

SUMMARY OF KEY PROPOSALS IN PLANNING WHITE PAPER

1 Local plans would confer outline approval for development in areas earmarked for growth

Under the proposals, local plans would identify three categories of land. In “growth areas”, suitable for substantial development, outline approval for development would be automatically granted for forms and types of development specified in the plan. There would also be “renewal areas”, suitable for some development, such as “gentle densification”, and “protected areas” in which development is restricted. Instead of general policies for development, the document says, plans would be required to set out site- and area-specific requirements for development, alongside locally produced design codes. There would be “a new emphasis on engagement at the plan-making stage”, the document says. The existing test of soundness would be abolished, to be replaced by a “single statutory ‘sustainable development’ test. The duty to co-operate would be also be abolished, and requirements for environment and viability assessment “updated”.

Under the new system, local plans would need to be “visual and map-based, standardised, based on the latest digital technology and supported by a new standard template”, the document says. The government proposes that local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate will be required through legislation to meet a statutory timetable (of no more than 30 months in total) for key stages of the process, promising sanctions for those who fail to do so.

2 The planning process would be increasingly digitised, moving from “a process based on documents to a process driven by data”

The document says local planning authorities would be helped to use digital tools to support “a new civic engagement process for local plans and decision-making”. The government would insist local plans are built on standardised, digitally consumable rules and data, with the aim of enabling accessible interactive maps that show what can be built where. It also plans to standardise, and make openly and digitally accessible, other critical datasets that the planning system relies on, including planning decisions and developer contributions. And it wants to modernise the software used for making and case-managing a planning application.

3 Planning authorities would be given new powers to drive up design and sustainability standards

Under the revised system, there would be a greater focus on ‘placemaking’ and ‘the creation of beautiful places’ within the National Planning Policy Framework, the government says. New development would be expected to create a “net gain” to areas’ appearance. Design codes, which would be expected to be prepared locally, would be made “more binding” on planning decisions. A new body would be established to support the delivery of design codes across the country.

Proposals for high-quality developments that reflect local character and preferences would benefit from “automatic permission” under a proposed new “fast-track for beauty”. And each

local planning authority would be required to have a chief officer for design and place-making. The document also repeats the government's aim to revise the system for assessing the environmental impact of development – the environment secretary has said that proposals for this will be set out this autumn. And it hints at changes to building conservation consents, saying that the government will “protect our historic buildings and areas while ensuring the consent framework is fit for the 21st century”.

4 A new ‘single infrastructure levy’ will replace the existing system for getting developers to fund the infrastructure required by their schemes through section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy.

The government says the new single infrastructure levy will be a nationally set, flat rate charge. It says that it intends the new levy to raise more revenue than under the current system of developer contributions, and deliver “at least as much” affordable housing, and on-site affordable housing, as at present. The government says it will also look to extend the scope of the consolidated infrastructure levy, and remove exemptions from it “to capture changes of use through permitted development rights”.

5 A “binding” housing requirement would be introduced that local planning authorities would “have to deliver through their local plans”

The document says a new, nationally determined, binding housing requirement that local planning authorities would have to deliver through their local plans would be created. It says the requirement would be focused on areas where affordability pressure is highest to stop land supply being a barrier to enough homes being built.

6 Big building sites would be split between developers to accelerate delivery.

The government proposes to revise the National Planning Policy Framework to make it clear that masterplans and design codes for sites prepared for substantial development should seek to include a variety of development types from different builders which allow more phases to come forward together. It also promises to consult on options for improving the data held on contractual arrangements used to control land. And to ensure decisions on the locations of new public buildings – such as government offices and further education colleges – support renewal and regeneration of town centres

7 Community consultation at the planning application stage is to be “streamlined”

The document says, although the government wants to place new emphasis on engagement at the plan-making stage, it intends to “streamline” the opportunity for consultation at the planning application stage.