



Planning for a Sustainable Future White Paper

Presented to Parliament by

The Secretary of State for Communities and
Local Government

The Secretary of State for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

The Secretary of State for Transport

by Command of Her Majesty

May 2007

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Foreword



Planning is of fundamental importance to the quality of people's lives. It shapes the places where people live; allows us to create vibrant, healthy sustainable communities; protects and enhances our natural and historic environment; ensures everyone has access to green space and unspoiled countryside; and supports the economic development which is vital to creating jobs and ensuring our continuing prosperity.

Since 1997, we have made significant progress in improving the planning system. But the long-term challenges are increasing. We need to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases to meet the challenge of climate change and use our natural resources wisely. At the same time we need to support economic development so that we can generate high quality jobs in the context of rapid globalisation. We also need to build more houses so that people can afford decent homes. And we need to put the right infrastructure in place to meet our needs for travel, energy, water and public services.

The planning system also needs to evolve so that it better serves us as individuals, communities and businesses; provides for better public consultation and engagement in the planning process; better supports local authorities' role; and better enables us all to meet the challenge of climate change and deliver sustainable development including economic growth.


This White Paper sets out a wide-ranging package of reforms. We propose to streamline further the process in the town and country planning system, improve the ability of local authorities to shape their local communities, and ensure that there is a stronger approach to supporting sustainable economic development alongside work to tackle climate change in a way that is integrated with the delivery of other sustainable development objectives.

And we propose to introduce a new system that will enable us to take decisions on the infrastructure that we need to support our communities and quality of life, and achieve our goals for secure energy supply, reduced carbon emissions and international competitiveness, in a way that is timely, efficient and predictable. We will also improve accountability as part of the new system by strengthening the role ministers in setting policy and by establishing an independent body to take decisions fairly and

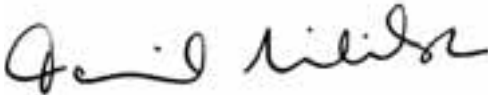
transparently. This White Paper also sets out proposals for improving and extending public and community engagement in the system.

It is 60 years since the landmark 1947 Town and Country Planning Act provided one of the pillars of post-war reconstruction, renewal and regeneration. Our planning system has served us well, with regular and sometimes radical overhauls, such as in the late 1960s, and again most recently in 2004. It has long been the model for many other countries to follow, and our intention is that our planning system should continue to set the standard in terms of the quality of outcomes for the individual citizen, the local community, developers and consumers of the system, and in terms of promoting sustainable and inclusive patterns of urban and rural development.


We believe that these reforms are essential if we are to create a planning system that is fit and able to meet the challenges that we face. In further developing these proposals we will work closely with stakeholders. This White Paper raises some important questions on which we are consulting now; we are also consulting separately on a number of other issues.




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David Miliband, Secretary of State for
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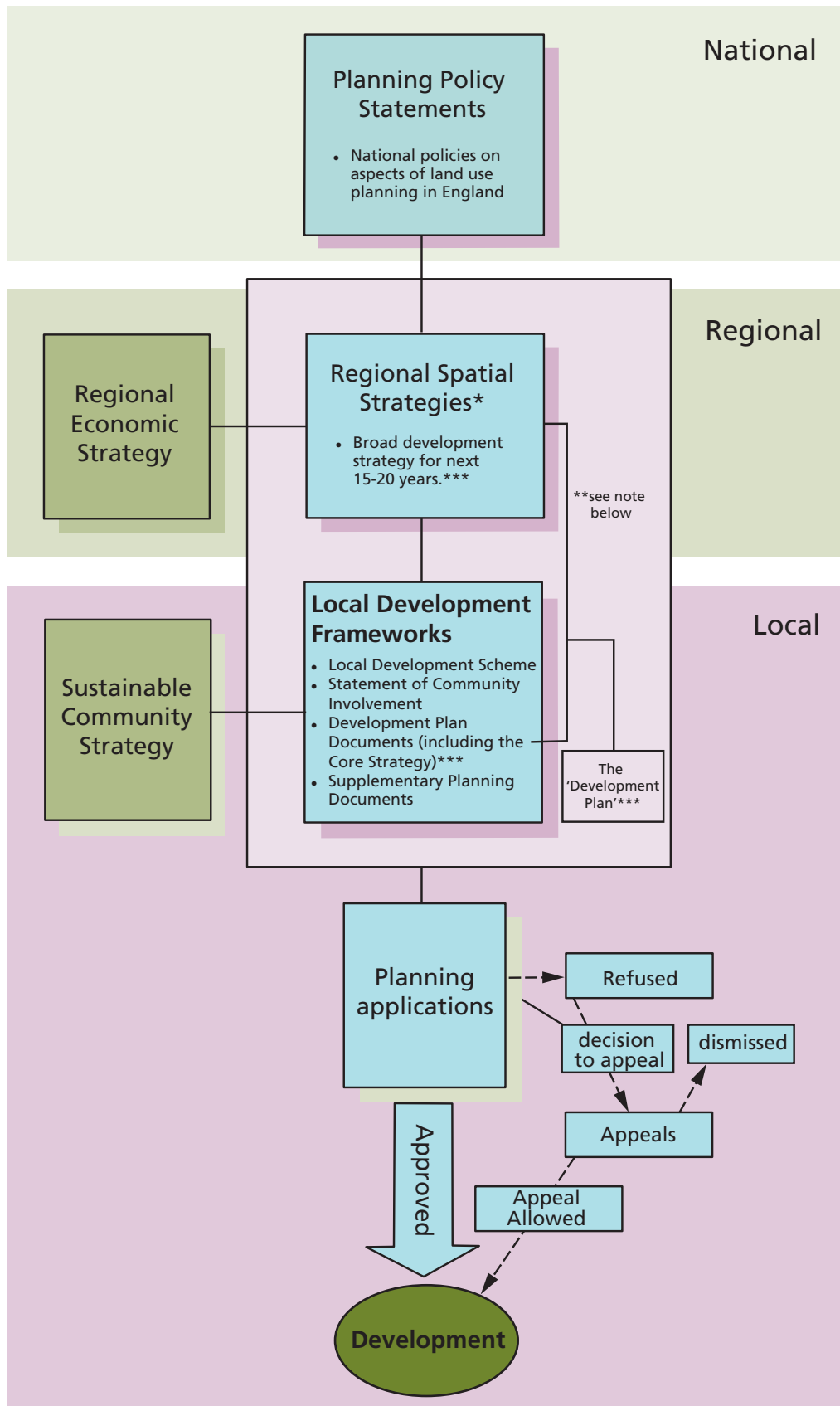
Executive summary



