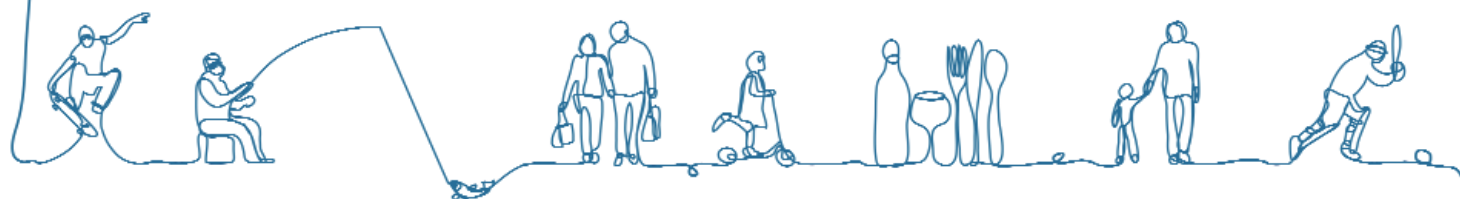
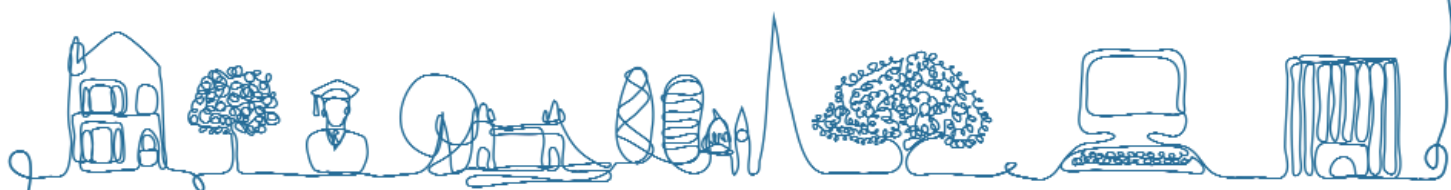




# Planning 2020 'One Year On' 21st Century Slums?



January 2020

## **Planning 2020 'One Year On' – 20th Century Slums?**

Raynsford Review of Planning in England

January 2020

**Published by the TCPA**



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**Raynsford Review of Planning in England**

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The Raynsford Review team is made up of the Review Chair, Nick Raynsford, and the TCPA staff team, led by Director of Policy Dr Hugh Ellis, with support from Jessie Fieth, Sneha Pednekar and Cova Cervilla.

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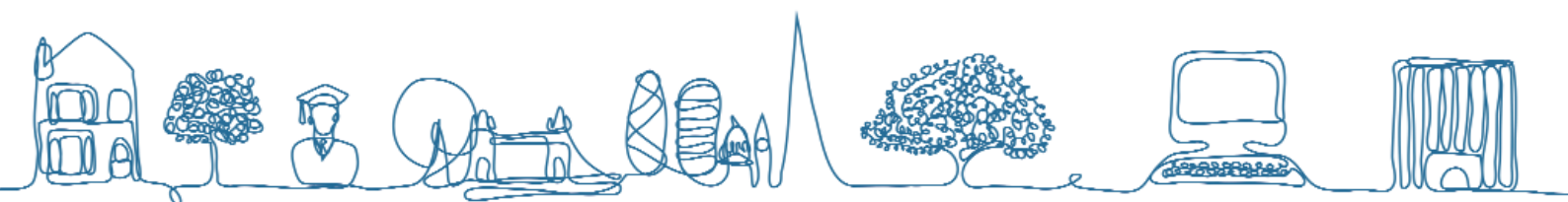
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# Foreword

It is now one year since the publication of the Final Report on our comprehensive Review of the English planning system. Our analysis revealed a system at breaking point. Seemingly endless tinkering with the system had made it bewilderingly complex but much less effective in delivering the outcomes society needs. Deregulation had weakened the planning process to such an extent that some local authorities had little control over their own urban environment. The planning service itself was, in many cases, underfunded and demoralised and denuded of the skills to effectively uphold the public interest. The Review’s Final Report contained a stark warning that unless radical change happened soon, we risked delivering the slums of the future.

Our call for a simpler, fairer system which works for all sectors and in the public interest has largely been ignored. As a result, the risk of building slums has become a reality. No system can be judged as ‘working’ if it cannot secure basic standards of light, space or places for children to play. While there remain many problems with the planning system, the final test must always be the practical outcomes on the ground, and particularly for those most in need of decent homes and communities. Our current situation is even more frustrating because we are capable of brilliant design outcomes which can deliver multiple and lasting benefits to all of us.

There are now some signs that the problem is being recognised, with the slow rediscovery of the importance of good design evidenced by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission. There is a wider cross-sector concern for the need to rebuild trust with communities. But despite these positive signals there appears to be no appetite for practical changes to

the core architecture of the planning system. Most important of all, the primary call of the Review, to fundamentally reframe the regulation of the built environment to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of people and communities, has not been taken forward.

England is not a poor nation, but we are badly organised, and this lack of organisation is not simply about a failure to use our limited resources efficiently; it is about a system that, in too many places, is doing real harm to people’s wellbeing, both now and for future generations. Placing vulnerable people in tiny flats with no windows damages their life chances. Failing to organise ourselves in the face of the overwhelming evidence of the climate crisis is a generational betrayal of the future. It is hard to feel anything but a sense of shame in our collective failure to plan rationally and humanely in the face of such self-evidently vital challenges.

In publishing this assessment of the year that has passed since the publication of the Review’s Final Report we hope to energise the debate about planning reform. I hope the government will recognise that planning is not only a part of the fabric of our democracy, but is a key part of the solution to many of the societal challenges we face. Our choice was and remains whether we have the political will to secure a fair and resilient future for all parts of our society.

**Nick Raynsford**

January 2020







**The Wellstones permitted development/conversion site in Watford. Surely we can do better than this in providing new affordable homes in good-quality living environments?**



## Section 1

# Taking stock

### Introduction

This short report is intended to take stock of English planning one year on from the publication of the Final Report of the Raynsford Review of Planning in England (the Review).<sup>1</sup> While Brexit has dominated government attention, many of the underlying domestic issues of housing, inequality and climate change have intensified. As we begin 2020 with a new government, this report offers a reminder of the scale of the challenges that we face. It also provides a timely reminder of the Raynsford Review’s call for a renewed planning system, focused on improving the health and wellbeing of all our communities.

The Review was designed to provide an in-depth analysis of the English planning system, and after 18 months of research its Final Report was published in November 2018. The Review dealt with the inspirational origins, legislative evolution and current practice of the system and made four significant contributions to the planning reform debate:

- The Review cut through the negative myths about the origins of town planning, highlighting its practical objective to improve the quality of people’s lives. The English planning system was not set up as an ideological experiment; rather, it is an important part of the fabric of our democracy, with the potential to support the long-term wellbeing of our society.
- The Review set out the growing and compelling evidence of the importance of planning decisions for the health and wellbeing of people’s lives. The Final Report noted the particular influence of housing standards, green infrastructure and walkable communities on health outcomes for people.

- The Review catalogued the multiple layers of dysfunction within the current planning system, from a lack of national and strategic planning to a failure to build trust at community level. It recorded how funding cuts and negative messages about planning have led to a demoralised planning service, and highlighted how central government has systematically taken power away from local councils.
- The Review also recognised that planning was still capable of some remarkably good outcomes, but these were the exception rather than the rule and often depended on officers and politicians working closely with a shared vision. These outcomes were described as being delivered ‘*despite the system*’ and not because of it.

Given this picture of a planning system which had lost its way, the Final Report set out an ambitious narrative for fundamental change. The recommendations would create a new system which would:

- Have a clear purpose, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of people, within a framework of long-term sustainable development, so as to create places of beauty, safety and resilience.
- Offer greater certainty and predictability to all parties, enabling investors, developers and communities to feel more confident in a genuinely plan-led system.
- Provide a clearer definition of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in relation to planning, and a more logical framework for decision-making at the most appropriate level.
- Achieve a better alignment between the different government departments and their agencies, as

#### Note

- 1 *Planning 2020 – Final Report of the Raynsford Review of Planning in England*. TCPA, Nov. 2018.  
<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/raynsford-review>



well as within local government, in planning for the needs of the whole nation.

- Secure a fairer balance between the interests of landowners and the public in terms of sharing the uplift in value derived from development.
- Attract sufficient people with energy, talent and commitment into planning in both the public and private sectors to ensure an adequate supply of imaginative, skilled and committed planners to deliver inspirational place-making.

## What has happened since publication of the Review’s Final Report?

The Review influenced the debate about the future of planning and was positively received across all sectors. It is significant that there was no substantive challenge to the overall analysis of the Final Report, although there were different degrees of enthusiasm for individual recommendations. The nature of this influence can be distilled into two major themes:

- The Final Report has countered the unevidenced myth-making about the founding purpose of town planning and has created space for a more balanced view of its evolution and benefits. Influential commentators who once freely described planning as a ‘Stalinist’ experiment have now become advocates of both good design and even strategic planning.
- The Final Report ignited a debate on the core purpose of the planning system. This is manifest in a growing call for a fundamental change to the philosophy of how we regulate the built and natural environment, in order to put the health and wellbeing of people, rather than simply growth, at the heart of the system. The debate itself is not new, but is now a mainstream part of the conversation, particularly in local government.

