

Event: **Town and Country Planning Association conference:** Climate change, social justice and planning  
Date: **1 December**  
Location: **1 Whitehall Place**, London

Thank you very much for inviting me to join you today.

I am very pleased to join you to celebrate 100 years of the Planning Act, and to discuss planning for the future.

Of course, the TCPA has been working for better planning even longer than that, and you are celebrating your 110<sup>th</sup> year. It is good to see that you are still at the cutting edge of thinking when it comes to delivering good planning. It is clear that the role of planners is just as central now as it was over a century ago.

I missed out on my first chance to speak to the TCPA back in June when I was first appointed Housing and Planning Minister. I was called to the House to take part in a debate – on my second day in the job – so wasn't able to speak at your conference.

That debate I was called to was about planning – the opposition wanted to take me to task for apparently building in back gardens, and to complain about the regional planning process.

That reveals a telling truth about planning.

And that is that, far from being dry and dusty, planning is highly political.

The Housing and Town Planning Act – 100 years old this year – was passed in midst of radical and progressive political reform on an unprecedented scale by Asquith and Lloyd George.

In fact, it's possible that Asquith and his Ministers spent long nights poring over clauses and amendments in this very building – the National Liberal Club.

Perhaps over a few drinks... Conservative MP Thomas Gibson Bowles had claimed in an 1893 debate 'I am informed there is an establishment not far from the House frequented by Radical millionaires and released prisoners, the National Liberal Club, where an enormous quantity of whisky is consumed.'

Some may say that times haven't really changed!

Whether fuelled by whisky or not, the Act was landmark legislation. It was radical and far reaching progressive legislation which profoundly changed the way we lived and the quality of life in Britain over the following decades.

One MP at the time said that it would 'lay the foundations of one of the greatest reforms in our city and town life'.

It made illegal the infamous back to back Victorian houses, and meant that there could never be less than 50 feet between houses on opposite sides of the road.

The aim of the Act was to create: 'the home healthy, the house beautiful, the town pleasant, the city dignified, and the suburb salubrious'. The spin doctors of the age obviously had a soft spot for alliteration.

Despite its lofty aims, the reaction to the Act was never universally approving. One MP said: 'Never yet have I had to read a Bill which has given me such infinite labour, which has left me with so appalling a headache'. Having taken the Planning Act through the Commons, I know how he feels.

The Housing and Town Planning Act was one piece of legislation that year which laid the foundations for twentieth century British society and economy. 1909 also saw the first pensions act coming into force in Britain; the Labour Exchange Act to help people find work; and the first budget announced with the explicit aim of redistributing wealth – the People's Budget.

One hundred years on, this Government and this Parliament in 2009 has passed legislation helping to lay the foundations for the twenty-first century – for a low carbon society and economy.

The Energy Act – to change our energy generation to low and zero carbon.

The Climate Change Act – to set out in law carbon budgets and cuts in carbon emissions.

The Planning Act – to put in place a national policy and planning system that will help secure the investment to transform Britain from a successful high carbon country to a world-leading low carbon society and economy.

Planning may not be the first reform which springs to mind when thinking of the beginnings of the welfare state.

But it is clear that it formed a central plank of the reforms which sought to reflect everyone's interests in Britain for the first time – not just the elite and ruling classes.

And it is the social justice aspects of planning which really spark my imagination.

Policy-speak acronyms like PPSs, PPAs, NPSs, Part L, LDFs are all necessary, of course. But it is the consequences of our planning decisions on people and their lives which is, and must be, at the core of our planning system.

And this point goes wider than simply the language we use.

In order to tackle the twin challenges which are the theme of your conference today – social justice and climate change – we need to change the terms of debate.

While the eco movement is polarised between our self-denial and conspicuous eco-consumption, we will never be able to make tackling climate change something which everyone feels they can play a part in.

Given the stark choice between giving up our home comforts in the name of the planet, or shelling out for expensive eco equipment, most people will stand back and simply give up.

This has consequences for social justice. We cannot allow those who can't afford to pop a wind turbine on their roof or to replace all their windows with the latest double glazing to be left without the gains that can come from greener living or left behind in the eco revolution.

So my view of the future of our planning system must be an egalitarian system, driven by an egalitarian vision – not the grand designs of a few, but greener, more affordable homes which help everyone do their bit for tackling climate change.

At the international level, it's a matter of days now until the Copenhagen climate change conference. It is essential we achieve an ambitious, comprehensive and binding agreement. That is why, every day we are working flat out to get an agreement that will be binding on all countries who are part of the discussions.

There are some good grounds to be upbeat – Indonesia, Brazil, Australia and Japan have made new offers to cut carbon emissions.

We're pushing for international change at Copenhagen, but we need to act here in Britain too.

As well as the individual actions all of us must take, there is a special role for Government to take a strong lead.

Our planning policies can make a huge impact on Britain's emissions. Nearly half of our carbon emissions come from the built environment. That's more than roads, railways and airports combined.