The importance of good planning

- 1.1** Planning is of fundamental importance to the quality of people's lives. When planning is done well it enables us to build thriving, healthy, sustainable communities where people want to work, shop, live or visit. It supports the economic development which is vital to create jobs and ensure our continuing prosperity as a nation. It helps us to protect our natural and historic environment and ensure everyone has access to green space and unspoiled countryside. It enables the delivery of essential infrastructure which allows us to travel and enjoy access to clean, affordable energy, water and waste facilities. And it supports us as individual citizens in improving our homes and property while protecting us from over-intrusive development. Planning does all of this by helping us to ensure development meets economic, social and environmental objectives in an integrated and sustainable way.
- 1.2** An effective and efficient planning system which is responsive to our needs as a society is therefore essential. But people have different views of, and different interests in, the way land is used. Planning is the forum for resolving those differences. On the one hand, it needs to help necessary development and modernisation, on the other, it seeks to protect and enhance our natural and historic environment and to ensure that a community's way of life, health and well-being are enhanced rather than harmed. Planning departments and committees are one of the parts of local government that people most frequently engage with because they take a strong interest in the future development of their neighbourhood and community.
- 1.3** Our vision is for a planning system which supports vibrant, healthy sustainable communities, promotes the UK's international competitiveness, and enables the infrastructure which is vital to our quality of life to be provided, in a way that is integrated with the delivery of other sustainable development objectives, and ensures that local communities and members of the public can make their views heard.

How the existing planning system works at local, regional and national level



* Prepared within context provided by the Regional Sustainable Development Framework
 ** Spatial Development Strategy in London



- 1.4** On the whole the planning system works well and allows us to encourage a thriving economy, deliver vibrant, healthy communities, protect and enhance our environment, and ensure people have a say in how their area develops. In particular, the plan-led approach with development plans and policies at both local and regional level on which the public is consulted, and which then provide a framework for assessing individual planning applications, is a good one.

Progress towards our vision

- 1.5** Since 1997, we have made significant progress in improving our planning system, as Box 1.1 highlights. Through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 we have put sustainable development at the heart of planning. The goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations. The UK Government's strategy for sustainable development, *Securing The Future*¹, launched in 2005, explains that this goal will be pursued in an integrated way through a sustainable, innovative and productive economy that delivers high levels of employment; and a just society that promotes social inclusion, sustainable communities and personal wellbeing. This will be done in ways that protect and enhance the physical and natural environment, and use resources and energy as efficiently as possible. This goal is reflected in *Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development*² which sets out the Government's objectives for the planning system.

- 1.6** So, for example, we have been able to achieve a substantial increase in new house building to help meet growing demand while minimising urban sprawl and maximising the use of brownfield land. Through our town centres first policy and revised compulsory purchase powers we have helped to regenerate and revitalise our town centres, and increase their amount of retail floor space. We have replaced the three tier plan-making structure with a simpler system based on Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks, with strengthened community and stakeholder engagement throughout the preparation process. The result will be improved spatial planning which allows local and regional bodies to shape their communities with greater certainty and flexibility.

- 1.7** We have also updated and improved some elements of the national policy framework with new Planning Policy Statements (PPS) on key issues, such as the protection of biodiversity and geological conservation, sustainable development in rural areas, waste management, renewable energy and flood risk. Most recently,

1 *Securing The Future – delivering UK sustainable development strategy*, March 2005. Cmnd 6467, TSO. www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/uk-strategy

2 PPS1: *Delivering Sustainable Development*, ODPMP, Feb 2005, TSO. www.communities.gov.uk

we have published a new PPS on housing and a draft PPS on climate change aimed at ensuring our goals in relation to increasing the supply of housing, creating sustainable mixed communities and reducing carbon emissions are integrated as far as possible and fully reflected in local planning decisions. In addition, through PPS1 and other measures, such as the requirement to provide design and access statements with planning applications for many types of new development and our new PPS on housing which makes clear that good design and high quality homes are fundamental to good place-making, we have strengthened our commitment to the achievement of good design, which is indivisible from good planning.

1.8 People and organisations making planning applications are getting speedier decisions. Many more local authorities are meeting the targets for dealing with planning decisions. We have halved the time ministers take to make decisions on town and country planning applications. The planning system has also become more efficient and effective and customer-focused with the introduction of e-planning services.