For this reason the Review contributed, along with the work of many other organisations, to changing the terms of the debate about the planning system. It is

now possible to rationally discuss the value of planning to health and wellbeing and the importance of regional and national planning. There is also a strong public demand, expressed through the climate emergency movement, for the positive use of planning to radically reduce carbon dioxide emissions. ***However, while these emerging attitudes may be a precursor to change, we should not mistake them for practical action.***

## How has the government responded to the Review’s recommendations?

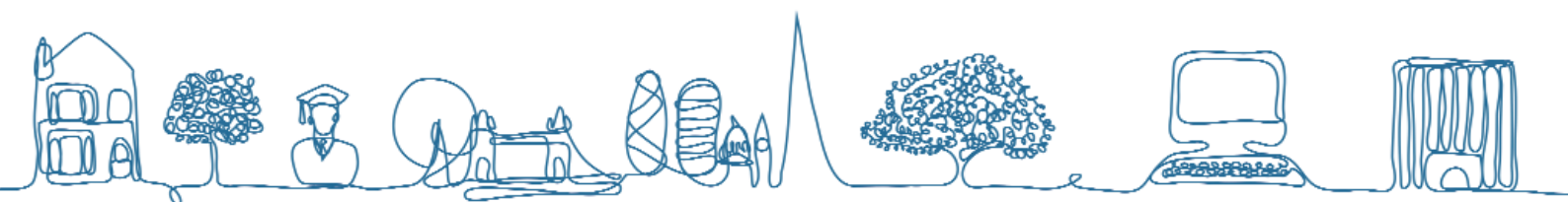
Given the positive response of the wider sector, the government’s muted response feels out of step with a changing public mood around the value of planning. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has made no commitment to support the Review’s recommendations. While feedback from civil servants and Ministers has been cordial and constructive, little action has taken place around the six priority areas noted above and considered further below.

### Priority area: The purpose of planning

There has been no action to create a clear purpose for the planning system in law or policy. As a result, the confusion and conflict over what the planning system is meant to achieve remains – and has, in fact, intensified. The tension between the publication of a new government design guide<sup>2</sup> and the outcomes of the relaxation of permitted development perfectly illustrates a system which lacks a credible and coherent narrative. There have been two major opportunities to address this issue through the 2018/2019 revision to the National Planning Policy Framework and through the draft Environment Bill, which amends planning legislation. However, national policy remains focused on growth in the *number* (if not the quality, affordability or type) of housing units and remains weak on both delivery mechanisms and basic outcomes for people.

### Note

- 2 *National Design Guide. Planning Practice Guidance for Beautiful, Enduring and Successful Places.* Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Oct. 2019.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/843468/National\\_Design\\_Guide.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/843468/National_Design_Guide.pdf)





The Environment Bill has ignored the clear calls in the Review to ensure that environmental principles apply to the town planning regime. The Bill now includes consideration of land but specifically excludes buildings and ‘structures on land’,<sup>3</sup> an omission which not only ignores the need for a clear purpose for planning but further complicates and fragments the way in which we regulate the built and natural environment.

#### Priority area: **Strengthening the plan-led system**

While there was widespread agreement with the Final Report’s conclusions that Local Plans needed an enhanced legal and policy status to create the necessary certainty for all parties, nothing has been done to achieve this objective. The status of development plans remains conditional on a range of complex factors<sup>4</sup> and is set within a discretionary system that commands little public or local political understanding and support. The status of Neighbourhood Plans has, theoretically, been strengthened, and it is clear that MHCLG sees a more important and complex role for such plans.<sup>5</sup> But the idea that Neighbourhood Plans could or should be required to take on this policy responsibility is flawed – not least because they are discretionary, dependent on hard-pressed volunteers, and under no obligation to include policy on health or climate change.

#### Priority area: **People and planning**

The lack of trust between communities and the planning system was a major theme of the Final Report. While national government has continued to champion neighbourhood planning as a way of reconnecting the system with people, it has taken no action to deal with the fundamental power imbalances that are a defining feature of the system. There has been no policy statement to clarify the role of communities in planning or to articulate a clear participative governance model.

There has been no further allocation of resources to help communities engage in local plan-making or major infrastructure decisions. Instead, the wider centralisation of policy on key issues such as shale gas extraction and permitted development has removed local accountability.

#### Priority area: **Strategic planning**

One of the most obvious conclusions highlighted by the Final Report was that the planning structures of the English system were fragmented and failed to reflect the functional geography of the country. National, regional, as well as local and neighbourhood planning are all needed to create a self-supporting and effective system. There has been no coherent action on any of these issues. Progress has been made across the country with different strategic planning models, some of which are being developed outside the system to try to align place-making with long-term economic and infrastructure planning. Devolution remains a government objective, but the pace of change has slowed significantly. In relation to national planning, there has recently been a renewed interest from government in a national infrastructure plan,<sup>6</sup> but at the time of writing no progress had been made with this policy aspiration. Announcements that have been made about the prioritisation of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc have not been accompanied by a clear delivery framework or robust governance structure.

#### Priority area: **Land value and betterment taxation**

There have been some significant and positive changes to the policy on land value and betterment. Viability testing, which proved so damaging to the public interest, has now been significantly changed by the 2018 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and subsequent guidance. This has the potential to modify the large and unearned windfall payments that landowners have

#### Notes

- 3 Environment Bill. House of Commons, Oct. 2019. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2019-2020/0003/20003.pdf>
- 4 Including the NPPF policy tests of five-year land supply and housing delivery. The latter delivery test is deeply controversial since local planning authorities often have little control over build-out rates unless they are delivering homes themselves
- 5 *National Planning Policy Framework*. CP 48. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Feb. 2019. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/810197/NPPF\\_Feb\\_2019\\_revised.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf)
- 6 The government committed to publishing a National Infrastructure Strategy in the October 2019 Queen’s Speech



received in recent years. It will, however, take time for this new metric to be adopted through Local Plans. Greater flexibility on being able to pool sums from planning obligations is also welcome. However, further action is needed in relation to the Compensation Code and the definition of hope value. Despite positive statements made by the Chancellor<sup>7</sup> and attempts in Parliament to make such changes, they have not been supported by the government. No action has been taken to deal with the wider question of how Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 payments tend to reinforce regional inequalities by accruing significant benefits only in high-demand areas. The Review made clear that Development Corporations still offered the best way of both achieving delivery and capturing land values. The government has shown, through a new consultation, renewed interest in their use. However, at the time of writing, and after a decade of consideration, no New Town Development Corporations have been designated. The potential for these bodies to effectively capture land values has not been realised.

#### Priority area: Skills, morale and capacity

One of the stand-out issues for the Review was how low the morale and capacity of the public sector planning service had become, and particularly how major budget cuts have driven this decline. Government has created more freedom to raise income from planning fees and there has been some expansion of planning performance agreements whereby developers pay for an agreed service level. Capacity funding has been offered to those areas bidding for large-scale growth, although the amounts remain relatively modest. Independent initiatives, such as the Public Practice not-for-profit social enterprise, are beginning to change perceptions of the profession and attract a new generation of built environment experts into local planning authorities. But

these changes, while welcome, are not yet restoring skills, morale and capacity to the levels necessary to deliver an effective, skilled and motivated planning service.

### The government’s future ‘reform’ agenda

A Green Paper on speeding up and streamlining the planning system was due in 2019. Whether it is published in 2020 depends on political events, but we understand that this was not intended to be, and is unlikely to be, a fundamental new programme for planning which takes forward the Review recommendations. An MHCLG review of permitted development was announced in March 2019 but is yet to report.<sup>8</sup>

Rather than taking stock and seeking to create a more coherent and effective framework, the government has continued with a series of incremental changes which have not addressed the fundamental problems identified in the Review. The government has announced its intention to extend permitted development by allowing two new floors to be added to existing buildings and by allowing demolition and rebuilding through ‘permission in principle’. These proposals appear to ignore widespread concerns about the outcomes of deregulation, and contradict more positive government statements around improving building standards.

With no new resources for social housing or the planning service announced in the 2019 Spending Round,<sup>9</sup> the government’s planning and housing agenda appears stuck. It is not yet clear whether the more muscular approach for bodies like Homes England will enable a stronger public sector role. Nor it is clear how government can square the circle between an

#### Notes

- 7 L Halligan: ‘Sajid Javid backs ‘morally justifiable’ tax on landowners to tackle housing crisis’. *Daily Telegraph*, 18 Nov. 2019. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2019/11/18/sajid-javid-backs-morally-justifiable-tax-landowners-tackle/>
- 8 ‘Planning: independent report on build out rates and permitted development’. HCWS1408. Written Statement by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire, 13 Mar. 2019. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-03-13/HCWS1408/>
- 9 *Spending Round 2019*. Policy Paper. HM Treasury, Oct. 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-round-2019-document/spending-round-2019>



ideological commitment to deregulation and the desire for beauty in design and greater public engagement suggested by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission.<sup>10</sup>

## How has the wider sector responded to the Review’s recommendations?

The Review set out ambitious recommendations for government, but also for the wider sector, including the professional bodies, planning schools, NGOs, trade organisations, and local government. Overall, these organisations have more freedom to adopt the recommendations.

A coalition of more than 50 organisations has come together to support the call for a ‘Healthy Homes Act’ which flows directly from the Review analysis of the impact of permitted development and the need for legal safeguards on building standards. The ‘Healthy Homes Act’ initiative has been supported partly by the Nationwide Foundation and driven by the TCPA. There is some real hope that this approach will be successful in securing support for new principles related to health and wellbeing being incorporated within planning and building regulations. There has been strong support for such a reform from public health professionals and an active debate as to whether planning, overseen by MHCLG, should be much more closely aligned with the Department for Health.

