



# Planning for the Future

*A response by the UWE Bristol Planning School*

The [UWE Bristol Planning School](#) is one of the largest planning schools in the UK. It offers a number of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in planning, all of which are accredited by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI). We pride ourselves in delivering a high quality student experience, and are proud of the real-world emphasis that we embed across our learning and assessment. We are also committed to making planning education more flexible. To support this, the UWE Bristol Planning School has recently introduced two degree apprenticeship programmes and a fully online masters programme that includes students from across the world. We are committed to showcasing planning as a dynamic, creative and value-driven profession, and are seeking to play our part in making the profession more diverse, yet more inclusive. Our teaching is research-informed, with planning school staff contributing to the activities of the [Centre for Sustainable Planning and Environments](#) (SPE).

The UWE Bristol Planning School and SPE have taken great interest in the consultation surrounding 'Planning for the Future' and our collective staff and student communities have spent time reflecting on the questions that have been presented. Our responses below seek to draw out key points which we trust will be useful as thinking continues.

*The UWE Bristol Planning School and the Centre for Spatial Planning and Environments  
October 2020*

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Although we respond to a number of the consultation questions below, we would also like to make the following points from our position as an effective planning school accredited by the Royal Town Planning Institute:

- We wholeheartedly agree that 'planning matters' (para 1.7) and our staff-student community regularly engages with a variety of stakeholders, including the general public, to outline the importance of planning and the contemporary challenges that planners engage with, from climate change to the planning and design of healthy and sustainable communities.

- We recognise the complexities that are inherent in the current system (as initially presented through para 1.3), and agree with the principles of providing greater timeliness and openness within planning processes and naturally support the push for the creation of more 'ambitious places' (para 1.12). We wholeheartedly support the push to give communities a stronger voice and the emphasis given to the greater democratisation of planning, although we do identify below some of the question marks that we have on certain elements of the proposals.
- We agree to the type of change that can help to positively transform existing perceptions of the planning profession (para 5.14), and the need to continue building a cultural change amongst planners. We also recognise the importance of creative leadership and the role that planners can have in leading urban change. Indeed, we have recently set-up an online masters programme with the title 'planning and urban leadership'.
- We are pleased that the White Paper recognises the significance of the budget cuts that have been progressively made to local authority planning teams (para 5.12). We believe this under-investment provides a sound explanation to some of the frustrations that the White Paper refers to, such as the timescales over which plans are made. Notwithstanding the view that certain reform is necessary, we believe that re-investing in our planning teams would make the 'existing' system operate with far greater efficiency.
- We agree with the need for workforce planning and the need for increased skill-development amongst planners. We also support the skills and competencies that the White Paper specifically refers to, such as those centred around design and communication, together with increased digital and geospatial capabilities. While our academic programmes have been developing in these areas in recent years amongst the next generation of planners, additional investment needs to be directed towards the planning schools for these ambitions to be extended. University planning schools are ideally positioned to fully gauge the type of skills and competencies required by practice and all of the planning schools, including ourselves, have strong partnership provisions in place. For instance, at UWE Bristol, we support an employers' panel that advises on course content and syllabus delivery, while our programmes regularly support external speakers and real-life project briefs that involve actual clients and stakeholder groups (including the communities of Bristol).
- We are pleased that universities are mentioned (at para 5.2.4) as a key partner for helping local authority planning teams with their skill development, although they are listed as the last contributing stakeholder. This may be accidental, but we would actually position ourselves, and the wider network of RTPI-recognised schools, more significantly in the training and development of planners, at all stages of their career. While we agree that local government should have a prominent role, we do not necessarily believe they should be the lead player on the basis that not all planners are based in local planning

authorities. Indeed, latest data from the RTPI identifies public sector members as contributing to 59% of the total workforce of RTPI-accredited planners. It is important that the remaining 41% are sufficiently involved and engaged too as disparities in the skill-set between public and private sector planners will limit the type of change that can be delivered. This is particularly important given that planners regularly shift between the two sectors, while private sector planners often contribute to the provision of certain local government services. In order to avoid these biases, we believe that university planning schools should be given a leading role in this agenda since they are responsible for equipping planners with their initial education. Providing this solid grounding at the start will effectively position our future planners to become the type of professionals that the White Paper is encouraging, irrespective of what sector they ultimately move into. Universities also have an important role to play in supporting the lifelong learning of planning professionals. While the UWE Bristol planning school was particularly active in offering such training and development a decade ago, particularly in the area of design, this activity has progressively declined, at least to public sector clients, as a consequence of budgetary cuts.

