

Insights

THE FUTURE OF PLANNING: MORE OF THE SAME OR A HINT OF MORE RADICAL CHANGE TO COME?

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SUMMARY

MHCLG published some of its proposals for planning reform in its 'Planning for the Future' statement on 12 March 2020, which largely builds on the Conservative Manifesto 2019 promises. However, more measures for reform are on the horizon in the Planning White Paper to be published later this spring which could potentially be more radical. In this blog we explore why more radical change to the planning system could be afoot.

Planning for the Future - what was announced?

The planning reforms set out in MHCLG's 'Planning for the Future' statement present no major surprises and largely build on Tory Manifesto promises, especially in the context of 'infrastructure first', building design and measures to support densification and brownfield development in cities and towns.

The statement sets out what measures will be put in place to deliver reforms in these areas. These include a **new national brownfield map**, a **new approach to calculating Local Housing Need** to encourage more building in urban areas, the expected permitted development rights for building upwards to be in place by the summer, funding incentives for local authorities to deliver more homes and a consultation on a **new permitted development right for the demolition of vacant buildings and replacement with new residential units**.

Also confirmed in this statement is the Government's commitment to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and **four new development corporations** to deliver development around Bedford, St Neots/Sandy, Cambourne and Cambridge, with the case for a New Town at Cambridge also to be explored. Plans to establish a **Net Zero development in Toton** in the East Midlands are also in the offing.

Planning White Paper – more radical change on the horizon?

None of the measures announced suggest that the Government is adopting the radical approach to planning reform that was put forward by Policy Exchange, the influential centre-right think tank, earlier this year in its controversial report “Rethinking the Planning System for the 21st Century” (authored by Downing Street’s newly appointed housing and planning special advisor, Jack Airey). Yet.

This Policy Exchange report promotes a **wholesale radical reform of the planning system** as a solution to the country’s planning and housing woes, and challenged the Government “to be ambitious in establishing a new system”.

The central theme of the Policy Exchange report is based on a theory that market conditions should dictate land use rather than local authorities. Ideas promoted would see the end of detailed land use allocation and the introduction of a binary zonal system in its place, where one class of land is protected against growth and the other class zoned largely for development; the redefinition of local plans to comprise a simple set of development rules and zoning map only and removal of the local authorities’ powers to decide planning applications.

However, there is a question mark as to whether any of these controversial, and indisputably ambitious reforms, will be followed through in the White Paper given the announcements to date. The ‘Planning for the Future’ statement says that **the forthcoming White Paper will be ‘ambitious’, will ‘offer creative solutions’ to modernise the planning system and that it will take a ‘fresh and sensible’ look at the planning rules.** Whilst there is no promise of ‘radical’ reform, could the language used in the statement suggest that some elements of the Policy Exchange report may resurface in the forthcoming publication of the White Paper? We live in extraordinary times, so watch this space.

MEET THE TEAM



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