1.9 We have improved the quality of professional advice in planning by:

- setting up the Planning Advisory Service to provide guidance, support and peer review for local authorities;
- establishing the Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS) which provides expert advice on large applications;
- grant-aiding Planning Aid, which provides free professional planning advice to local communities and individuals; and
- increasing the supply of qualified planners by introducing bursaries for post-graduate planners and providing distance learning in spatial planning skills.



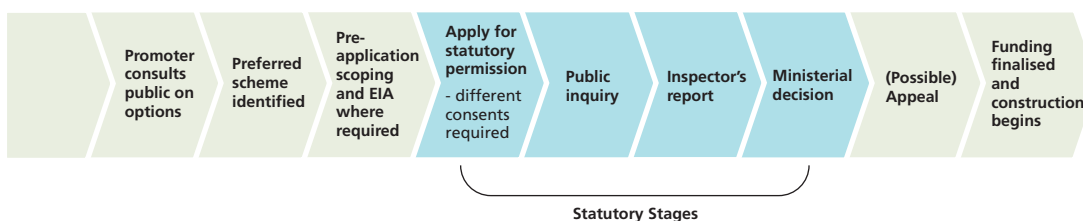
Box 1.1

What recent reforms have achieved

- **Speed – local decisions:** local planning authorities have dramatically improved their performance in handling planning applications. We set standards to be met by 31 March 2007 (60 per cent of major applications to be dealt with within 13 weeks, 65 per cent of minor and 80 per cent of other applications within eight weeks). In 2001/02 just under a quarter of authorities were meeting all three targets– today three quarters are doing so.
- **Speed – national decisions:** we have cut in half the time taken to decide cases determined by the Secretary of State with 85 per cent of cases decided within 16 weeks in 2006.
- **Customer centred e-planning:** all local authorities are linked to the Planning Portal which deals with electronic planning applications and planning content. It has more than 170,000 users and processes more than 6,000 online planning applications each month. The Planning Portal also provides up-to-the-minute information and services to citizens and business users generating efficiencies for all.
- **Supporting planners by increasing capacity:** at the end of 2005 there were nearly 2,000 students on accredited planning courses and we have assisted over 400 post graduate students with government funded bursaries.
- **More efficient land use:** about three quarters of new dwellings are being built on brownfield land, exceeding the 60 per cent target set by the Government.
- **Increased housing supply:** more houses are being built – in the period between 2002-03 and 2005-06 there has been a 22 per cent increase in the number of new dwelling completions in England. This includes a 30 per cent increase in the four southern regions of England.
- **Revitalised town centres:** since the mid 1990s there has been an upward trend in the proportion of new development in and around town centres. In 1994 about 23 per cent of development was in and around town centres – by 2004 it was up to 41 per cent.
- **Good design:** to improve quality standards new planning guidance, along with design and access statements and new tools such as Design Coding have been introduced. CABE research is showing that this is beginning to have an effect. And local authorities have responded to the challenge, with nearly two thirds now having a design champion, up from a fifth in 2001.

1.10 We have also taken steps to improve the planning system for key national infrastructure projects. We have introduced new rules to speed up and enhance public inquiries into major infrastructure applications that go through the town and country planning process. The 2003 Air Transport White Paper explained the need to expand our airports but to do so in a way that took account of environmental and other considerations. And the Government's 2006 Energy Review included proposals to improve the planning consents system for energy projects; guidance for power station promoters on a range of issues; new rules for more efficient inquiries; and a statement of need on renewable energy.

The current planning process for infrastructure projects from start to finish



1.11 Improving the provision of local infrastructure has also been a priority. Local transport, roads, schools, health and social care facilities, and other community facilities are essential to the creation of thriving, healthy, sustainable communities. The Government has contributed to this through sustained investment in infrastructure. For example, in the 2006 Pre-Budget Report the Government committed to increasing capital investment in education, including in children's centres, schools, colleges and universities, from £8.3 billion in 2007-8 to £10.2 billion in 2010-11.

1.12 At Budget 2007 the Government made further announcements for allocating the revenues generated by the proposed Planning-gain Supplement (PGS) to help finance the local and regional infrastructure necessary for sustainable economic development. The Government remains engaged with stakeholders on its proposals for PGS, and will consider their views, alongside the need for additional infrastructure investment and the mechanisms that could help provide these resources. If, after further consideration, PGS continues to be deemed workable and effective, PGS would be introduced no earlier than 2009.

1.13 As a result of the reforms we have introduced, we are already seeing real improvements across the board. Speed and performance have improved; spatial planning has become more effective; our town centres are more vibrant; substantial increases in housing are being achieved. At the same time the impact on the countryside and green space has not only been minimised but, wherever possible, opportunities have been taken to improve the local environment.

The challenges that we face

1.14 The long-term challenges for planning are increasing. Over the coming decades, debate and decisions about where development should take place are likely to become more difficult. We must ensure that the whole planning system, including both the town and country planning system covering residential and commercial development and some infrastructure, and also the range of separate consent regimes for specific types of infrastructure, is fit and able to cope with the following challenges:



- **Meeting the challenge of climate change:** The evidence is now compelling that greenhouse gas emissions from human activity are changing the world's climate. The recent Stern Review makes it clear that ignoring climate change will eventually damage economic growth, people's health and the natural environment. The Climate Change Bill published on 13 March will introduce a clear, credible, long-term framework for the UK to achieve its goals of reducing carbon dioxide emissions and ensure steps are taken towards adapting to the impacts of climate change. The planning system also has an important role to play in enabling the UK to meet those challenges. It can help us to meet our targets for the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases by, for example:
 - supporting the building of zero-carbon homes and business premises that are low energy and produce lower carbon emissions;
 - locating development to reduce the need to travel;
 - making walking and cycling accessible, attractive and essential components of new development;
 - supporting integrated public transport.