- We agree that the English planning system requires a strong cadre of professional planners. Although the employment prospects for planning students remains very high, the reality is that the supply of new planners has been constrained and this has been evidenced to us through employers citing recruitment challenges. Sadly, planning is not on the radar for the majority of school leavers so there is a need to challenge the perceptions and language surrounding planning as a career. While the White Paper includes some positive sound-bites that will hopefully attract a new cadre of planners to step forward, we need to tackle some of the negative rhetoric that is currently putting students off. Interestingly, until the onset of the pandemic, the UK's planning schools were delivering planning education to a significant and growing number of international students. Although this is an endorsement of the quality found within the UK's planning schools, the fact that many were studying on government-funded bursaries identifies the importance and standing that planning has elsewhere in the world. We are pleased, in an English context, that levy-funded degree apprenticeships are beginning to lead to a step-change in student recruitment. We are also grateful to the bursaries, administered by the RTPI (but with MHCLG funding), that have helped a growing number of talented graduates, from a variety of fields, to enter into the profession. This level of support should be maintained moving forward.
- We strongly support any action that can help to make the planning profession more diverse and inclusive. While there is a need to expand the numbers within the planning profession, its membership should also seek to better reflect the diversity that is found across the communities that planners serve. The RTPI's [CHANGE strategy](#) marks an important step forward and it is pleasing to see that 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity' forms one of the four integrated pillars of the institute's corporate strategy for the period

to 2030. We, as a planning school, are seeking to play our part and the degree apprenticeships outlined above provide one such opportunity for presenting planning as a viable career to a broader spectrum of society.

- We are pleased to see that the White Paper acknowledges itself that not every part of the new system has been comprehensively covered (para 6.2), with recognition that further thought will be necessary in certain areas. This is understandable given the scale of the change being considered and some of our comments below are intended to support the evolution of this thinking. We do believe that universities, and the planning schools in particular, have a significant role to play in gathering the evidence to inform the type of re-workings felt to be necessary, and to critically explore some of the proposals being presented. Some of this research is already happening and therefore needs to be brought together but in those areas where it is not, a dedicated research programme should be formulated to provide insight, and encourage engagement, in certain features of the White Paper's proposals. For example, while PropTech is frequently cited through the document, limited research has been undertaken to explore the type of impacts that this could deliver or how this data can be meaningfully fed into plan-making and development management activities. Equally, while the proposals to involve the general public in digital planning activities (including 3D visualisation) are supported, research will be necessary to identify the skills and competencies that the general public will require so that they can meaningfully engage.

Our comments to the set consultation questions are presented below:

**Q1. What three words do you associate most with the planning system in England?**

Some of the words that arose from our discussion included: Democratic, holistic, rigorous, responsive, professional, aspirational, visionary, place-focused.

**Q2. Do you get involved with planning decisions in your local area?**

Since we are responding as a planning school and research centre, this is a difficult question to answer as a collective but it is fair to say that our community of staff and students share a strong affinity with what happens in their area, and take a strong interest in the wide-ranging changes affecting place.

**Q4. What are your top three priorities for planning in your local area?**

Although the question presses respondents to select three priorities from a list of eleven, the reality is that all are important and deserve equal weight in both plan making and development management processes. Indeed, the key to good planning is the ability to look at all of these issues in a local specific context, in a way that also takes into consideration the role of that locality in its region and in the country as a whole. In other words, it is important that each challenge is approached and managed in a holistic way; effective placemaking can never be approached on a single issue basis. Indeed, the priorities are interlinked and self-reinforcing. For

example, supporting the high street should also support the local economy, protection of heritage should be linked to the design of new homes and places. We know from the research evidence that young people have lower access to private gardens, so greenspaces are particularly important for their health and wellbeing and should be prioritised when building homes for young people. We also know that the quality of those greenspaces is extremely important, so it is not enough to simply protect them as a land use; they also need to be well designed and maintained, and provision increased where necessary.

Furthermore, unidentified priorities can also arise, such as the actions necessary to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, local planning authority teams should be commended for the fast pace change that they have enacted.

Lastly, in considering these priorities as a whole, it is essential for planners, and other key stakeholders, to bear in mind the needs of future generations and those without a voice.

**Q5. Do you agree that Local Plans should be simplified in line with our proposals?**

**A: No/not sure**

While we recognise the arguments for change, we believe the proposals raise more questions than they identify. There is nothing necessarily wrong with trying to simplify the categorisation of land to make the understanding of this simpler for everyone, but the proposals here do not outline how this would work. It is not clear who would have the power to designate land for growth/renewal/protect; the relative role of central government, local authorities, the Planning Inspectorate, local communities, housebuilders and other developers in this process is not explained. How frequently would the allocation of these categories be re-visited? How would disputes in categorisation be resolved?

