found the planning system to be too complex, under-resourced, expensive, and a barrier to good change. Several reports have produced recommendation for change, much of which has been implemented but in a manner that has added additional complexity.

The CLA itself has run a number of member surveys about aspects of the planning system. These have found a restrictive system plagued by delays, additional costs and unrealistic demands which is harming the sustainability of rural economies and communities.

The CLA paper focusses, especially in light of the covid-19 emergency, on short term actions that are required now. Although there will be a need to consider more fundamental change, we are more concerned with change which could be introduced quite quickly with limited cost and disruption to get the economy in rural areas moving in light of the three main challenges it is facing:

Responding to community needs for jobs, housing, services, transport, leisure which are similar to those in urban areas. But many in the countryside feel they are not receiving the benefits of economic growth and government at all levels does not properly understand the relationship between rural businesses, rural life and the environment;

Levelling up the economy – the economy in rural areas lags behind urban areas. The traditional image of rural economies as dominated by primary industries (agriculture and forestry) and small-scale tourism is increasingly anachronistic. In fact, the rural economy has become increasingly diverse and differentiated. The business base in rural areas continues to grow, and is becoming much more sophisticated, creative and innovative. However, there is still 8%² lower productivity compared to urban areas, and compounded by a skills shortage.

Recovering from the economic impact of Covid-19 – Covid-19 has had a hugely damaging effect on the rural economy across all sectors, but in particular leisure, hospitality and tourism.

But there is also the need to take into account the significant changes signalled by both Brexit and the Agriculture Bill and the new trading relationships that these will generate, creating both opportunities and risks. These changes come alongside new expectations and perceptions about what the countryside is for and the nature and make-up of the rural economy.

A broader rural economy that delivers a range of full-time jobs, with associated salaries, will be infinitely more robust and sustainable than the seasonal “tea shop” economy favoured by some. In this context, a planning system that seeks to achieve its objectives for rural communities and environment outcomes by restricting economic development fails the very businesses, communities and the environment it is intended to support.

An efficient, proportionate, effective planning system is a key component to economic recovery. Some welcome changes have been implemented but there remains an over-arching concern that the planning system is acting as a barrier to the delivery of beneficial development for rural businesses, communities and for environmental outcomes. A simpler and better resourced planning system would restore confidence and encourage more development to come forward, unlocking the potential of the rural economy through investment and innovation.

The paper sets out a number of recommendations, these include:

- National planning policy to properly recognize the broader rural economy that delivers creativity and innovation;
- The existing permission in principle process to be widened to include rural economic development;
- Permitted development rights for new build affordable dwellings for rent on rural exception sites aimed at local communities;
- A national exemption from the community infrastructure levy for new farm buildings
- Implementation of a package of shovel-ready Heritage reforms;
- A segmented approach to local plans, so that housing policies do not undermine the entire plan;
- Putting sustainability at the heart of rural communities by updating local authority sustainability assessments to factor in current and emerging technological development;
- Introducing a national policy for roadside barn development in designated landscapes;
- Resourcing of the planning system so that it is fit for purpose

Longer term policy recommendations include:

- A fundamental review of the Green Belt planning policy
- Land value capture must deliver a competitive return to a willing seller
- Improving minerals planning policy

The paper includes a business case. Its findings demonstrate that in England rural businesses generate £261bn³ GVA⁴, around 16% of total UK GVA⁵. However, there is an 8% productivity gap between the performance of rural and urban businesses which, if closed, could add around £20bn to the national GVA per year.

The farmed landscape provides the backbone for rural businesses, but farming contributes less than 2% GVA which demonstrates the current strength of rural diversification activity. For those 66% of farms with a diversified income, income from that activity accounted for 28% of their profit in 2017-18 – this generated around £680m additional income, and 22%⁶ of farmers’ total income was derived

from some form of diversified enterprise. This rate of increase averages 7%⁷. Using this average, the CLA estimates that diversification activities could generate some £1.02bn in 2025 and £1.43bn in 2030.

This not only highlights the scale of contribution which diversified rural businesses can make to the rural economy, it also provides a suitable platform for further growth. This is why we argue that the rural economy could be more diverse and economically powerful still if the planning system positively supported and encouraged sustainable change in rural areas.

The countryside is a mosaic of activities each with a contribution to make to the whole. A transformed planning system that can respond quickly to change, that recognises the importance of a broader rural economy and which provides a more level playing field for appropriate and sustainable rural business and housing for local people can turn our countryside into a rural powerhouse. This in turn will assist the government's commitment to levelling-up in rural areas, and also deliver critically important environmental outcomes.

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3. Statistical Digest of Rural England 2020
4. Gross Value Added
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6. 2018-2019
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County Councils Network

Founded in 1997, the County Councils Network (CCN) is the voice of England's counties. A cross-party organisation, CCN develops policy, commissions research, and presents evidence-based solutions nationally on behalf of the largest grouping of local authorities in England.

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Recommendations

CCN's vision for the planning system would require changes to legislation but would lead to a more joined-up approach to housing, growth and infrastructure. Our recommendations are to:

- Reintroduce strategic planning at a county scale, with counties given powers to prepare strategic plans that align spatial, economic and infrastructure priorities over a long-term period.
- Reform the developer contributions system to give county councils a bigger stake in agreeing and spending contributions.
- Extend the Strategic Infrastructure Tariff to county areas supporting better land value capture and providing a long-term income stream for infrastructure projects.

Current context

As it currently operates, the planning system is failing to be as effective as it could be. In two-tier areas, the system is fragmented leaving often numerous district and borough councils as planning authorities, and county councils as highways, education and social care authorities. The Duty to Co-operate, as introduced in the 2012 NPPF, has failed and often difficult decisions about housing growth are stalled due to a lack of agreement. This is exacerbated in high growth areas such as the South East where pressure is highest, and land availability often limited due to Green Belt designations.

As pressure to deliver increased housing numbers continues, the lack of a joined-up approach to also delivering vital social and physical infrastructure runs the risk of creating isolated communities, and the continued introduction of permitted development rights risks low quality development over which authorities have little control and receive nothing in the way of developer contributions to support essential infrastructure.

In 2018, CCN undertook a review of current and emerging practice around strategic planning across all member councils¹. It found that many CCN members are working to overcome the challenges of the system in innovative ways to seek the best outcomes for communities. Some of the innovative practices include:

- Norfolk County Council, who worked across the county with districts to prepare the Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework and Infrastructure Delivery Plan. This non-statutory framework aims to set out shared objectives and strategic priorities to improve outcomes for Norfolk and inform the preparation of future Local Plans.
- Hertfordshire County Council, who is working with the five district and borough councils on the South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan, and who are also a partner in the non-statutory Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership (HIPP).

- Oxfordshire County Council, who has worked with its district councils to secure a growth deal with Government which includes a Growth Board. The board works to facilitate and enable collaboration between local authorities on economic development, strategic planning and growth. As part of this, a statutory joint spatial plan is being prepared.

Proposals

With the recovery of COVID-19 presenting both challenges and opportunities, we now need more than ever a planning system that provides certainty for developers, delivers high quality places for residents and responds in a place-based way to unique opportunities and challenges across areas. At the heart of this, should be:

- High quality, affordable housing, in the right places with access to adequate open space;
- Thriving and economically resilient town centres;
- Employment opportunities and access to education and skills training;
- High quality, sustainable infrastructure that easily allows people to easily move around.
- Resilient places that can respond to extreme weather events and contribute to the UK's target to bring greenhouse gas emission to net zero by 2050.

In order to achieve this, CCN believes that the government should use the untapped resource and knowledge of both county and unitary councils to properly reintroduce strategic planning and design a system that actively encourages authorities to work together at scale.

Strategic plans set a vision for the future of a defined area, and can facilitate sustainable economic growth, boost housing supply and ensure better alignment between long-term spatial, infrastructure and economic priorities to deliver quality places. CCN has long argued that county areas should be given the same powers offered to metro-mayor areas which have allowed them to plan strategically across their wider areas to ensure that investment in infrastructure is prioritised in the right places and that new homes are matched with the right infrastructure. County geographies offer an appropriate scale and established geography to undertake strategic planning and whilst this should come forward on a locally agreed basis, the government could do much more to encourage it.

With many members facing significant infrastructure funding gaps², CCN also believes the government should review the developer contributions system. Contributions towards infrastructure from developers are vital to ensure that some of the value of new homes is captured and put into the community to ensure services can cope with new development – this may include extending or building schools, giving extra capacity to doctors surgeries and providing public spaces and parks.

In two-tier areas, district councils are responsible for setting the CIL rates and negotiating Section 106 agreements, even where some of the money collected should be handed to the county council for highways and education. We believe that county councils should have a much greater say in rate setting and negotiations to ensure that they get a fair share of the contributions. This could be intrinsically linked to strategic planning, with parties agreeing the priorities for pooling contributions and using them on projects that would deliver the best outcomes. Extending the Strategic Infrastructure Tariff to county areas, which is currently only on offer to mayoral areas, would also assist in providing a funding stream for infrastructure projects.

Looking ahead

As government narrative around the future of local government changes, and with more unitary authorities on the horizon, it is important a focus on strategic planning is maintained. Without this, risks the creation of 'big' local plans, which although highly necessary, often overlook long-term key strategic investment that help to align spatial, economic and infrastructure priorities over broader geographies.

We are also concerned about the possibility of recreating the issues of disjointed planning and delivery seen in two-tier areas with the establishment of Mayors and Combined Authorities. This must be avoided at all costs if we are to genuinely transform the planning system and make it fit for the future.

References

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CPRE

CPRE The countryside charity's vision is of a beautiful and thriving countryside which enriches all our lives. We work to enhance, promote and protect the countryside through influencing national policy and by supporting our network of CPREs across the country, in their work to increase support and improve their local environment.

www.cpre.org.uk



The
countryside
charity

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For the CPRE countryside includes not only the protected landscapes of National Parks and AONBs, but also the countryside near where people live, Green Belt, locally valued landscapes and green spaces.

Our strategy, to take us to our centenary year in 2026 is summarised [here](#).

CPRE and communities across the country have a wide range of tools at our disposal to achieve these aims, but the single most important is a truly democratic planning system. The planning system is as important to the future of our countryside and rural life as it is to the history of CPRE and all that has been achieved by communities for their local areas in the past 70+ years.

CPRE agrees that we need to significantly improve planning outcomes. We seek a democratic planning system balancing all interests and ensuring:

- countryside for all: fair access and quality green space near where everyone lives, wherever they are in the country;
- connected space and landscapes for nature, wellbeing and for addressing the climate emergency; and
- affordable housing, a thriving rural economy and communities and a sustainable, green recovery.

Our views about the extent to which the Planning White Paper meets this vision, can be summarised as:

- Tackling the climate emergency. In recent years most of the innovation in tackling climate change has come from the local level. For example the Merton Rule helped encourage more energy efficient new homes. The White Paper sets a target for new homes to be zero carbon by 2050. This does not command public confidence when we know that the 2005 Code for Sustainable Homes set the target of 2016. A more ambitious target – 2030 at the latest – is both needed and perfectly feasible. Local authorities should be given power to set zero carbon targets for new development in local plans.

- Levelling up. The White Paper's proposed new housebuilding requirement in particular aims to ensure 'enough land is released in the areas where affordability is worst'. In practice, Government housing policies and investment programmes in recent years have been directed mainly towards southern England. There is a clear tension with the need and political imperative to encourage regeneration in the Midlands and the North. The current lopsided approach also means that the affordable housing needs of communities in the north of England are not being addressed. There are enough suitable brownfield sites in England for over 1 million new homes and extensive tracts of this land can be found in all English regions. The Government needs to reform a number of spending programmes, in particular the Housing Infrastructure Fund and New Homes Bonus, to increase fairness between the regions.
- Building the quality homes we need, in the places local people want to see them, at a quicker rate. Sir Oliver Letwin's Review of Build Out has set out how we can do this – in particular through local authorities taking a lead role in acquiring land and requiring a wider variety of housing types. The White Paper does little or nothing to set out how the changes proposed by Letwin might be taken forward. Rural areas across England have particularly acute affordable housing needs and it is not clear how a continued focus on home ownership, as set out in the White Paper, is likely to lead to those needs not being sufficiently met. We agree with many of the White Paper proposals on design, in particular the call for a new body to provide advice on design quality. But our 2010 research with Place Alliance shows that a particular problem with new build housing schemes is that residents are forced to rely on their cars. The Government must give more support for strategic, 'larger than local' planning in order to avoid these problems.
- Safeguarding and improving the countryside near where people live. In this respect CPRE differs from many in the planning sector, who dismiss the value of Green Belt and argue that it protects poor quality land and encourages unsustainable patterns of development. Green Belt land provides the countryside next door for 30 million people. CPRE believes that Green Belts are needed more now than ever, in order to provide space near cities for nature, wellbeing and climate mitigation, to encourage urban regeneration and prevent London growing at the expense of the rest of the country. We agree with Dieter Helm that it is not a binary choice between poor quality Green Belt and building on it, but that we should seek to invest in, enhance and expand countryside near cities for all the reasons mentioned above.

In addition we call for better protected countryside around large towns such as Leicester and Middlesbrough that do not currently have Green Belts. Planners need to better understand the heritage, farming and nature value – and potential value – of Green Belts and other countryside around large towns and cities. We fear that the White Paper will increase pressure to release Green Belt land for development in spite of the Government's manifesto pledges. Plans already exist for the release of Green Belt land for over 266,000 houses.

- Giving communities a say in their local environment. We see public involvement in planning as critical to achieving good quality development and protecting and improving the environment. We believe that much greater safeguards and reassurances about public involvement in the planning process are required. The processes for both Local Plans and planning applications can be made simpler, but the public needs to have meaningful influence at both stages. The nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIP) regime is aimed at providing a fast track but still provides for these two stages of involvement. Decisions on large housing schemes must still rest with elected local authorities. Local authorities should also be able to use their planning powers to help regenerate town centres post-COVID. This must involve being able to annul or disapply national permitted development rights where this is needed to help deliver a local vision for the future.

'Planning for the Future' makes bold and exciting claims about improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system and outcomes in terms of design, speed and affordable housing provision. We struggle to see how in practice it will achieve these aspirations and we are alarmed by the implications for local democracy and by the absence of any apparent ambition for the environment beyond a rump 'protected' zone of pre-existing, already besieged designations. Covid showed many of us the importance of access to nature and green space, a post-Covid planning system needs to radically improve that access and make the connection to the Government's wider environmental goals, which will depend to a great extent on the planning system for their success.

Create Streets

Create Streets is a social enterprise which exists to help create high density, beautiful, resilient, economically and socially successful developments with strong local support. Nicholas Boys-Smith was co-chair of the Government's Building Better Building Beautiful Commission whose final report the Secretary of State for Housing and Community described as "seminal."

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A fast track for beauty

Nicholas Boys Smith argues that we should give small developers, landowners, innovators and third sector organisations more certainty so they can create more popular places.

The ratio of average UK house prices to average incomes has doubled since 1998.¹ The UK had the highest growth in real house prices of any OECD country in the 45 years before 2015 - increasing at nearly four times the rate of the OECD average.² This means that Britain's housing challenges are not just retarding the age of home ownership as in, for example, the US.³ They are fundamentally changing generational fairness. A smaller proportion of people born between 1981 and 2000 are homeowners, at this life stage, than for any previous generation since 1926.⁴ And their rent payments have increased from 10% of net income 30 years ago to around 30% now.⁵ This is having catastrophic consequences for standards of living and wealth inequality.