Crucially, planning can help speed up the shift to renewable and low carbon forms of energy. Renewables currently contribute over four per cent of our electricity supplies. The European Council has agreed a binding target for renewable generation to provide 20 per cent of the EU's energy consumption by 2020. In parallel, the Renewables Obligation supports investment in new renewable electricity technologies but we need to ensure that the right regulatory and planning framework is in place to encourage this investment.

The planning system can also play a vital role in helping ensure that new developments through their location and design are resilient to the consequences of climate change including flooding, coastal erosion and higher temperatures.

- **Supporting sustainable economic development:** The global economy is changing rapidly, with new technology, production and trading patterns emerging. Globalisation is bringing more intense cross-border economic competition. This means new opportunities for growth and jobs, but also increasing competition from fast growing economies, such as China and India. It is also leading to a much more dynamic and global network of market places. To be competitive, business needs to respond much more quickly to changes in market conditions. Planning can help by being responsive and efficient, and supporting vital economic development in a way which ensures

it is consistent with wider environmental and social objectives, and which ensures that all our regions share in the benefits of sustainable economic development.

- **Increasing the supply of housing:** The population is increasing, ageing, and becoming more prosperous. The rising population means that more people have to be housed; the trend towards smaller households is further increasing housing demand; and increased prosperity means that more people are seeking to own their own home. The housing and wider service needs of the growing number of elderly will also impact on the type and location of development. These demographic shifts are putting pressure on the stock of available housing, pushing up prices. It is imperative that we support housing growth so that people's aspirations for good quality, affordable housing can be met. If we do not increase the supply of housing from currently planned rates, the proportion of 30 year old couples able to afford their own home would drop from around 50 per cent to around 30 per cent by 2026.
- **Protecting and enhancing the environment and natural resources:** Continuing economic growth and the need to build more homes puts pressure on the environment and natural resources. Planning has a role to protect and enhance the quality, character and amenity value of the countryside and urban areas as a whole, through positive policies. A high level of protection should be given to our most valued townscapes and landscapes, wildlife habitats and natural resources; and those with international and national designations should receive the highest level of protection. Environmental quality has a direct impact on overall quality of life, and the conservation and improvement of the natural and built environment brings social and economic benefits for local communities. Planning should contribute to improving the quality of water, land and air, and the conservation of renewable and non-renewable resources and to sustainable waste management.
- **Improving our local and national infrastructure:** These changes also bring with them new demands on infrastructure, public services, and commercial and leisure facilities. Vibrant, healthy, sustainable communities are not created by new housing alone. People need places to work and spend leisure time. People want high quality local services and amenities such as schools, health and social care facilities and green space. They also expect to be able to travel reliably including by road, rail and air; and to have clean, secure and affordable supplies of power, water and facilities for waste management. If we do not ensure the right infrastructure is in place at every level, our quality of life – individually and collectively – will diminish. Improving infrastructure provision is also vital for unlocking housing growth.



- **Maintaining security of energy supply:** A particular challenge is maintaining the security of our energy supplies. We need investment in about 25-30 gigawatts of new electricity generation capacity over the next two decades – equivalent to about one third of our existing capacity. If we do not do this in a timely fashion, then we may not have enough capacity to meet our energy demands. At the same time we are becoming more dependent on imported energy as our supplies from the North Sea decline. This means we also need to modernise our infrastructure by constructing import terminals and storage facilities for liquefied natural gas if we are to get the energy we need at competitive prices. We can also seize the opportunity presented by the need to renew capacity to help support the shift towards renewable and low carbon energy.

Why we need to do more

- 1.15** Despite the improvements that have been made in the planning system over the last decade, we need to do more to ensure that it is capable of meeting these long term challenges.

National policy is not sufficiently clear and responsive:

- 1.16** Over the years we have built up, incrementally, a body of national planning policy which is too voluminous, complex and unwieldy for those that use it. National planning policy on economic development is out of date. The result is that local authorities and others can find it difficult to take account of all the relevant policy considerations or may adopt an overly cautious approach rather than one that positively encourages sustainable economic development or the development of renewable energy sources.
- 1.17** Neither do we have clear policy frameworks for all areas of nationally significant infrastructure. The result is that fundamental issues such as whether there is a need for additional capacity or whether a technology is proven and safe are addressed from scratch in each individual application. This can make the process of preparing applications for individual project proposals more onerous and uncertain, and mean that many months have to be spent at the inquiries into these proposals debating high level issues such as need.

The planning system is too bureaucratic, takes too long and is unpredictable

- 1.18** It is absolutely right that planning applications should be refused where the adverse effects of development for society or the environment outweigh the benefits. But the planning system should produce decisions in an efficient,

consistent and reliable manner. A common complaint, especially from business, has been that planning decisions take too long, cost too much and, in some cases, do not consistently reflect national policy.