The mentioned test for sustainable development is not defined. It is not made clear whether this is one test made by central government for the whole country, or whether local areas will have scope in the creation of this. At what stage of plan-making will this test be applied? One of the important features of Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environment Assessment) is that it starts at an early stage of plan-making in order to allow for appropriate mitigations to be subsequently incorporated. As it stands, the timescales for applying the test in the context of the stages outlined, is somewhat unclear. There is real risk that an advanced plan could be found to be unsustainable at a late stage, and be subject to a judicial review.

The 'other constraints' (as well as flood risk) that exclude land from 'growth' designation are not outlined, nor are the grounds on which they would be chosen. Some complexities are also identified, for instance where historic buildings are positioned in an area of growth.

The scales at which land would be designated into these broad categories is not clear. Would local authorities be able/required to do this on a street-by-street, neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood level, or would there be broad areas for each category with a

minimum size? Would there be scope for some form of layering with sub-areas being applied across certain parts of categorised land? Could there be scope for leaving certain areas uncategorised?

These sorts of decisions sound very time-consuming and resource intense, going against the stated wishes of streamlining and simplification.

The comment on including land specifically designated for CLH/self building is to be commended, but why is this only for areas of growth, not renewal/protect? The government could be more radical and consider adopting a policy here such as the one in One-Planet-Wales that allows genuinely sustainable development in open countryside.

Simplification per se is not a bad objective, but the proposals as outlined are unlikely to achieve the intended simplification desired. There is the potential for local authorities, developers and communities to have to comprehend and manage three different planning systems at a local level - in addition to another separate system for National Infrastructure Planning under the 2008 Act. These designations also need to have a degree of flexibility, and resourcing for regular reviews.

**Q6. Do you agree with our proposals for streamlining the development management content of Local Plans, and setting out general development management policies nationally?**

**A: Not sure**

It is unlikely that many people- planners, community members or developers- would support the idea that local plans should just simply repeat national policies, so the removal of this aspect of development management in local plans seems fairly uncontentious. However, what local plans do at their best is interpret these necessarily broad-brush policies to fit their local area. All local areas are in their own way exceptional; local place identity is hugely valued and valuable and it is highly unlikely that this could be replicated in some form of computer code. The idea that there is no need to adapt national guidelines to local circumstances, and that this can be done without the use of words, is at very best naively optimistic or at worst willfully ignorant of how the planning system actually operates and how locally particular, well designed developments can be brought about.

There is a need to think about the role and function of policy in development management - getting the policy right is a critical backstop for decision makers. It is, however, appropriate to consider which national policies do not require local specification to avoid lots of unnecessary repetition across local authority areas, but there is undoubtedly the need for local specificity in policy to support the development management process.

Our research into green infrastructure standards found that developers and local authority planners find the lack of certainty of what is required in terms of quality and quantity is

hindering the delivery of high quality places. Therefore the setting of national policy, with local design codes and rules to provide certainty for all is welcome.

However, this very much depends on the nature of the policies - it will be hard to develop policies that are fit for all areas, yet contain the necessary detail to remove the ambiguity in the current system. Anything that allows an increased ability for developers to use ambiguity in policy to deliver poor quality, unsustainable development will not deliver your aims to streamline the process and create high quality places. Similarly, the ability of local areas to develop their own design codes and rules could provide great benefits, however, if their rules and codes are subject to variation in planning inspectors interpretation of national policy as we see at present. This may mean that they are not able to require the level of quality/provision that their local areas need. We need to be cautious of developing policies, codes and rules that bring the high performing places down - we need to raise the standard at the bottom. In addition, what we want to avoid is a two tier system where some local authorities (particularly those in less affluent areas who may be in dire need of any investment) are setting lower standards than more affluent areas, as this will exacerbate inequalities.

**Q7(a) Do you agree with our proposals to replace existing legal and policy tests for Local Plans with a consolidated test of “sustainable development”, which would include consideration of environmental impact?**

**A: No/Not sure**

The issues with this have been outlined in response to Q5 above. The merit of replacing an existing tool with something new would depend entirely on the soundness of that new tool, its grounding in local democracy and the implicit and inherent value judgements which would be built into any assessment of sustainable development (i.e. how to weight society, environment, economy). Furthermore, there would need to be absolute clarity about weightings, should such an element be incorporated.