In times of trouble, many turn to what they already believe. However, many facets of the English housing market routinely 'blamed' for high costs are not actually that different from other countries. Credit rates are not lower (0.75% bank base for sterling versus 0% for the Euro area).⁶ The overall proportion of publicly owned homes in the UK (18.6%) is not lower than the EU average (10.8%). Nor are there more empty homes (there are far fewer). Looking at data comparatively, it is hard to escape the conclusion that we just don't have enough homes in the right places. Nationally our ratio of homes to households (0.99) is one of the tightest in Europe (average: 1.12). Nor does this reflect suppressed household formation due to high prices.⁷

Many studies that demonstrate that 'greater' regulation of housing markets tends to be aligned with constrained supply and higher prices.⁸ However, it is difficult to argue this simplistically in Britain. The annual supply of planning permissions is now outstripping the government's annual target (of 300,000) and the gap between homes permitted and homes completed is widening (from less than 100,000 seven years ago to nearer 200,000 in 2016-17).⁹

Also supportive of not finding 'planning' to be the problem is that our level of regional spatial planning is similar to many countries. Only Italy and Spain have completely regionalised systems. Our level of green belt protection of existing settlements is comparable to Holland and Denmark. Both have very similar population densities to South East England and also have urban containment policies in many ways very similar to our, more lyrically named, green belts. We don't take a radically different approach to land value capture to pay for infrastructure compared to most countries.¹⁰

However, there *is* a smoking gun. The English planning system is not rules-based but operates on a more discretionary case-by-case basis. A new building in England needs a building permission; a 'tick-box' exercise based on building codes. It also needs planning permission; a case-by-case judgement

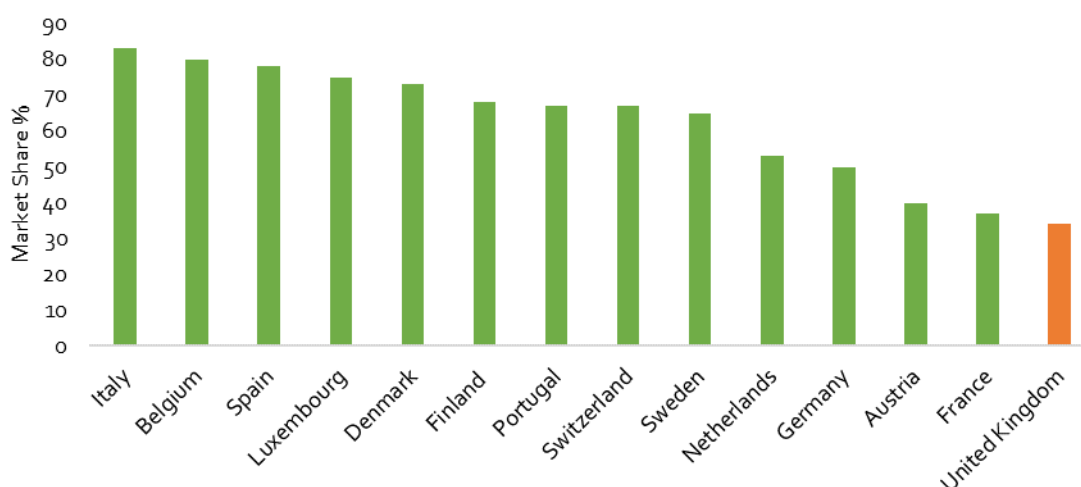
by a planning officer.¹¹ This judgement is based on the local plan which is a policy document not a regulatory one. It gives principles and guidance. It doesn't set rules. This is the fundamental difference to nearly all other approaches to land use regulation.¹²

This approach has advantages. If you regulate for the wrong thing (for example demanding suburban housing in city centres as much of the US has done for 70 years) than you can entrench a development that is less valuable, popular or sustainable.¹³

But there are disadvantages too. All standard frameworks of good regulation suggest that regulation should be predictable, certain, not subject to producer capture or to 'who you know'.¹⁴ Nearly all economic studies conclude that when this is not the case then markets become 'hard to enter' and are unduly influenced by an oligopoly of large firms and producer not consumer interests. As a recent Housebuilders Federation (HBF) argued;

*'The fragility of the standard SME business model and the inherent risk associated with planning are a source of frustration for all builders but these challenges can be disastrous for the smallest of companies.'*¹⁵

This is what has happened in England. Greater uncertainty and a slow process with major expense up-front before the right to build is certain has increased planning risk, pushed up enormously land prices which have permission and acted as a major barrier to entry for small developers, minor land-owners, self and custom builders, Modern Methods of Construction and other innovators. In a survey of over 500 small firms, the main challenges identified were the planning process and associated risks, delays and costs. 38% (the highest number) voted this their primary challenge and 31% the second highest.¹⁶ In the latest available data smaller British firms built fewer new buildings proportionally than any other European country.



*SME self-build & custom build in the United Kingdom vs. Europe*¹⁷

The proportion of homes that small British builders develop has collapsed Thirty years ago small builders built 40% of new homes. Today it is 12%.¹⁸

One way to help SMEs re-enter the market is to reduce planning risk. England should introduce more predictable planning for mass market new homes and for simpler situations. We should stop treating all development as bespoke process and 'move the democracy forward' where possible from the development control process to the setting of the local plan. Then, as in the US or much of Europe, the (important and necessary) democratic debate can take place at the *plan-making* stage not the *development-specific* stage. Strategy is the time of maximum impact, not tactics. Too much local involvement in development control is mere *post hoc* damage limitation.

This, as I understand it, is the logic of the Government's recent White Paper, *Planning for the Future* and this is to be welcomed. The initial draft of this essay, written in July, argued that it should be possible for provably popular developments to have their own special 'fast track for beauty.' This might work thought the local plan or a supplementary planning document. Developments benefiting from the accelerated building route would need to follow clear rules on minimum size and use provably popular (via polling with the community), visually set out design codes. These would lay out (via pictures and numbers not verbal assertions of 'suitability') clear criteria on relationship to rest of the public highway, height, range of acceptable materials, bay width and fenestration pattern. I was delighted that the White Paper proposed something similar.

For this, as for other elements of the White Paper, there are genuine questions about how best to make it work. And, for a programme as radical as the government is proposing, there are real risks. Might legal change just stall development?

But for those 'small c' conservatives who are seeking to prevent planning reform, there is a key question they need to answer. England is systemically building neither the number of new homes that we need nor the quality of new places that we deserve.¹⁹ Given this, what is so different about Britain that, uniquely in the world, we should regulate what we build through sequestered judgements by planning officials not clear rules that anyone can follow. Exceptionalism is justifiable when it works. Ours isn't.

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One 1999 study estimated that ineffective land use regulation retarded British productivity, pushing up costs by up to 40% in some industries. McKinsey Global Institute (1999), *Driving Productivity and Growth in the UK economy*, p.15.
9. In 2016-7 there were 351,169 permissions granted but only 183,570 new build completions and only 217,350 net additional dwellings. House Builders Federation (2018), *Housing Pipeline Report*
10. Germany is quite an outlier in permitting public purchase of land at unimproved valuations. See Boys Smith (2018), *More Good Homes*, pp. 32-3.
11. Only in a few circumstances is planning permission not required. These include domestic extensions up to 6m from the rear wall, 8m on a detached property. Additionally, buildings in farmyards. These can be built via 'permitted development' outside the planning systems.
12. Partial exceptions being Ireland, other parts of UK, Portugal and some though reducing elements of the Australian approach.
13. See Speck, Jeff (2019), *Walkable City* for a brilliant exposition of what went wrong in the US and how enlightened planners, communities and developers are fixing it.
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15. HBF (2017), *Reversing the decline of small housebuilders: Reinvigorating entrepreneurialism and building more homes*, p.21.
16. NHBC Foundation, (2017), *Small house builders and developers*, p.3, pp.13-24. 60% felt that the length of time and unpredictability of the planning were a serious impediment to delivering houses. Main concerns were: 'the length of time it takes to achieve a decision, the unpredictability and inconsistency of the process, the fees and tariffs involved, and the internal resourcing of, and communication with, planning departments'. Factors such as these, and the pre-application process, are now greater concerns for small house builders and developers than in 2014
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Design Council

Design Council is an independent charity and government advisor on design. Our vision is a world where the role and value of design is recognised as a fundamental creator of value, enabling happier, healthier and safer lives for all. Making better places, better products, better processes and better performance



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Reshaping planning

There has never been a more important time, with the challenges of the climate emergency and Covid 19 to think holistically and across disciplines to challenge how we plan our cities, suburbs, towns, villages, and natural landscape.

The Government has taken positive steps towards delivering a better designed built environment over the last 12 months with the introduction of the National Design Guide co-created by Design Council and Tibbalds Urban Planning and Design.

Plan-making and development management, can ensure that we are not finding a “single response” to a “single problem” but fully explore these challenges

Design Council has looked further at the changes we would like to see through the forthcoming Planning White Paper. Our recommendations are based on our extensive experience and expertise in embedding high quality design into our homes, neighbourhoods, and infrastructure.

Establish a Design Quality Unit

We welcome the '[Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission](#)', report and endorse recommendations for an independent Design Quality Unit to be established by Government. This should reach across Government departments and its agencies to deliver on the principles in the National Design Guide through monitoring the quality of development, and by driving culture change across the industry, inspiring and championing good design.

Our recent affiliation with the Place Alliance and the publication of '[Delivering Urban Design Quality](#)', recommends the development of a hub and spoke model which will work with existing design service providers in the regions. As a steering group member for the Place Alliance Housing Design Audit, we have a strong understanding of the need to drive up the quality of our homes in urban areas.

Skills Centres of Excellence

Design Council endorse further recommendations in the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission report, that regionally based Skills Centres of Excellence are set up to support local authorities and communities that may be lacking in skills and competencies in delivering against the National Design Guide principles. We imagine that this would align with the National Design Unit and be an inclusive, collaborative partnership delivering a programme of support, mentoring and leadership training. The Skills Centres of Excellence would use local placed based social infrastructure institutions and work with our established built environment expert networks and the existing Design Network.

Place-based regional spatial planning

If the Government is serious about local place-based solutions, long-term flexible strategic plans that can respond to changing circumstances are required to align and integrate economic and environmental priorities. Strategic regional plans should provide the structure for infrastructure investment, replacing the duty to co-operate. Regional and national geo-spatial data sets and data repositories that demonstrate green infrastructure, built form and deprivation indices should support long term plans and engage communities.

Put nature at the heart of our communities

Blue and green infrastructure is not just a nice-to-have. It should be given equal weight to housing and other land uses through the identification of strategic sites in regional and local plans and alongside local on-site provision. Nature based solutions and green infrastructure must be an essential aspect of all development to support health and wellbeing, climate adaptation and the economic recovery of our communities as well as providing opportunities for local and regional employment.

Past research from Cabe Space, [Urban Green Nation](#), current research from [Fields In Trust](#) and [Parks Alliance](#) show how access to green space and good quality public realm is intrinsic to good health and wellbeing and ultimately saves the public purse. It has also highlighted the lack of access in areas of deprivation. Our planning system must enable access to quality open space.

High streets

Design Council's built environment experts will be working closely with high streets across the country through the [High Streets Task Force](#) but planning reforms will have a significant impact on future viability. We have a once in a generation opportunity to reimagine our high streets, improve access for all, protect and encourage local co-working spaces and consolidate their position at the heart of communities. Pivoting high streets for health, work, housing for social integration and making use of temporary or stalled spaces for green space and creative uses are all possible if place based partnerships are allowed to thrive under the context of progressive planning licenses with communities and the private sector.

There is a significant risk that the current housing crisis and attempts to reboot the economy result in poorly thought through development - we are seeing the unintended consequences of changes to permitted development and the emergence of homes that lack basic space and light. Local Authorities, Housing Associations, Universities, and major landholders like the MoD, Pension Funds and Infrastructure organisations have the opportunity to focus on long-term stewardship of the land, and focus on long-term creation of value and the wellbeing of residents.

Putting people at the heart of building new homes

In 2020 we published, [A Public Vision for the Home of 2030](#) as part of a government backed scheme to drive innovation in the provision of affordable, efficient and healthy green homes of the future. The findings of our Home of 2030 report show the importance of allowing people to contribute to the design of their communities and homes. The planning system must mandate the use of genuine community engagement and co-design processes whilst enabling tools like design codes and neighbourhood plans to hold the vision of the community.

Active travel and connectivity

Through the Home of 2030 consultation we understood that people want to be better connected to each other and their whole communities. We have an opportunity to learn lessons from the pandemic, and place communities and pedestrians at the centre of place making and seek to reduce car use and create walkable neighbourhoods that encourage active travel. We recommend that the Manual for Streets handbook is made mandatory and that highways agencies are encouraged to participate in design reviews and more progressive road and street design.

We at Design Council are actively supporting this approach through our new strategic partnership with Sustrans and our work with Highways England and Network Rail.

District Councils' Network



The District Councils' Network (DCN) is a cross-party member led network of 187 district councils. We provide a single voice for all district councils within the Local Government Association

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Challenges

District councils have helped lead the local humanitarian response to the Covid-19 crisis, keeping the planning system going throughout and have now turned their whole place effort towards the recovery. As planning authorities and guardians of place, district councils are not only planning for today but setting the strategy towards tomorrow - working with communities to build places and create green, resilient and inclusive growth and jobs in the years to come. Stability and certainty are needed as the industry adapts to this new normal, and the unknowns of the coming years.

Covid-19 is impacting the housing market in a number of ways, for instance the availability of mortgages, changing demand, cost of labour and construction materials, reductions in land value, ability of developers to bring forward schemes as previously envisaged due to financial or other reasons. These and many other issues, are resulting in fewer starts and slower completions, and uncertainty in delivery, which has a direct impact upon land supply and the authority's ability to meet the housing delivery test. It is also impacting on districts' ability to deliver the infrastructure needed to support sustainable new growth; for example with some developers seeking to reschedule CIL instalments.

The long-term impact of a recession is even more concerning. Districts fear for the future lack of a five-year supply because fewer sites will come forward for planning permission and build rates will not rise as required by the delivery test, or even remain stable. Districts want to manage the impact of speculative development as a planned local approach is important to support recovery. Government efforts must be focused on achieving delivery of allocated sites to avoid the corrosive effects of speculative development. This will also give residents and buyers confidence in the quality of new homes and the communities being created.

Opportunities

A downturn in the property market puts affordable housing delivery via the planning system at risk. However, the opportunities are at their greatest now; capitalizing on low interest rates to invest in social housing to deliver significant returns on investment, mostly through jobs and growth and increased tax receipts, and housing benefit savings. Previous research by Capital Economics demonstrates investment in social housing 'could return £320 billion to the nation over 50 years'¹, and that 'each new social home would generate a saving of £780 per year in Housing Benefit and generate a fiscal surplus through rental income'.² The HCLG Committee have concluded that England needs at least 90,000 net additional social rent homes a year. An increase in social housing should be at the heart of the recovery, as well as a commitment to a green housing revolution and an emphasis on good design and healthy placemaking.

We would like to see government working with planning authorities to:

Empower districts to deliver local solutions: Free to set Right to Buy discounts locally and retain 100 percent of sales receipts, districts can deliver more council homes. Having local control over the Right to Buy discount levels and the time period for retention of receipts would enable local leaders to adapt the policy so that it fits local market conditions.

Focus on delivery: District councils and their local communities continue to grant nine in 10 planning permissions, while tens of thousands of homes with planning permission remain unbuilt – the housing delivery system is broken, not the planning system. Government can empower planning authorities to kickstart the delivery of housebuilding by giving powers to step in and ensure granted planning permissions are not lying dormant. Too often it is the delivery system that lets communities down, rather than the planning system. Where are the measures to address this?