1.19 Recent reforms mean that local planning authorities are taking half the time it used to take to draw up plans but many plans are still taking longer than originally intended and some aspects of the process are inflexible. For example, if a plan is unsound it cannot easily be fixed but must go right back to the beginning of the process. The speed and quality of decision making is also an issue and, despite the improvements that have been made, local communities, businesses and individuals are not always receiving the level of service they have a right to expect. Household applications more than doubled in the 10 years to 2005 and the planning system is in danger of becoming bogged down as planning applications rise. The growth in applications is in turn increasing pressure on the appeals system. The number of appeals grew from around 14,000 in 1997-98 to over 22,000 in 2005-06 and is forecast to grow further to 26,000 by the end of the decade. This in turn means appeals are taking longer.

1.20 The process for dealing with major infrastructure projects, from submission of the proposal to decision in particular, is too slow and complicated. It took seven years to get to a decision on Heathrow Terminal 5; more than six years to get to a decision on the North Yorkshire Power Line upgrade; nearly four years to get to a decision on Dibden Bay container terminal; and two and a half years to reach a decision on Staythorpe C gas-fired power station. Prolonged procedures of this sort rarely result in better decision making but they do impose high costs, not only on promoters but also on other participants in the process. Delays can also result in years of blight for individuals and communities during which people are unable to move house or receive compensation. And they can put at risk the country's economic and environmental well-being if, as a consequence, good development is delayed or investment and jobs go overseas rather than wait for modern infrastructure that is needed to support efficient business logistics.

Individuals and communities find it difficult to be heard

1.21 Long, drawn out planning processes do not necessarily provide the best opportunities for people or communities to have their say or deliver the best outcomes in terms of social justice. Complex and lengthy consultation on local plans can lead to consultation fatigue while still failing to engage citizens effectively. The adversarial nature of the inquiry system for major infrastructure projects can be intimidating and make it difficult for local government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and members of the public to participate



effectively. The time and costs involved means it often favours the well-resourced and well-organised over less well-off communities and citizens.

Planning systems are confusing and unclear

- 1.22** Some forms of development, and especially major infrastructure projects, have to get approval under a number of different statutory arrangements. In planning terminology they are subject to ‘multiple consent regimes’. So, for example, a proposal to develop a major port may need to seek a consent to dredge the harbour under the Harbours Act 1964; an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 to provide for necessary upgrades to the rail connections to the ports; planning permission under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 for related storage facilities for containers unloaded from ships; and separate compulsory purchase applications to allow the necessary land acquisition. Another example would be Heathrow Terminal 5 where BAA had to lodge 37 applications under seven different pieces of legislation. Complex railway projects may need to be considered under the hybrid Bill procedure.
- 1.23** The existence of multiple consent regimes also means there are multiple decision points and multiple decision makers, with potentially several ministers being involved. The result in these cases is a system which not only adds to costs for users but also reduces clarity about who is accountable for decision making. There are also multiple consent regimes for many infrastructure schemes that are not nationally significant, which can be confusing, complex and time consuming for all concerned.
- 1.24** The role of ministers in planning decisions on major infrastructure is also not well understood. For example, confusion can arise where ministers take decisions on schemes in which they or the Government have a specific policy interest, and it is sometimes thought that they are able to take into account wider political factors not directly related to the development. In reality, however, ministers perform a quasi-judicial role when deciding planning applications, basing decisions on the evidence presented and published policy and take great care to avoid any real or perceived conflict of interest. Hence, if they are likely to be involved in taking decisions on an application, they are heavily circumscribed in their ability to encourage projects, even if they consider them to be vital for the national interest; to discuss projects with representatives of affected communities and other key stakeholders; or to get involved in resolving problems or brokering compromises.

Decisions are not always taken at the right level

- 1.25** Decisions are not always being taken at the right level. For example, transport ministers take decisions under the Transport and Works Act on some projects –

such as guided bus lanes – which are predominantly local in character. Additionally, between April 2002 and July 2006, 60 “called-in” cases were determined by ministers under the Town and Country Planning Act which were for housing developments of 25 units or fewer. While size is not the only issue when deciding whether an application raises issues of more than local importance, which merit the application being “called in,” we propose to look again at the type and scale of application where decisions are taken nationally rather than locally, with a view to reducing the number of cases decided by the Secretary of State.

- 1.26** Conversely, local decision making may not be the best solution for some applications which are particularly complex, span several local authority areas, or confer national or regional benefits but local disbenefits (the “spillover” effect). Transport projects such as new roads and railway lines can often involve a number of different local authorities; energy projects, such as new overhead power lines, while vital to the overall security of electricity supply, may confer no direct local benefits.

The foundations for further reform

- 1.27** To help it understand how the planning system could best respond to some of the key challenges of the future, the Government commissioned Kate Barker to consider how, in the context of globalisation, and building on the reforms already made in England, planning policy and procedures could better deliver economic growth and prosperity in a way that is integrated with other sustainable development goals.³
- 1.28** The Government also asked Rod Eddington, who had been commissioned to advise on the long-term links between transport and the UK’s economic productivity, growth and stability, to examine how delivery mechanisms for transport infrastructure might be improved within the context of the Government’s commitment to sustainable development.⁴
- 1.29** Kate Barker’s *Review of Land Use Planning* concluded that ‘planning is a valued and necessary activity’ and welcomed the progress that had been made with reforms to date (Barker, 2006, p3). However, Barker recognised that the planning system was facing ever more demanding challenges and argued that the responsiveness and efficiency of the system needed to be improved. She recommended further wide-ranging reforms, building on recent changes and the plan-led approach, to improve the way that planning supports our economic prosperity while maintaining or enhancing delivery of other objectives, including

³ Barker *Review of Land Use Planning*, Dec 2006, HMSO

⁴ *The Eddington Transport Study*, Dec 2006, HMSO.



ensuring community involvement, supporting local democracy, and protecting and enhancing the environment.

