

Making Planning Better

A response to the Planning White Paper

Good planning is essential for sustainable development and environmental protection. We have come together out of a deep concern about many of the proposals in the Planning White Paper which, if implemented, would be a backward step for the planning system. This statement sets out our shared vision of why planning matters, and what's wrong with the White Paper.

Why Planning Matters

Planning shapes the places where people live and work and the country we live in. Good planning ensures we get the right development in the right place and at the right time. It makes a positive difference to people's lives and helps to deliver homes, jobs and better opportunities for all whilst protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment and conserving the countryside and open spaces that are vital resources for everyone.

The Government's Objectives for the Planning System,
Planning Policy Statement 1 *Delivering Sustainable Development*

Planning is for delivering sustainable development

As PPS1 says, this is the core principle underlying planning. Planning delivers huge economic benefits in terms of securing investment, functioning places and environmental quality. But, contrary to the impression given by the Planning White Paper, it is about more than just economic development. It involves integrating a wide range of objectives and recognising that we need to live within environmental limits.

Planning is for people

Planning enables decisions about the future of areas to be democratic, accountable and made in the public interest. It secures public consent on necessary development. It helps deliver outcomes the market alone cannot deliver, such as affordable housing, urban regeneration, open space, biodiversity, open landscapes and community facilities. Planning gains its legitimacy as a decision-making process through being trusted by local communities and voluntary groups who should be involved at all stages in a process which must be transparent, accountable and accessible.

Planning is for the environment

Planning is a key tool for meeting environmental objectives. It helps to deliver high quality environments, by ensuring the long term protection and enhancement of our wildlife, landscapes and historic environment in both town and country. This is good for people, and has benefits for business too. Planning should secure appropriate protection, conservation and enhancement of sites of international, national and local importance and recognise that valuable wildlife and landscape features exist beyond designated sites. The planning system should make a much stronger contribution to reducing and adapting to climate change, for example by reducing the need to travel.

Planning helps to deliver homes, jobs and better opportunities for all

The planning system is also a key tool in facilitating economic goals. Planning enables the right type of development to occur in the right place, provides certainty to investors and enables different interests to be reconciled, with the overall goal of securing sustainable patterns of development.



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Where the Planning White Paper gets it wrong

Presumption in favour of development

The fundamental premise of the White Paper seems to be a rebalancing of the system in favour of economic development, even though there is no real evidence that the planning system is a constraint on productivity. This is contrary to the principles of sustainable development, which seeks to integrate objectives and recognise that we must live within environmental limits.

We believe that there should be no presumption in favour of development, and that the strength of the planning system in being able to take all interests into account must be protected. Legislation for major infrastructure should include a sustainable development duty.

Major infrastructure projects

As anticipated, the White Paper advocates a revised planning system for dealing with major infrastructure projects (also known as nationally significant infrastructure projects), such as motorways, airports, waste incinerators, nuclear power stations, nuclear waste sites, power stations and reservoirs. It sets out concerns that planning for major projects takes too long. However, the delay factors identified are more to do with the procedures governing complex schemes, or the result of poorly conceived schemes. The proposals in the White Paper threaten the involvement of local communities and the proper consideration of environmental impacts.

We believe that National Policy Statements must have credible community involvement, examine alternatives and be subject to robust assessment. An Infrastructure Planning Commission must be democratically accountable, allow proper public engagement, allow for the robust testing of evidence, and have environmental expertise.

Participation in local plans

Engaging local communities in the early stages of plan preparation is vital to producing effective plans which enjoy local support. Barker proposed reducing these opportunities by streamlining the preparation of local development frameworks, although we welcome the commitment in the White Paper of additional funding for Planning Aid.

We believe that public involvement in the issues and options stage should be retained, and, building on the Planning Aid commitment, more must be done to build the capacity of community groups to engage in plan-making.

Wildlife, habitats and Countryside under threat

The White Paper pays insufficient regard to the importance of a high-quality natural environment for business, for people, and in its own right. Prioritising economic development threatens wildlife and habitats on the urban fringe and in the wider countryside, yet planning needs to protect sites and join up fragmented landscapes to allow wildlife to adapt to climate change and to bring nature close to where people live.

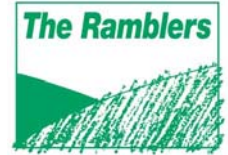
We believe that reforms should strengthen the potential of planning as an environmental tool and enhance the quality of the Green Belt. It should value the natural environment and ensure that its proposals add to, and don't compromise, objectives to enhance biodiversity and landscapes.

For more information on our campaign against proposals in the Planning White Paper, visit www.planningdisaster.co.uk

If you would like to discuss any of the issues raised in this statement in more detail, please contact: Owen Espley, Coordinator, Planning Disaster Coalition: Tel: 020 75661639; owen.espley@foe.co.uk



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