Put communities at the heart of plans for their places: Districts want to see a planning system that delivers the right homes in the right places, the infrastructure that people need to live their lives, and businesses to do their business, and which provides the necessary certainty to developers, landowners and the public. Local communities have to be at the heart of plans for their places. We cannot compromise on the quality of new homes and places and sideline public consultation, we must focus on building the homes and places that will stand the test of time.

Moves to extend permitted development rights result in communities losing vital investment in infrastructure and affordable housing. We fear these changes are merely storing up a longer-term housing supply problem, with low quality and remote living accommodation with limited open space. Where is the incentive for building owners to invest in these properties in the long term? We see a high risk that these office to residential conversions are a short-term measure, that may well lead to increased pent up need when they are no longer habitable/desirable and people who can afford to choose, will choose elsewhere.

Maintain incentives to facilitate future growth: It is critical that district councils continue to see incentives for new housing so that communities see the benefit of new housing development. Councils work hard to win local support through connecting new development with the new local services and infrastructure. Further focus on supporting associated green infrastructure such as electric charging points will be important to communities going forwards as we move towards Net Zero.

Drive investment into the supply of social housing: Long term certainty of capital funding streams, rent standards and welfare benefits are all essential in maximising supply. Government should look at subsidy by a combination of grant funding and access to low-interest loan streams that will allow rent levels to be set as low as possible. Affordable housing providers including district councils need certainty to develop their business plans, deliver new housing and manage the associated risks.

Focus on good quality, energy efficient homes and decarbonisation: The £50m announced by the Chancellor for low-carbon retrofitting of social housing is a welcome start, but we urge the government to bring forward proposals for the £3.8bn social housing decarbonisation fund, to kickstart jobs and support the journey to Net Zero. District councils should also have a lead role in shaping investment in energy efficient measures in private homes, in order for maximum benefits for homeowners, the industry, and for best value from government investment. Zero Carbon and on the role of housing to meet our ZC targets.

Housing and wider placemaking have such a key role to play in helping us meet zero carbon targets - through housing that is affordable to live in because it is energy efficient and water neutral, and which discourages car journeys because it is accessible to work, education, and leisure. Local government has a key role to drive forward ambitious standards that reflect local priorities.

To what extent does Planning for the Future meet your ambition for a post-COVID planning system?

The paper is heavy on rhetoric however light on the practical details of how a new system could work in practice. There are elements of the paper which are sound in principle, the proposed appointment of chief officers for placemaking at each local authority, and the extension of the scope of a levy on permitted development schemes are worth noting in particular. Development should pay for its wider costs regardless of the route of consent. However the Planning for the Future Paper does not set out a route towards a practical, workable and efficient post-covid planning system. The introduction of a zonal system will not in itself accelerate delivery or reduce house prices because the delivery of housing would still be controlled by the market. There are also concerns that the zonal system in the paper is not representative of how zoning works in practice elsewhere and the time and resources to introduce a zoning plan from scratch would be significant and not fully appreciated in the paper.

The proposed system will remove local decision making and accountability and will extend further the deregulation of planning – the negative impacts of which we are already seeing through existing permitted development rights and which are affecting the well being and quality of people's lives now³. The minimisation of the role of public participation and democratic decision making through the planning application process, the unclear future of neighbourhood plans, and the centralisation of development management policy serves to remove local decision making. Local members and local people know their area and district councils are best placed to plan for the future in a democratically accountable way, and which best serves the public interest.

The future provision of affordable housing is also a concern, in the shorter term through the proposed increase in threshold for which affordable housing is expected - from sites of 10 homes to sites of 40 or more. In the longer term the potential scrapping of section 106, a significant contributor of affordable housing, and its replacement with a new levy raises concerns over the ability for contributions to affordable housing to be secured despite the claim in the paper that overall levels will not fall under the proposed system. There are clear concerns over the centralisation of the setting of binding housing requirements. On a practical level how will the scale and impact of genuine constraints of land be factored into the calculations? Will local knowledge be sought on these matters? What of local areas with a strong vision for growth and a desire to accelerate housing delivery but where housing requirements would fall considerably? And what of areas where agreements on cross boundary housing distribution have previously been successful. Finally the setting of housing requirements is based on an arbitrary 'affordability' calculation and has no reference to any spatial strategy for growth either at a local, regional or national level.

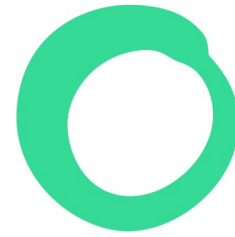
We are eager to explore opportunities to streamline planning and reduce unnecessary burdens on district councils, the public and developers however the proposed reforms set out in the paper risk long lasting harm.

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Friends of the Earth

Friends of the Earth is an international community dedicated to the protection of the natural world and the wellbeing of everyone in it. We bring together more than two million people in 75 countries, combining people power all over the world to transform local actions into global impact.



**Friends of
the Earth**

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Introduction

What, where and how development takes place all impact on society's ability to meet wider objectives: whether these be tackling the climate and ecological emergency; providing (and maintaining) healthy, pollution-free environments, with space for people to exercise and enjoy nature and wildlife to thrive; or providing well designed, affordable homes with low running costs.

A robust planning system will ensure thorough, transparent, democratic scrutiny of plans, proposals and projects, locally led decisions, and participative decision making. Taking a short cut on any one of these in a drive to build faster or attempt to reduce the system to a 'light touch' tick box exercise, will diminish planning's effectiveness and undermine confidence in the system among those who use and are most affected by it.

In seeking to identify improvements to planning, we must not lose sight of the strengths of the current system and those aspects it relies upon to be effective and therefore be mindful of changes that are best avoided. ^{1 2 3}

Below are set out suggestions for changes needed in order for planning to better respond current opportunities and challenges.

Plan better within the current system

There is much that can be achieved within our existing planning system. For example, there is scope for planning authorities to plan more positively for renewable energy,⁴ green infrastructure, alternatives to car-based development, a green economy and thriving town, village, neighbourhood centres (the list goes on...) without requiring major system changes.

Neighbourhood planning offers a tool for communities, if they so choose, to plan holistically to tackle the climate and ecological emergency and work towards achieving zero carbon, resilient neighbourhoods.⁵ Greater uptake of neighbourhood planning with plans aligned to these goals would foster better planning outcomes within the current system.

Realign priorities and restore balance

Now is not the time for a radical overhaul of the planning system when present circumstances call for certainty and stability.⁶ However, there is a need to reframe priorities to align with the challenges and opportunities facing us and equip communities and councils with the tools they need to manage development and land use in their area.

Our current planning system places a disproportionate emphasis on housing delivery at the expense of other planning considerations, such as quality, affordability, impact on the environment or other development and land use requirements. It therefore comes as no surprise when planners, and planning authorities who must abide by the system are, on occasion, powerless to prevent poor outcomes. This must change and priorities realigned⁷ if the UK is serious about tackling the climate and ecological emergency and working towards a green recovery.^{8 9}

An appetite is emerging among the wider public for doing things differently with people noticing more wildlife, cleaner air and greater sense of community during lockdown and a desire for these things to continue in future.¹⁰ Planning reforms must embrace these aspirations if the system is to work for people and nature.

Plan for a green and fair recovery

Planning inevitably has to deal with competing interests and seemingly disparate objectives. The best way to respond to these, and rise to the challenges and opportunities of our time, is to have a strong policy and regulatory framework alongside procedures which are fair,¹¹ transparent and accessible, enshrining rights to participate and rights of redress.¹² Changes to the planning system should seek to safeguard and build on principles enshrined in the Aarhus Convention,¹³ to which the UK is signatory. The Convention grants the public rights to access information, participate in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) are key tools for environmental protection and contribute to the effective operation of our planning system in line with Aarhus principles. Proposals for reform should therefore seek to strengthen the SEA and EIA process and improve their effectiveness, not water them down.

Planning is about far more than the purely technical, important though that is: at heart it is about choice. For the planning system to deliver on the most pressing challenges and opportunities of our time, it must put local councils, communities¹⁴ and our environment centre stage.

An anomaly exists within our current system, whereby developers can appeal a decision to refuse their application, whereas third parties cannot. This is perceived by some as unfair. There is the option of judicial review, but this is costly and focuses on matters of law, not merit. Introducing a limited third party right of appeal would help create a fairer, more equitable planning system.

Strengthen planning to tackle the climate and ecological emergency

As others have noted,¹⁵ government needs to give stronger direction on certain matters, such as requiring new development to be zero carbon, empowering local authorities to lead on climate change mitigation¹⁶ and enforcing the climate change legal duty.¹⁷ Climate considerations should factor in key stages of planning and development. To that end, Friends of the Earth believes it should be made a requirement to consider climate impact in planning decisions, as it is for plans, and Building Regulations must be tightened.

Planning decisions should ensure that new development respects existing nature as well as creating more. This will require a re-balancing of policy in favour of nature. With regard to biodiversity net gain, there is concern about how this approach will work. Policy, regulation and decisions should require strict adherence to the mitigation hierarchy, otherwise this could lead to impoverishment of wildlife and habitats in some places as a result of applying the net gain approach at a site remote from where a harmful impact occurs.¹⁸

Scrap Permitted Development Rights

Permitted Development Rights allow development to side-step the Local Plan and proceed without proper consideration of the consequences for the host community, wider environment and broader societal objectives. For the planning system to work effectively — and ensure communities and councils can continue to manage development in their area — Permitted Development Rights for anything other than minor development, must be scrapped.

Address the strategic planning vacuum

The duty-to-cooperate has not worked well and 'statements of common ground' are no substitute for strategic plans. A top-down centralised approach is undemocratic and likely to foster mistrust of the planning system, as has been clear with plans for the Oxford-Cambridge arc drawn up by the National Infrastructure Commission. Across the country, a plethora of different types of strategic plan is emerging.¹⁹ This approach lacks consistency — some places have no strategic plan at all. Democratically accountable strategic planning helps bridge the gap between the local and national. Consideration should be given as to how we might strategically plan in a coherent, consistent way.

Wider changes

Planning does not operate in isolation. Wider changes needed include investment in green jobs; improved access to green space;²⁰ a programme to retrofit existing buildings with energy and water efficiency; higher building standards and changes to fiscal, tax and public investment to support a green recovery.^{21 22}

Conclusion

Deregulation and over-simplification are a recipe for uncertainty and poor quality development and serve to undermine the planning system, making it harder to plan. Our current crises call for reforms focused around stronger regulation, realigned priorities and measures to empower planners, communities and local authorities. Above all, reforms should ensure we retain our plan-led, locally accountable, democratic planning system.

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Historic Houses

Historic Houses is a business association representing 1,500 of the most significant Grade I and Grade II listed historic houses, castles and gardens across the UK. These places are the bed-rock of the tourism industry, welcoming over 26 million visitors through their gates every year, and generating over £1 billion in visitor spend. All our member places are owned independently of government or national charities; most are independent small businesses providing jobs, enterprise and leisure opportunities in rural areas.*

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The Long Goodbye? Planning and the past

The owner of a grade II*-listed mansion property (flat-roofed, and in an elevated location) wants to install a small (4kw) solar unit on the rooftop, the panels hidden below the parapets. The planning application costs several hundred pounds. The local authority responds by asking for significant amounts of additional information including elaborate photomontages of any potential visual intrusion for walkers on nearby footpaths. The decision is delayed and ends up costing the owner a thousand pounds more than it needed to.

Another owner wishes to commission bespoke double-glazed units to replace the glass (not original) in the 17th-century window frames of her property. Although the replacement would hugely increase the property's energy efficiency and reduce its carbon footprint, it is rejected outright as it is not a true 'like for like' replacement.

A house sitting in parkland near a county town offers to host a popular and long-running annual steam fair which temporarily is without a venue. An application to widen the park gates to accommodate the vehicles is recommended for rejection. The owners are told that not only is there the risk of damage to nearby tree roots, but that they have also overlooked the prior need to apply for planning permission to host the event in the first place.

A change of use is sought to convert a 500-year old listed building into self-catering accommodation. The local authority takes five months to respond to the pre-planning enquiry. On submitting the full application, the owner faces a further wait of several months before he gets an answer, as questions about highways and floods are addressed. The building, having stood in the same spot for half a millennium, remains idle and unused.

These are all recent examples of encounters with the planning system by member properties of Historic Houses. The vagaries and costs imposed by the planning system in England are a disincentive to anyone with responsibilities for listed buildings. Too often, planning officers look like



Historic Houses member properties, such as Broughton in Oxfordshire, are owned independently and depend on their own entrepreneurialism for their survival

they are searching for a way to say 'no', rather than taking the time to find solutions and reduce the cost burdens for owners. There is no reason for them to act in any other way. After all, they don't suffer the financial consequences of delays and requests for additional information – that burden is borne solely by the applicant.

Planning officers know where the scapegoats will be found if something was ever to go wrong. It leads to a risk-averse culture, in which barriers are quickly erected against anything that is perceived to be new, unusual or untested. It is the English disease, and it is soul-destroying: a denial of sensitive change, and therefore of history itself. Had the planning system been around longer, we would now be deprived of such gems as Eltham Palace (a 1930s Art Deco mansion built onto a medieval great hall) or Hever Castle (a thirteenth-century fortification which became a Tudor mansion and then an early twentieth-century pleasure ground). Neither is likely to have survived even the pre-application discussions about their conversion.

Many will argue that the planning system has saved much heritage that would otherwise have been lost to demolition and redevelopment. This is doubtless true, particularly in the context of rapidly changing cities and towns. But the period between the creation of listing (in 1947) and the introduction of listed building controls (from the 1960s) happened also to be the highwater mark of country house demolitions. Seeing which way the wind was blowing, owners took the opportunity to pull down mansions and liquidate their assets while they could. The imminent threat of ever-greater planning controls perversely encouraged more destructive behaviour than might otherwise have been the case.



Houses such as Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire came under real pressure in the years after the Second World War, and are expensive properties to maintain today

It doesn't have to be this way. A culture change is needed – and this must come from the top. Most owners want to work with the grain of a responsive and customer-focused planning system. They want to know that they will get a decent hearing, and that planning officers will work with them to look for solutions to ensure that heritage has a viable future. To be fair, this happens already in a great many cases. But delays in dealing with applications continue to grow, and the system seems to betray on a deep-seated antagonistic bias in which the reflexive response is invariably 'no'.

Measured and justified relaxations in the planning system would signal a willingness to work with owners and custodians rather than against them. An extension of permitted development rights, safeguarded with backstops to block the most egregious and damaging developments, would confirm an obvious point: that planning departments do not create the buildings we see around us, owners do.

A programme of heritage protection reform measures has been in gestation for almost a decade now. The various ideas look to establish a system of class consents for minor works to listed buildings, or to delegate parts of the decision-making process to accredited third-party experts to relieve the burdens on local authority officers. Successive governments have pledged their commitment to deregulation and have then sat on the proposals in the face of intransigent officialdom.

Reform is undoubtedly difficult work, in which the interests of private owners are pitted against powerful and multivocal lobby groups and professional representative bodies. Who these days wants to be on the side of country house owners? The moral high ground is claimed by those who bang the drum for far bigger causes: nature, climate change, the environment.

And yet. If historic properties cannot evolve, their utility will surely diminish, and they will die. Not suddenly in a new wave of demolitions, but slowly, through attrition, as successive re-uses and adaptations are denied. Owners will not be able to afford the 'like for like' replacements insisted upon by their local planning department. A noble desire to save heritage results in a fetish for exactitude which is ultimately self-defeating. With collections auctioned off to pay the repair bills, historic houses will sit empty, eventually to be sold on to any new owner wealthy (and foolish) enough to take on the responsibility. More history dies in the process, and with it public access, jobs and opportunities.