Box 1.2

Kate Barker's headline recommendations:

- streamline policy and process through reducing policy guidance, unifying consent regimes and reforming plan-making;
- update national policy on planning for economic development;
- introduce a new system for dealing with major infrastructure projects;
- promote a positive planning culture within the plan-led system;
- consider enhancing fiscal incentives to ensure a more efficient use of land;
- a more risk-based and proportionate approach to regulation;
- remove the need for minor commercial developments to require planning permission;
- improve skills and ensure sufficient resources for planning;
- reduce delays at appeals and call-in; and
- ensure that new development beyond towns and cities occurs in the most sustainable way.

1.30 Rod Eddington's analysis of the delivery system for transport infrastructure echoed Kate Barker's concerns about the potential for the planning process to delay the development of vital new infrastructure. He recommended radical reforms to the process of planning for major transport infrastructure.

Box 1.3

Rod Eddington's headline recommendations for major infrastructure planning:

- the primary role of ministers should be to set national policy statements for major infrastructure development, taking full account of economic, social and environmental considerations, following consultation;
- there should be a presumption in favour of development for major infrastructure proposals so long as they are consistent with national policy statements, and compatible with EU law and the European Convention on Human Rights;
- an independent commission should be established to manage inquiries and determine individual applications for major schemes in England;
- local consultation should be carried out by the applicant at the pre-application stage and inquiries and decisions would have regard to local considerations;
- consent regimes should be rationalised to eliminate duplication and overlap, and to treat major projects as a whole; and
- there should be a clear framework for statutory rights to challenge at key stages in the process.

1.31 Kate Barker's Review considered these proposals in a wider planning context and recommended comprehensive reform of the planning of key infrastructure projects in relation to transport, energy, water supply and waste, based on the same principles.

The Government's response and key principles and proposals

- 1.32** The Government has considered the reports by Kate Barker and Rod Eddington carefully. And it has taken into account both the views expressed on these reports and further feedback it has received from a range of stakeholders. We accept that there is still more that we can do to improve the way that the planning system operates, in particular to increase its responsiveness to change and its efficiency. And we accept that the planning system has to adapt to enable us to build the infrastructure necessary to support sustainable communities and our quality of life, as well as to achieve vital goals in relation to energy diversity and security of supply, reduced carbon emissions and other environmental goals, international competitiveness and reduced congestion.
- 1.33** This White Paper sets out our detailed proposals for reform in response to the recommendations made by Kate Barker and by Rod Eddington in respect of planning.
- 1.34** These reforms will, for the first time, embrace all development consent regimes, including those for major energy, water, transport and waste development, as well as the town and country planning system. We need to consider planning and development holistically if we are to ensure that it delivers the best outcome for us as a nation and for local communities.
- 1.35** For town and country planning, we consider that, even while the reforms introduced in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 are bedding down, the system needs to adapt further to meet the challenges we now face. We will build on the improvements we have already made to ensure that there is a stronger approach to support sustainable economic development, alongside work to tackle climate change and cut carbon emissions and other environmental impacts from new economic development; strengthen the role of local authorities as place-shapers; and streamline the system to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of the planning system for all.
- 1.36** For key national infrastructure projects – such as major airport and port projects, improvements to the Strategic Road Network, major new power generating facilities and facilities critical to energy security, and major reservoir and waste water plant works – we propose to replace the multiple existing consent regimes with a new system. This will enable us to take decisions on infrastructure in a way that is timely, efficient and predictable. It will also improve the accountability and transparency of the system by strengthening the role of ministers in setting policy and establishing an independent body to take decisions fairly and improve the



ability of the public and communities to participate effectively in the process. Our new system needs these characteristics because, while the infrastructure concerned benefits us all and will help prevent problems such as energy shortages, congestion and increased pollution, the impacts tend to fall disproportionately on a relatively few people living close to the development. The new system will ensure that their interests are also taken into account in decisions on infrastructure. Local authorities, in particular, will have a strong part to play in representing their communities and helping shape national infrastructure in their area.

1.37 Five core principles underpin our proposals:

- planning must be responsive, particularly to longer term challenges such as increasing globalisation and climate change, and properly integrate our economic, social and environmental objectives to deliver sustainable development;
- the planning system should be streamlined, efficient and predictable;
- there must be full and fair opportunities for public consultation and community engagement;
- the planning system should be transparent and accountable; and
- planning should be undertaken at the right level of government – national, regional and local.

Responsive planning which integrates our economic, social and environmental objectives

1.38 In order to properly integrate our economic, social and environmental objectives, we need clear and up-to-date policy frameworks which can inform decision making at every level. For town and country planning, we propose to develop a new policy framework for encouraging sustainable economic development in the challenging and rapidly changing global context, in line with the Government's objectives for the planning system set out in PPS1. We will also finalise our planning policy on climate change.

1.39 For nationally significant infrastructure projects, we propose to produce national policy statements for key infrastructure sectors such as air transport and renewable energy. These will set out the national need for infrastructure and explain how this fits with other policies such as those relating to economic development, international competitiveness, climate change, energy conservation/efficiency and protection of the historic and natural environment. By setting out the Government's strategic, long-term approach to infrastructure development,

national policy statements will provide far greater certainty and clarity for promoters, planners and communities.

