

going back to first principles

The Raynsford Review of Planning, set up by the TCPA, is aiming to formulate a vision for how a renewed system of planning could better respond to people's needs and address the challenges facing the nation – and is seeking everyone's input, as **Nick Raynsford** explains



Thinkstock/walencienne

Planning at its best has a vital and transformational role to play in securing the long-term wellbeing of our communities through the delivery of sustainable development. Good planning enables us to make efficient and co-ordinated use of resources and infrastructure, offering multiple benefits to society, the environment and the economy.

Britain was one of the first countries in the world to adopt a civilised and democratic system of place-making that recognised the views of the public – something that many others have since replicated. That ground-breaking initiative has been in large part responsible for the preservation of our valued landscapes and heritage, as well as the development

Raynsford Review task force members

- **Rt Hon. Nick Raynsford**, Chair of the task force and former Minister for Housing and Planning
- **Maria Adebowale-Schwarte**, Founding Director, Living Space Project
- **Julia Foster**, Managing Partner, David Lock Associates
- **Tom Fyans**, Director of Campaigns and Policy, Campaign to Protect Rural England
- **Kate Henderson**, Chief Executive, TCPA
- **Lord Kerslake**, Former Head of the Civil Service, President, LGA, and Chair, Peabody
- **Professor Yvonne Rydin**, Professor of Planning, Environment and Public Policy, Bartlett School of Planning, University College London
- **Chris Shepley**, Consultant and former Chief Planning Inspector for England and Wales
- **William Upton**, Barrister and Secretary of the Planning and Environment Bar Association
- **Finn Williams**, Regeneration Area Manager for North West London, Greater London Authority, and founder of public sector planning think-tank NOVUS

of successful new settlements and the regeneration of our older cities and towns. Inspired planning and the robust legislation which underpinned it over the last century have made an enormous contribution to enhancing social mobility and improving the lives of millions of people.

But today planning in England is in a pretty tough place. The planning service is underfunded; its staff are often demoralised; its very purpose is questioned by powerful lobbies; and its processes are criticised as slow, bureaucratic and out of touch with people's lives.

At a time when we need planners more than ever, a career in planning no longer looks such an attractive proposition to talented and ambitious young people. Potential applicants are discouraged by the dilution of what was once a world-changing and creative vocation into a process-driven, restrictive and undervalued function. Many would argue that planning is now in its least effective manifestation since the introduction of the landmark Town and Country Planning Act in 1947.

Everyone recognises that the country is facing an acute housing crisis. The same was true in 1947. Yet the contrast between today's responses and those of 70 years ago is very telling. Then, a major national housebuilding programme was launched by government, with a network of New Towns designated to relieve the pressure on our bomb-scarred cities. Today, the government acknowledges that the housing market is broken and is not delivering the homes that are needed at a price people can afford. But there is no mechanism at either national or regional level in most parts of the country to identify the numbers and types of homes that are required and where they can best be provided. Instead, the government hopes that the sum of local decisions will add up to an adequate supply of homes, when all the evidence shows that the numbers will continue to fall seriously short and that affordability will remain a huge barrier to both owning and renting a home.

It is hardly surprising that homelessness – which should not be an issue in a developed country like the UK – has been rapidly increasing in recent years.

Regardless of these well publicised failures, planning reform in England has mainly involved deregulation and tinkering with the system, rather than focusing on the fundamental question of how we are going to live. So we are seeing more extensive permitted development, with little or no consideration of whether the development is adequately served by schools, doctors' surgeries or transport links; and an increasing proportion of decisions are reached on appeal, rather than reflecting an agreed local plan. The consensus which used to exist in favour of a system designed to uphold the long-term public interest seems to have broken down, and there is a deep confusion in civil society about what the planning system is designed to achieve. We are currently following a path which is unsustainable and which is tending to widen rather than reduce inequality.

We can and should do much better than this. We need a planning system that recognises and responds to the needs of everyone; that is fairer, better resourced and secures outcomes of which communities can feel proud; and that responds to the economic, social and environmental challenges we face.

The review of planning that the TCPA has set up and asked me to chair is designed to point the way to such an alternative. It will not simply attempt to patch up some of the most problematic elements in the current system, nor seek merely to apply sticking plaster to wounds that require much more fundamental treatment. We will be going back to first principles to formulate a vision of how the planning system can best meet the country's needs and wider challenges such as climate change. We will collect research from a broad range of stakeholders and provide an alternative and workable framework to present to the government.

The review will mainly focus on the planning framework in England, which has undergone extensive change in recent years and as a result is increasingly diverging from the policy approach taken in other nations of the UK. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each have a distinctive policy environment, and we will be looking at these frameworks, as well as international examples, as a secondary part of the review.

We have set the following **three objectives for the review:**

- Engage constructively with politicians and council officers, communities, housing providers, developers, consultants and academics – all those interested in the built environment – to examine how to deliver better place-making through a fairer and more effective planning system.
- Set out a positive agenda following the outcome of the general election – and the planning hiatus that it may create – in the form of a solution-focused report setting out a blueprint for a new planning system in England.
- Set out a new vision for planning in England, and rebuild trust in the planning process by communicating with the public as well as with professionals.

Ultimately, although the review certainly aims to inform short-term changes to the planning system, our primary focus will be to provide a holistic appraisal of the kind of planning system that England needs.

‘Although the review certainly aims to inform short-term changes to the planning system, our primary focus will be to provide a holistic appraisal of the kind of planning system that England needs’

The task force started work in spring 2017, launching the official call for evidence on 28 June at the TCPA AGM. As part of the call for evidence, over the summer and autumn of 2017 the review team will be holding several formal and informal events across the country to engage with practitioners and those interested in making a submission. Informal engagement will continue over the entire review period, and the task force will publish its final report in autumn 2018.

If respondents are not able to attend one of our engagement activities, they may alternatively

submit evidence by written statement, video upload or online survey (the latter option being available only to respondents who work outside the fields of housing and planning). We would recommend that, preferably before submitting evidence, respondents download our background and provocation papers from the TCPA website. These documents, which will be updated intermittently throughout the review, offer guidance to participants wishing to better understand or refresh their knowledge of the planning system in England.

The success of the Raynsford Review is dependent on the amount of engagement we receive, so I would ask that you kindly inform others of our work to help encourage greater participation. This will help us challenge assumptions and build consensus about solutions so that we can produce a blueprint for a new planning system that is robust and indisputable by the government.

Full details of the project, including event listings and guidance papers, can be found on the Raynsford Review webpage of the TCPA website, at www.tcpa.org.uk/raynsford-review

- *The Rt Hon. Nick Raynsford is a former Minister for Housing and Planning and is the President of the TCPA.*