Historic Houses represents 1,500 grade 1 and 11 listed (and their equivalents) properties across the UK*

In *Planning for the Future*, the Government has committed to reviewing the process for how listed building consents are secured, whether for routine works or for adaptations to support the response to climate change. This is a positive sign. But oft-made pledges of support for lightening the regulatory load need to be matched by action. Judicious relaxation of the planning burdens faced by historic house owners will do more to save heritage than any new control introduced in the last fifty years has ever done.

Home Builders Federation

The Home Builders Federation (HBF) is the principal trade federation for all sizes of housebuilders in England and Wales. We represent over 300 housebuilding companies providing housing of all tenure types. Combined, our members account for nearly 80% of all homes delivered in England and Wales in any one year.

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Planning the Future

One touch planning

Too many things in the planning process are decided more than once. There are a great many hurdles in the planning race and there is no need to jump them more than once each. Sites that are allocated in the development plan should not have to justify the principle of development at application stage. Similarly, sites with outline planning permission have merely to submit reserved matters applications – a technical process that should not re-open a debate over the terms of the original permission. Removal of this re-consideration of principle is a one-touch planning system. Do it once, and do it right.

Perhaps the best demonstration of this principle is that of the technical studies undertaken as part of a planning application. Of course, they need to be done. But they need to be done once. And only once. Currently, technical studies (such as ecology, drainage, flood risk assessment or viability assessment) are undertaken by the developer, more often than not, by a specialist consultant. Submission to the LPA as part of an application often results in the study being sent to a specialist consultant for “verification”. Often this is the same consultant firm. Why not agree an independent consultant between the applicant and the LPA and jointly commission the report? That is a one-touch planning system.

The plan-led system

Do we really have a plan-led planning system? The woeful statistics of plan preparation and review would suggest either that some LPAs don't want a plan or that the process of delivering a plan (and keeping it up-to-date) is too difficult. But difficult for whom? I know that if I appointed any of the private sector planning consultancies to write me a local plan for any area of the country I would have a draft of that plan within a couple of weeks. Public consultation is a statutory process and takes a further two months. Assessment of the responses and a redraft of the plan (assuming the responses require any modification) maybe another month. A public examination, inspectors report and Bob's your uncle! A Local Plan produced within a year. Not three years, or five years, or never – one year. So why doesn't it happen? One simple answer – politics. Local politics to be precise. Councillors who are more worried about their own re-election than running a pro-active, plan led, development process for their local authority.

The planning system is overly dominated by people who object to development. A small handful of objectors can do more to influence decision makers than the silent majority. But why should planning applications ever be contentious? If decisions are made in accordance with the development plan and each LPA has an up-to-date plan then decision making should be easy. Local Councillors should use their plan more to defend the difficult political decisions they need to make. Of course, there will be some people who object to planning applications, or growth, or strategic infrastructure. They will,

inevitably, have a justifiable reason for doing so. But it does not mean that they should over-ride the development plan allocation, or the strategic infrastructure plan for a much wider area. Planning is (or should be) about big decisions, not neighbour disputes. Focus on the things that matter to most people, not a minority group of objectors.

Nowhere is this parochial vision seen more clearly than in neighbourhood plans. Where are the neighbourhood plans with strategic vision? Of course, there are some. I have been impressed with a few plans that, faced with urban expansion plans, have prepared neighbourhood plans in order to shape development – in terms of design features, accessibility, biodiversity or open space strategy. But they are very few and far between. So many more have been produced as a negative brake against development. So why are they given so much weight? “Referendum equals local support” I hear you say. And you are right. They are the will of the electorate. But if that is so, then why are the plans not subject to the same scrutiny as other parts of the development plan process? Why are allocated sites not tested for deliverability? Why are the plans not subject to viability assessment and all the other checks and balances of the rest of the development plan process? If they carry the same weight, they should be subject to the same scrutiny.

Land value capture or mitigation of impact

We need to choose. Planning obligations can either be required to mitigate the impact of the proposed development under the tests for reasonableness or we can attempt to capture land value uplift through the planning system. But we need to be clear on which we are choosing. Currently the planning system seeks to achieve both while pretending to do just one. Viability assessment of local plans is yet another attempt at capturing land value uplift disguised as mitigation of the impact of cumulative development. It will fail. Just as all other attempts at capturing land value have failed. The list of attempts is endless (certainly far too long to list them all here) but each fails on the same grounds as the others – landowners. Land ownership is in private hands and thus the State has little say over when, how or even if a landowners should sell their land for development. There are tools that remove land from private ownership into public ownership – nationalisation of land. These work. They are the only tools that do work. Everything else will fail.

The process of change

Change, they say, is as good as a rest. Unfortunately, changes in planning policy or process usually result in paralysis. The speed of change in planning is glacial. Whether it is reflecting new policy approaches in development plans or even a simple move to rename development control as development management takes forever. Which means that, before proposed changes have had enough time to be adopted across the country they are deemed to have failed and are abandoned in favour of a different change – and so we go on, round and round and round. Sometimes the legislation catches up with policy, sometimes it doesn't. Which policy or process changes catch hold almost seems a random process. And it is not always the best ideas that make it.

One thing we do know is that some LPAs succeed where others fail. Some developers succeed where others fail. Whether it is in plan delivery or design quality; whether it is in meeting performance targets or in placemaking some succeed. And they all succeed within the planning system, not despite it. Some people just seem to be able to make things work and some don't. Maybe we all need to be a bit more like them? If we have a lemon let's make a gin and tonic!

Institute of Historic Building Conservation

The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) is the professional body of the United Kingdom representing conservation specialists and historic environment practitioners in the public and private sectors. The Institute exists to establish the highest standards of conservation practice, to support the effective protection and enhancement of the historic environment, and to promote heritage-led regeneration and access to the historic environment for all.

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Demolition Rebellion

*Everything changes. We plant
trees for those born later
but what's happened has happened
and poisons poured into the seas
cannot be drained again.*

From Everything Changes by Cicely Herbert

The words of this poem about irrevocable harm to the natural environment echo those of the NPPF in relation to the historic built environment: 'These [heritage] assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life for future generations'. But often there is a public perception that heritage is at odds with climate change, sustainability and conservation of the natural environment. This can be seen in the conflicts, both large and small which exist between heritage values and the green lobby. These range from how to deal with bats in churches which may be damaging the building (not to mention the congregation), to historic buildings being seen as a barrier to effective retrofit to improve their thermal performance. And yet, there is much that we have in common. How can heritage be seen to be more environmentally friendly?

Covid 19 has altered our perceptions of the environment and how we use it. It has been a confusing mixture of positives and negatives. For each upside there seems to be a downside. For example, some local shops have been benefitting from increased trade, but at the same time there has been a large increase in online shopping with consequent adverse effect on retail outlets, not to mention the increases in numbers of delivery vans roaming our streets. There has been a marked increase in walking and cycling; good for the environment and health, but less use of public transport and potentially more use of cars. We are all using our local parks and open spaces much more; again good for our health, but that comes at an environmental cost as many people do not take their litter home with them. I could go on, but I'm sure that you get the picture.

In terms of planning and the historic environment, government slogans about 'Build, Build Build' certainly ring alarm bells in the heritage sector. Specific proposals such as permitted development rights to redevelop buildings using their existing footprint without permission do not bode well for the historic environment. Whilst there are exemptions for listed buildings and buildings in conservation areas, The Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) along with others have objected because of the potential loss of locally listed buildings and urban design issues. Another objection to the proposal involves embodied energy.

This objection is not against economic recovery which will be assisted by boosting the construction industry, but a plea to do it in a climate friendly way. In 2019, Heritage Counts, published by Historic England (HE) on behalf of the Historic Environment Forum (HEF) included a report on embodied energy entitled 'There's No Place like Old Homes: Re-use and Recycle to Reduce Carbon'. I quote from HE Chairman Laurie Magnus's excellent introduction: "Continuing to use and re-use these assets can reduce the need for new carbon-generating construction activities, thereby reducing the need for new material extraction and reducing waste production. Our built environment is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions – the third biggest in most assessments.

"The Heritage Counts research also demonstrates that up to one third of the total carbon emitted from a new home is released during the construction and demolition process. It also shows that we can dramatically reduce carbon in existing buildings through retrofit, refurbishment and, very importantly, through regular repair and maintenance. By extending the life of our cherished historic assets, we can materially reduce the need for high carbon consuming activities and materials.

"This locked up, or 'embodied', carbon is a very important source of emissions that is often overlooked. Failing to account for the full carbon cost of demolition and construction of a building, as well as the energy used during its life, is false accounting. The construction sector needs to address this accounting gap and we in the historic environment sector can and must help them to do so. It is no understatement to say that, in general, the greenest buildings are the ones that are already built".

This research was confined residential buildings, and it would be interesting to see its conclusions on other building types. But the message is clear. The IHBC also recognises the significance of embodied energy in its recent statement 'Sustainability and Conservation of the Historic Built Environment' https://ihbconline.co.uk/toolbox/position_statement/sustainabilityconservation.html

So, what might be the legislative answers to this issue? My proposals are as follows. First, both legislation (including statutory instruments) and policy need to be changed to give effective control over demolition, with greater consideration given to conservation of embodied energy.

Second, changes to the NPPF which should set out criteria for demolition in terms of embodied energy which then becomes a key material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Third (and not planning legislation), a reduction in VAT for works to existing buildings. This one is certainly not an original proposal and has been subject of campaigning by the IHBC and others. For developers, this is the 'carrot' to offset the 'stick' of more onerous legislation.

There we have it. Using a current buzzword, we have a 'nudge' towards sustainability and a positive contribution to reducing the effect of climate change. This might also be a rather effective way of helping to conserve the historic environment.

So how does this fit with the Government's White Paper, Planning for the Future? At first glance, my proposal does not fit easily with the present government's de-regulation agenda. Yet, at the same time, its Environmental Audit Committee is calling for evidence on Greening the Post-Covid Recovery. Perhaps the time is right.

It has to be said that the White Paper is not particularly strong on sustainability and climate change. Its proposals in the introduction include a requirement that local plans should be subject of a single, statutory "sustainable development" test. It is not clear at this stage what that might entail, but may be the place for a demolition or embodied energy assessment. This could be applied to any area whether it be designated for growth, renewal or protection. However, this might be seen as a rather

cumbersome and onerous requirement. There is more optimism in paragraph 1.18 which proposes to amend the NPPF to address climate change mitigation and adaptation and facilitate environmental improvements. As I have argued above, the issue of demolition and embodied energy should be subject of national policy.

It is disappointing that the issue of energy efficiency does not appear in detail in the White Paper until the last section of Pillar Two, Planning for beautiful and sustainable places. Even more disappointing is that while it deals with energy efficiency standards in newbuild as well as retrofit, there is no mention of embodied energy. My final plea is for joined up government and that the evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee will feed its way through to MHCLG and lead to innovative changes to the NPPF in terms of demolition and embodied energy.

Landscape Institute

The Landscape Institute (LI) is the royal chartered body for the landscape profession, including landscape architects, landscape and parks managers, landscape planners, and urban designers. It is an educational charity, whose members work across the built and natural environment for the benefit of people, place, and nature.

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Note: This contribution was prepared as the Executive Summary to the Landscape Institute's recently published policy paper "Greener Recovery: delivering a sustainable recovery from COVID-19"

In order to meet the UK's 2050 net zero carbon target, the economic and social recovery from COVID-19 must be green.

It is now widely accepted that the UK's comeback from the pandemic cannot ignore the fact that we have only a few years remaining to address climate change, and to reverse the decline in nature. An unsustainable recovery will only create new problems further down the road, and particularly the health inequalities that COVID-19 has laid bare—and which climate change will only worsen.

However, "green recovery" cannot simply be a slogan. A business-as-usual response, led by capital investment in grey infrastructure construction, will not suffice. A green recovery means leading with green infrastructure.

To achieve a truly sustainable recovery, Government investment and regulatory reform around the 2020 Autumn Statement, should:

- Take a natural capital approach to new infrastructure and housing
- Invest in maintenance and renewal of existing places
- Set higher and fairer standards for green space
- Invest in natural solutions to climate change
- Create a step-change in green skills, digital, and data

Our policy paper "Greener Recovery: delivering a sustainable recovery from COVID-19" builds on the public stimulus announcements made in July 2020, and describes what role the landscape sector—including parks and green spaces—can play in contributing towards a sustainable economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and what further government action may be needed to enable that.

Locality

Locality is the national membership network supporting local community organisations to be strong and successful. Our network of 1,000 members helps more than 400,000 people every week. We offer specialist advice, peer learning and campaign with members for a fairer society. Together we unlock the power of community.

www.locality.org.uk



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Using lessons from Coronavirus to plan for sustainability

No one has escaped the impacts of Coronavirus, whether physical or mental health or financial impacts. However, impact is uneven. Some areas are harder hit than others, and this is going to mean additional challenges in creating truly sustainable communities. One where people want to live and work. Where people feel equal and there is access to decent homes and green spaces regardless of income.

We need to plan for sustainable communities because they lead to happier and healthier lives, whilst building better places will help us weather future shocks. We suggest how planning and other policies can support community power to flourish as a pillar of creating thriving places. This could embed the recent wave of community spirit by supporting people to drive forward positive change in their neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood planning (NP) is a good place to start – it has been a community power success, with over 1000 made neighbourhood development plans (NDPs). NDPs are transforming neighbourhoods, bringing forward more affordable housing than local plans and securing well designed places. NP groups can inject all 3Bs into the Prime Minister's commitment to “*build back better*”.

The Planning White Paper signals the government's commitment to NPs, but the wider proposals could shrink their scope, unless government reasserts how to capitalise on a successful model of how civil society can support public good. NPs need to continue to play a strategic role in housing growth, economic development and wider place-shaping.

Government wishes to see more NP in urban and low income areas. If NPs retain their punch this could help spread the benefits and underpin a levelling up agenda. With targeted resourcing, more community organisations could spark neighbourhood forums to develop NDPs. With their focus on improving health and creating opportunities built on involving local people they are well-placed to deliver sustainable outcomes.

Currently, under the National Planning Policy Framework, NDPs can allocate green spaces to help communities safeguard them. Coronavirus brought home what the evidence already demonstrated - the closer you live to a green space, the happier and healthier you are¹. NDPs, through design policies, can also help deliver developments with open space for all the community to enjoy and help make a difference for the for the 2.6 million people that do not live within a ten minute walk from a park².

Design is not just how buildings look (though of course that is important), it is how the building blocks of the built fabric connect to each other. Local design policies can also site homes and provide greater opportunities for walking or cycling. Councils could encourage more groups to use NDPs to design for happier, healthier communities that are more resilient to external shocks.

There has been much talk about a new normal and whether that will include a permanent shift away from office working and high street shopping with speculation that offices, shops and industrial premises will be redundant and ripe for converting into residential. But, recent experiments with permitted development rights (PDR) suggest the market ill-serves some³. Rather than extending PDR, national planning and housing policy need to ensure that all homes, whether new build or refurbishments, promote health goals –their size, energy efficiency, and access to light cannot be jeopardised if we want to build back better.

PDR currently circumvent affordable housing contributions, but may be captured by the proposed infrastructure levy. A key test of planning reform as a whole should be the extent to which it ensures homes are built for people across the income spectrum.

The overwhelming community response to the lockdown has shown communities can be trusted to lead change locally. More could be done to involve community organisations in delivering affordable housing and re-purposing high streets.

We could be on the cusp of community led housing (CLH) becoming mainstream. The reinstatement of the Community Housing Fund (CHF), could provide revenue support for more CLH groups to draw up housing plans. Many embed sustainability by prioritising affordability and eco-standards. CLH schemes can also help build community resilience as they bring people together. By reinvesting in the CHF the Government could support the delivery of up to 20,000 CLH homes in the pipeline⁴.