A streamlined, efficient and predictable system

- 1.40** We will speed up town and country planning and make it more efficient. We propose to give people greater freedom and flexibility to make minor extensions to their home and their business premises, and to install microgeneration equipment such as solar panels where there is little or no impact on neighbouring properties, to reduce the number of developments for which planning permission is needed. And we propose to simplify the provisions governing how planning applications are made, and streamline information requirements for applications, to reduce the burden on all parties involved in the planning process.
- 1.41** For nationally significant infrastructure, we propose to help promoters improve the way that they prepare applications and to streamline the development consent procedures by rationalising the different regimes, improving inquiry procedures, and imposing statutory timetables on the process. These proposals are aimed at reducing the time taken from application to decision to under a year in the majority of cases.

Full and fair opportunities for public consultation and engagement

- 1.42** A fundamental aspect of the planning system is that it is the means by which people have their say in proposals for development which have the potential to impact on their homes, communities, access to amenities and quality of life.
- 1.43** Our aim is to improve actual community engagement in planning rather than create more processes. So in respect of local plan-making we want to encourage a more joined-up approach to community engagement across the range of a local authority's functions. We will end the independent examination of separate planning 'Statements of Community Involvement', as the new statutory best value duty to involve will become the means of ensuring high standards of engagement. And we will preserve the principles of early engagement and effective consultation on local plan preparation but give local planning authorities more flexibility to decide how and when to consult and engage. This is designed to produce meaningful processes rather than bureaucratic ones, which reflect the different needs of different types of plan in different places.
- 1.44** The new procedures for dealing with nationally significant infrastructure projects will also include new provisions for public consultation and engagement. In particular, we propose to:



- ensure effective public engagement in, and Parliamentary scrutiny of, national policy statements before final conclusions are reached. Where national policy statements include proposals for development at particular or likely locations, this should include local and community engagement;
- require promoters who are developing particular schemes to consult and to do so in a way that meets best practice standards;
- introduce an ‘open floor’ stage in inquiries to ensure that members of the public can participate more effectively. We will also reform the inquiry rules more generally to ensure members of the public can engage on a much more equal footing with the professional advocates who currently dominate the process. In this way we will also balance the need to streamline inquiries with the need to ensure a fair opportunity for those with an interest in development proposals to be heard; and
- increase grant funding for bodies such as Planning Aid (alongside the introduction of the new infrastructure planning system) to ensure members of the public get the advice and support they need to get involved on site-specific proposals in national policy statements, and in the planning inquiries on major infrastructure projects.

A transparent and accountable system

- 1.45** Decisions on planning must be made in a fair way. All of those involved in the planning system – individuals, objectors, local communities, promoters – have a right to understand the reasons for decisions and to expect accountability from policy makers and decision takers. Our proposals to reduce the number of minor applications and streamline information requirements will help ensure that more resources are available to focus on the schemes and issues where scrutiny and public testing is vitally important.
- 1.46** We want to clarify and improve the way policy is set and decisions are made for nationally significant infrastructure projects. We propose that ministers should be clearly accountable – including through direct Parliamentary scrutiny – for setting overall strategy in national policy statements. We consider that decisions on individual applications should then be taken within the framework of the relevant national policy statement, by an independent, and expert, commission on an objective basis. This infrastructure planning commission would work within a clear legislative framework set by Parliament and a policy framework set by ministers, and would be accountable to them for its decisions and performance, as well as being subject to legal challenge. We consider that this framework provides for greater transparency and more effective accountability than current

arrangements, by achieving a clear separation between setting policy and taking quasi-judicial decisions.

Planning at the right level – national, regional and local

- 1.47** *Strong and prosperous communities*, the Local Government White Paper published in October 2006, set out our proposals for giving local government and their partners more freedom and powers to meet the needs of their citizens and communities and enable citizens and communities themselves to play their part. Planning is a core function of local authorities and is central to their role as place shapers. We are committed therefore to ensuring that decision making is taken at as local a level as possible so that it can fully reflect local circumstances and needs.
- 1.48** But a purely local approach to planning cannot deliver the best outcomes for us as a society or nation, or for the environment. Sometimes, development may have national or regional benefits or impacts which go far beyond the immediate impact on local communities. Planning needs to reflect these wider regional and national factors. That is why we also have plan-making at the regional level with Regional Spatial Strategies in each English region (and the London Spatial Development Strategy). We will continue to encourage regional planning bodies and local authorities to make best use of the flexibility within the system, which enables them to collaborate across boundaries.
- 1.49** Most major infrastructure decisions – which account for a tiny proportion of all planning decisions – are already taken at the national level by ministers. Decisions on such development, which is vital to our prosperity as a nation, will continue to be taken at the national level but, as described above, in future they would be taken independently of government by an expert commission.
- 1.50** But we also consider that there is scope for further devolution to local authorities. We therefore propose to reduce the number of town and country planning cases notified to, and also called in by, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. And we propose to explore devolution of some non-national infrastructure decisions, especially in relation to local transport, to local authorities. Further work will be needed to work out how this might operate in practice and what safeguards might be needed. For instance, some form of limited “call in” ability similar to that under the town and country planning system might be appropriate. We will work with local authorities to resolve these issues.
- 1.51** Whatever level decisions are taken at, however, it is clear that they must be taken within a framework that takes account of relevant factors at national, regional, and local level. Thus, under our proposals, we expect local authorities and regional planning bodies to take full account of relevant national policy. And we propose



that local authorities should have an important role in ensuring that national decision makers, including the proposed infrastructure planning commission, take full and proper account of relevant local and regional factors and considerations.

