

PLANNING FOR FUTURE – CONSULTATION



Andrew Towler, SLCC's National Planning Advisor, shares an overview on the Government's latest consultation on proposed changes to the planning system in England.



The Government has published a consultation paper which contains wide ranging proposals aimed at 'fixing' the planning system. Changes of interest to the sector include:

1. **Local use plans will be simplified.** It proposes that Local Plans should identify three types of land - **growth areas** suitable for substantial development, **renewal areas** suitable for development, and **protected areas**. In 'growth areas', outline approval for development would be automatically granted for forms and types of development specified in the Plan.
2. **Local Plans should set clear rules rather than general policies for development.** They'll be shorter in length ('we expect a reduction in size of at least two thirds'), as they will no longer contain a long list of "policies" - just a core set of standards and requirements for development.
3. **There will be new emphasis on engagement at the plan-making stage. At the same time, consultation at the planning application stage will be streamlined,** because this adds delay to the process and allows a small minority of voices...to shape outcomes'.
4. **There will be an emphasis on design guidance and codes** (which will set the rules for the design of new development). 'Based on genuine community involvement rather than meaningless consultation, so that local residents have a genuine say in the design of new development, and ensure that codes have real 'bite' by making them more binding on planning decisions'. Local planning authorities and neighbourhoods (through Neighbourhood Plans) would play a crucial role.
5. **There will be a greater focus on 'placemaking' and the 'creation of beautiful places'.** Development would be expected to create a "net gain" to an areas' appearance. A new body would be established to support the delivery of design codes across the country. Proposals for high-quality developments that reflect local character and preferences would benefit from "automatic permission" under a proposed new "fast-track for beauty". The local planning authority would be required to have a chief officer for design and place-making.
6. **Neighbourhood Plans should be retained but may change,** which 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... but we will want to consider whether their content should become more focused to reflect our proposals for Local Plans, as well as the opportunities which digital tools and data offer to support their development and improve accessibility for users'... we wish to encourage their continued use and help spread their use further, particularly in towns and cities'.
7. **A new 'single infrastructure levy' will replace the existing system for getting developers to fund the infrastructure through section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy.** The neighbourhood share of the Community Infrastructure Levy which ensures that up to 25 per cent of the levy is spent on priorities in the area that development occurred. Funding transferred to parish councils in parished areas 'should be kept', and 'would be interested in ways to enhance community engagement around how these funds are used, with scope for digital innovation to promote engagement'.
8. **Decision-making should be faster and more certain,** within firm deadlines, and should make greater use of data and digital technology.
9. **Enforcement powers and sanctions will be strengthened** 'so that communities can have confidence rules will be upheld'.
10. **A 'binding' housing requirement would be introduced** that local planning authorities would 'have to deliver through their local plans'.

Further information can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>.

The deadline for comments is the 29th October 2020.