Local governments bodies, such as the Greater London Authority, were generally enthusiastic about the call for a system which supports health and wellbeing. Some local authorities have adopted stronger policies around health and wellbeing in their draft Local Plans, particularly through Health and Wellbeing Strategies which highlight the role of place-making. While we cannot quantify its extent, there is a tangible sense of renewed ambition for high-quality design outcomes among local authorities. In some cases, this is

demonstrated by local conversations between planning, public health, housing and regeneration teams, reminiscent of the ambition of the ‘total place policy’. Parts of the private sector have been equally supportive of the need for certainty and ambition for high-quality and inclusive design. Skilled private sector practitioners can only apply their professionalism where law and policy support high-quality outcomes. There continues to be exciting innovations from the private and third sectors on technology use in planning practice, public understanding and public participation, but these initiatives tend to be exemplars rather than mainstream parts of planning practice.

There has also been some notable inaction. Despite our best efforts, no action has emerged on Recommendation 2, ‘A cross-sector compact on the values of planning’, which focused on a joint compact on the value of planning. It is also significant that no progress has been made on the ethical standards of professionals who work in the built environment. This is despite cases such as the Watford example set out in Box 1 in the following section, where a planning inspector approved development with no windows while acknowledging that it would make very poor-quality dwellings. He did this because there was no choice under the law but was plainly unsupported by any professional code which might have enabled practitioners not to engage in decisions which so clearly create harm to the public.

There has also been a variable response from planning schools to the call for a greater focus on community development skills and opportunities for students to work directly with communities as part of the wider corporate social responsibility of universities. Some institutions have seized this agenda, but much more could be achieved for both communities and the skills and self-confidence of planners. The tendency of some planning schools to emphasise real estate skills has not always been matched with equal emphasis on climate change, public health and community participation.

### Note

- 10 *Creating Space for Beauty. The Interim Report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission.* Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, Jul. 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creating-space-for-beauty-interim-report-of-the-building-better-building-beautiful-commission>



## Section 2

# The state of English planning in 2020

Section 2 of this report is not intended to be a detailed examination of all aspects of the English planning system,<sup>11</sup> but instead aims to highlight just a few of the stand-out challenges that have come to dominate the debate about English planning over the last 12 months. There have been a significant number of reports and investigations into planning during this period. Demos has published a comprehensive study on the state of public participation and trust in planning.<sup>12</sup> The UK2070 Commission has set out powerful evidence of the stark regional inequalities in the UK and how strategic planning forms a key part of the solution.<sup>13</sup> The Committee on Climate Change has highlighted how modern housing is not fit for purpose to meet the climate challenge.<sup>14</sup> The National Audit Office has explored housing delivery challenges, particularly highlighting skills and capacity issues.<sup>15</sup> The RTPI has powerfully made the case for renewing the resources of the planning service and the vital importance of planning in the public interest.<sup>16-18</sup> Finally, the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission’s Interim Report

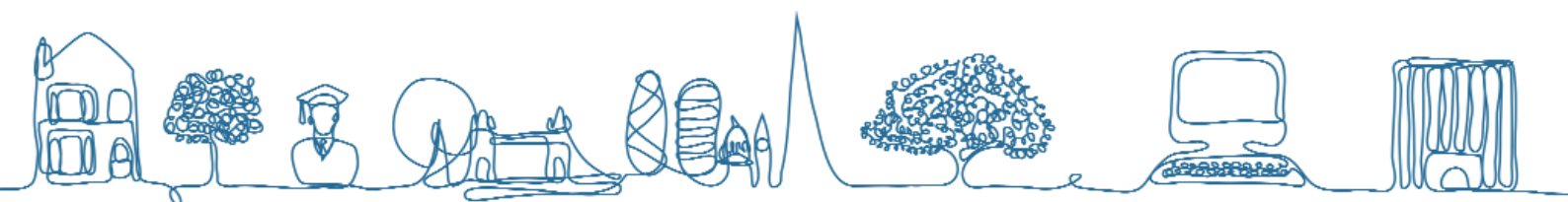
has acknowledged the poor design outcomes from the current system.<sup>19</sup>

However, as we enter 2020, there are a number of key issues which remain unresolved, including the following:

- ***The continuing stark evidence about the poor quality of many new homes.***
- ***The continued housing crisis and particularly the issues of affordability, delivery and betterment taxation.***
- ***The inadequate state of strategic planning in England.***
- ***The ‘people and planning’ question and the continued disconnect between communities and the planning process.***
- ***The state of the public planning service.***
- ***The growing concerns as to whether planning is fit for the future. Is the system ready for the challenges of climate change, inequality, health, biodiversity loss and technological change?***

### Notes

- 11 Such a review is, however, set out in *Planning 2020 – Final Report of the Raynsford Review of Planning in England*. TCPA, Nov. 2018. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/raynsford-review>
- 12 B Glover: *People Powered Planning: How to Better Involve People in Planning to Get More Homes Built*. Demos, Sept. 2019. <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/People-Powered-Planning.pdf>
- 13 *Fairer and Stronger: Rebalancing the UK Economy*. Second Report. UK2070 Commission, Sept. 2019. [http://uk2070.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/UK2070\\_SECOND\\_REPORT\\_EXECUTIVE\\_SUMMARY.pdf](http://uk2070.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/UK2070_SECOND_REPORT_EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY.pdf)
- 14 *UK Housing: Fit for the Future?* Committee on Climate Change, Feb. 2019. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/uk-housing-fit-for-the-future/>
- 15 *Planning for New Homes*. National Audit Office, Feb. 2019. <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/planning-for-new-homes/>
- 16 D Slade, S Gunn and A Schoneboom: *Serving the Public Interest? The Reorganisation of UK Planning Service in an Era of Reluctant Outsourcing*. RTPI, Jan. 2019. [https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/3220094/serving\\_the\\_public\\_interest\\_-\\_v2\\_-\\_2019.pdf](https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/3220094/serving_the_public_interest_-_v2_-_2019.pdf)
- 17 *Resourcing Public Planning: Five Stories about Local Authority Planning in England and Recommendations for the Next Chapter*. RTPI, Jul. 2019. <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/3415870/ResourcingPublicPlanning2019.pdf>
- 18 *Ambitions for the North: A Spatial Framework for People and Places in the North of England*. Research Paper. RTPI, May 2019. <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/3355428/ambitionsforthenorth.pdf>
- 19 *Creating Space for Beauty. The Interim Report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission*. Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, Jul. 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/creating-space-for-beauty-interim-report-of-the-building-better-building-beautiful-commission>





## Current challenges

### Housing quality

The Raynsford Review raised significant concerns about the quality of many new homes being delivered today. The last 12 months have seen growing confirmation of these outcomes both in the formal analysis of permitted development and in individual decisions, illustrated most acutely in cases such as that outlined in Box 1 on the following two pages.

The evidence of the negative impact of the extension of permitted development for the conversion of office, commercial and industrial units to housing is now overwhelming. Some people continue to argue that the provision of housing units, however sub-standard, is better than no homes at all for those in greatest need. This is not an argument that bears close scrutiny. Housing some of the most vulnerable people in our society in substandard conditions and unsuitable locations such as those in the Watford case or in high-rise office blocks like Terminus House in Harlow<sup>20</sup> damages their health and life chances. It is, as the media have commented, little more than ‘human warehousing’.<sup>21</sup> Permitted development also directly undermines the provision of housing for those most in need as it excludes any possibility of Section 106 contributions from the developer.

The worst examples of these places are unfit for human occupation when they are completed. **It is right and proportionate, therefore, to conclude that government policy has led directly to the creation of slum housing. Such slums will require immense public investment, either to refurbish them to a proper standard or to demolish them. Morally, economically and environmentally it is a failed policy.** In any event, there are real alternatives to using permitted

development rights to meet housing need, such as building council houses in well planned communities or refurbishing redundant commercial buildings in appropriate locations to a high standard.

We now have a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the relaxation of permitted development, notably through the assessment set out in *Understanding the Impacts of Deregulation in Planning* by Ben Clifford and colleagues,<sup>22</sup> published in 2019. The study catalogues not only the poor conditions which result from much of this permitted development, but also its impact on the availability of office and commercial employment space and the financial loss to local authorities in contributions for affordable homes. The authors summarise the situation in this important conclusion:

***‘In this book, we have presented our evidence of the damage that the ideological fantasy of deregulating planning in England to solve the housing crisis has delivered. Given the pace of change in the built environment this is a legacy that will potentially blight communities and environments for years to come. But there are alternatives. Another world is possible. We can’t but hope that the planning system is supported to do better in future, as part of a broader reconsideration of how our society supports the good life for all its members.’***

While the outcomes of deregulated planning are now clear, it would be a mistake to assume that development with planning permission is always delivered to a decent design standard. The evidence of poor build quality, poor housing design, and lack of local social facilities and walkability remains worrying but unquantified. New research by the Place Alliance<sup>23</sup> may fill this gap, but there is no doubt that poor-quality development damages the case for the homes we need and exacerbates local political division.