Councils should invite community and business organisations to co-create and oversee high street strategies. Where shops are exiting, there are opportunities for affordable housing, local businesses, including social enterprises, and community services. Coronavirus has brought home that a sustainable high street would have a mix of these uses, but the opposite could happen without a strategic approach.

The upcoming Devolution White Paper offers an opportunity to revitalise local governance and create new powers for communities to lead change locally. It could introduce a new Community Partnership Power to provide communities with the right to trigger reviews of neighbourhood provision, with a statutory responsibility on councils to support a process for community consultation and co-design. These powers could be used by neighbourhood forums, accountable community organisations or parish councils to draw down local budgets to support plans for community delivery.

Ringfencing for community-led partnerships, 25% of economic development funding, such as the Shared Prosperity Fund, could be transformational. All funds to rebuild and regenerate areas such as town centres could also take this approach.

Public bodies could transfer their empty premises to community groups. When properly supported, putting the governance and ownership of community spaces and services into community hands can unlock new capacity, service improvement and innovation⁵. If the Government expanded the Community Ownership Fund by leveraging, dormant assets and other funding, it could establish a £1bn investment plan for community assets.

By ensuring communities are engaged in planning, delivering homes and local economic development, Government can help foster sustainable communities. Any reform of the planning system should be guided by what sustainable development for resilient, empowered communities looks like. Let's unlock the power to community as part of a national drive in favour of truly sustainable development.

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National Farmers Union



The NFU represents 55,000 members in England and Wales, involved in 46,000 farming businesses. Our membership covers all sectors of the agricultural industry and includes tenant farmers, owner occupier farmers and farmers with mixed tenure farms, as well as agricultural landlords.

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Introduction

The NFU welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the National Planning Forum. If the Government is looking to carry out its most significant reform to the planning system in seven decades; it is important that it does so to address the economic and social, as well as environmental challenges, coming to the fore in the wake of the Coronavirus outbreak.

Key Recommendations

- The need for a flexible and enabling planning system; that will also support the transition to a new farming economy; support rural communities and provide access to resilient agri-food chains.
- For regulatory change to happen in a simple and efficient way, that does not overburden already poorly resourced local planning authorities; and at a cost business can afford.
- To keep social and economic priorities on the agenda alongside future environmental priorities.
- For digital planning to be provided in an inclusive way and when suitable infrastructure is in place.

Background

The coronavirus outbreak has occurred at a time when the agricultural sector in England and Wales is undergoing its most significant regulatory and economic change in decades with a new agricultural framework proposed through the [Agriculture Bill](#). The UK has left the EU and from 2021 the agriculture sector is transitioning from a system where farmers are supported with direct payments and payments for engagement in a Countryside Stewardship scheme; to one centred on an Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS).

In simple terms this means farmers and growers are entering into a seven-year transition. From 2021 to 2027, Government support will be primarily targeted towards delivering public goods alongside driving farm productivity improvements. A fundamental concern is that ELMS will not provide a like for like financial replacement for direct payments. The question to Government is: how will farm businesses remain viable and resilient as they adjust to change?

The planning system can help to enhance the sustainability of the farming sector by supporting farmers seeking to develop [more efficient buildings, operations, and land management practices](#). To enable British farmers and growers to produce food to high environmental and animal welfare standards and meet new market demand. Planning also needs to help farmer adapt to new operating conditions, farm business diversification, as well as planning for succession and retirement will be an important response to the shifting economic reality.

Lessons from the Covid-19 outbreak

Farmers and growers will need a flexible and enabling planning system to be able to effectively manage the agricultural transition and in this regard the planning system has made a positive start as

a response to the Coronavirus outbreak. Farmers sought to change their businesses overnight to ensure food supplies could continue and grocery shops and supermarket shelves could be filled, some used [flexible planning rules to do so](#).

Another positive legacy would be to add a requirement to promote local food networks and access to food in Chapter 8 (Promoting healthy and Safe Communities) of the National Planning Policy Framework, which can then be translated into local planning policies and decision making.

The lockdown emphasised the importance of [retaining vibrant rural communities](#). If farming and rural businesses are to remain the economically resilient backbone of protected environments, they cannot rely solely on rural tourism. Instead such businesses need planning policy, which can deliver both modern efficient building and infrastructure development, and which actively encourages diversified income streams.

Supporting the economic recovery

Many agricultural businesses such as those supplying the food service sector, and those offering rural event and business space, have been significantly financially impacted by Covid-19. Some businesses are adapting to the new normal, using temporary permitted development rights to allow more use of open space for social distancing and to carry out more on farm events to support people coming out of lockdown. The extension of time for implementing permissions would also help deliver farm developments which would be otherwise put on hold.

The NFU recognises that the Government's response to the coronavirus outbreak could help drive the greener agenda and to help deliver the Government's levelling up agenda.

Our message is that this needs to be done in a simple and efficient way that does not overburden already poorly resourced local planning authorities. How the Environment Bill will be legislated into the planning system will need careful thought. Local planning authorities need to be able to help businesses deliver positive, long lasting environmental outcomes in the simplest and most effective ways in a consistent manner with the ambition to build [a sustainable and productive agricultural sector](#).

If local authorities are required to start charging significant fees for applications; this will simply constrain economic development amongst small and medium sized businesses and will particularly impact on the farming transition.

To ensure farming and rural communities can successfully adapt during the agricultural transition and in response to Covid-19 we need to refocus on rural proofed permitted development rights; and fundamentally to design them to work efficiently in protected environments and provide rural homes. We also need to be able to explore the potential for local development orders to support [food hub activities](#) and renewable energy provision.

The NFU believes a reformed planning system needs to keep social and economic priorities on the agenda and balance them alongside future environmental priorities. The coronavirus lockdown has [highlighted inequalities](#), especially in some urban areas, with poor air quality, failing housing standards and a lack of access to safe open space. A future planning system should prioritise the need to improve the urban environment, but also needs to address the economic and social reasons why this has happened. The agricultural sector can play an important role in providing access to nature to support better social outcomes, but this must be achieved through promoting rural economies and empowering farmers to deliver solutions rather than by undermining the viability of farm businesses.

The coronavirus outbreak has led to some online only planning services, but the lack digital infrastructure has limited how inclusive such services are, especially for the [30% of farmers with 2Mbps broadband speeds](#). Efficient rural broadband and mobile infrastructure networks need to be completed before local authority services can be delivered this way.

National Federation of Builders

Founded in 1896, the National Federation of Builders (NFB) is the longest standing and most representative construction trade body for constructors and housebuilders across England and Wales. Representing 21,000 employees and 6.6bn turnover its members range from the sole trader to large, billion pound construction companies, with turnover ranging from below £500,000 to £1.1 billion.



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Biodiverse development needs (bio)diverse thinking

A biodiversity challenge is looming, yet for all the great work ecologists do, the housing and construction industry feels quite separate from the solutions. This is why, in 2015, the National Federation of Builders (NFB) began growing its relationship with Natural England (NE) and making their challenges, ours.

This relationship was important to NFB members, who are predominantly small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) because ecology can stall construction works by years. As a statutory consultee for the environment, NE understands this and through a shared ambition of better outcomes, they proposed and collaborated with industry to implement district licensing for the Great Crested Newt (GCN).

Very simply, the revenue generated from the license pays for the tracking, mapping and conservation of this EU protected species. In turn, developers can get on site more quickly.

Tracking was done through environmental DNA (eDNA) testing, which can detect the GCN in a body of water and NE mapped a local authorities newt population.

Constructors and developers who were eligible for the licence did not need to net newts, or wait for assessments or counts but instead could pay a mitigation sum, which would fund conservation and habitat creation.

They were even encouraged to create their own conservation land and use it as a habitat bank.

This first foray into a wildlife license has sparked the imagination of NFB members, who in the coming years, understand that further changes are coming. One of these changes will soon be in place, through 'the Environment Bill 2020', which makes biodiversity net gain (BNG) a mandatory requirement of development.

The NFB, through its housebuilding division, the House Builders Association (HBA) has been very keen on BNG, which leaves biodiversity in a better state than before development began and has worked closely with NE to get it over the line. However, this policy must be viewed as the first step to real change for our landscapes and environment, which, rather than limiting development, should place environmental design at the heart of the challenge.

The NFB sees environmental design as two things, biodiversity knowledge and designing in biodiversity.

Biodiversity knowledge

As with the GCN, we must begin mapping all our species, their movements and their needs. We should accept this will take many years to achieve but also recognise it as fundamental to solving the biodiversity crisis.

This is because over the coming decades, many more policies will be implemented to ensure habitats and landscapes are protected and we must ensure we meet actual biodiversity need, rather than tick boxes to meet perceived need.

We already see box ticking with bee and swift bricks, which are being placed into developments to ensure wildlife has a chance to thrive. Many builders don't know if these creatures are present or will even use the bricks but many do it to win planning permissions, not to integrate homes into the environment.

And who can blame them? Specialist ecologists are typically the only ones who have this detailed knowledge but they are few and far between. A better solution would be to begin mapping biodiversity and developing techniques to ensure appropriate species do thrive.

A simple example of how this could work can be seen with street lighting, where certain light spectrums or lights turned off completely can encourage or deter specific insects. In turn, this stimulates and nourishes food chains of other species, such as birds, bats and lizards. It also has a great impact on pollination.

This level of detail is not available to local authorities or developers but should be an integral part of the planning, design and building process. If we build knowledge libraries and map opportunity, we would not only support biodiversity but ensure that constructors and human populations are more in tune with nature.

This level of detail would also ensure that wildlife, habitat and green corridors, which are often used to separate humans from nature, integrate with them. Not only will this help our rural communities grow with their landscape but it would enshrine nature in human activity, while giving a new appreciation and recognition for ecological impact.

Designing in Biodiversity

Construction is already designing in biodiversity but as noted with the street lighting example, the wider development industry, which includes planners and builders, don't have the knowledge or understanding to achieve this. Swift and bee bricks are becoming commonplace, as are wildlife corridors, such as lifted fences but this barely scratches the surface of opportunity and is not part of a biodiversity strategy. They are tick box exercises.

If we can increase biodiversity knowledge and publish guidance, industry will implement and progress change.

NE, alongside NFB and other organisations are exploring whether national and regional guidance can be produced because NFB's ambition is not to rely on BNG being provided offsite but to build it into the fabric of development. However, this must be treated as a starting point because the ecological industry to support this change is not established and will take years to mature.

The opportunity to grow an ecological industry must not be missed. Although many see biodiversity as a rural challenge, green walls and roof terraces are opportunities to grow biodiversity in our densest cities. The Government is already planning tree lined streets, which will assist cooling and beautify our urban landscapes but by planting the correct trees, we can ensure species, such as squirrels, birds and beetles, have the correct environment to thrive.

What needs to happen

The initial strategy must be to map biodiversity knowledge and produce updateable guidance. This may be a costly exercise but the payback would be vast and permanent.

Ecologists would be adding to the knowledge, creating new products and providing solutions to build in and advance biodiversity. The construction industry, including planning would intrinsically design in nature. Rural communities would not be stifled by growth restrictions. And, rather than pushing nature to the fringes of communities or separating ourselves from it, a new appreciation and understanding would be embedded as we grow **with** our biodiverse world.

The biodiversity challenge needs (bio)diverse thinking and it's time that instead of clashing on how humans and development are the cause of biodiversity loss, we ensure that we are at one with increasing it.

Place Alliance

Place Alliance advocates for place quality. It is founded on the idea that through evidence and collaboration we can establish a culture whereby the quality of place becomes an everyday national and local priority.

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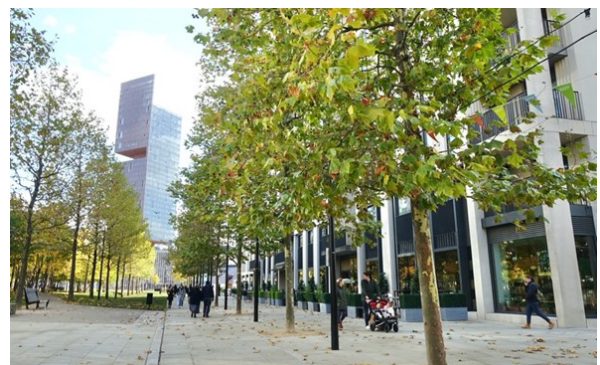
Do zoning and local design codes offer a fast-track route to beauty?

At the heart of the aspirations in [Planning for the Future](#), the new White Paper on planning, are what the Prime Minister recently referred to as building back a greener and more beautiful Britain, whilst simultaneously sweeping away the 'red-tape'. "We are cutting red-tape, but not standards" according to the Secretary of State in his introduction to the paper. The core of this will be simplified local plans based on a new zoning system, accompanied by local design codes to ensure high quality outcomes. Setting other issues aside, notably the troubling loss of even the basic strategic planning provisions that currently exist care of the 'Duty to cooperate', will the combination offer a fast-track route to better urban design or what the White Paper narrowly describes as beauty? It's not that simple, and here's why.

The current 'system' is not working

It is evident that more often than not the current planning system delivers unsustainable and unattractive large scale development. [A Housing Design Audit for England](#), published in January, utilised a nationwide audit of 142 major housing schemes to reveal that three quarters of new housing development in England is mediocre or poor as regards its design; a fifth should never have been given planning permission as the design is so clearly contrary to advice given in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). To make matters worse, the less affluent are most effected (ten times more likely to suffer poor design), exacerbating disadvantage rather than helping to 'level up'.

Planning needs to take its share of the blame for this sad state of affairs, but the root cause is a shared and systemic failure of housebuilders, local authorities (highways authorities as well as planning) and successive Governments. Collectively, and for decades, they have failed to prioritise the delivery of well designed coherent bits of city that maximise '[place value](#)'. To the extent that this is a failure of planning stems, not fundamentally from the type of system (when it works well it works really well), but from the systematic decimation of skills, capacity and the confidence to proactively shape development for the better. We can play around with the tools available to planners, but if we don't address the context within which they operate then the situation will never improve. Fortunately, here the White Paper has some welcome proposals to make which will be returned to. First, however, it is necessary to deal with the major structural change proposed by the paper and in other recent announcements of Government.



When planning works well, it works really well

We need vision but not crude deregulation

The White Paper comes in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic which has changed – perhaps for ever – the way we interact with our urban environment. It also follows hot on the heels of recent misguided regulatory changes that seek to further expand permitted development rights. While this is dressed up in the White Paper as an attempt to allow our flagging high streets to flex and adapt, as self-evidently they need to do, it is really an attempt to bolster housing numbers with more of the sorts of sub-standard units that we have seen through recent office to residential conversions. Crude deregulation of this sort will never deliver the housing we deserve, let alone beauty!



Retail to residential without control delivers poor quality accommodation and an uglier environment

In the same vein, planning is not 'red tape' it is a vital public service that protects us all and which, at its best, is proactive and propositional, shaping positive change and making real places. Rather than running planning down (as Ministers have a tendency to do), we need to empower local planning authorities to demand better outcomes, just as happens in many of our near neighbours in Continental Europe where high quality design and dynamic development markets often go hand in hand – both enabled by excellent local planning.

The White Paper has something interesting to say here:

“Local planning authorities remain at the heart of our ambitious reforms. We want to free up planners to focus on what they were trained for – creating great communities through world-class civic engagement and proactive plan-making, rather than reactive development management”.

Moving planning from a service dominated by the administration of development to a more visionary service is something the Place Alliance has advocated for, although this should be achieved primarily by investing in plan-making rather than by undermining development management. The White Paper extends admiring glances to the zoning systems in Japan, The Netherlands and Germany and proposes sweeping away policy based local plans to be replaced with plans based on three simple zones.