Environmental impact in particular, and considerations of sustainable development, are extremely site specific and largely dependent on use. It will be incredibly difficult, and actually could be counterproductive to your aims, to provide generic tests for environmental impact. Assuming these will be linked to specific sites, categorised as growth/renewal/protected, the environmental impact will be hugely dependent on what is proposed for the site, and this relates back to the design codes/rules that local authorities will be able to set and how site-specific they are able to be. For example, a development with little green infrastructure provision in a growth area could have a significant negative environmental impact, whereas a development with enough high quality green infrastructure threaded through the development to maximise opportunities for street trees, green roofs etc., could improve the environment (e.g. by increasing ecological connectivity). Would a 'one size fits all' environmental impact assessment pick up this variation? How would the quality of the development be enforced to ensure that

environmental impact was minimised if the generic assessment had assumed a certain quality would be forthcoming? We would need to move to a system where local authorities would need to be incredibly prescriptive on exactly what use, types, designs of development would go on to a site - this has enormous resource implications for local authorities.

**Q7.(b) How could strategic, cross-boundary issues be best planned for in the absence of a formal Duty to Cooperate?**

This question has not been tackled head on by the government since the abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategies in 2010. Strategic, cross boundary issues need to be tackled in a strategic, cross boundary way which is consistent and rigorous for the whole country. It needs to be properly resourced and democratically accountable in whatever form it might take.

The Duty to Co-operate has not provided the answer to the lack of strategic planning since 2010. This is primarily, although not exclusively, because the duty has been only a duty to cooperate not to agree outcomes and solutions. Strategic planning is an important function of planning, and it's absence has created problems for all players in the development process.

It is striking that the call for more and better strategic planning comes not just from those within the public sector, who understand the value of planning according to functional geographies, but from the private sector as well.

The re-introduction of proper strategic planning needs to be accompanied by good governance and clear structures within which governance takes place. One of the challenges for strategic planning currently has been the absence of a proper requirement for it, and the complexity of governance arrangements within which various strategic planning activities are taking place. Cambridgeshire, for examples, has 4 tiers of governance - with competing responsibilities on planning within it. This needs simplification in order for proper strategic planning activity to take place.

**Q8.(a) Do you agree that a standard method for establishing housing requirements (that takes into account constraints) should be introduced?**

**A: Not sure**

Similar to the points raised above about the methodology for assessing sustainable development, the key issue in this is how this method would be developed, on the basis of what specific values, and with whose input. Moreover, this method represents a giant leap in a journey of greater centralisation, something that the 2010 Conservative/Coalition government tried to dissociate with by the abolition of regional targets for housing- these measures represent more than a complete U turn here- moving the decision-making away from even regionally representative bodies.



To be able to nationally decide on housing numbers, there is a need to plan nationally, and think about the regional imbalances in the economy and opportunities across England. It seems highly unlikely that simply following demand, and the greatest need for affordability, while at the same time inserting such constraints as greenbelts and national parks, there will be space for the needed housing without some greater consideration of regional rebalancing. As Mark Twain famously said about land 'they're not making any more'. Simply by implementing nationally set targets, local authorities are not going to be able to find land which is socially and environmentally suitable to be built on which had been previously just forgotten about. Consequently, a system in the context of a national plan would be favourable.

Many countries have national plans, and the UK is a bit of an outlier in this respect. Any nationally imposed method for establishing housing targets will not work if there is no national spatial strategy linked to the provision of key infrastructure (e.g. transport, health, water, energy, green). The key to developing any top down targets must be that it is transparent, evidence-based and can be robustly defended. We cannot have a standard method that can then be compromised because it does not suit short-term political interests.

**Q8.(b) Do you agree that affordability and the extent of existing urban areas are appropriate indicators of the quantity of development to be accommodated?**

**A: Not sure**

These are very broad sweeping criteria which take no consideration of local differences and needs. Again, without a national plan, it is hard to see how using existing urban areas can be an appropriate indicator. What might be an existing urban area now, might not be the most appropriate place to concentrate new development in the context of climate change, population change and so on.

**Q9(a). Do you agree that there should be automatic permission in principle for areas for substantial development (Growth areas) with faster routes for detailed consent?**

**A: Not sure**

These proposals seem to have a misguided belief that reserved matters applications simply provide a checklist for development, to be ticked off and therefore are quick and easy in comparison to full applications. This is a vast oversimplification of a process which quite rightly can take years because it is vitally important that building which can last for decades is done right (as this white paper sometimes hints at). Issues of 'beauty' (or design quality) in housing necessitate attention to detail, such as ensuring the correct colour of a brick, its weatherability, size and longevity of bin storage to name just two very minor details.

Moreover, the assessment of land to give outline permission for developers will be a time and resource consuming process, something that local authorities, underfunded as they are now, do

not have capacity to deliver, let alone with the levels of public consultation suggested at this state. If the proposals will substantially fund both planning departments and planning education, this would be a good thing, as allowing LAs to establish how and where development should take place would be both more democratically for local residents and swifter for developers. But this could only work with substantial funding increases to the sector.