#### Notes

20 M Precey and L Cawley: ‘Inside Harlow’s office block ‘human warehouse’ housing’. *BBC News*, 3 Apr. 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-47720887>

21 *Ibid.*

22 B Clifford, J Ferm, N Livingstone and P Canelas: *Understanding the Impacts of Deregulation in Planning. Turning Offices into Homes?* Palgrave Macmillan, 2019

23 See the Place Alliance website, at <https://placealliance.org.uk/>





**Box 1 Permitted development, Wellstones, Watford, Hertfordshire**



Nick Raynsford at the Wellstones permitted development site in Watford

The Review described in detail how the permitted development regime has been radically expanded from small-scale developments, with marginal impacts on people, to a much wider use for the conversion of commercial buildings to housing units. Under this regime full planning permission is not required and only a very limited number of issues can be considered, such as transport and flood risk. The design,

overall location, contributions for educational provision, and the provision of recreation and play space, along with many other factors, cannot be considered. The Wellstones case highlights that Watford Council tried to resist this development, which they were clear would result in ‘oppressive’ living conditions. The council refused the prior approval application, which was then appealed. The appeal was upheld despite the substandard nature of development because under the current law the inspector had no choice but to do so. Because there is no legal duty in the planning system to secure people’s health and wellbeing and nothing in professional ethical codes to help defend practitioners from being involved in such cases, the development was approved. The inspector’s concluding remarks are telling:

*‘I recognise that the proposed units are small and that, for example, living without a window would not be a positive living environment. However, the provisions of the GPDO 2015 require the decision makers to solely assess the impact of the proposed development in relation to the conditions given in paragraph PA.2.’*

The fact that such development may breach the provision of separate housing legislation on dwellings unfit for human habitation is a signal of just how broken the English planning system has become. The Mayor of Watford is clear that his council wants to be a pro-growth authority but that this development is a ‘totemic’ sign of the lack of control that local politicians have over their community. It was also clear that in Watford and the wider sub-region, permitted development has damaged the economy by removing office and commercial premises in a completely unplanned way.

*‘The thing that people find really frustrating is when there is clearly a case where you have windowless development, unsafe, tiny units... it is not fair or right that anyone should live in those types of conditions; but we are not able to reject those applications. ... The one thing that I would like to do is to scrap permitted development rights so that all planning applications actually have to be considered by local councillors, so that we can decide: are they in the best interests of this town? And so that we can make a balanced decision. At the moment we have no control, developers have all the power, and when you get proposals coming forward which are clearly wrong we are not able to stop them.’*

Peter Taylor, Mayor of Watford, speaking in an interview at <https://www.dropbox.com/s/gqt33vitoh8tnt0/Mayor%20Interview%20%28questions%20added%29.mp4?dl=0>

**Housing delivery**

The extent of the housing challenge is well understood – we are not building enough homes to supply those in greatest housing need, and there is a chronic shortage of socially rented homes. The extent of the current

housing crisis is starkly reinforced by the following data:

- The number of households in England is projected to increase by 4 million (a 17% increase) over the next 25 years, from 22.9 million in 2016 to 26.9 million.<sup>24</sup> This equates to 159,000 households being formed each year. While this figure is a significant revision

downwards from previous estimates, it masks hidden households which would form if affordable homes were available.

- The latest official statistics estimate that the national total for rough sleeping was up 169% since 2010 and that total local authority homelessness case

actions stood at 274,310 in 2016/17, a 34% rise since 2010. These numbers do not consider hidden homelessness and do not show a full picture of the current situation in Britain; however, what is clear is that there has been a substantial expansion in all forms of homelessness since 2010.<sup>25</sup> In March 2019,

**Note**

24 *Household Projections in England: 2016-Based*. Office for National Statistics, Sept. 2018. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/bulletins/2016basedhouseholdprojectionsinengland/2016basedhouseholdprojectionsinengland>

**Note**

25 S Fitzpatrick, H Pawson, G Bramley, S Wilcox, B Watts and J Wood: *The Homelessness Monitor: England 2018*. Crisis, Apr. 2018. [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/238700/homelessness\\_monitor\\_england\\_2018.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/238700/homelessness_monitor_england_2018.pdf)



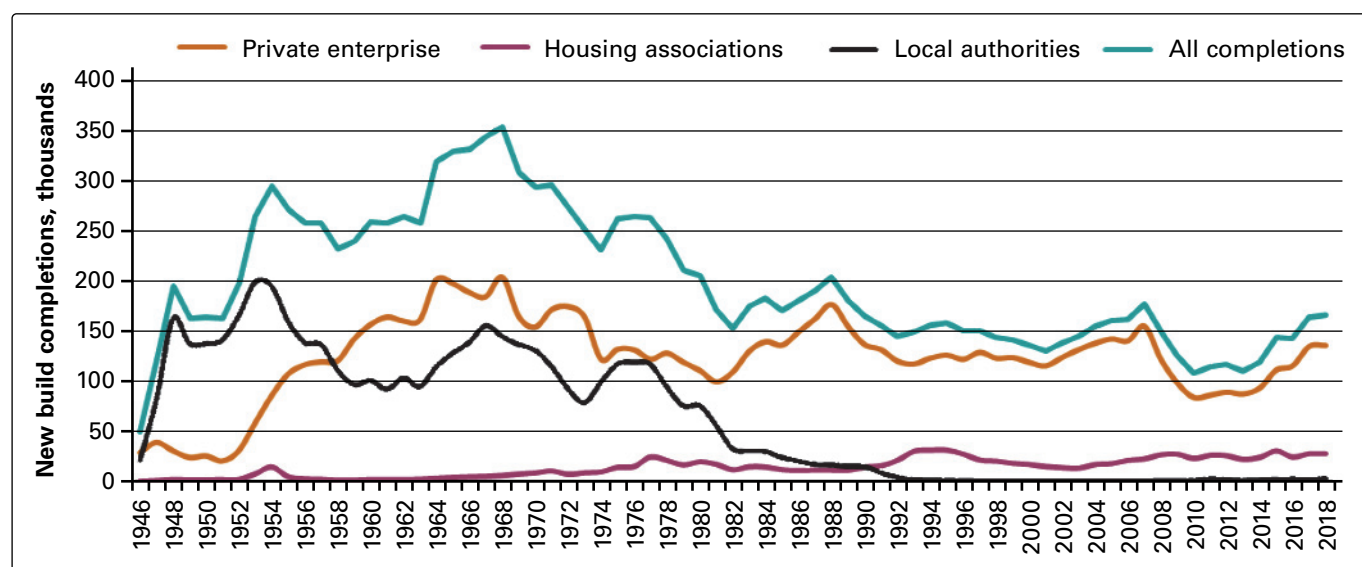
84,740 households in England were in temporary accommodation, of which 73.2% included dependent children, equating to 126,020 children living in temporary accommodation.<sup>26</sup>

The Review noted the changes to the definition of affordable homes in national policy and how this was now based on market prices rather than ability to pay. It is significant that in 2018/19 the delivery of social rented homes, which remains one of the few genuinely affordable tenures, declined to 4,783.<sup>27</sup>

There has been a sustained increase in planning permissions granted for housing units. The latest data on completions gives a total estimate of 213,660 new

build completions in the year ending 31 March 2019. Permitted development amounted to 14,107 of total completions.<sup>28</sup> In 2007/08 when we had a more robust and accountable planning system with local and regional coherence, the figure for new build completions was just over 200,000.<sup>29</sup> In 1968, under a much more interventionist system of strategic delivery through the development of New Towns, completions were in excess of 350,000.<sup>30</sup>

The argument for deregulating planning was to simplify the system and unleash the market to transform housing supply. In fact, the results on supply are at best marginal, while quality and affordability have declined. The longer-term view shown in Fig. 1 illustrates how the



**Fig. 1 Number of permanent new build development completions, by tenure, in England, 1946-2018**

Source: House Building; New Build Dwellings, England: June Quarter 2019<sup>31</sup>

#### Notes

26 *Statutory Homelessness, January to March (Q1) 2019: England*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Sept. 2019. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/831246/Statutory\\_Homelessness\\_Statistical\\_Release\\_Jan\\_to\\_March\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/831246/Statutory_Homelessness_Statistical_Release_Jan_to_March_2019.pdf)

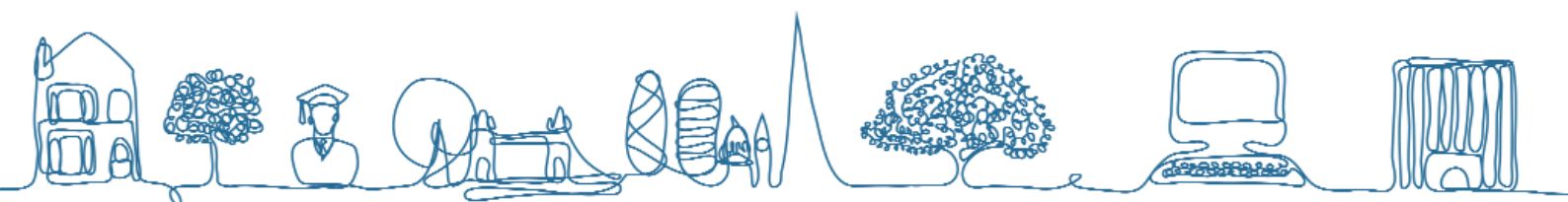
27 *Affordable Housing Supply: April 2018 to March 2019 England*. Housing Statistical Release. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Nov. 2019. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/847661/Affordable\\_Housing\\_Supply\\_2018-19.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/847661/Affordable_Housing_Supply_2018-19.pdf)

28 *Housing Supply; Net Additional Dwellings, England: 2018-19*. Housing Statistical Release. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Dec. 2019. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/850825/Housing\\_Supply\\_England\\_2018-19.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850825/Housing_Supply_England_2018-19.pdf)