Realising our vision

1.52 Our recent reforms have put the delivery of sustainable development at the heart of the planning system. We believe that the reforms set out in this White Paper will, building on the reforms we have already put in place, make our vision for the planning system a reality, and help deliver a wide range of benefits for individuals, communities, business, society and the environment, including:

- more and better jobs as a result of sustainable economic development;
- better infrastructure so people have access to reliable transport, clean and secure energy, clean water supplies, and better local amenities;
- continued protection and enhancement of the natural and historic environment;
- places shaped by their communities where people are proud to live;
- more efficient and timely systems in which controls are proportionate to impact and unnecessary costs are eliminated; and
- a more transparent and accountable planning system in which national and local government work together to ensure decisions at every level deliver the best outcomes for all.

1.53 The rest of this White Paper sets out our proposals in detail. The reforms to the regimes for nationally significant infrastructure projects are dealt with first, in Chapters 2 to 5, as they are more wide ranging. Chapters 6 to 9 then explain our proposals to improve the responsiveness and efficiency of the town and country planning process. Chapter 10 explains the position with regard to the Devolved Administrations, sets out our proposed timetable for introducing these reforms and details transitional arrangements.

Consultation

1.54 These are important and wide-ranging proposals for reform. Some of the proposals will require legislation, others changes in policy and guidance. In developing these proposals, we want to work closely with stakeholders, consulting where appropriate and when timely.

1.55 This White Paper raises some important questions on which we are now seeking views and comments. A series of consultation questions are set out in the body of the document. For ease of reference, the proposals and the questions are then summarised at the end of the document, Annex A. The consultation closes on **17 August 2007**.

1.56 We are also consulting separately on a number of more detailed proposals in relation to the implementation of reforms to the town and country planning system. These consultations, and where you can find them, are detailed in Section 2 of Annex A.

Summary of proposals

For key national infrastructure such as major airport and port projects, improvements to the Strategic Road Network, major new power generating facilities and facilities critical to energy security, and major reservoir and waste water plant works, we propose to:

- produce, following thorough and effective public consultation and Parliamentary scrutiny, national policy statements to ensure that there is a clear policy framework for nationally significant infrastructure which integrates environmental, economic and social objectives to deliver sustainable development;
- provide greater certainty for promoters of infrastructure projects and help them to improve the way that they prepare applications by making better advice available to them; by requiring them to consult publicly on proposals for development; and by requiring early and effective engagement with key parties such as local authorities, statutory bodies, and relevant highway authorities;
- streamline the procedures for infrastructure projects of national significance by rationalising the different consent regimes and improving the inquiry procedures for all of them;
- clarify the decision making process, and achieve a clear separation of policy and decision making, by creating an independent commission to take the decisions on nationally significant infrastructure cases within the framework of the relevant national policy statement;
- improve public participation across the entire process by providing better opportunities for public consultation and engagement at each stage of the planning approval process; improving the ability of the public to participate in inquiries by introducing a specific “open floor” stage; and, alongside the introduction of new system, providing additional funding to bodies such as Planning Aid.

For the town and country planning system, we propose to:

- produce a more strategic, clearer and more focused national planning policy framework with PPS1 – *Delivering Sustainable Development* at its heart, to provide the context for plan-making and decision-taking;
- publish a new Planning Policy Statement, *Planning for Economic Development*, which will further reinforce the Government’s commitment set out in PPS1 to promoting a strong, stable and productive economy with access for all to jobs, to regeneration and improved employment prospects;



- improve the effectiveness of the town centre planning policy by replacing the need and impact tests with a new test which has a strong focus on our town centre first policy, and which promotes competition and improves consumer choice, avoiding the unintended effects of the current need test;
- finalise the Planning Policy Statement on climate change and introduce legislation to set out clearly the role of local planning authorities in tackling energy efficiency and climate change;
- work with industry to set in place a timetable and action plan to deliver substantial reductions in carbon emissions from new commercial buildings within the next 10 years;
- review and wherever possible extend permitted development rights on microgeneration to non residential types of land use including commercial and agricultural development;
- place planning at the heart of local government by aligning the Sustainable Community Strategy and the local development framework core strategy. We will also work with the Local Government Association and others to continue building capacity, promoting culture change in planning and we will issue ‘place shaping’ guidance;
- introduce changes to local development frameworks to ensure a more streamlined and tailored process with more flexibility about the number and type of plans, how they are produced and a more meaningful, engaged level of community involvement;
- introduce Planning Performance Agreements, which will help streamline the processing of major applications, and support a properly resourced planning service with changes to planning fees and consult on devolving the setting of planning fees to local authorities;
- introduce a new impact approach to householder development which will reduce the number of minor applications whilst protecting the interests of neighbours, the wider community and the environment, and then extend this approach to other types of development; and
- streamline the planning application process, reduce the number of applications called in by ministers and introduce a range of measures to substantially improve the appeals process.

1.57 Annex B sets out a schedule of the Government’s responses to each recommendation made by Kate Barker. The Government plans to respond to other aspects of Rod Eddington’s report in full alongside the Comprehensive Spending Review. We will also be responding to the March 2007 Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution report on the Urban Environment⁵, which contains recommendations about policies for the urban environment including some which could effect the planning system, in due course.

5 *The Urban Environment*, Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, March 2007.



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