
The importance of democratic planning

A briefing by the TCPA for Second Reading of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill in the House of Commons

March 2025

1 Overview

The TCPA believes that democratic planning is a vital tool for securing socially just and sustainable outcomes in an era defined by the housing, health, nature and climate crisis. Planning is not a blocker and consistently approves more planning consents for homes than the private sector can deliver¹. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill could be the platform for the delivery of healthy communities designed to enhance nature and secure healthy and resilient homes. However, to achieve that goal the legislation requires significant amendment.

2 The elements of the Bill the TCPA will be supporting

The Bill includes some welcome and important measures that could be the foundation of a new generation of highly sustainable communities. The measures to modernise development corporations [part 4] and simplify the compulsory purchase process [part 5] are welcome. The TCPA also welcomes the emphasis on strategic planning and the creation of spatial development strategies (SDS), recognising the importance of addressing some issues at a more regional level. **It is positive that in preparing a SDS the strategic planning authority must have regard to the effect the proposed strategy will have on people's health but regrettable that there is no requirement to improve health outcomes** [12G within clause 47].

3 Strengthening the Bill

Currently the Bill has no content on a range of important planning outcomes. For example, the Bill does not contain any measures to secure affordable, healthy homes, create an effective link between the Climate Change Act 2008 and planning decisions, or give planning a positive, visionary purpose around sustainable development and the welfare of future generations. We urge Parliamentarians to address the following issues as the Bill passes through Parliament.

We ask Members of Parliament to consider the following points:

- **The Bill should set out a clear purpose for planning which reframes the planning system based on the United Nations principles of sustainable development.** This would offer an opportunity to build a new consensus about the value of the planning system and provide a framework for smarter decision making.

¹ <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/our-shared-future-a-tcpa-white-paper-for-homes-and-communities/>

- This should be accompanied by two new clauses. One that **explicitly requires all elements of the planning system to have full regard to the achievement of the commitments under the Climate Change Act 2008**. And a second which **requires the Secretary of State to have special regard to present and future generations in relation to planning**. This would explicitly recognise the needs of children and young people in both plan making and decision taking.
- it is essential that new homes are built to a high quality to support rather than undermine people's health, wellbeing and life chances. The failings of the current system are all too evident in the very poor-quality housing being produced through permitted development. **The Bill should be amended to support Lord Crisp's long-standing campaign to place a duty on the Secretary of State to positively promote healthy homes and neighbourhoods.**
- There is an urgent need to rebuild public trust in planning. The Bill risks doing the opposite by further eroding the role of people in the planning process. For example, the proposed national scheme of delegation [clause 46] creates extensive powers for the government to determine which kinds of application are determined by local planning committees. **This could be used to severely restrict the role of elected members on planning committees and remove democratic accountability at the point consents are granted. This would also remove the right of communities to be heard in committee when decisions are made².**
- If the planning system is to be democratic **it is essential that the public has a voice during the examination of plans. This includes for the new, and powerful, spatial development strategies (SDSs)**. Rather than this being seen as a potential source of delay for plan-making, it should be seen as an important opportunity to galvanise support for development, such as affordable homes, which are vital to our collective future.

4 Conclusion

New homes, local democracy and enhancing nature are not incompatible objectives. A democratic planning system with the power to drive delivery can achieve all these goals as part of a vision led mission for sustainable development. In the context of a housing, health, nature and climate emergency communities must be part of delivering solutions that can provide healthy and resilient homes. None of this can be achieved by marginalising the voice of communities over decisions which have a profound impact on their lives.

5 Contact details

For further information, please contact:

- Dr Rosalie Callway – Rosalie.Callway@tcpa.org.uk
- Dr Hugh Ellis – Hugh.Ellis@tcpa.org.uk

² The UK ratified the Aarhus Convention in 2005 which requires provisions for the public to access environmental information, to participate in environmental decision-making and to access justice when challenging environmental decisions: https://bit.ly/UNECE_AarhusUK