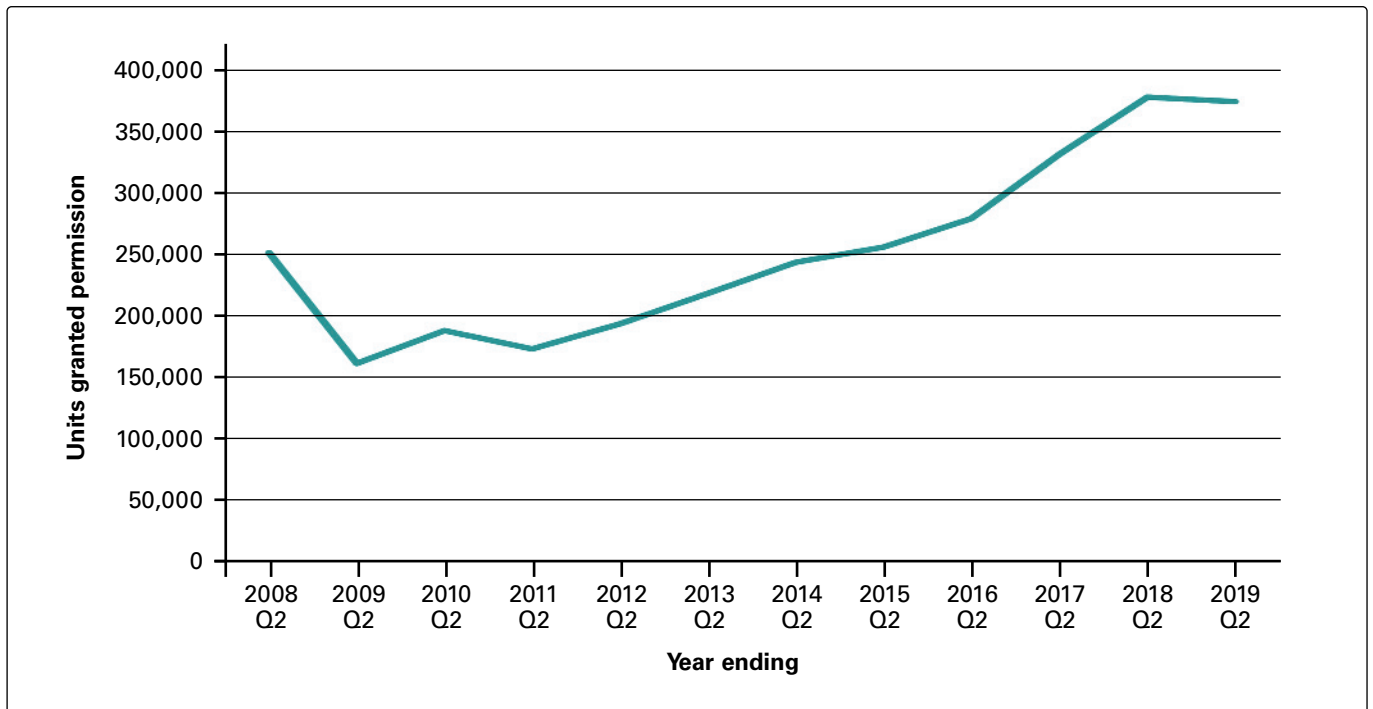
29 *Ibid.*

30 *House Building; New Build Dwellings, England: June Quarter 2019*. Housing Statistical Release. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Oct. 2019. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/835887/House\\_Building\\_Release\\_June\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835887/House_Building_Release_June_2019.pdf)

31 *Ibid.*







**Fig. 2 Number of housing units granted planning permission in England, rolling annual totals to June 2019**

Source: *Planning Applications in England: April to June 2019*<sup>34</sup>

combination of public investment and strong planning instruments such as the New Towns programme transformed the delivery of homes in period between 1950 and 1980.

We could not obtain a definitive figure for how many outstanding units for housing have permission in England. The figure is hard to calculate and does not include hundreds of thousands of housing units allocated in Local Plans but not yet consented. The Review estimated that there was a stock of around 851,000 housing units with permission in 2018.<sup>32</sup> The latest provisional figures show that permission for 375,200 homes was given in the year to 30 June 2019,

down marginally from the 378,700 homes granted permission in the year to 30 June 2018 (see Fig. 2).<sup>33</sup> Over the last decade the number of units granted permission has always exceeded new build starts, but the gap between consents and total completions has widened significantly since 2013.

We have been adding substantially to the stock of unbuilt permissions each year for the last five years. In the year ending June 2019 councils approved around 135,000 more units than were completed by new build and conversion.<sup>35</sup> The Letwin Review<sup>36</sup> estimated that there were approximately 107 undelivered sites of above 1,500 units in England with permission for

#### Notes

32 *Planning 2020 – Final Report of the Raynsford Review of Planning in England*. TCPA, Nov. 2018. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/raynsford-review>

33 *Planning Applications in England: April to June 2019*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Sept. 2019. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/833697/Planning\\_Applications\\_April\\_to\\_June\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833697/Planning_Applications_April_to_June_2019.pdf)

34 *Ibid.*

35 160,640 new build starts were recorded in the year to June 2019

36 *Independent Review of Build Out. Final Report*. Cm 9720. Letwin Review. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Oct. 2018. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/752124/Letwin\\_review\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/752124/Letwin_review_web_version.pdf)



approximately 393,000 homes. The approval of 375,200 units of housing in the year to June 2019<sup>37</sup> shows that planning is plainly not the ‘problem’ in terms of numbers of consents. The practical delivery of these consents is not within the gift of local authorities. Rather, it relies on what the government has itself described as a ‘broken’<sup>38</sup> housing delivery market. Ten years of continuous planning reforms have not achieved the desired ‘step-change’ in the delivery of new homes, while the quality, safety, location and affordability of these units remain a real concern.

The government and the housebuilding industry were keen to highlight the headline conclusion of the Letwin Review of housing delivery, whose report was published at the end of 2018,<sup>39</sup> that the industry was not land-banking. In fact, it would be more accurate to conclude that housebuilders do accumulate substantial land banks to deal with the uncertainty of the housing market and to restrict competition. The growing number of unimplemented permissions is also a product of intermediaries in the land market with no interest in housing delivery. Nonetheless, the very substantial increases in unimplemented permissions for housing is striking.

The other major aspect of the Letwin Review report was its advocacy for a much stronger role for the public sector as master-developer. The government has not implemented this recommendation, although Homes England has become a more muscular force in the development of larger sites. This progress has to be set against the continued skills shortage in the planning service and a lack of a coherent national development narrative from central government. Recent research<sup>40</sup>

shows a significant renewal in council-led homebuilding, with two-thirds of councils now directly engaged in delivering homes, despite an absence of support from central government and an increase in borrowing rates set by the Public Works Loan Board.

***While there is a seemingly endless discussion about how to solve the housing delivery problem, the components of the solution are relatively straightforward.*** The task is to maximise the output of homes from the full range of private and public bodies with the potential to meet our housing needs across all tenures. The key to unlocking this potential is to recognise the leading role of the public sector in de-risking the development process, and to build capacity within local government to take on this role. Councils can do this through a variety of means, from informal partnerships with the private sector to the use of Development Corporations. The key element here is a public body acting as master-developer, with the skills, resources and long-term vision to drive the development process. Far from planning being the problem, it is a *lack of planning* which is a key barrier to delivery, not simply in terms of strategic spatial planning but with regard to the effective organisation of labour and resources in the supply chain. As Letwin pointed out, we are running out of skilled construction workers. It remains significant that some of the very best affordable homes built to the highest environmental standards are the products of public sector bodies not simply writing plans but acting a lead partner in the development process.

Ultimately, this model requires public investment and a step-change in way that we harness land values of the kind set out in the Raynsford Review Final Report.

#### Notes

- 37 *Planning Applications in England: April to June 2019*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Sept. 2019. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/833697/Planning\\_Applications\\_April\\_to\\_June\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833697/Planning_Applications_April_to_June_2019.pdf)
- 38 *Fixing Our Broken Housing Market*. Housing White Paper. Cm 9352. Department for Communities and Local Government, Feb. 2017. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/590464/Fixing\\_our\\_broken\\_housing\\_market\\_-\\_print\\_ready\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/590464/Fixing_our_broken_housing_market_-_print_ready_version.pdf)
- 39 *Independent Review of Build Out. Final Report*. Cm 9720. Letwin Review. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Oct. 2018. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/752124/Letwin\\_review\\_web\\_version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/752124/Letwin_review_web_version.pdf)
- 40 J Morphet and B Clifford: *Local Authority Direct Delivery of Housing: Continuation Research*. Research Paper. RTPi, Jul. 2019. <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/better-planning/better-planning-housing-affordability/local-authority-direct-provision-of-housing/>



Current practice continues to emphasise ad hoc betterment taxation through Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). While there has been some positive movement on the metric for viability testing, the demand placed upon these planning contributions has increased, with bodies such as the Department for Education recognising the potential to use of these funds to pay for social infrastructure.<sup>41</sup> The government estimates that there were around £6 billion of developer contributions arising in 2016/17. In fact, the list of public goods previously funded by central government grant which now have to be achieved through ad hoc betterment taxation is long and complex, ranging from affordable housing to green infrastructure, schools, and health and cultural facilities. The prospect of local authorities or Development Corporations acting as a master-developer capable of purchasing land at or close to existing-use value and using the value uplift resulting from development to create high-quality places remains tantalisingly out of reach in all but a few high-demand areas. Only when national and local planning policy is firmly expressed, fully evidenced and therefore less open to being gamed by the private sector will land values fairly adjust.

### Strategic planning

The Review considered the development of strategic planning in England and how the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies has been a major barrier to the effective delivery of high-quality homes and communities. It also highlighted the development of ad hoc planning arrangements across England driven by bespoke devolution deals. This has led to a number of strategic planning processes, each of which can have a different legal status and governance framework.

