

## **Briefing: 'Planning for the Future' White Paper**

The document “proposes reforms of the planning system to streamline and modernise the planning process, bring a new focus to design and sustainability, improve the system of developer contributions to infrastructure, and ensure more land is available for development where it is needed.”

\*White Papers set out the Government’s proposals for future legislation.

### **Key points**

- The government is planning to streamline the planning process, making it easier, swifter and more transparent for a local planning authority to develop and implement a Local Plan, and to speed up housing and infrastructure development around the country. The Government hopes that “planning decisions will be simple and transparent, with local democracy at the heart of the process.”
- The planning process “will still be democratic, it will still have local engagement, but it will be much faster and help us to meet the needs of the next generation.”
- New rules will force local planning authorities to designate land as one of three new categories:
  1. Growth areas: Here planning will be allowed automatically.
  2. Renewal areas: This category will mean councils would have to look favourably on new developments.
  3. Protected areas: These are places of natural beauty and the green belt.
- Developers will pay a new national charge, replacing the existing Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- All new streets will be tree-lined and "all new homes to be carbon-neutral by 2050, with no new homes delivered under the new system needing to be retrofitted".
- They also plan to roll out a “first homes scheme”, which will provide newly built homes at a 30% discount for local people, key workers and first-time buyers.

### **Planning for the Future – A brief overview**

The Government’s new White Paper – *Planning for the Future* – sets out its plans to shake up the local planning system. The overall goal is to streamline the current system and make it easier for development to take place. The White Paper states that it will “cut red tape, but not standards, placing a higher regard on quality, design and the environment than ever before. Planning decisions will be simple and transparent, with local democracy at the heart of the process.”

The White Paper sets out radical changes to the process for developing and implementing Local Plans.

These changes are being designed to enable Local Plans to:

1. identify land for development and sites that should be protected;

2. be clear about what development can take place in different areas so that there is greater certainty about land allocated for development and so that there is a faster route to securing permission.

To achieve these goals, the Government has set up three distinct categories into which a Local Plan will divide an area:

- **Growth areas:** Here planning will be allowed automatically.
- **Renewal areas:** This category will mean councils would have to look favourably on new developments.
- **Protected areas:** These are places of natural beauty and the green belt.

## Growth Areas

These will be areas designated as “suitable for substantial development” – the White Paper proposes to legislate for a clear meaning of “substantial development” so as to avoid confusion. The adoption of the Local Plan would automatically allow all developments in principle. There would, nevertheless, still be a process to acquire full details and full permission for individual developments, however this would be done through “streamlined and faster consent routes which focus on securing good design and addressing site-specific technical issues.”

## Renewal Areas

Similar to Growth Areas, development is encouraged, and proposals are accepted via new streamlined methods.

## Protected Areas

Here, any development proposals would come forward as now through planning applications being made to the local authority (except where they are subject to permitted development rights or development orders) and judged against policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

## The changes to Local Plans and the role of communities.

The Local Plan is where areas will be divided into the three new development categories. The White Paper proposes to reduce the time scale for Local Plan development to 30 months. During this time, there would be an initial 6-month consultation process which would use “best in class” ways of achieving public involvement and then an additional 6 weeks whereby the proposed Local Plan would be available for comment on from the public.

It is unclear what “best in class” means, although the White Paper talks at length about the importance of “genuine community involvement rather than meaningless consultation”. Once implemented, each planning authority would have to “review its Local Plan at least every five years”. Reviews will be undertaken sooner where local circumstances have changed significantly.

Alternative proposals that differ to the Local Plan will be allowed but will require a specific planning application undertaken using the current planning process.

The Government remain committed to providing the opportunity for residents to develop their own neighbourhood plans. Neighbourhood plans have “become an important tool in helping to ‘bring the democracy forward’ in planning, by allowing communities to think proactively about how they would like their areas to develop.”

The White Paper also signals the possibility of Neighbourhood Planning becoming hyper-localised: “We are also interested in whether there is scope to extend and adapt the concept so that very small areas – such as individual streets – can set their own rules for the form of development which they are happy to see.”

## **The Infrastructure Levy**

The Government is proposing streamlining the payments that Local Authorities received for developments, removing Section 106 payments and the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Instead, they will create a consolidated Infrastructure Levy. This will either be a flat-rate set nationally or be set at area-specific rates. The area-specific nature of the levy would depend on land-value-rates in that locality. In some places land-value would be below the threshold to qualify for the Infrastructure Levy charge.

The Government is proposing to give greater freedom to Local Authorities around how they spend the infrastructure levy.

An alternative option suggested is that the Infrastructure Levy could remain optional and would be set by individual local authorities.

The Minister Robert Jenrick stated that this consolidated Infrastructure Levy will give communities “more control over how it is spent.”

## **Community agenda**

Whilst the White Paper does not go into detail on specifically how residents within communities will be consulted on the new planning process, below are some indications that the consultation process could be more extensive than before.

- “Local councils should radically and profoundly re-invent the ambition, depth and breadth with which they engage with communities as they consult on Local Plans. Our reforms will democratise the planning process by putting a new emphasis on engagement at the plan-making stage.”
- “Support local planning authorities to use digital tools to support a new civic engagement process for local plans and decision-making, making it easier for people to understand what is being proposed and its likely impact on them through visualisations and other digital approaches.”

## Local Trust

- Residents will be able to engage in a much more democratic system that is open to a wider range of people whose voice is currently not heard.
- Residents will no longer have to rely on planning notices attached to lamp posts, printed in newspapers and posted in libraries to find out about newly proposed developments. Instead people will be able to use their smartphone to give their views on Local Plans and design codes as they are developed, and to see clearer, more visual information about development proposals near them.
- Communities will be able to trust the planning system again as their voice will be heard from the beginning of the process and better use of digital technology will make it radically easier for people to understand what is being proposed in their neighbourhoods and provide new ways to feed their views into the reformed system.