



The Raynsford Review of Planning

Background Paper 1: Creating a blueprint for a new planning system in England

[30 June 2017]

Introduction

Planning is a vital enabler for securing the long-term well-being of our communities through the delivery of sustainable development. It enables the efficient use of resources and infrastructure, with multiple benefits to society, the environment and the economy. While planning can claim many significant achievements, there has been growing criticism of the current system because it is out of touch with ordinary people's lives and is not fit for purpose in securing lasting progress on key aspects of the economy, meeting housing needs or tackling climate change.

Since 2010 the English planning system has gone through an extensive period of radical reform and deregulation, but the outcomes for communities, the environment and the economy remain uncertain. Planning departments are under growing pressure to perform, but many do not have sufficient skills and capacity to manage the change. Emerging research by the TCPA suggests that local plans have downgraded or removed policy on climate change and social inclusion, and have not yet responded to growing evidence on the links between public health and the built environment. All of this is increasing concern over the kinds of places that are being built and their impact on the long-term public interest. Are we building the kinds of places the nation needs and deserves?

The TCPA has undertaken an extensive body of research identifying the challenges facing the current planning system. There are signs that the Government is considering a new approach to issues such as strategic planning. Now is the time to put forward constructive solutions and win the hearts and minds of national and local policymakers, industry groups, environmental and social justice charities and those who make crucial decisions at a local level.

The TCPA is achieving this by setting up a cross-sector, 18-month task force, chaired by our president, the Rt. Hon Nick Raynsford, a highly-respected former planning minister. The task force will start work in May 2017 and publish its final report – The Raynsford Review – in autumn 2018.

The Raynsford Review aims to inform short-term changes to the planning system that will be delivered as part of the implementation of the 2017 housing white paper. However, the primary focus of the review will be a holistic appraisal of the kind of planning system the nation will need by 2020. It will identify the ingredients for a successful and positive planning system in terms of:

- the vision for the future of the nation;
- the principles underpinning a fit-for-purpose planning system;
- the structures and processes at a national, sub-national or city-regional, local and neighbourhood scale; and
- the leadership, resources and skills needed to transform planning.

What do we want to achieve?

This initiative has three overarching aims:

1. Firstly, to set out a positive agenda for planning reform set within the context of the major changes proposed in the housing white paper and the result of the general election. The review will be a solution-focused report setting out a blueprint for a new planning system in England and will be launched at all major political party conferences in autumn 2018.
2. Secondly, the task force will engage constructively with politicians and council officers, communities, housing providers, developers, consultants and academics – all those interested in the built environment – about how we can deliver better place-making through a fairer and more effective planning system.
3. Thirdly, the Raynsford Review will set out a new vision for planning in England and rebuild trust in the planning process by communicating with the public as well as professionals.

Why is planning important?

There has been a significant loss of public trust in planning. A stark comparison can be drawn between the post-war consensus in favour of development and the highly polarised contemporary arguments which play out today over issues such as housing. This process is part of a profound change in civil society, manifesting in declining political participation and a loss of trust in ‘experts’. Clearly planning is not solely responsible for this wider political trend, but planning decisions are one of the greatest catalysts of local political activity because of their direct impact on people’s lives.

We believe that a planning system which is truly fit for purpose must offer a compelling and optimistic vision for the future of the nation, setting out the role of people and participation in the planning process. We also believe that a functional planning system must offer a strong narrative of strategic spatial policy, from national through sub-national and city-regional to local and neighbourhood levels. This is simply because the challenges we are confronted with in infrastructure investment, housing, climate change and social inclusion are played out at differing spatial scales. This is not about top-down imposition. Instead, it is about recognising the need to integrate the differing spatial challenges into a coherent framework which can help guide decision-making in all sectors.

While many organisations focus on how to improve technical bits of the planning process, or focus on single issues such as housing, we think there is a gap in terms of the ‘big-picture’ vision, a set of comprehensive solutions and advocacy about the benefits of planning for the future of England.

What are the barriers to achieving lasting reform?

The main barriers to achieving a blueprint for a better planning system in 2020 are:

Lack of cross-sector consensus between the development industry, the environmental movement and the social justice sector. Too often we see a polarised debate where the economy is played off against the environment, when in fact they are two sides of the same coin. At the same time, social justice is so often missed out from these debates – but we cannot afford to continue doing this. One of the clear lessons from the Brexit vote is that whole communities have been left behind in terms of development and engagement in the last few decades. The task force will provide a forum for bringing together different interests with the aim of generating a cross-sector consensus.

A strong, continued drive to deregulate the English planning system, based on an analysis that planning is anti-competitive. This analysis is simply wrong. For example, there is extensive evidence of the benefits of planning for economic efficiency, human health and long-term place-making. However,

there is often little or no consideration for the positive benefits of planning for the economy, society and the environment, or of the evidence of such benefits. Through the task force there is an opportunity to demonstrate the value of planning as a building block of a civilised democratic society, vital to ensuring that the public accept and consent to more and better homes, and that we create economically successful places.

Draft Terms of Reference

To examine the performance of the English planning system in relation to the key challenges facing the nation; to identify key areas of underperformance; and to offer positive recommendations for reform. Specifically, the review will:

Examine the objectives of the planning system in relation to delivering sustainable development which is in the long-term public interest and reflects on how sustainable development should manifest within the key objectives of local and national policy. In particular, to examine how the application of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has affected the outcomes of the planning system and how effective changes can be made.

Examine the extent of the application of the land-use planning system and the case for a comprehensive, long-term approach. This reflects both the original question asked in the Town & Country Planning Act of 1947 and the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution reports of 2002, as to whether land-use control should apply to all land uses in light of social and environmental challenges facing the nation. It would also address the widespread extension of permitted development rights which have significantly reduced the scope of planning.

To examine the structures of the planning system in relation to its application to the national, sub-regional, local and neighbourhood scales. This theme picks up the devolution and national planning debate as well as the case for a role for the new towns legislation. The challenge is defining a narrative and an effective relationship between the spatial scales.

To consider the appropriate governance structures of the system in relation to democratic accountability and citizen rights.

To consider how the substantial values which arise from land-use regulation can be effectively captured and distributed in the public interest. This is the 'betterment' question and relates to Section 106 and CIL and to the wider question of a fair and transparent balance between the rights of land owners and the wider public.

To consider the key delivery issues which can aid effective implementation. This theme will include how the planning service can be resourced and the appropriate skills and expertise of planners, and what this implies for planning education.