In the period since the Review’s Final Report was published there have been three significant trends in strategic planning in England:

- Those formal strategic plans which have begun to be tested at examination have revealed significant

flaws in policy-making and the evidence used. In some cases, this appears to be a product of a chronic lack of resources and the continued difficulty of striking complex political agreements between constituent authorities. The feedback from the Planning Inspectorate on the West of England Joint Strategic Plan is supportive of the ambition, recognising the achievement of a draft plan on limited resources; but the Inspectorate also highlighted profound questions about the quality and evidence of the overall strategy for housing growth.

- It has become clearer that the current system of strategic planning, and its governance, is much more complicated than that which was in place in 2010. As an example, Fig. 3 illustrates the two sets of arrangements for the East Midlands region, under the regime in place at the beginning of 2010 and that operating now.
- The final issue is likely to be the most problematic for strategic planning in England. Regardless of the different legal status of strategic plans, there is a real democratic and legitimacy deficit. As a general rule, the public has no clear opportunity to participate in the development of the growing number of informal strategic plans. The research conducted for this report found that many of the plans being prepared in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc had been, or continue to be, subject to confidentiality agreements between local authorities and consultants. Because the overall process lacks clear legal definition or statutory underpinning, there is no effective participation or governance framework. As a result, when individual plans – or a collective plan – for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc are placed in the public domain, there is likely to be a strong public response.

The contrast between these chaotic systems and the regime in London is stark. The capital remains an island of relative coherence, albeit with no formal way of talking to its neighbouring regions. Effective strategic planning for an overall vision cannot be successfully

#### Note

- 41 *Securing Developer Contributions for Education*. Department for Education, Nov. 2019; and *Education Provision in Garden Communities*. Department for Education, Apr. 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-schools-to-support-housing-growth>





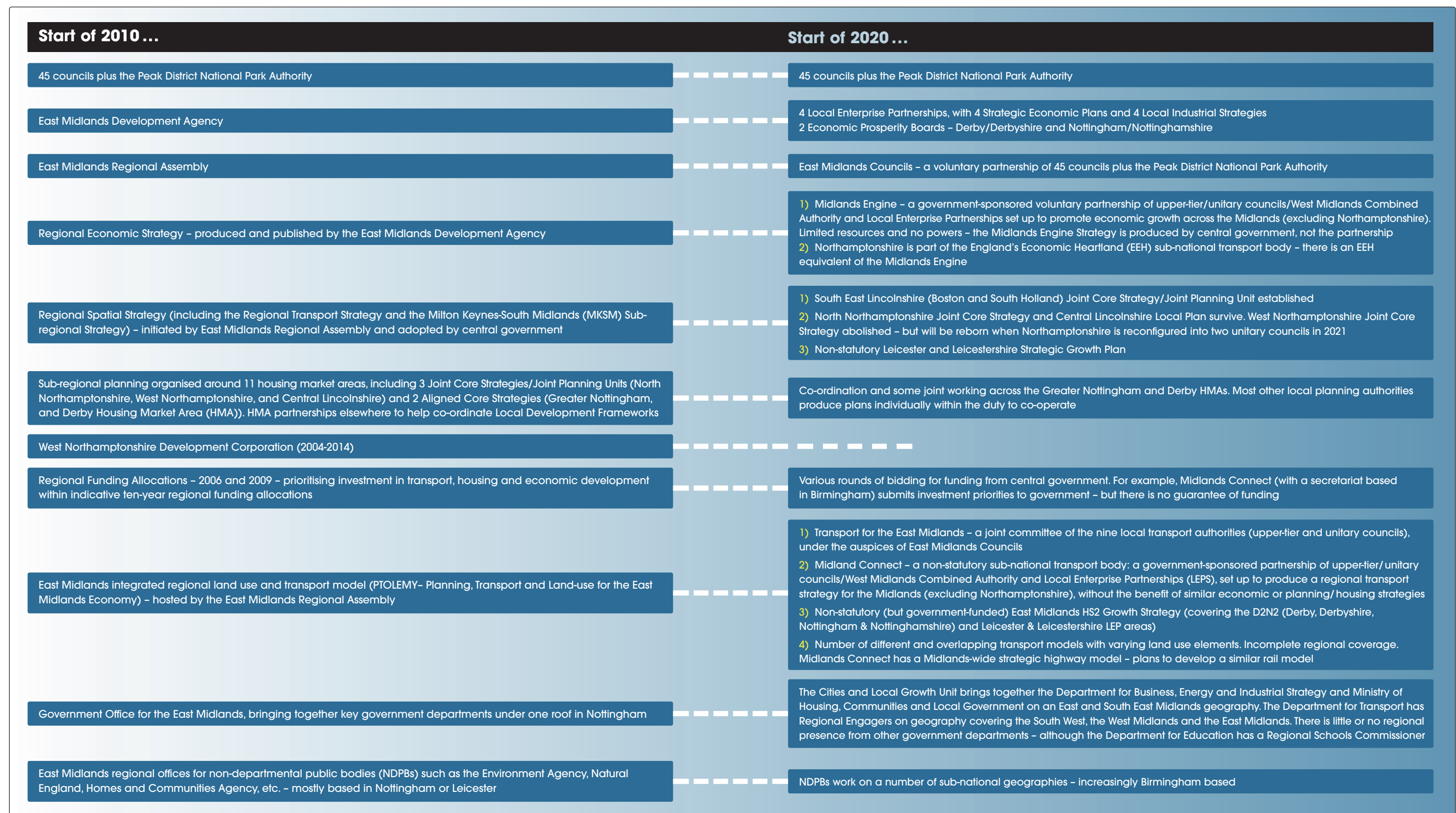


Fig. 3 Strategic planning and related governance arrangements for the East Midlands region – at the start of 2010 and at the start of 2020  
Produced with thanks due to Andrew Pritchard, of East Midlands Councils



achieved by solely drawing on the existing hard-pressed resources of the constituent local authorities. The Oxford Joint Statutory Spatial Plan<sup>42</sup> illustrates the challenge of strategic planning based solely on fragile political consensus between district authorities: when one authority, for whatever legitimate reason, decides to follow a different path, the whole strategy is placed in doubt. Such outcomes were entirely predictable and were predicted.

This implies the need not simply for a formal overarching plan but for an independent regional planning body with sufficient powers to strike lasting agreements in sub-regions and enshrine these agreements in a formal strategic plan. As the Review’s Final Report pointed out, the character of these plans should be genuinely high level, providing coherence on growth and infrastructure provision to frame local action. They also need to be supported by government policy, which should be ‘a national expression of geographic intent’.<sup>43</sup>

Such plans may not be needed everywhere in England, but where they are prepared they must be placed on a formal footing, with a defined preparation process, an independent regional planning body, and clear and meaningful accountability and participation. ***What is clear is that the decision taken in 2010 to abolish regional plans and the organisational and intellectual capital they contained was a major mistake and has made the job of producing sustainable growth much more complex.***

## Public trust in planning

The lack of public trust in planning is well understood, and Demos has published research concluding that engagement in the planning system is generally low –

more than half of the public (56%) has never engaged with the planning system and 54% do not feel at all involved in planning and housing decisions in their local area (just 10% feel very well involved).<sup>44</sup> Grosvenor Britain and Ireland too has conducted research into public trust in place-making in the UK,<sup>45</sup> finding that just 2% of the public trust developers and only 7% trust local authorities when it comes to planning for large-scale development. Further research by the TCPA<sup>46</sup> has explored the power of planning to affect the lives of particular social groups and raised concerns about the way in which Equality Impact Assessments are often marginalised in the preparation of Local Plans. The result is a missed opportunity to design spaces which are sensitive to the diverse needs of differing groups and which can promote inclusion.

One factor which does appear to have intensified over the last 12 months is a sense of a loss of control over local development by local elected members. This has fuelled a remarkable increase in anti-development sentiment and an increase in independent local councillors after the May 2019 local authority elections. Many of these new councillors have been elected with an explicit promise to overturn Local Plan policy. One councillor (a Labour ex-deputy leader of a district authority) commented that ***‘above all it was the Local Plan that cost us control of this authority. Five-year land supply was all central government cared about and local people could see rubbish being built with no benefit to them or their community.’***

This sense of disempowerment is not just about Local Plan preparation. It reflects the impacts of permitted development and the outcomes of informal strategic planning. One elected member (an independent group leader of a high-growth district authority) commented

## Notes

42 See the Oxfordshire Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP) website, at <https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/info/83/local-plans/577/oxfordshire-joint-statutory-spatial-plan-jssp>

43 David Lock, in an interview with the Review Secretariat

44 B Glover: *People Powered Planning: How to Better Involve People in Planning to Get More Homes Built*. Demos, Sept. 2019. <https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/People-Powered-Planning.pdf>

45 *Rebuilding Trust: Research Findings Summary*. Grosvenor, Jul. 2019; and *Rebuilding Trust: Discussion Paper*. Research Findings Summary. Grosvenor, Jul. 2019. <https://www.grosvenor.com/our-businesses/grosvenor-britain-ireland/rebuilding-trust>

46 *London Planning for a Just Society? Exploring How Local Planning Authorities Are Embedding Equality and Inclusion in Planning Policy*. TCPA, Oct. 2019. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=a74198b6-39fe-4378-86e1-f1fdf3b9dd8e>



that the Oxford-Cambridge Arc plans were likely to be like **‘rabbits pulled from hats which the public are very likely to shoot on sight’**. There is also a great deal of concern about the relative roles of local politicians and Members of Parliament in planning decisions. Much of this ongoing tension stems from two issues highlighted in the Review:

- a lack of a clear democratic settlement to define what powers local communities and their representatives might have over decisions; and
- a lack of any constitutional limitation to central government interference with local government powers over issues of obviously local significance, such as permitted development.