It is a misnomer to suggest that permission in principle will deliver faster development that is also of a good quality. The emphasis in the process shifts towards the local plan - and this would need to be much better resourced than it is currently in order to make this happen well. The stage post "permission in principle" will be key for ensuring quality, in the way reserved matters applications are currently. These are not unproblematic and the lack of resources for handling these properly currently can result in significant diminution in the quality of development.

The success of the proposal is also dependent on the degree to which local authorities are allowed to specify their requirements in their local rules and design codes. If they are allowed to be very prescriptive, down to the site level, then permission in principle may be acceptable, if the assumption is that development applications simply must comply with these local rules and codes. However, this will be dependent on local authorities being resourced sufficiently to develop these design codes/rules quickly, and then subsequently to resolve any remaining detailed matters. If there is a lag between an area being designated as a growth area, and the codes/rules being published, the unintended consequence could be a glut of extremely poor quality housing in the short term.

**Q9(b). Do you agree with our proposals above for the consent arrangements for Renewal and Protected areas?**

**A: Not sure**

In many ways, it is very difficult to see any differences in these suggestions from how the system operates at present. Since the early 1990s, development decisions have had to be made in accordance with the local plan, and levels of highly problematic permitted development are already occurring. If the 'new' system could increase regulation to stop some of the worse examples of office to residential conversions, in line with better building and design codes (which emphasised things such as livable space standard, access to public transport and open space), this would be a positive step if the legitimacy of the approach more conceptually is supportable. As noted above, the role for design codes/rules will be critical.

**Q9(c). Do you think there is a case for allowing new settlements to be brought forward under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects regime?**

**A: Not sure**

Far more detail is required on this before a fuller judgement can be made. That said, there has been a strong lobby for housing and new settlements to be brought into the NSIP regime for some time, and the reasons for and against have been well articulated. Two elements are key: firstly, DCOs for new settlements are only likely to work effectively in the context of National Policy Statement for New Settlements which is prepared to identify - at a national level - settlements that are of a sufficient size to be deemed to be in the national interest. This is - in effect - a national plan; secondly, the DCO approach would need to be modified to allow for the kind of flexibility that is inherent in placemaking over the longer term. The fixed and legal nature of DCOs in their current form, is unlikely to allow for the kind of flexibility that building communities need.

**Q10. Do you agree with our proposals to make decision-making faster and more certain?**

**A: Not sure**

It is not at all clear that the proposals will make decision-making faster and more certain compared to current arrangements within which Local Plans establish a level of certainty on the principle of development, noting too that the challenging consideration of detailing will remain in some form. The proposals simply lead to a shifting in weight to different elements in the process; these elements have the potential to become contested at different points.

An increasing use in digital technology could be a good thing, but fuller consideration needs to be given to who would be excluded by this process. As with comments Q9a above, to increase the speed of local authority decision making, without compromising on the quality of developments, the key thing needed is much greater resourcing of local planning departments. Decision making cannot simply be replaced by a computer algorithm because of the nature of knowledge and judgement in locally specific planning decisions.

Timeliness will also depend on the nature of the system. If the system aligns itself with the design codes/rule that local authorities set, then this may be beneficial. The danger with any digital technology is that it is extremely difficult (impossible) to include qualitative measures, and these will be a key component given the desire to increase quality. Using the example of green infrastructure, we can (and some areas already do) use quantitative measures to assess the proportion of greenspace in an area, the proportion of the population within walking distances of different size spaces. But the use of the spaces (and therefore the benefits derived from them for people) is hugely dependent on their quality and the amenities they provide in terms of lighting, seating, even paths, toilets, design of planting, colour, vegetation types etc. Some of these are much easier to measure than others, so the danger of a completely digital system is that it only makes decisions based on aspects that can be measured. Perhaps a two tier system that uses quantitative measures in tier one and qualitative measures in tier two (you have to get through tier one before progressing to tier two), would provide the right balance and free up resources to focus on the qualitative aspects of places.

It is noted that SoS call-in procedures are not considered within the scope of the review presented by the White Paper. Although it could be argued that the review is wide-enough, the role of central government in decision making should not be overlooked given that it has an important role to play with respect to timeliness and integrity.

A separate point in a way but para 5.18 explains how planning fees should continue to be set on a national basis although no explanation is provided to justify this decision.

**Q11. Do you agree with our proposals for digitised, web-based Local Plans?**

**A: Yes**

In theory, software tools have the potential to offer a lot to simplifying and making the planning process more accessible (although internet access cannot be assumed for all so there are important barriers here for marginalised communities). The most appropriate tools need to be researched, understood, and experience of their use properly shared. Importantly, local authorities need the resource, and training to make effective use of these tools. The capacity of the public and other key stakeholders to use these systems also requires research; broadband access is not universal and where households do have access, broadband speed and service can often limit certain functionalities.

