

PROPOSED PLANNING REFORMS IN ENGLAND

Committee name	Environment, Housing and Regeneration Select Committee
Officer reporting	Julia Johnson – Planning Policy and Infrastructure
Papers with report	None
Ward	ALL

HEADLINES

The purpose of this report is to highlight key points from the government’s white paper on proposed changes to the planning system – ‘Planning for the Future’ – together with a summary of concerns expressed about the proposals and recent updates from the government.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Committee:

1. **Note the reforms summarised in the report.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Planning for the Future White Paper

The white paper Planning for the Future was published by the government for consultation in August 2020. Launching the white paper, the Secretary of State for Communities, Housing and Local Government explained the government’s intention to overhaul the outdated planning system, streamline the process to deliver homes faster, protect valued green spaces and build beautiful homes.

The white paper outlined 24 new proposals, that were organised around 3 ‘Pillars of Change’. These were:

1. **Planning for development:** establish a clear and predictable basis for the pattern and form of development in an area;
2. **Planning for beautiful and sustainable places:** ensure a planning system that enables the creation of beautiful places, protects and enhances the environment, and supports efforts to combat climate change and bring greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050; and

3. **Planning for infrastructure and connected places:** make developer contributions fairer, simpler and more consistent.

The key proposals present under these 'Pillars' included:

- Simplified designations for land usage in the form of three 'zones' – growth, renewal and protected.
- Automatic permission in principle for development in some areas and a shift away from public engagement on individual planning applications.
- A national housing delivery target of 300,000 homes per annum that will be distributed to local planning authorities by central government.
- Greater use of digital technology in the planning process.
- A national design guide to ensure high quality design.
- A new nationally set infrastructure levy to replace Section 106 contributions and the Community Infrastructure Levy.

The consultation on the Planning for the Future opened on 6 August and closed on 29 October 2020. The London Borough of Hillingdon submitted a response to the Consultation which was approved by Cabinet in October 2020. In the reasons for the decision, the minutes noted the Cabinet's concerns that the proposed changes had the potential to dramatically change how the Planning Service in Hillingdon was delivered, negatively impacting residents, business and other service users.

The government received over 40,000 responses to the proposed reforms which are still being reviewed. A government response to the consultation is not expected until autumn 2021.

Reactions to Planning for the Future's Proposals

The proposed reforms have received a strong level of public, local government and planning sector interest. They have also been subject to an inquiry and subsequent report by the House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee which took extensive evidence from the development industry, planning professionals, local authorities and a public survey.

Key issues identified by the Committee include:

- The lack of detail regarding the proposed reforms makes it a challenge to assess the possible practical implications.
- The proposed three zones approach for Local Plans is too simplified and will not create the certainty sought by developers or provide the necessary level of protection for the natural and historical environment. They will also be challenging to apply in complex urban areas.
- The need to address the conflict between speeding up the production of Local Plans and increasing community involvement.
- Concerns about the resources available to local authorities to achieve the ambitious timelines.
- The potential absence of a framework for strategic planning above the level of single planning authorities to address sub-regional or regional planning issues.

- The proposal to remove the ability of individuals to comment upon individual planning applications and the absence of any reference to the role of local councillors in the planning system within the white paper.
- Reforms to the 'standard method' for calculating housing needs within each local authority. The proposed housing requirements for London would be 93,500 per annum, which is the equivalent of a 155% uplift on average levels of the delivery.
- Concerns that changes to Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy could have negative impacts on the delivery of affordable housing.
- The clear need for additional resources for local planning authorities and a skills strategy to ensure that professional planners have the capacity to implement the reforms.

The House of Commons Select Committee also identified a list of important areas they believe have been omitted from the proposed planning reforms which should be addressed before the publication of a Planning Bill. These include:

- The 'levelling up' agenda.
- The high street and economic recovery from the pandemic.
- Addressing climate change.
- Improving sustainable transport.
- The delivery of commercial and industrial property alongside housing.

The Government's Emerging Response

In response to the growing political, public and media interest in the planning reforms, the Housing and Local Government Secretary Robert Jenrick MP gave several updates on the proposed planning reforms in a recent speech to the Local Government Association (6 July 2021). The key points from his speech included:

- A shift away from an intention to 'rip up the planning system and start again' to one of improvement.
- Emphasising that the planning changes would be 'council-led', with councils continuing to determine how to provide the homes needed in their area.
- That the planning system will be plan led with clear land allocations.
- There continues to be an intention to replace section 106 agreements with more predictable and transparent levies, which will be set locally.
- An emphasis on making the planning system more accessible through digital plan making.
- The intention to consider new ways of ensuring that sites get built out as expected.

Another area of note from the speech was reference to the publication of a Levelling Up white paper later in the year with a requirement for every local council to produce a ten or twenty-year levelling up plan for their area which is genuinely place-based.

Next Steps

The timetable for the publication of the draft Planning Bill and the government's response to the planning reform paper have not yet been set out in detail. However, it is likely that there will be

further publications towards the end of this year.

Implications on related Council policies

A role of the Select Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

The planning reforms will impact on the Council's planning policies in the future, however further detail is required until these impacts can be fully understood.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

None at this stage.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Planning for the Future White Paper

London of Borough of Hillingdon – Cabinet – October 2020 - Response to Government Consultation.

House of Commons Select Committee - The future of the planning system in England.

Local Government Association annual conference 2021: Secretary of State's speech - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)