### The planning service

Part 1 of this report makes clear that little has been done to counter the low morale of the planning service or to restore funding after the stringent cuts to local government planning departments. In fact, the morale of planners is highly variable, depending on the leadership and resources of local authorities. Some best practice is recognised in Section 3, but it remains true that in general planners still lack a compelling and creative narrative to help unpick the undeserved negative attitudes of national politicians. This latter trend has continued, with recent Housing and Planning Ministers continuing to criticise architects and planners for ignoring community concerns over the design of new development.<sup>47</sup> Such criticism completely ignores the systematic deregulation and underfunding of the public planning service. It also fails to understand the impact of the ‘planning by numbers’ approach of the NPPF, which displaces vision and creativity. Such criticism could only be justified if local authorities had the power to shape their communities – but, as the extension of permitted development illustrates, they do

not. These powers have been seriously eroded by central government.

Rebuilding planning capacity in local authorities would have an immediate impact on the quality and efficiency of the service. Rebuilding skills on issues such as strategic planning will take longer but is vital to meeting the challenges society faces. It is important that a critical mass of skills is held internally by local authorities, thus building their institutional capacity. While funding is a major issue, there are equal challenges in recruiting and retaining staff. The Planning Advisory Service survey of resources conducted for the MHCLG/Local Government Association (LGA)<sup>48</sup> found that there was a large proportion of failed recruitment exercises for senior planners. The LGA Workforce Survey<sup>49</sup> also showed that planning is the most challenging discipline for local authorities to recruit. A number of new initiatives are starting to make a difference to recruitment and perceptions of public planning, including the RTPi apprenticeship scheme, Public Practice, Women in Planning, and Planning Out, but these interventions remain relatively small in scale.

One final stand-out issue is the impact on planners of having to be involved in consenting very poor-quality development which they feel they have little or no choice but to approve. One senior planner commented that **‘some of the outcomes of permitted development applications are breathtakingly bad. It is a corruption of the planning system and corrosive to the morale of the department. None of us came into planning to make people’s lives worse.’**

### A system fit for the future?

It is one thing to consider whether the planning system is fit for the challenge we now face and quite another

#### Notes

47 J Airey (Ed): *The Duty to Build Beautiful: A Collection of Essays on Embedding the Beauty Agenda in Policymaking*. Policy Exchange, Oct. 2019. <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/The-Duty-to-Build-Beautiful.pdf>

48 R Crawley: *Resources Survey 2019: Summary of Findings*. Planning Advisory Service, for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government/Local Government Association, Aug. 2019. <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/pas-topics/monitoring/survey-planning-departments-2019>

49 *Local Government Workforce Survey 2017/18*. Research Report. Local Government Association, Jun. 2019. <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publication%20-%20Local%20Government%20Workforce%20Survey%202017-18.pdf>



to reflect on whether it is fit for the challenges of the future. While these challenges have intensified over the last year, particularly on inequality and climate change, there has been no progress on making the system fit for purpose. The Review set out the scale of these challenges, but one powerful example is worth emphasising.

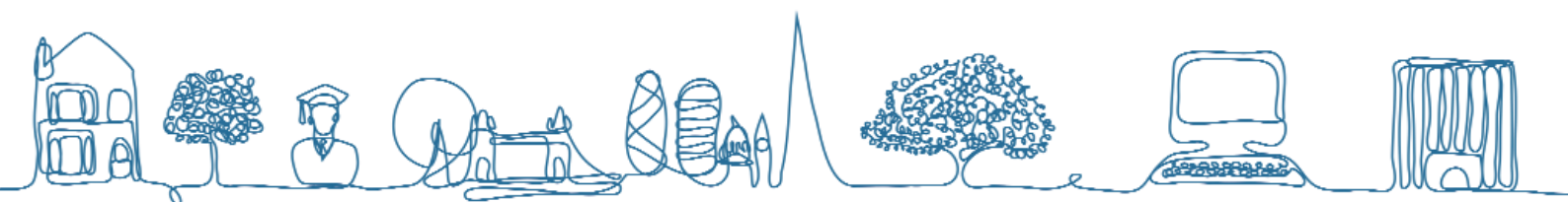
In the summer of 2019, the Environment Agency published a consultation on the future impacts of climate change.<sup>50</sup> One very practical and very stark conclusion was the need to respond to 1.15 metres of sea level rise on Britain’s East Coast.<sup>51</sup> The Agency estimates do not include the break-up of the West Antarctic (owing to the high levels of uncertainty about this process), so in fact the sea level rise could be greater than this, with a best estimate of 2 metres by 2100. Sea levels will go on rising after 2100. Extreme

weather events will intensify, leading to increases in surface water, storm surges and river flooding, like the events experienced in places such as South Yorkshire in November 2019. The 1953 storm surge was 5 metres above high tide. This brings into question the long-term viability of many coastal places.

The Environment Agency consultation recognised the prospect of moving vulnerable populations to new locations. There is no doubt that the current system is neither strategically coherent nor locally effective in dealing with planned movement of significant populations, nor is it ready for the re-engineering of our cities to secure their long-term climate resilience. Despite the record of the planning system in transformational change in our nation, not least through the New Towns programme, we remain critically unprepared for the future.

#### Note

- 50 *Draft National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England – Consultation Document*. Environment Agency, May 2019. [https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/fcrm/national-strategy-public/user\\_uploads/draft-national-fcrm-strategy-for-england---consultation-document.pdf](https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/fcrm/national-strategy-public/user_uploads/draft-national-fcrm-strategy-for-england---consultation-document.pdf) and <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/draft-national-flood-and-coastal-erosion-risk-management-strategy-for-england>
- 51 *Sea Level Rise and Storm Surge*. UKCP18 Factsheet. Met Office Hadley Centre Climate Programme, for the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Environment Agency, 2018. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/binaries/content/assets/metofficegovuk/pdf/research/ukcp/ukcp18-fact-sheet-sea-level-rise-and-storm-surge.pdf>





## Section 3

# 2020 planning – a programme of renewal



What ‘good planning’ looks like – young people engaging with planners in Leicester

It is difficult to overstate the gap between the continual running down of the planning system, because it is seen to be anti-competitive, and the growing evidence on how important the system is in tackling a range of public policy issues. More positively, the NHS has been advocating a programme of Healthy New Towns, recognising the importance of design to people’s health and wellbeing; but, at the same time, there are the damaging impacts of the poor-quality homes being delivered through permitted development. In thinking about how we bridge the gap between the planning

system’s potential for public good and the reality of the outcomes it currently delivers, it is worth reflecting on just how much an effective planning system can achieve.

### The ingredients of success?

Despite the challenges set out in this report, there are particular examples of highly successful place-making. In a number of visits made over the last 12 months, it is evident that some places – such as Leicester – have





Box 2 What does ‘good planning’ look like?



Brooklands in Milton Keynes

The places where people live, work and play have a significant impact on whether or not they are in good health. For instance, illness caused by poor housing is estimated to cost the NHS £1.4 billion a year in first-year treatment costs alone.<sup>i</sup> In contrast, urban green spaces provide £34 billion worth of health benefits to the UK’s population each year.<sup>ii</sup> The things that can determine good health – good homes; access to the natural environment; affordable and healthy transport; access to jobs; the availability of affordable healthier food options; and strong communities – are all influenced by the way that places are planned, designed and managed. Consequently, planning is now recognised as having a vital role to play in shaping these ‘wider determinants of health’. The evidence for this is robust and growing.<sup>iii</sup>

Despite this evidence, many of the places that are being built today undermine people’s health and wellbeing. For instance, it is often difficult, unpleasant or impossible for residents to walk, cycle or get public transport to the places that they need to reach. This encourages car journeys and limits people’s ability to be physically active as part of their daily routine; and a lack of physical activity influences more than 20 chronic health conditions and costs the NHS £1 billion a year. If the location and design of new development matters, so does the detail of the homes we build. Fig. A indicates that a cost saving to the NHS of over £19 billion by 2041 could be gained by reducing hazards in homes for the over-55s.