Furthermore, as with any digital system, they are only as good as the data that goes into them. There is a massive shortage in data in some areas of planning, and this will need to be addressed with some urgency.

This is not just a case of digitising data - this will also involve a massive effort in data collection, which will require resourcing at a time when local record centres have faced systematic budget cuts for a number of years. There is the danger of a) holding off on plan development until the data are available, creating further delays in delivery or b) allowing poorly informed decision-making. Therefore, there is probably a need to phase in digitisation to allow data collection to 'catch up'. In addition, there is possibly an opportunity for better collaboration between data collection efforts (e.g. ecological surveys and hydrological modelling commissioned by developers are often not easily available and could reduce the effort needed for new data collection).

**Q12. Do you agree with our proposals for a 30 - month statutory timescale for the production of Local Plans?**

**A: Not sure**

The imposition of a target is welcome as is the presentation of particular plan-making stages. The proposals do look very ambitious, with the first plans (according to para 6.2) expected by the end of parliament. There is clearly an intention to front-load the system but there is concern

that all relevant parties will become overwhelmed with respect to what they are being asked to provide. For example, site allocation, to a high level of detail, comes at an early stage of the process and will require local authority planners to undertake a significant amount of investigation into the sites and the design principles and practices that will be required. This will require land-owners and developers to provide some potentially detailed information but whether they will do so remains to be seen. This activity also takes place at the same possible time as work on the sustainability test is progressed and as design guidance / design codes are worked up. These concerns might be unwarranted but there are concerns that this level of demand, and the protracted timescales that could arise, could generate far longer timescales. With this in mind, seeing a timeline of plan-making activity would be useful.

**Q13. (a) Do you agree that Neighbourhood Plans should be retained in the reformed planning system?**

**A: Yes**

With so much centralisation proposed in this white paper, it is hard to see what role neighbourhood plans would actually have. For neighbourhood plans to be meaningful, there needs to be greater funding for deprived communities to engage in this process so that it is not a preserve of white, middle class retirees, and that neighbourhood plans have real power to positively influence development in their area, such as demanding higher environmental standards in housing, demanding community/cultural spaces in their neighbourhoods, allowing community-led energy development, preserving green and public spaces, with leverage for funding for these areas.

It would be beneficial if Neighbourhood Planning Groups could inform the design codes/rules set by local authorities, particularly if these are set at the site level. However, it is clear that the capacity for local communities to engage in this way will need to be significantly upgraded.

**Q13 (b) How can the neighbourhood planning process be developed to meet our objectives, such as in the use of digital tools and reflecting community preferences about design?**

As expressed above, issues of digital exclusion do not seem to have been thought through properly, nor do the questions of how this will be resourced.

If local authorities are setting detailed design codes/rules down to the site level then neighbourhood planning could make a positive contribution to ensuring community preferences are considered. Alternatively, if local authorities are developing generic design codes/rules for their area, then neighbourhood planning groups could set site level requirements in line with the higher level codes set by local authorities.

**Q14. Do you agree there should be a stronger emphasis on the build out of developments? And if so, what further measures would you support?**

**A: Yes**

Land value tax on land given planning permission but not built out.

The enforcement of quality is critical. We have found time and time again in our research that quality of development diminishes through the development process so that even developments that appeared to be high quality at outline planning permission, are not once delivered. This is particularly critical in phased development, where the delivery of the public realm is pushed back to later phases and then is not delivered as the cost is too great. Local authorities need to be empowered and resourced to tackle poor delivery - a few high profile cases where developers were held to account would reduce this - at moment everyone knows that local authorities do not have the resources for enforcement.

Although para 5.28 outlines the importance of enforcement, there are no proposals relating to this area nor is there a specific consultation question. We trust NAPE (the National Association of Planning Enforcement) will provide a response to this White Paper but if not, a direct approach will be necessary.

**Q15. What do you think about new development that has happened recently in your area?**

**A: Mixed**

Outcomes are very mixed and context specific. Here is an extract from a current research paper focussed on design quality in four local authorities that is relevant to this question. Places are anonymised as the research is not yet published.

"No local authority officer was unilaterally positive about the quality of development achieved in X area, although one observed some *"more recent improvements"*. Whilst one X officer suggested that *"on some schemes you can push hard on quality and be really successful"*, most were more downbeat, suggesting that development quality was: *"a somewhat mixed picture ... some good schemes, some disappointment"*, *"the overall quality could be better"*, and *"if I were revisiting some schemes I'd like to have seen a better outcome. There's always compromise"*. There were four consistent points of detail to supplement this overall narrative of 'disappointment'.

