

Summary of the Planning White Paper

Background

I have attended a number of meetings and listened to a number of speakers on the Planning White Paper. I have also read the white paper and a number of very useful summaries, Housing Today, Lichfield, Lambert Smith and Hampton. There are many others all of which help to make clearer the change this paper will make to planning.

Context

Before the pandemic it was clear Britain's Housing system was broken. Homelessness was up by 50% since 2010 rough sleeping doubled and 120,000 children without a home to call their own.

Home ownership had fallen to a 30 year low, and the average cost of a home is now 8 times the average annual salary. Social housing lists are increasing while luxury flats stand empty, and thousands live in sub standard accommodation.

The problem is not new Aneurin Bevan was faced with the problem after the war of needing 700,000 houses his Housing Act in 1945 addressed the problem. He believed decent housing improves health, nurtures educational attainment and builds vibrant and sustainable communities.

IN 2009, Caroline Spelman MP -then Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government wrote to local authorities advising a Conservative Government would abolish "national and regional building targets". The then Shadow Minister, Grant Shapps MP said " we don't believe in a top down approach that is Stalinist in nature". In his first abortive attempt to cancel Regional Strategies Eric Pickles MP described them as "soviet tractor style top-down planning targets".

Proposals in the White Paper

Binding Housing requirement:- The change advocated in the White Paper in Proposal 4: is for the Government to introduce a standard method for setting at a national level a binding housing requirement figure for each local planning authority. The formula being used has an affordability factor in it which means that London and the South East get more houses than the rest of the country. West Sussex will be hit particularly heavily.

Zoning:- Under the new system , local authorities will have to bring forward stripped back local plans zoning all land in their area for "growth", "renewal", or "protection".

Growth areas: Proposals for new homes, hospitals, schools, shops and offices will be automatically allowed.

Renewal Areas: Proposals for high-quality development, largely on urban and brownfield sites will be permitted through a prior approval system.

Protected areas: Development on Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks will continue to be restricted to protect treasured heritage.

Areas zoned for growth will accommodate “substantial development” and will benefit from outline permission, but developers will still need to secure reserved matters permission in accordance with a locally drawn up design codes though councils won't be able to debate the principle of the scheme

Local Plans: Local authorities will have 30 months to produce a new-style stripped back local plan, down from a current average of seven years, While the new plans will be more powerful in that they will confer planning permission to “growth” sites, councils will lose the ability to set local policies. Instead all planning policy will be set nationally with local plans restricted to development allocation and the specific codes and standards to be applied to projects in the development zones. The plan should include “an interactive web-based map of the administrative area where data and policies are easily searchable, with colour-coded maps reflecting the zoning, key and accompanying text setting out “suitable development uses, as well as limitations on height and/or density as relevant” within the zones.

Given the imposition of a top-down target, councils will no longer have a duty to cooperate with each other over the drawing up local plans, as the number will be set by government. Numbers will take into account the pressure of constraint on growth, such as green belt.

Section 106: The existing system of developer contributions is to end, Section 106 agreements will be scrapped, while the existing Community Infrastructure Levy will be morphed into a national-set levy on development value that the government says will bring in at least as much or more in the way of developer contributions as the existing system. The levy will be paid at the point of occupation, leaving councils to pay for and deliver any infrastructure needed up front. Councils will be allowed to borrow against future levy receipts to fund this.

Design Code Body: A new body to be set up to be given the role of supporting local authorities in the creation of local design and each local authority will be expected to employ a chief officer for design and place-making to oversee quality. Local designs must have community input to be valid.

Permitted Development: Within the “renewal” areas, certain pre-approved development types – such as the densification of suburban semis – will be given automatic approval via new permitted development rights. These new PD rights will also have to take account of local design.

Neighbourhood Planning: The Government will look to strengthen neighbourhood planning and design with more communities having more direct say over development in their area. The Government will make further funding available to neighbourhood planning groups from 2018 -2020 and they propose to amend planning policy so that neighbourhood planning groups can obtain a housing requirement figure from their local planning authority.

To improve design local and neighbourhood plans will set out clear design expectations. The importance of early pre-application is stressed between applicants, authorities and local community about design. However, it makes clear

that design should not be used as a valid reason to object to developments where it accords with design expectations set in statutory plans.

In conclusion the paper if passed will potentially set housing targets in the same Stalinist manner Shapps and Pickles spoke out against in 2010 not to mention the Conservative manifesto in 2009. The algorithm pushing building to London and the South East is flawed. What happened to encouraging growth in the Northern Powerhouse? The paper will create development led planning rather than planning for communities leading developments.

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