But the zoning systems in Japan and continental Europe are very different and lead to profoundly different outcomes. Japan's system is a pure as-of-right system. It offers simple, speedy and effective control, but does so at the expense of design quality as there is little site-based interpretation or response to context. The result is a visual chaos that is fascinating in a Blade Runner sort of way but which few would regard as beautiful, at least not in the sense implied by the White Paper. Similar systems operating in the suburban dominated cities of the United States produce the visual monotony of suburban sprawl that is only relieved when the zoning ordinances are overlaid with complex discretionary mechanisms and / or long and complex zoning ordinances capable of addressing different contextual circumstances.

The Design-based zoning in Europe, by contrast, combines as-of-right entitlements with highly sophisticated mechanisms created to shape design outcomes on a site by site basis. This is not cheaper, quicker or necessarily more efficient than the British system as it requires careful up-front planning and design for each site – typically by the public sector – and (crucially) before developers are able to gain consent.

What this shows is that there is no short-cut, if we want development certainly and great design, we need to put the time in up front in order to establish clearly what is acceptable and what is not – in other words, to establish the vision. The same, by the way, applies to our current system!

We already have local codes and pattern books – and poor design!

The zones proposed in the White Paper encompass: i) extending Permission in Principle status to the largest development sites – in effect once these ‘growth areas’ are zoned for development they will have planning permission; ii) granting automatic permission for “pre-specified forms of development” in non-protected urban areas, the so called ‘renewal areas’ where most people live; iii) a regime not dissimilar to the existing discretionary system in ‘protected areas’.

A National Model Design Code is being developed which, it is envisaged, will be interpreted and applied locally in a series of local design codes and pattern books for, respectively, growth and renewal areas. Such codes have the potential to turn Japanese type zoning into a continental European type, but be under no illusion, this is far from inevitable.

Arguably we already have local codes (of sorts) in place across the country care of the locally adopted highways design standards that our highways authorities require to be applied to sites, many, with their origins in 1970s ‘road first’ approaches. In the absence of a creative design process intended to optimise the potential of the place, these tend to be applied in a purely technical manner with little reference to context. They give rise to the sorts of highways and parking dominated developments that featured so heavily in the *Housing Design Audit*.



Crude and generic highways design standards are local codes—of sorts

To these, developers add their standard house types from their own pattern books. They would argue that these are what the White Paper refers to as ‘popular design’ because they are extensively market tested and sell well, and, as the White Paper calls for, are capable of crude application to different local policy requirements by changing the bricks, render and ‘gob ons’ (e.g. fake chimneys and porches). Yet they give rise to the sorts of homes that the *Housing Design Audit* identified as sub-optimum in terms of overall character and sense of place, and which local communities seem so adamantly opposed to, if the views of local councillors can be taken as a guide.



Pattern books have never disappeared. Here, ‘The Edale@’, from one of our largest housebuilders—available in a variety of layouts and external treatments—substandard and ugly!

By themselves, local codes and pattern books are no guarantee of quality or a fast-track to beauty. To achieve that requires a move away from the standardised approaches of the past and towards one in which schemes are genuinely designed for sites in a manner that seeks to optimise place value through design outcomes that are sustainable, healthy, attractive, and socially equitable. That may or may not use ready-made typologies of homes, but necessitates a careful site-specific and up-front design process of the sort that all the examples used to illustrate the White Paper will have benefitted from. [Research](#) has consistently shown that this up-front investment in design quality takes time – there is no way around that if we want high quality outcomes – although this is paid back in a more streamlined regulatory processes further down the line.

The new recipe – Plan / zone + site-specific design codes + design review

The newly envisaged ‘local’ design codes, with their basis in the national model design code and a revised *Manual for Streets* (also trailed in the White Paper) will undoubtedly provide a much better basis for the delivery of good urban design than those we commonly see today, but if they are deployed across the country without a mechanism to ensure that they are applied creatively and sensitively to the nuances of sites (large and small), then we are in danger of still delivering sub-standard outcomes.

By correlating outcomes with processes, the *Housing Design Audit* revealed that the most effective tools for delivering good design were, by some margin, site-specific design codes followed by design review. Schemes that benefitted from such design codes were five times more likely to appear in the 'good' or 'very good' categories than in the 'poor' or 'very poor' ones. Schemes that benefitted from the advice of a design review panel were four times more likely.

The audit confirmed that to achieve good design requires more than the application of a generic list of design parameters (e.g. in a local design guide), it requires a proactive and site-specific creative process of design coding and accompanying peer review. In other words, a plan (or perhaps zone) + site-based code + design review model. Such systems are common amongst our near neighbours and they work. They have the advantage that site based codes are produced incrementally, as sites look likely to come forward for development, and don't need to be produced all at once during the zoning phase of plan-making.

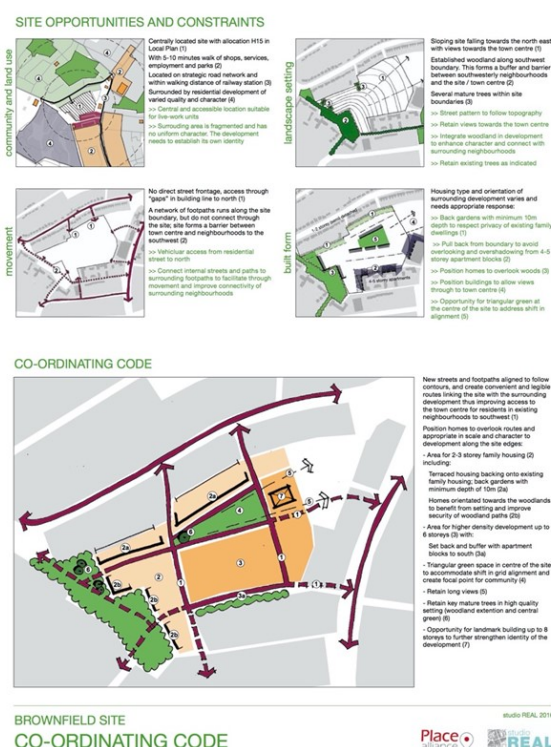


High quality housing is a feature of many of many continental European planning systems based on careful site-specific design coding

Design codes don't have to be hugely complicated and expensive to produce either. The White Paper picks up on the idea of local authorities themselves using paired back [Coordinating codes](#) as a means to establish a clear and concise set of site-based design parameters for sites early in the development process as a means to guide more detailed design work later on. The White Paper also commits to legislate to require site-specific codes as a condition of Permission in Principle in growth areas. This should be extended to all significant development sites with, at the very least, a Coordinating code produced for all sites over say thirty units. Their status also needs to be clarified in the proposed revisions to the NPPF, namely that, once prepared they are fully enforceable by local planning authorities and are not just guidance that can be ignored by less scrupulous developers once they have their 'automatic' permission.

Produced early and in such a clear and assessable manner, Coordinating codes would provide the ideal basis for the up-front and fundamental participation of communities in the planning process – something the White Paper aspires to see although without giving much detail. Perhaps stemming from a hands-on charette, they can provide the basis for engagement around real development principles which can be understood by all without the technical detail and language that so often makes later consultation unsatisfactory.

A simple coordinating code, combining a basic analysis, simple design framework and only 'essential' coding on a single sheet



+ culture change + investment

Combined with regular design review for key sites – not mentioned in the white paper, but an essential element of guaranteeing quality – site-specific design coding has the potential to transform design outcomes nationally, but will require a skills and culture change, the magnitude of which should not be underestimated. As the report [Design Skills in Local Authorities in England](#) showed, currently our local planning authorities have little capacity and a shortage of skills required to do such work, or to ensure that developers deliver on their promises afterwards. This results in the sort of reactive development management-led approach that typifies planning in England today and which the White Paper criticises, but which is also the only (albeit not very effective) line of defence against ubiquitous poor quality development. We should not undermine it until we have something better in place.

To break this cycle will not be quick or easy. Rather than demoting our planners to become mere administrators of regulations – as they are in pure as-of-right zoning systems – we need a new national investment in the skills and capacity of our planning system (and in our highways authorities), and a belief in its potential to deliver. It will require a culture change, one in which design quality is routinely prioritised by local authorities and developers alike. In this respect the commitment in the White Paper to develop a comprehensive resources and skills strategy is both welcome and fundamental, as is the proposition that each local authority should have a chief officer for design and place-making (although this needs to be a new position with a dedicated team, not just a re-labelling exercise). Nothing of the ambition of the White Paper will be delivered until and unless we invest significantly in our vital planning services.

In May, the pamphlet [Delivering Urban Quality, Time to Get Serious](#) called for such a culture change. It argued that this will require focus, design capacity, determined leadership and proper resourcing, and called on the Government to urgently set up a dedicated Design Quality Unit for England in order to confront the challenges head on and focus on changing the culture of design as part and parcel of any changes to the planning system. It is therefore very welcome to see the commitment in the White paper to:

“explore the options for establishing a new expert body which can help authorities make effective use of design guidance and codes, as well as performing a wider monitoring and challenge role for the sector in building better places”.

As we argued in the pamphlet, such a body should work through a partnership and networked approach across the country to ‘monitor’, ‘challenge’, ‘inspire’ and ultimately help to ‘deliver’ real change. It would be a small but powerful national investment that could lead the culture change that we need to see, and notably the process of up-skilling within local authorities that a move to a zone + site-specific design code model will require.

To zone or not to zone?

Whether we abandon our discretionary planning system and opt for zoning is not, ultimately, the critical factor. Properly resourced and supported, our existing planning system can deliver excellent outcomes effectively and efficiently. Impoverished it struggles to deliver on any count. The same will apply to a zoning-led system, or indeed to any system we might care to invent!

The recipe for great urban design can be summarised as plan/zone + site-based design code + design review + culture change + investment. This is an approach to planning that is supported by the research evidence and in the celebrated practices of many of our continental near neighbours and in the best practices here at home. It is not a fast-track route to beauty but, if we get it right, can deliver greater certainty and the real potential for more sustainable urban design with the greater support of local communities. The question is, are we prepared to make the real and substantial investment that this will require, both in the transition to the new system envisaged in the White Paper, and over the long-term? If we are going to change – and the evidence suggests we need to – then let's do it right or not at all!

RSPB

The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again. We play a leading role in BirdLife International, a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations.

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Why good planning is so important to green recovery and tackling the biodiversity crisis

Build, build, build. If that means building quality homes in the right places with natural greenspace on the doorstep, who could object? But if speeding up the planning system means cutting back vital environmental protections, it's time to speak up for good planning.

The RSPB works with planning systems in the UK and abroad to protect important wildlife sites and promote biodiversity in development, giving us a unique perspective.

The global biodiversity crisis and the UK's failure to halt nature loss has only worsened in recent years. The most recent State of Nature report shows just how significant the losses are, with 41 per cent of species in Great Britain declining and 15 per cent at risk of extinction¹. The UK has failed to reach most of the biodiversity targets set in 2010².

As has been widely reported, lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic has given many people a renewed appreciation of the nature on their doorstep. A YouGov poll carried out for the RSPB showed overwhelming public support for investing in nature as part of plans for recovery from the coronavirus crisis, with four out of five people in England supporting the idea of more accessible nature-rich areas in the UK³.

Using a medical analogy, if the Covid-19 pandemic was an acute crisis, we still have to deal with the chronic ecological and climate crises which will shape our world for years to come. The planning system has a key role to play in this.

In response to the huge economic dislocation resulting from the pandemic, it would be easy to respond by rolling back regulations in the mistaken belief this would facilitate a massive programme of building to create jobs and stimulate the economy. The desire to get the economy back on its feet is understandable, but critics of planning tend to focus on the costs to business and public administration. At the time of the last major planning reforms, we showed that this is a one-sided picture⁴.

In fact, there is a wealth of evidence that well-designed, properly enforced regulations provide confidence and result in positive economic outcomes, and that they are good for the environment too⁵. There can be a significant return on investments driven by regulation: every £1 spent on the management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest delivers over £8 in benefits⁶.

Good planning should work for people and the environment

The purpose of the planning system is to deliver the right development, in the right place, at the right time, for public benefit. This includes significant environmental benefits, for instance protection of

valued wildlife habitats, public access to green spaces (all the more important in a post-Covid world) and avoidance of flood risk. It also helps to avoid significant environmental costs, such as the loss of beautiful landscapes or costs associated with pollution or devastating floods.

Environmental regulations which protect nature and other environmental assets – such as habitats regulations and Environmental Impact Assessment – have been a cornerstone of this approach. They have given teeth to the good intentions of planning policy and, in the case of habitats regulations, have been shown by successive reviews to be fit for purpose⁷.

It would be wrong to imply that the planning system is perfect; the Planning White Paper attempts to address concerns about delays in plan-making, the mediocre quality of development and the under-provision of new homes by making some radical changes. However, it misses the opportunity for a similarly radical approach to tackle the ecological and climate crises.

Five key tests for nature

The Planning White Paper proposals can be assessed against five key tests for nature.

Do they ensure protection of our most important places for nature?

We expect all internationally, nationally and locally designated nature conservation sites to be included in 'Protected' areas. However, their protection could be undermined by future changes to environmental assessment (see below). To counter proposals for building in 'Growth' and 'Renewal' areas, why not put all these designations in a 'Highly Protected' sub-area where the level of protection is actually strengthened?

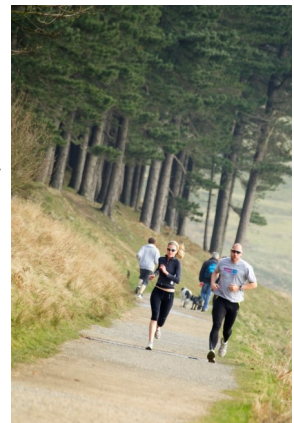
Do they ensure natural green space near people's homes, wherever they live?

There are encouraging statements, and a welcome commitment to develop "a national framework of green infrastructure standards", but this must set improved, mandatory standards for accessible natural green spaces. This is a matter of social justice, as starkly illuminated in our Recovering together report⁸. The proposal to move to a new flat-rate system for developers contributing funds to infrastructure raises funding concerns, though. Any future system must provide adequately for community green space, wildlife and other community needs including social and affordable housing.

Do they enable the creation of new wildlife-rich spaces, to help nature recover?

Here there are significant concerns. The Environment Bill currently before Parliament sets out new requirements and tools to help us create more space for nature, such as biodiversity net gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Yet the White Paper proposals potentially create many loopholes where developers do not need to deliver for nature by extending the scope of permitted development or permission in principle in 'Growth' and 'Renewal' areas.

These gaps need to be stopped, but why not go further and create a new Nature Recovery sub-area in 'Protected' areas? Permission in principle could be given for environmental investments and new restrictions could be set for built infrastructure. These areas could provide space for large-scale ecosystem restoration, greening the Green Belt and nature corridors running into the heart of our towns and cities.

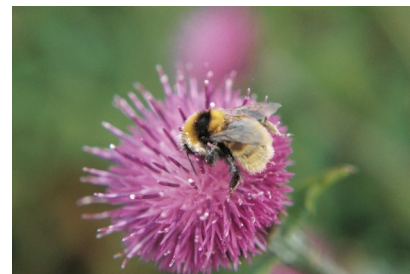


Wildflower verges at Kingsbrook, Aylesbury (Barratt Developments)

All major infrastructure and large-scale development projects should avoid harming nature in the first place and then be required to deliver a genuine overall net gain for biodiversity. In addition, if the UK is serious about meeting its obligations under the Paris agreement, these projects should also be designed to keep us on track for reaching net zero as soon as feasible.

Do they ensure that wildlife is safe wherever it is found?