- **Firstly, design outcomes are highly context and developer specific.** It was clear, for example, that officers in X felt that in some parts of their authority, achieving good design outcomes was easier than elsewhere. Conservation Areas, for example, were perceived as offering officers more control on design quality than elsewhere. Working with developers that were *'legacy minded'* was also frequently cited as often resulting in higher quality design outcomes, alongside original

landowners maintaining an interest in the site either as the master developer or through an arrangement with the delivery team. As three officers observed :

*"Our motivation is to create a great city – that's where we are coming from. Some developers want the same thing. Some are rascals".*

*"It's patchy ... there are good sites there are bad sites. It's a whole combination of factors ... but developer ethos, landowner ethos, some may be more legacy minded".*

*"Depends on the developer. Some are better than others. Some know they can get value from good design and some developers are not interested in that uplift they are interested in doing the same brick across the whole of the UK cranking down the price with the manufacturer and not interested in any design uplift".*

- **Secondly, there was a perception that higher design outcomes follow the market and were widely considered as more "achievable" in parts of X and X than elsewhere.** Officers in these expressed greater, although not absolute, confidence to negotiate with developers on design when faced with requests for change on the grounds of viability.
- **Thirdly, there is insufficient resource to support design in absolute terms across the four authorities, and an uneven distribution of that resource across X.** There was a strong sense across all authorities of *"doing our best within the resources we have available"*, but that better outcomes could be achieved with increased resources both in development management generally and in specialist expertise.

*"I think the problem in planning in general and specific to here is that we don't have enough specialist resource."*

*"Most planners are starting to say, well I'm not the specialist on that I just collect specialist's advice and the specialists are saying, I'm too busy to help you with that ... support from specialists is becoming more limited. There's a confidence point".*

*"I can't do 80% of what I'm asked to do. There's a lot going on and there's not enough resource to do it ... it's a real struggle, time and effort and requires specialist knowledge to actually provide a convincing determined argument, so that time issue is a really big factor".*

## **Q16. Sustainability is at the heart of our proposals. What is your priority for sustainability in your area?**

### **A: Other**

As with the second question, these priorities are self-reinforcing and display a worryingly limited view of what sustainability is from the government. Sustainability cannot be boiled down to 'more trees' - we have instances of local authorities, aware of the vogue for tree planting targets,

proposing to plant trees on valuable grassland habitats due to a perceived shortage of other available land - this is not sustainable. All of these priorities are very environmental, and even then are missing hugely important priorities (e.g. flood risk). What about social and economic sustainability? The entire premise of sustainable development is one of balance between environment, society and economy (although many favour a model where environment encapsulates the others as it is irreplaceable). This list encapsulates the entire problem with short sighted, simplistic thinking on how to achieve sustainable places.

**Q17. Do you agree with our proposals for improving the production and use of design guides and codes?**

**A: Not sure**

Yet again, the key issues in terms of this question will be in the detail of the implementation of this idea. As a principle, extensively involving diverse and representative local communities in drawing up creative and locally sensitive design guides which are legally binding and fully monitored and enforced for all new development in an area sounds excellent, as long these are resourced fully, and in a way which insures that all voices are heard, not just those of educated people with time on their hands, play a part in these. If instead this is an extra demand placed on already under-resourced local authorities who will be punitively judged on the speed of their preparation of such codes, this is a poor idea which will produce no tangible benefits.

Design codes can work - and can work really well - but in their current form they are dependent on the enthusiasm and motivation of the developer as to how effective they are. Design codes must be seen and executed as a creative not technical process. If local authorities are to be responsible for the production of codes then they need far greater design resources across the board. Gothenburg in Sweden employs nearly 100 planners on the preparation of codes.

The proposal to create a national design code is an interesting one and judgement is held until its release. It will be important to avoid the kind of homogenous development that the White Paper is currently critical about.

**Q18. Do you agree that we should establish a new body to support design coding and building better places, and that each authority should have a chief officer for design and place-making?**

**A: Yes**

As long as the chief officer for design and place making is an RTPI accredited planner and the new body should not be based in London- or even better have a base in each of the regions- as this would be seen as reinforcing certain attitudes and styles. It is very important this body is representative of the diversity of the UK, especially in terms of age, sex and ethnicity. It should be fully independent of government and be able to critique the government as appropriate.



**Q19. Do you agree with our proposal to consider how design might be given greater emphasis in the strategic objectives for Homes England?**

**A: Yes**

Points in Q18 and 19 are relevant here about detail and remit.

