

NPSG FEEDBACK ON GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

1. Introduction

The Government White Paper released earlier this month is attempting to bring about radical reform of the planning system, much of which has not changed since 1947. The prime objective is to increase the supply of housing through greater centralisation of decisions and fast-tracking the planning cycle. It is released at an interesting time since the impact of COVID-19 has led to a disruption in conventional thinking about where people live and work. For example, the transition to home working has not only rendered many office blocks redundant but has also led to a rethink about the sort of spaces people need in their homes, in order for remote working to be effective.

A planning system which dates back to the Town & Country Planning Act of 1947 cannot be fit for purpose given the seismic changes which have occurred in society in the last 73 years! So, if it is accepted that the present system is extremely slow, costly and unwieldy, then what would a new system look like? The use to which land is put imposes costs and benefits on many of the stakeholders and co-ordination with the provision of public services is paramount.

The key question is there a serious prospect of the proposals set out in the White Paper being successful?

2. The Positives

- a. The CBPC Parish, as AONB, falls into the third category of land and as such is PROTECTED. This means that more stringent controls are applied in order to ensure sustainability.
- b. CBPC villages will fall exclusively into the “renewal and “protect” categories and certainly not “growth”
- c. A single flat rate infrastructure levy rather than a negotiated S106 levy may accelerate the planning process and ensure that the various infrastructure needs of schools, surgeries, playing fields etc are met. However, more detail on how this would be satisfactorily enforced is required. There is a threat that removal of the negotiated S106 process would make matters worse.
- d. The potential shift to a more objective “rules based” approach has got to be an improvement on the largely subjective approach to planning in use today.
- e. Since there have been a number of poor enforcement examples any strengthening of enforcement powers will be welcomed, although again it is not clear if the WP addresses this.

3. The Negatives

- a. There is a potential reduction in scope of Neighbourhood Plans. For example, Neighbourhood Plans may be unable to allocate sites for development and not include development management policies. The adoption of a Neighbourhood Plan has always felt important to us, but now it is imperative that we move as quickly as possible to a local referendum and adoption of the Plan. It’s possible that given our area is classified as protected then the

impact of these changes may be less than in those areas targeted for growth or renewal. It is important that we make our views known on any attempt to erode the influence of Neighbourhood Plans in general, whichever category they fall into.

- b. The areas we have been focussing on such as a local voice, better engagement with local planning and harnessing local views are all in jeopardy if this report is adopted.
- c. The White Paper seems to imply that arbitrary annual housing targets could be imposed by Central Government without any reference to actual need. It could result in either excessive homes being built and/or inappropriate housing being built.
- d. The overall target of 300,000 homes per annum is aspirational and not underpinned by radical reforms in the way houses are built and designed. Unless more pre-fabrication is done off site with adoption of new materials and processes, other than bricks and mortar, then such a target is unlikely to be met. There is also very little detail on how emerging technologies can be exploited to meet the stated aims.
- e. As we have observed from the very beginning each village in the CPBC domain is very different and it highlights the importance of understanding the different needs and character of each village, before any new developments are permitted. A regime which is based on centrally imposed housing numbers will reduce the ability of local people to influence the future of their community.
- f. The White Paper fails to address the issue of "Land Banking" by unscrupulous developers. Perhaps land with pre-existing development approval should be built on first?
- g. The proposals seem to be largely aspirational and short on detail with the emphasis on the "what" but very little on the "how".
- h. The various stakeholders and vested interest groups will each have different concerns and trying to get a consensus on such radical reforms is going to be very challenging.

FINAL NOTE

It is our intention to send the above to the following bodies as suggested by Locality, provided that the PC is happy for us to do so.

- 1. Letter to our MP*
- 2. Directly to the planning consultation*
- 3. To Locality*