This is probably the most concerning area of the proposals. After years of under-investment in baseline data collection, we simply do not know where all of our most vulnerable wildlife is, and finding it often depends on checks and assessments through the current planning application process.



It is critical that we do not downgrade tools which can help to inform better decisions, such as Habitats Regulations Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment. These are the global gold standards for environmental planning, and the same rules apply in other countries – such as France and Germany – who seem to have no problem in delivering the homes they need. Environmental protections are not the barriers to speed.

By streamlining the planning application process in ‘Growth’ and ‘Renewal’ areas, it is unclear how wildlife within those areas affected by site-specific developments will be identified and protected in a future system. We await a separate consultation on these proposals in the autumn.

Do they ensure decision-making is transparent, with public participation and that decisions are taken by a democratically accountable body or person?

The proposed new system seeks to enhance public engagement at the plan-making stage, but reduces it at later stages, which is a concern. For this to work, communities and individuals of all ages and backgrounds will need to be actively engaged in plan-making in new and meaningful ways. Barriers to engagement must be removed, and we need to see much more about how communications would change to make sure community participation is truly representative.

Planning problems are usually down to implementation

The recent revival of strategic planning in combined and mayoral authorities is welcome, as long as nature is properly embedded. However, the Planning White Paper is mostly silent on this issue, as it is on the need for a national spatial plan.

Many of the problems planning faces – and in particular the speed of decision-making – are not really about the tools and policies, but about their implementation. Local authorities have been the victims of many cuts, especially to their planning services and to specialist roles such as ecologists. Finding ways to resource the right skills and capacity will be crucial in a post-Covid world, and so the proposal for a comprehensive resources and skills strategy for the planning sector is very welcome.

We have a unique opportunity to place nature and people at the heart of the recovery from this crisis, increasing access to nature-rich green space for everyone, as well as restoring and protecting our wild places on land and sea. Only this way will we stand a chance of passing the environment on to the next generation in a better state than we found it.

This paper is based on blogs previously published by Green Alliance on 30 June⁹ and RSPB England on 7 August 2020¹⁰.

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“Joggers” - Ben Hall (rspb-images.com)

“Wildflower verge” - Adrian Thomas (rspb-images.com)

“Bumblebee” - Mike Edwards (rspb-images.com)

Royal Town Planning Institute

The RTPI champions the power of planning in creating prosperous places and vibrant communities. As learned society, we use our expertise and research to bring evidence and thought leadership to shape planning policies and thinking. As a professional body, we have over 25,000 members across all sectors, and are responsible for setting formal standards for planning practice and education.

www.rtpi.org.uk



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NOTE: This essay was prepared prior to the publication of the Planning White Paper

Plan The World We Need

To recover from Covid-19, we need to make plans which accelerate progress to a zero carbon economy, increase resilience to risk, and create fair, healthy and prosperous communities. As UK governments look beyond the immediate challenges of the pandemic, and towards economic 'recovery' measures, the RTPI have set out how we must '[plan the world we need](#)'.

The UK has only 30 years left to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero, with an even closer target of 2045 in Scotland. This rapid transition will require structural changes to the economy, and new ways of living and working. The following decades will also see further risks from extreme weather and the breakdown of ecological systems. These will disproportionately affect the most vulnerable in society, who have already been hardest hit by Covid-19.

Investment is clearly needed to tackle these problems, but the economic outlook is bleak. The Bank of England have forecast that the pandemic will push the UK into its deepest recession in 300 years, decreasing output by 30% in the first half of 2020, more than doubling unemployment, and creating a £337bn deficit over the financial year.

In a fragile economy, with pressing social and environmental challenges ahead, recovery packages must be carefully designed and deployed. The RTPI has called on governments to complement capital investment with the necessary resources and tools to plan effectively for the recovery, at a range of scales. Planning has seen disproportionate cuts over the past decade, especially in places which were already struggling. Proper resourcing is urgently needed to deliver better local and strategic plans: ones which can direct stimulus measures towards place-based solutions which have local support and deliver multiple benefits.

By examining the impacts of Covid-19 on the built environment, and the challenges which lie ahead, our paper suggests four broad priorities for planning during the recovery:

- Tackling place-based inequality by delivering affordable and high quality housing in the right locations, regenerating deprived areas for the benefit of existing communities, and improving access to key services, amenities and infrastructure
- Enabling a green industrial revolution by actively planning for the growth of sectors which deliver emission reductions, environmental gains and jobs, while helping places adapt to shifting economic and labour markets
- Prioritising healthy and sustainable modes of transport by integrating temporary active travel measures into strategies which lock-in behaviour change and support regeneration, and enable growth in locations which help the public transport sector to recover

- Accelerating the deployment of zero-carbon infrastructure by using local and strategic planning to coordinate the delivery of energy efficiency retrofit, renewable energy, smart grids and nature-based solutions to flooding and overheating, guided by ambitious policies and standards

Achieving these objectives will require a re-imagining of planning, which goes beyond purely statutory and regulatory functions. This conflicts with the view of planning held by some government officials and think tanks, who see it as a narrow and reactive tool for managing the negative impacts of land use change and market-led development.

This view neglects both the history and potential of the profession. Modern urban planning was of course conceived during Victorian times as a public health intervention, responding to the spread of disease through overcrowded slums. The UK's current systems were designed to help the country rebuild after the devastation of World War II. In the decades that followed, planning evolved to reflect wider objectives: improving access to public parks and open spaces, setting standards for high quality and affordable housing, protecting cultural and historical assets, and shaping neighbourhoods to provide a mixture of local services and offer a choice of sustainable, healthy modes of transport.

Planning must now respond to new challenges and opportunities: supporting the economic recovery while tackling inequality, accelerating progress towards net zero carbon, building resilience and reversing habitat and biodiversity loss. Our paper demonstrates the wide range of tools and approaches that planners can draw upon: those which allow for direct engagement with diverse local communities, support local leadership and visioning, enable collaboration across geographical and sectoral boundaries, and provide the flexibility and adaptability needed in uncertain times.

But to unlock the true potential of planning, changes are needed at the national level. [Our paper](#) sets out key areas for change, including:

- The creation of powerful and effective structures for cross-boundary strategic planning across the UK and Ireland, with investment in the planning services needed to engage with communities, businesses and infrastructure providers
- Joined-up national strategies which deliver investment in genuinely affordable homes, retrofit existing buildings, cut emissions from heat and transport, and plan networks of multi-functional green infrastructure
- Common objectives and metrics which allow us to test plans, infrastructure decisions and bailout packages against common objectives for the future, with clear metrics and targets for decarbonisation, resilience, health and social justice
- Harnessing the power of data and technology, for example by establishing regional data observatories to provide common data and analysis for plan-making, and investing in open source digital planning tools for scenario modelling, public engagement and coordination with infrastructure providers

A growing and diverse international movement is calling on governments around the world to build back better after Covid-19. The RTPI supports these voices, and is campaigning for a recovery that creates a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive society. We know that any failure to act now will simply defer costs to future generations and the most vulnerable, with the risks of climate and ecological breakdown to a weak economy becoming rapidly unmanageable in scale and complexity. At this pivotal moment we must strengthen and invest in planning, building the capacity for critical place-based systems thinking, and giving all parts of the country the tools they need to shape their future.

Theatres Trust

Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres, established through the Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres'. We are a statutory consultee for planning applications affecting theatres within England, Scotland and Wales as well as Northern Ireland through an administrative agreement.

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The nation's cultural venues for live performance have been particularly hard hit by Covid-19. These are amongst the uses which closed first and will be last to re-open. A number have gone into administration with many at risk. Some have abandoned plans to re-open in 2020, and even if they are able to return there is a lack of product to go into them through lack of confidence to invest in shows and the organisation and logistics required for tours to take place.

Yet, these venues contribute tremendously to our places and town centres, to our economy and more fundamentally to the social and cultural well-being of our communities. In many cases the buildings themselves may be significant heritage assets and attractions. They can contribute to a sense of place, supporting the success and vitality of their surroundings by drawing people in. Audiences visit local shops, pubs and restaurants and also occupy hotel rooms or stay for longer periods. In other cases the venue might be community-oriented and small-scale, providing opportunities for people to participate in the arts at an amateur or grass-roots level and develop their skills. This brings people together and reduces isolation, particularly in more rural communities.

In terms of new development and regeneration, cultural venues are being increasingly recognised as assets which can increase value for developers. New theatres have been provided as part of major schemes, such as Kings Cross and the Olympic Park in London. Local authorities have invested in restoring and returning old theatres back to use recognising the wider value they add; in Stockton the Globe is a key project within the Council's town centre improvement programme and in Bradford the former Odeon is returning as a large-scale music venue.

Despite this clear value venues have already been faced with threats due to incompatible nearby development – acknowledged through introduction of paragraph 182 of the NPPF (2019) – as well as reductions in subsidy or funding over the last few years. Venues can be vulnerable to being undermined by developers seeking more financially lucrative uses in particular residential.

Even before Covid-19, it can be considered there was scope for the planning system to better promote and support theatres and other venues and protect them from unnecessary loss. Once a venue has been lost it is challenging and costly to provide a new one. With Covid-19 and the threat of more venues becoming vacant such amendment has become even more critical.

Amongst many challenges one that is relatively easily rectifiable – and would address inconsistency – would be to amend permitted development regulations to prevent unlisted theatres and other performance venues from being demolished. At present there is little to stop valued and potentially viable facilities from being demolished and evade national and local policy requirements which seek to protect from unnecessary loss. This is an even greater risk if venues are brought out from administration by speculative developers. Even with 'normal' policy requirements seeking evidence

of marketing for a period clearly it would be difficult in the short-term to secure interest to the contrary if these facilities cannot open. Pubs already benefit from exemption from demolition under permitted development. We consider for greater consistency this should be extended; while the Government has just announced this will be the case reflecting Theatres Trust's proposals it was not included within amendments brought in prior to Parliamentary recess. It will be important for our places and communities this commitment is honoured.

On a similar note we also considered guidance was necessary to address the problem of general evidence requirements justifying loss being inadequate in an era of Covid-19 uncertainty; this is equally valid in demonstrating wider uses are also no longer required. We welcome that a recent Ministerial Statement has given greater flexibility, but more broadly there is perhaps an opportunity for the planning system to review how evidence is undertaken by applicants and assessed. There is disparity between the requirements of different authorities, and some inadvertently enable applicants to manipulate and undermine evidence.

Whilst clearly there is great need for housing generally – and in some cases other uses – this statement has articulated just how beneficial cultural venues are for people, places and the economy. Better consideration as to whether loss leads to truly sustainable development when taking other factors into account must be elevated. As one example, a current case is seeking the loss of a town's only theatre – which is currently vacant – for conversion to residential. It is on a very central site within the designated town centre. The applicant's argument is focused on the Council's lack of demonstrable five year housing supply and outdated plan and that its central location is sustainable for housing. It makes no attempt to demonstrate the theatre is surplus to requirements, analyse whether permanent loss would harm the function of the town centre or attempt to identify whether other cultural, town centre or community uses more conducive to safeguarding the building for future theatre use are viable. Therefore superficially, in the absence of fuller assessment, the development would be sustainable only in terms of its location but would not necessarily be considered sustainable or beneficial to the town when broader matters are considered. This is symptomatic of fragmented land ownership and competing interests within our town centres which is a barrier to a holistic approach which could better ensure our town centres are functional, viable and attractive to their communities and potential users. How our town centres are managed has to be an area for discussion.

Similarly the nature of the example above also raises a broader question for the planning system and our communities which impacts not just theatres and performance venues but many other uses. Would an increase in home working, and possible out-migration from city centres, fundamentally improve the viability of smaller and suburban town centres which may currently be seen as failing, and if so, how can the planning system arrest the erosion of such area's commercial, cultural and social capacity?

TCPA

The [Town and Country Planning Association](https://www.tcpa.org.uk) is a charity that campaigns for the reform of the UK's planning systems to make them more responsive to people's needs and aspirations and to promote sustainable development.

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Securing a more resilient, sustainable future

Prior to COVID-19 we faced health, climate, biodiversity and housing crises. These will still exist post COVID and our need to tackle them will be even more pressing. Planning has the potential to be a key part of the solution to many of these problems. To maximise the potential of the planning system post pandemic, however, we need to re-focus and strengthen it, to enable it to support places and communities to be more economic and climate resilient in order to provide better outcomes for people ¹. We do not believe the proposals set out in *Planning for the Future* ² will achieve this.

The experience of lockdown will have been very different for different people but for many that experience will have depended, at least in part, on the characteristics and quality of their home and local environment. For those of us who think about the role of the built environment on people's lives, the pandemic highlights the need to go back to first principles.

The TCPA was founded by Ebenezer Howard back in 1899 based on a belief that there was a better way of delivering high quality environments and the homes and jobs people needed. This vision for a different way of living continues to underpin the TCPA and its work. But the conditions in which some people had to live through lockdown highlight that while our work to promote the Garden City principles has led to higher standards in some places, there remains an overwhelming disconnect between the Garden City movement's radical vision for sustainable and socially just places and the quality of many new and converted developments.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the Westminster Government publishing the report it had commissioned on the quality of homes delivered via permitted development rights on the same day as it announced further deregulation in order to "deliver much-needed new homes and revitalise town centres across England" ³. There is a need for new homes, especially genuinely affordable ones, but the Government commissioned report concluded that "permitted development conversions do seem to create worse quality residential environments than planning permission conversions in relation to a number of factors widely linked to the health, wellbeing and quality of life of future occupiers." ⁴

The first step for changes in response to the crises we face must be **clarity around the purpose of planning**. The planning system should operate with the aim of positively promoting the long-term sustainable development of the nation and the health and wellbeing of individuals. With sustainable development encompassing economic, social, environmental and cultural issues, and an explicit emphasis on promoting social justice and reducing inequality. Decisions then need to be made in the public interest and with that purpose in mind.

If that is the starting point for decision making, and planners, applicants and those wanting to engage with the system are all clear about this, we stand a chance of securing better outcomes from the system but also rebuilding trust between community groups and planning.

We are also clear, however, that climate, health, housing and biodiversity crises, plus delivery of new development that is both resilient and in the right places, cannot be addressed at the neighbourhood or even local level. Involving communities in planning at the local level is essential, but if we are to effectively tackle major crises **local decisions must be set in a wider strategic framework**. The current, chaotic and piecemeal approach to strategic planning will not enable us to tackle the challenges we face, least of all the need to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

The final priority for the TCPA is that **planning must remain democratic so that it is locally accountable**. Up to date data is important to inform place-making and the determining of planning applications, but so too are the views of local people. And rather than deregulating the planning system we must strengthen it so that when communities participate in plan-making those plans and policies can be implemented. Local authorities need to be given back powers and resources to enable planning to be genuinely participative and meaningful. If we truly want to support places to respond to the lessons from the pandemic, but also tackle challenges pre-dating COVID such as a shortage of affordable housing, the Government needs to empower and adequately resource local planning authorities to take on the role of ‘master-developers’ ensuring that local plans deliver real change⁵. This would require various changes, including to financing, skills and a stronger offer from central Government to reward local action, but it is a key route to achieving the changes we believe are necessary to securing places that enable communities to thrive.

The TCPA has many recommendations for what would help the planning and development sectors to address the issues facing communities today but our top three are:

- There is an urgent need for consensus around the purpose of planning. We believe it should be to secure outcomes that deliver sustainable development and improve people’s health and wellbeing. Ideally this would be set out in legislation but could be achieved by a cross-sector compact supported by both planners and developers.
- Develop a shared position about the need for a National Sustainable Development Plan, which is informed by a national conversation. The National Planning Forum could also work to begin this conversation while making the case for the national plan.
- The National Planning Forum should support local democratic planning and place making by campaigning for government to empower and adequately resource local planning authorities to take on the role of ‘master-developers’. While this would need a programme of support including up-skilling, it would mean that local plans can be more effectively implemented and deliver real change.

