



# Planning for the Future

On Thursday 12 March 2020, the Government published the *Planning for the Future* document, which sets out some ideas to bring the planning system into the 21st century.

This short 11-page document comes after a number of Budget announcements aimed at boosting the built environment sector and acts as a preview to the Government's publication of the eagerly anticipated Planning White Paper, due in Spring 2020, among other publications.

As a brief overview, the Budget announcements included the following key investments:

- Exploration of plans for a new town at Cambridge and development corporations at four locations between the city and Bedford
- New allocations from the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) totalling £1.1 billion to unlock up to 69,620 homes
- A new £400 million fund aimed at creating more homes on brownfield land
- A directly-elected mayor with "significant" new planning powers will lead a new West Yorkshire combined authority from May 2021
- £27 billion towards strategic roads and motorways, alongside the provision of additional loans available to assist councils deliver local infrastructure projects
- £4.2 billion investment in the transport networks of eight city-regions across England from 2022-2023.

## Key messages

It is clear from the introductory paragraphs of the *Planning for the Future* document that there is a continued focus on home ownership, particularly to those of younger generations yet to step onto the property ladder. Further, the Government set out its intentions to modernise the rental system, to prevent people from falling into homelessness and to strive to end rough sleeping and support the most vulnerable in society.

To achieve this mission, the Government set out a series of major publications and will legislate to deliver lasting change. This series of publications

begins with the Planning White Paper, which is poised to modernise our planning system. Following are: a Building Safety Bill, which promises to be the biggest change in building safety, and a Renters' Reform Bill, providing greater stability to those who rent their home. The Social Housing White Paper will also look to ensure residents in social housing are treated fairly.

When taken together, the Government envisage that these will form the bedrock of a Housing Strategy that will be published later in the year, setting out longer-term strategic plans to deliver homes.



## Implications expected to everyday planning practice

With the intended publication of a number of key planning documents over the coming year, for our day-to-day planning practice, it is important to understand what the modernisation of the planning system looks like in reality. Whilst more information will be made available in due course, TOR has highlighted 10 anticipated key changes:

- 1 **Revisions to the housing need calculation formula** – this revision seeks to evolve the formula to place an emphasis on making the most efficient use of land and increasing densities in sustainable locations with access to transport links. However, little is known about how the calculation of housing need will be revised or whether this will supersede existing measures.
- 2 **The requirement for an up-to-date Local Plan by December 2023** – whilst it is confirmed that the Government will intervene where local planning authorities fail to meet this deadline, the level of intervention will be determined on a case-by-case basis. No doubt all eyes will be on the first authority to go through this intervention.
- 3 **Permitted Development Rights to encourage upward extensions** – this new PD right is expected to be introduced in the Summer and will assist in increasing densities but ensure that local character is safeguarded. New PD rights for the demolition of vacant commercial and industrial buildings and residential blocks will also be introduced to help accelerate the creation of new well-designed residential units that will take their place. A consultation to establish the details of this new PD right will be held in due course.
- 4 **Introduction of refunds of application fees, where applications are refused at planning committee but allowed at appeal** – this would be very comforting for applicants and seeks to promote proper considerations by planning committees, emphasising the importance of an Officer's planning judgement during the application's determination and recommendation.
- 5 **Introduction to make use of 'zoning tools' to support development and improvements to Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs)** – this will look to simplify the process of granting planning permission for residential and commercial development through zoning tools. There will also be revisions to CPO seeking to help facilitate land assembly and infrastructure delivery with the use of statutory timescales for decisions, an end to the automatic right to an inquiry and encouraging early agreements on compensation.
- 6 **Revisions to planning application fees and reforming the New Homes Bonus** – the long awaited revision to application fees is expected to assist with resourcing planning departments. The fees will be linked to a new performance framework to ensure that an increased application fee is paired with a good-quality and efficient service. It is unknown how much fees will rise and when authorities will be able to make these changes but it is anticipated that this may fall in line with the 20% increase in application fees authorities were allowed to implement in 2018. Further, the New Homes Bonus will be reformed to act as a reward to authorities that help enable and encourage housing growth.
- 7 **Introduction of new technologies in planning** – the Government hopes that this will assist communities to understand the planning system and play a role in decisions that affect them. From an applicant's perspective, it will be crucial to understand what this involves, how this will affect pre-application engagement and whether this will encourage further engagement post submission. Limited detail has been revealed at this early stage, the specifics of this will be fully investigated to understand the full impact once the Planning White Paper has been published in the Spring.
- 8 **Encouragement to build above stations and the launch of a national brownfield site map in April 2020** – the Government is to call for evidence on the challenges and opportunities around building above stations in urban areas, to ensure that the most is made of existing transport hubs. The Government will also launch a "national brownfield sites map" in April 2020, however the source of this information or how often it will be updated is currently unknown.
- 9 **Review the policy for building in areas at flood risk** – this revision coincides with a £5.2 billion investment in flood defences and will seek to ensure that communities across the UK are safeguarded against flood risk. This includes a review of the current protection within the NPPF and will consider other options for further reform to inform the wider ambitions for the new planning system.
- 10 **Exploration of wider options to accelerate build out rates** – at present, very little has been published on what this will involve, however it is thought that this will consider the use of pre-commencement conditions only with the agreement of the applicant. Further there is information to suggest that the Government will roll out a strategic approach to habitat management of species and use of a streamlined licensing system piloted in Woking.



## Timescales

In the current uncertain circumstances, accurate predictions on the timescales for the publication of Government documentation may be unrealistic. However, from a cautiously optimistic perspective, we anticipate that the Planning White Paper will still be published in Spring 2020, with the Building Safety Bill\*, Renters' Reform Bill\* and the Social Housing White Paper to be published throughout the rest of 2020.

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*\*note these Bills are required to gain approval from both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and gain Royal Assent before becoming Acts of Parliament.*

## Final remarks

A number of key changes arise from the *Planning for the Future* document, which give an indication of policy direction going forward, but in many cases, there is a distinct lack of detail at present that prohibits a full understanding of the real implications. This note therefore marks the start of a series of notes which will explore the changes and key messages from each document as they are published throughout the year.

The Planning White Paper in particular promises to be of extreme interest and TOR will be sure to provide an update and our thoughts once it becomes available in Spring this year.

TOR is happy to assist in providing further detail on the forthcoming, anticipated changes to the planning system or with any other planning matter.

**For further information please contact TOR on 020 3664 6755.**



### Further information

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