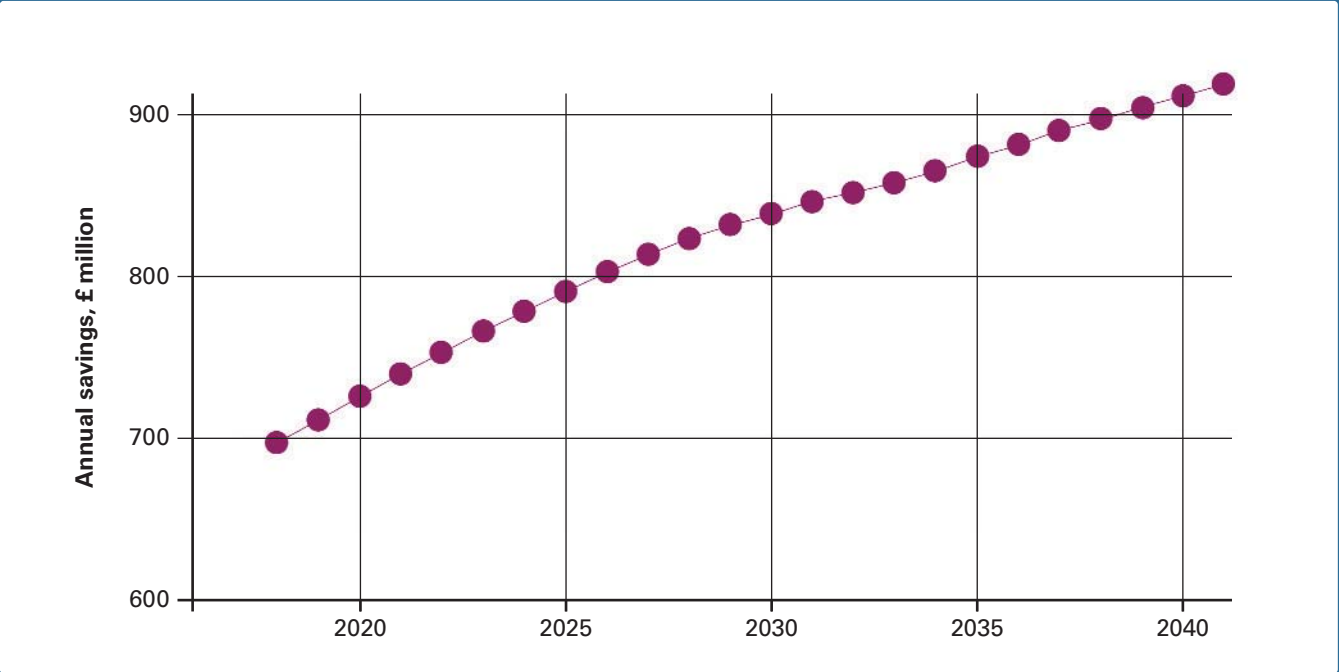


Fig. A Savings to the NHS per annum if Housing Health and Safety Rating System Category 1 hazards were reduced to an acceptable level for households aged over 55  
Source: *A Home for the Ages*<sup>iv</sup>

Poor health is not distributed evenly across the population. The least well-off have by far the poorest health: people born in affluent neighbourhoods will, on average, have 20 years more good health than those born in the most deprived neighbourhoods. Worryingly, this gap is increasing.<sup>v</sup>

The NHS recognises that it cannot afford to wait until people become ill and then try to fix them: it must help people stay healthy. As part of this, NHS England set up its ‘Healthy New Towns’ project to support ten areas of new development in creating healthier places. The learning from this project has been published in a set of ‘how to’ guides to healthy place-making, under the title *Putting Health into Place*.<sup>vi</sup> Based on evidence from the Healthy New Towns and wider research, the guides set out ten principles for creating places that help address 21st century health challenges such as obesity, loneliness, and poor diet.

Notes

- i M Roys, S Nicol, H Garrett and S Margoles: *The Full Cost of Poor Housing*. BRE, May 2016. <https://www.brebookshop.com/samples/327672.pdf>
- ii *Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces: Measuring their Economic and Wellbeing Value to Individuals*. Fields in Trust, 2018. <http://www.fieldsintrust.org/revaluing>
- iii *Spatial Planning for Health: An Evidence Resource for Planning and Designing Healthier Places*. Public Health England, Jun. 2017. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/729727/spatial\\_planning\\_for\\_health.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729727/spatial_planning_for_health.pdf)
- iv *A Home for the Ages: Planning for the Future with Age-Friendly Design*. Royal Institute of British Architects, Jul. 2019. <https://www.architecture.com/-/media/gathercontent/work-with-us/additional-documents/11756-agefriendly-report-finalpdf.pdf>
- v V Raleigh: ‘What is happening to life expectancy in the UK?’. ‘Long Read’ website publication. The King’s Fund, Oct. 2019. <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/whats-happening-life-expectancy-uk>
- vi See the NHS England ‘Healthy New Towns’ webpage, at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/innovation/healthy-new-towns/>

made real progress in renewal. The ingredients of success in these places have some common attributes, including a good understanding of the unique identity of a particular place, strong political leadership with a long-term vision, strong community and business participation, sufficient and well managed resources and skills within the public sector, and, of course, inspired and talented planners. It remains interesting to reflect on what such a combination of vision and talent could achieve if the English planning framework were made fit for purpose to empower and enable local action. But one striking feature of the visits conducted to inform this report was that the ambition for civic leadership in many places was matched only by frustration at both the loss of funding and the centralising of planning powers by government.

## Priority actions for 2020

Work on the Review began three years ago, with the ambition to fix a planning system that had been deregulated, underfunded and demoralised. Over this period, it has become apparent that the system does not deliver on a range of public interest outcomes. It is neither decisively strategic nor sensitive to basic human living conditions. The gap between the system’s positive potential and what is delivered on the ground has never been so stark. The Final Report set out a comprehensive and interlocking narrative for action that remains the best basis for a reformed planning system. Accordingly, we advocate prioritisation of the following programme of reforms in the early months of the new government.

### Government must make three legislative changes:

- Introduce a statutory purpose for planning focused around the health and wellbeing of people and communities.
- Implement minimum basic housing standards in a Healthy Homes Act that would also include a meaningful definition of housing affordability based on income.
- Revoke damaging permitted development rights, returning these powers to local government.

### Government must make five policy changes:

- Publish a revised NPPF with a clear policy commitment to meaningful public participation throughout the planning process.
- Commit to a nationally enabled programme of New Town Development Corporations as part of a portfolio of options to solve the housing crisis.
- Provide greater clarity on the definition of hope value in the Compensation Code and on what constitutes a reasonable return to landowners in viability testing.
- Develop a national spatial plan.
- Rebuild local government planning capacity through stable revenue funding and a national programme to tackle recruitment and retention challenges.

### Local government should:

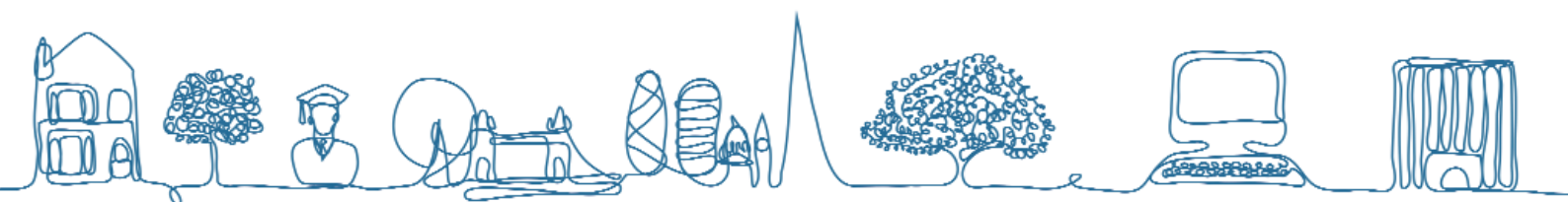
- Ensure that health and wellbeing are key objectives of their corporate strategies and Local Plans.
- Adopt minimum standards in Local Plan policy in line with a new Healthy Homes Act.
- Help transform public awareness of planning by making the public, not the profession, the primary audience of the planning system.
- Place people at the centre of plan-making, and Local Plans at the centre of decision-making.
- Invest in attracting, developing and retaining the planners of the future.

### The profession should:

- Co-operate on and agree a fundamental shift in the objectives of professional activity to support the health and wellbeing of people through a new compact for planning.
- Urgently adopt the ‘do no harm’ principle in the ethical codes of all professional bodies for those that work in the built environment.

### Planning schools should:

- Adopt a clear social mandate in their corporate objectives. This should include much greater support for local communities and much greater emphasis on community participation skills for planning students.





## Section 4

# Conclusion

One year on from the publication of the Raynsford Review’s Final Report, English planning remains in crisis. It is a system with multiple and systemic problems caused by a decade of deregulation and disregard by national politicians. Ironically, the system is now even more complex and fragmented than that which existed in 2010. The tools to plan strategically in regions and sub-regions are now both more complicated and less effective. But the real test of any framework designed to work in the public interest is not whether any particular structure of plans or policies is more or less ‘right’, but the outcomes for people which the system creates. As we have seen, some of these outcomes are shockingly poor. The extraordinary fact that planning in England still manages to achieve so much in this challenging context is a tribute to those who operate it and their tenacity in overcoming the obstacles placed in their way.

Climate change, poverty, affordable homes and economic renewal are real and pressing issues for 2020. The choice for the nation is now even more stark

than it was one year ago. Do we persist with the current narrative of deregulation and fragmentation? Or do we recognise that inclusive, efficient, and well evidenced planning is a vital tool in securing our long-term future and transforming people’s individual and collective wellbeing?

The situation is challenging, but there are still immense levels of ambition, skills and commitment in the planning sector, and still a great enthusiasm among communities and practitioners to be part of the shared endeavour of building a better future. We hope that the government will seize the opportunity to deliver the wide-ranging benefits for people and places provided by inclusive democratic planning. Planning can help stitch a divided nation back together. From reconciling local aspirations to giving hope to the many forgotten parts of England, the system could contribute to a national conversation about our future. ***Democratic planning is not the problem; it is the solution. It must be made fit for purpose by restoring its powers, its accountability and, above all, its purpose.***







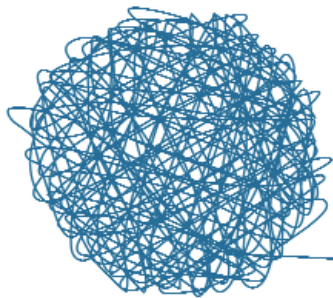
## Town and Country Planning Association

The **Town and Country Planning Association** is an independent charity working to improve the art and science of town and country planning. The TCPA puts social justice and the environment at the heart of policy debate and inspires government, industry and campaigners to take a fresh perspective on major issues, including planning policy, housing, regeneration, and climate change. Its objectives are:

- To secure a decent, well designed home for everyone, in a human-scale environment combining the best features of town and country.
- To empower people and communities to influence decisions that affect them.
- To improve the planning system in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.







## **Planning 2020 'One Year On' – 20th Century Slums?**

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