Based on our understanding of the proposals in *Planning for the Future*, we do not believe that the planning reform will secure the important changes we believe are needed for a post-COVID planning system. The reforms will abolish the duty to cooperate but do not propose any new mechanism that will set a new strategic framework within which local plans can be developed. The White Paper is also unclear about the purpose of planning; while there are warm and welcome words about the importance of planning in tackling many of the important issues we face, the reform proposals state “the starting point for an effective planning system is to establish a clear and predictable basis for the pattern and form of development in an area”. For the TCPA, the starting point should be an ambition that the reformed system provides better outcomes for people, rather than a focus on process.

Our biggest concern, however, is around the impact of the proposed reforms on democracy and local accountability. The White Paper states that “communities will be able to trust the planning system again as their voice will be heard from the beginning of the process” [paragraph 1.23]. We share the Government’s desire to rebuild trust and we welcome that aspiration, but we do not believe that reforms enhance democratic involvement.

If the reforms really are to further democratize planning, in addition to capacity building and resources for local planning authorities, the right of people to be heard in person at the plan making stage (Section 20 of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act) must be retained as it is, rather than be made discretionary as the Paper proposes [paragraph 2.48]. There is also a need for clarity around the formal opportunities for community input into the development of local design guides; they should we believe be developed as part of the Local Plan, rather than it being seen as a ‘twin track’ approach. And if the reforms truly want to implement a plan-led, local system power must also be returned to local authorities by giving them the power to decide which permitted development rights are applied to their local area.

References

1. The final report of the Raynsford Review (Nov 2018) set out a comprehensive set of recommendations about how the planning system needs to be reformed to enable transformational change and improve people’s lives. It has underpinned much of this thinking and can be found at: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=30864427-d8dc-4b0b-88ed-c6e0f08c0edd>
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>
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4. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/902220/Research_report_quality_PDR_homes.pdf
5. See <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=0f78e74a-b631-4449-a8eb-ffe967765fd7> and the Raynsford Review for more discussion of this

Urban Design Group

Sharing knowledge and best practice for more than 40 years, the Urban Design Group (UDG) is a campaigning membership organisation with over 1000 members who care about the quality of life in our cities, towns and villages, and believe that raising standards of urban design is central to its improvement.

www.udg.org.uk

**URBAN
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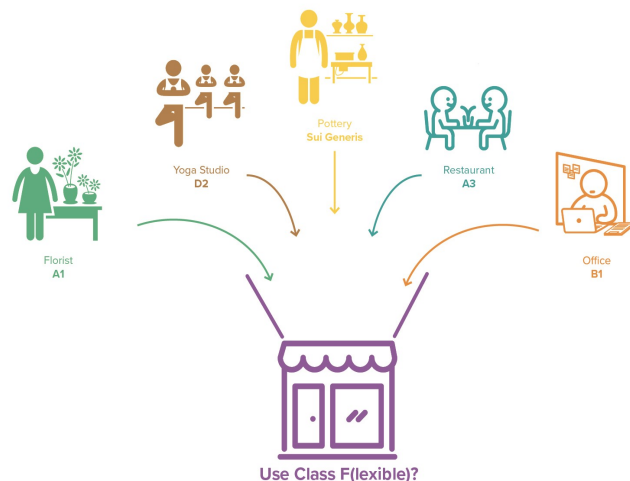
In less than six months, the way people use and think about their urban neighbourhoods has changed completely. Working from home has become the new normal for many, and government limitations on movement coupled with a warm spring meant that the opportunity to get out for daily exercise led many to experience their local area on foot and bicycle in a way they never have before. In many of our suburbs and commuter towns, the sense of community has grown, and the local economy has benefitted while the city centre shops, cafes and bars have suffered.

This new-found appreciation for our local areas has also led to a demand for changes to our urban environment. People have found the challenges with cycling and walking in streets which are often dominated by car infrastructure, and many have also benefitted from their local shops to buy food and essentials, avoiding the long queues and restricted access at the large edge and out of town supermarkets. The Urban Design Group was keen to capture the thoughts of the profession on the changes that were being seen, and to think about how we could look to build back better after the pandemic. To that end, and to replace our regular in-person events in London, we set up a weekly Zoom event on a Thursday evening called IDEASpace.

In our session on Future High Streets a number of parallel strands of discussion came together. The decline in the High Street has been happening over a number of years and is not a new issue, but the pandemic had highlighted some new weaknesses, along with, we felt, some new strengths and opportunities too. The forced closure of non-essential businesses meant that there was a real concern that the decline of the High Street would accelerate, with some shops simply never re-opening. However, anecdotally the pandemic had seemed to increase people using local shops, with the smaller convenience stores and individual bakers and butchers seeing an increase in custom. This was not a uniform experience, and for many issues of affordability still meant that the larger supermarkets and value stores were their go-to shops, but the fact that many stores were closed did however mean that it was easier to manage queuing for the shops that had remained open, but in many areas footway space was an issue for trying to maintain social distancing.

But what about the longer term? With many people at home on furlough thinking about their future careers and spending time on their passions rather than work, it was felt that there could actually be an increase in people looking to set up businesses, and recent reports from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) seems to back up this idea – the FSB says it has seen a significant increase in inquiries from people looking to become self-employed. But how could this be of benefit to the High Street? Well with the right incentives, the High Street could be a place for these new businesses to establish and thrive. They can bring a range of new goods and services, and if the increased focus on staying local can be maintained, maybe they could be the start of a high street renaissance. There is an issue with this however – the current Use Class system is relatively inflexible and evidence suggests that it can prevent people from being able to try new ideas quickly and easily. It also leads to longer than necessary vacancies on the High Street, and empty shops can quickly send out a message that a High Street is in decline.

So, what can be done? There are a number of organisations which now take over unused shops and offer a pop-up facility which allows people to take them on for a short period to try out new ideas, but these are still constrained by existing use designations. We explored the idea of creating a new Use Class – let's call it Use Class F(lexible) – which would allow a much wider variety of activities and which would encourage people to try out new ideas without the need for costly change of use applications. We were therefore pleased that in July, about 3 months after our event, the Government announced a raft of changes to the Use Classes Order, including the creation of a new Class E (Commercial, business, and services) which will supersede and combine many of the uses which previously sat separately. Broadly speaking, this new Class E will contain all the uses which are deemed suitable for the High Street – something akin to our Use Class F proposal. It will be good to see where the idea goes in future, but for us it is only part of the solution.



The proposed 'Use Class F(lexible)' – is this now going to be realised through the new Use Class E?

More recently, the publication of the Planning White Paper in August, also talks about the High Street, and how the Government are already introducing a new Use Class Order, with associated permitted development rights, to make easier for businesses to change use without the need for planning permission to support our high streets and town centres bounce back following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, as it stands while the Use Class Order changes are generally welcome, the permitted development rights which sit alongside are very likely to do serious and long-term harm to the High Street if left unchecked.

The ability to convert shops, even empty ones, into residential without any form of permission risks the creation of 'gap tooth high streets' where vacant units are quickly converted by landlords, which in turn will create dead frontages in the middle of what may otherwise be vibrant High Streets. Even with the theoretical ability to just as easily convert them back, the likelihood is that it will never happen, and instead the decline of the wider shopping area is likely to be hastened. What is required is a measured assessment of retail floorspace in our retail centres – looking at the overall quantum and type of floorspace available. If this suggests that there is too much floorspace for future demand (acknowledging the shifting global trends), and in many cases there will be, then buildings could be 'released' from planning protections which many retail centres have. Those shops on the edges of the high street could be converted – and if they happen to house thriving businesses as many may – then those businesses should be supported to relocate to empty shops in the retail cores. That way, the long-term vibrancy of our High Streets can be preserved over the desire for a quick profit for land-owners – the tradition of living above the shop should not become living in the shop.

Of course, the buildings themselves are not the only factor to consider. We also need to address the issue of streets and movement, and how we can make our local centres places that are pleasant to walk and cycle, rather than being dominated by motor vehicles, either as through-traffic or parking. Transport and movement is something which the Planning White Paper is very quiet on, and it needs to be emphasised that the sustainable growth in beautiful places and vibrant communities which the Paper aspires to, can only be realised if movement is at the heart of the planning process.

The reduction in private motor car use during the pandemic, coupled with the need to have more space for people to move around while maintaining social distancing provided a real opportunity to revisit how we use our streets in both the short and long term, with many local authorities looking to create Low Traffic Neighbourhoods on a trial basis, but how could we adapt our streets to accommodate the increased levels of cycling and walking in a way that was safe and would promote long-term modal shift?



In London's Soho neighbourhood, the cafes and restaurants have spilled into the streets thanks to temporary closures

To try and help with this, the Urban Design Group published a "How to Guide" setting out ways in which local authorities could fast-track changes in street design using measures that can be implemented within the existing powers and without the need for lengthy bureaucracy. Titled "Fast Urban Change for Life Saving Streets" the document was primarily focussed on helping with the short-term recovery and supporting local communities and businesses. It sets out how to deliver additional space outside shops, cafes, restaurants, and bars that can enable the economy to be unlocked, and people to safely come together. However, we don't see these as temporary interventions, we want them to be the first step to permanent change which puts people back at the heart of their communities. Ultimately the aim is that through our combined efforts, we can start the process of building back better, together.



A vision of what could be – produced as part of the UDG Fast Urban Change for Life Saving Streets Guide.

The Woodland Trust

The Woodland Trust is the UK's leading woodland conservation charity. Our vision is of a UK rich in native woods and trees, for people and wildlife. We own and manage over 1,250 sites, covering 26,000ha and have over 500,000 members and supporters across the UK.

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Planning for the future of our woods and trees

Coronavirus has shone a light on how important green space is –we’ve been able to take the time to see trees blossom and birds fledge from their nests on (or near to) our doorsteps. It’s also highlighted the unequal access to these spaces and the impact this has on health and wellbeing.

This paper is written at a time of significant uncertainty, with the English government proposing sweeping planning reforms as part of a green recovery. Discussions on planning reform show that no one thinks that the current planning system is delivering what they think it should - but the viewpoints vary considerably.

Despite this uncertainty, the Woodland Trust believes that the way we deliver homes and infrastructure must be done in a way that meets the twinned challenges of the climate and ecological emergency, supporting healthy communities and providing homes for people and wildlife.

Planning for our woods and trees is central to this. However, details within the Planning White Paper are conspicuous in their absence: there is no mention of irreplaceable habitats, and a passing reference to integrating tree lined streets into design of new developments. As this paper outlines, existing policy processes are not enough to support both the protection and planting of trees. Turning national rules into local action is key to turning this around, with local authorities resourced and empowered to make decisions that deliver genuinely sustainable development

The role of woods and trees

Our woods and trees have a major role in meeting today and tomorrow’s challenges. Ancient trees in particular are a significant carbon store, are home to thousands of species and form part of our country’s heritage. Once lost they cannot be replaced.

Proposals to address the climate emergency have focussed on tree planting targets. But it cannot just be about creating new trees, but protecting those we already have: the planning process is central in both protecting and supporting the planting of trees and woods.

Stronger protection?

The Woodland Trust successfully campaigned for stronger protection for ancient woods and trees in the 2018 revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This means that development leading to the loss or deterioration of ancient woods and trees can only be approved in “wholly exceptional circumstances” and where a “suitable compensation strategy exists”. And yet, development remains one of the biggest threats to this irreplaceable habitat. Between 1st July 2019 and 1st July 2020, the Trust was aware of 55 cases where ancient woods at threat of direct impact and 124 under threat of indirect impact. These cases are a mix of direct destruction of ancient trees,

but also indirect effects, such as increased pollution and damage to tree roots and soils. These threats have come about due to a variety of reasons, for example, a lack of data has resulted in developers pursuing damaging development; buffers that are smaller than the minimum in national guidance required to avoid impacts; and proposals being approved by local planning authorities because the compensation package (i.e. tree planting) justifies the loss or damage to the irreplaceable habitat, contrary to planning guidance.

The proposed planning reforms are frustratingly silent about the importance of protecting irreplaceable habitats; missing an opportunity to strengthen the protection of our ancient woods and trees. Ensuring ancient woods and trees, and their buffers, are highly protected from development is imperative if any reforms to planning are not going to undermine these recent policy changes.

Turning national frameworks into local action

From national frameworks and strategies to detailed neighbourhood and local plans, all are central to ensuring we balance competing demands on our land. The England Tree Strategy provides opportunity to lead an approach that provides space for tree planting, natural regeneration and, of course, to support the protection of ancient woods and ancient and veteran trees.

However, national policies on their own are not enough. Integrating the England Tree Strategy into local planning frameworks is needed to turn rules into action. Local tree and woodland strategies (LTWS) should be developed to provide the puzzle pieces that steer implementation within local planning authorities (LPAs). Integrating LTWS into local plans can provide the detail on how new development will contribute to the protection, restoration and creation of woods and trees.

LTWS will also be an important way of engaging communities in enhancing their local area. They should look to include details about what is expected from development, helping LPAs push for better planning applications and development.

The need for data

In order to protect important trees, planners need to know where they are. LTWS would bring together existing and improved data on the whereabouts and condition of ancient trees and woods, as well as other valuable trees, so that planning can protect them. There is a need to update the Ancient Woodland Inventory, a vital resource for planners identifying where these irreplaceable habitats are. In addition, there is no easily accessible database of other valued trees protected by law through Tree Protection Orders (TPOs) leading to confusion and conflict when these trees are threatened by development. Important trees are often only identified through the planning application process. Proposed planning reforms are therefore likely to increase risk to valued trees.

Trees in development

New development also has an important part to play in planting new trees. The Trust advocates that new development should include 30% canopy cover to meet the challenges of the climate emergency. Design codes should deliver the government's manifesto commitment to ensure all new development has tree-lined streets. Increased canopy cover can also be achieved through planting new accessible woodland and orchards. These trees will be particularly important in addressing unequal access to high quality nature and enhance a sense of place, create pleasant environment to walk and cycle, rather than use a car, and brings nature closer to homes for example. In designing trees to be part of the new development, it is important that the specific constraints and opportunities within sites are taken advantage of. A cookie cutter approach, a risk of a national code that dictates design of new development, should be avoided. Site specific assessments are necessary to ensure the right tree in the right place.

The need for resources

Central to ensuring these policies and plans are followed through is effective monitoring and enforcement. Bolstered planning departments in local planning authorities must have the ability to both encourage planning applications that protect and deliver trees and woods but also refuse applications that cause harm to ancient woods and ancient and veteran trees. In order to do this, local authorities need ecologists, tree officers, environmental planners and enforcement officers that are resourced to deliver.

Impact of proposed reforms of trees and woods

It is impossible to separate out wider concerns about the direction of the proposed planning reforms from a system that plans well for woods and trees. Trees are often at the heart of communities, and communities must be at the heart of planning – throughout the design and development of schemes. Even as the government proposes to require community consultation before felling trees as part of the Environment Bill, the reforms undermine public engagement in the process from start to finish.

A number of reviews of the planning system have explored how the planning system is delivering against its objectives. These have proposed a number of fixes. Balancing competing pressures on our land is not simple. Planning needs to be strategic and long term, cutting across boundaries and silos to plan not just for new homes, but communities and nature side by side.

As noted throughout this paper, planning reform provides an opportunity to improve outcomes for trees, woods and local communities. At present, we fear that they could do just the opposite.

But done well, planning is uniquely placed to provide the proposals, skills and expertise to ensure that we use our land for development in a way that delivers genuinely sustainable development that both protects and expands woods and trees, and creates healthier and more beautiful places to live.

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