Planning is where we integrate economic, environmental and social objectives, and it's where potential conflicts between interests of individuals, or local communities, and needs of the nation are reconciled.

Planning continues to evolve to match the challenges and needs of the nation.

The Barker and Eddington reviews helped improve planning and delivery of big infrastructure projects.

The Sub National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration which I brought over with me from the Treasury helps make sure planning is done at the right spatial level.

Some question this regional approach. But Local Authorities understand the need to be able to take decisions on priorities and to plan for some developments beyond their own boundaries. With no regional or subregional arrangements, the alternative is decisions taken in Whitehall by people without the local knowledge or challenge.

That's why Local Authorities and RDAs are working together in their regions through the LDEDC Act. Most didn't wait for Royal Assent, and five out of eight regions have Local Authority leader boards agreed and in place with working arrangements underway with their RDAs.

The establishment of the Infrastructure Planning Commission this year. It has been up and running for just over a month now and already has more than ten projects lined up which could add up to investment worth around £20bn. These big green projects show that international companies are queuing up to use the new system to bring their investment to Britain.

The IPC already has an experienced Chair in Sir Michael Pitt. And I can announce that Gideon Amos [TCPA Chief Exec] will be joining the IPC as a Commissioner in March. Very few people have the experience that Gideon brings with him. After ten years at the TCPA, you could say that he's done his time. Your loss at TCPA will be our gain, and the country's gain.

We have also carried out wide ranging reform of the planning application process in response to the Killian Pretty review, designed to make processes more proportionate and streamlined for development that can deliver economic recovery in a sustainable way.

I wonder what the Ministers back in 1909 would have thought of these changes, and of the complex challenges facing planners today. Demographic change, the need to support economic growth, sustainable transport, energy, and of course climate change.

Those are the challenges we face, and you face, every day. And the choices we make about how to tackle them through planning system will have profound effects in the future.

So to meet those challenges and build that future, we must have a planning system to support sustainable development which provides decent and affordable homes and communities for everyone. Eco-equality, if you like – at the heart of the planning system.

Our actions over the last twelve years have that guiding principle behind them at all times, certainly in the six months that I've had this job.

And last week I announced a set of green policies which will take us closer to that eco-equality vision:

- A new energy efficiency standard for zero carbon homes on which we will now consult;
- A consultation on how to build zero carbon offices, factories, shops and other non domestic buildings; and
- Funding to test out new zero carbon homes in normal housing developments.

Today, I can add another green string to our bow: the second wave of our world leading Eco Towns.

I can announce today nine areas in which local authorities would like to develop projects to Eco Town standards. Those areas are Northstowe, Shoreham Harbour, Taunton, Yeovil, Leeds City Region, Central Lincolnshire, Sheffield City Region, Cornwall Council, and Coventry.

In July, I said that I'd put £5m on the table to help councils develop a second wave of proposals. Today, I'm matching that with another £5m to develop exemplar projects at the sites.

And I'm setting up a new 'Eco Town Group' with the Town and County Planning Association, acting as an eco workshop for councils to come together and share ideas.

I am unapologetic about prioritising these environmentally friendly developments. I want to give green planning a green light and to make it as simple as possible to get the permission people need to build these green developments.

So today I am pleased to announce our first six pilot Planning Performance Agreements specifically for renewable energy and low carbon schemes. This collaborative approach will make the process of getting planning permission more transparent and efficient, and should improve the quality of planning applications and the planning decisions.

The pilots include:

- A biomass power plant in Teesside, large enough to produce electricity for over 50,000 homes;
- A wind project near Doncaster which will return around £300k of profit a year to the local community; and
- A proposal to generate enough electricity to power the Eden Project in Cornwall using geothermal energy.

The need for more homes has not gone away and we are determined to deliver the housing that is needed in order to improve affordability –

particularly for first-time buyers, reduce pressure on waiting lists and address over-crowding.

While many Councils are delivering good quality homes quickly, some are still failing to properly identify land for the homes their communities need.

Supplying land for housing is vital to securing as much house building as possible during the downturn and for housing development upon the upturn.

So I am announcing today provisional allocations of £135 million for the second year of Housing Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) (2009/10). Councils across the country will get a share of a £135million funding pot to plan and deliver new homes.

HPDG provides a direct incentive for councils to work more closely with partners in the public and private sector to ensure that new homes are built where they are needed. It is a top up to mainstream funding and councils can spend it as they choose.

Today we have been celebrating the last 100 years of planning, and you will have had facsimile copies of a handbook to the 1909 Act. I hope that in 100 years time our children's children will distribute the 2008 Planning Act in whatever form technology then takes.

The planning system was born of the chaos and overcrowding brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

Some say that we are now going through a 'green revolution', with the potential to be a second industrial revolution. What we can say with certainty is that the responsibilities that you, as planners, and we, as politicians, have within the planning system will be central to meeting these big social, economic and environmental challenges in the next century, just as they have been in the last.

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