**Q20. Do you agree with our proposals for implementing a fast-track for beauty?**

**A: No**

There is significant subjectivity in deciding whether a scheme complies with any set of planning regulations be these more technical or more design focused. This is not something that can be achieved via a 'fast-tracking' without the potential for several accusations of favoritism and potential conflicts of interest to be hurled at any decision. Schemes need to be looked at in depth and in detail, and any developer that wants to produce a good quality product that they are proud of will want the time and attention paid to their scheme to ensure it is as good in built out as it was on paper in the design stage. There is also no evidence from recent experience in England that extending permitted development does anything other than produce poorer quality developments overall. The suggestions for 'form based development types' sound top down and insensitive to the different needs and vernaculars in different localities.

On the other hand, the idea of master planning large sites could be a good idea (previous points about resourcing still valid here) but there is no sense that this would make the process- overall- swifter, it would just change the stages in which decisions about development were made.

**Q21. When new development happens in your area, what is your priority for what comes with it?**

It is about achieving the best outcome for the context that is supported by the community, is well designed, and balances the different objectives of planning.

**Q22. (a) Should the Government replace the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 planning obligations with a new consolidated Infrastructure Levy, which is charged as a fixed proportion of development value above a set threshold?**

**A: Not sure**

The 'above a set threshold' point is a worrying phrase here. This could mean that areas which only have small sites are unable to get any revenue through this scheme, and the same for areas of very low demand, and with low land values. This would make the system more not less

inequitable. A land value tax- clearly higher on land with planning permission, to encourage developers to build out the permission they are banking, would be a better instrument, as this could apply on all sites, and would not lead developers to try to develop in smaller parcels of land to avoid being charged.

Incremental development in existing places can have a substantial negative impact on places. All new development should be required to contribute to local infrastructure. In areas with a lot of small brownfield sites, the development of multiple small schemes can have a large cumulative impact on local amenities. Often these small infill developments are carried out by the same local developer and they are not required to make a contribution - this may be beneficial in terms of supporting local firms - but can also be to the detriment of infrastructure provision.

**Q22. (b) Should the Infrastructure Levy rates be set nationally at a single rate, set nationally at an area-specific rate, or set locally?**

It is unclear what the difference is between 'nationally, at an area-specific rate' and 'locally'.

**Q22. (c) Should the Infrastructure Levy aim to capture the same amount of value overall, or more value, to support greater investment in infrastructure, affordable housing and local communities?**

**A: More value, if other sources for infrastructure investment are not forthcoming.**

There is an implied view that the level of received monies will be higher with a combined levy but no evidence or research is used to support this claim.

A separate point in way but it is still worth stating that there needs to be a well understood, universal definition of affordable housing, which should be separated from social housing etc. At the moment much 'affordable' housing is not affordable, and this allows local authorities and developers to say they are meeting their commitments without actually delivering housing that is accessible to those on even modest incomes.

**Q22. (d) Should we allow local authorities to borrow against the Infrastructure Levy, to support infrastructure delivery in their area?**

This should not be used as yet another way of making the richer areas richer and the poorer ones poorer and less able to borrow money to provide necessary infrastructure for their area.

**Q23. Do you agree that the scope of the reformed Infrastructure Levy should capture changes of use through permitted development rights?**

**A: Yes**

This is simply a question of fairness.

**Q24. (a) Do you agree that we should aim to secure at least the same amount of affordable housing under the Infrastructure Levy, and as much on-site affordable provision, as at present?**

**A: Yes**

Far more affordable housing needs to be provided across the country, and this should not simply be replaced with 'help-to-buy' housing. These schemes may be very useful for some, but go no way to adequately support the needs of millions of people excluded from decent (nowhere near beautiful) housing- housing which offers families the best start in life and supports healthy aging. Land should also be allocated for community land trusts, housing co-ops and other forms of alternative housing and measures should be taken to make the funding of these sorts of homes more accessible to all. This should be over and beyond the 'affordable' housing targets.

**Q24. (b) Should affordable housing be secured as in-kind payment towards the Infrastructure Levy, or as a 'right to purchase' at discounted rates for local authorities?**

No comment

**Q24. (c) If an in-kind delivery approach is taken, should we mitigate against local authority overpayment risk?**

No comment

**Q24. (d) If an in-kind delivery approach is taken, are there additional steps that would need to be taken to support affordable housing quality?**

No comment

**Q25. Should local authorities have fewer restrictions over how they spend the Infrastructure Levy?**

**Q25 (a) If 'yes', should an affordable housing 'ring-fence' be developed?**

**A: Yes**

This would seem a sensible suggestion given the pressures and associated risks of delivering affordable housing.

**Q26. Do you have any views on the potential impact of the proposals raised in this consultation on people with protected characteristics as defined in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010?**