



# making planning work:

## ‘a peaceful path to real reform’

### A Statement from the TCPA

**T**he TCPA welcomes the new coalition Government’s commitment to give communities more influence over the places in which they live. Good planning creates confidence, reduces costs, and supports investment. It enables economic growth, helps to meet local housing needs, and addresses the challenges of climate change. Today, planning is not doing this as well as it should. Reforms are necessary to ensure that local plans reflect the needs and aspirations of every community, while supporting economic recovery.

For over a century, the TCPA has promoted community-led grass-roots planning. We welcome the Government’s commitment to make this ambition a reality. At the same time we are profoundly concerned that the Government’s proposal to abolish regional planning, without a carefully mapped transition plan, will remove a valuable mechanism for aligning strategic investments. We believe that in many parts of the country an appropriate sub-national scale is required to enable economic growth, to respond to the demand for new housing, and to mitigate and adapt to the impact of global climate change.

The TCPA believes that reform of the planning system must be based on principles which command broad support. At present, there is wide agreement that change is needed, but, as yet, no clear proposal has emerged on what the new system should look like. We recommend that, in preparing new legislation, the coalition Government should build a new consensus around the principles that must underpin reforms. We urge the coalition Government to start an open dialogue with local communities across the country, and with business, investors and professionals, to agree these principles. Failure to do so could lead to reforms which might have potentially devastating impacts on our economy, on our communities, and on our environment.

To start this dialogue, the TCPA suggests the following four principles for consideration.

#### **1 Responsible localism**

The TCPA urges that any reforms of planning should start with a commitment to ‘responsible localism’. Strong local leadership is essential to provide the homes, jobs and services that every community needs, to accelerate the move to a low-carbon society, and to

protect our valuable natural environment. In parallel, widespread community engagement must provide the foundation for this strong leadership. Thus, we believe that reforms of planning must:

- be part of a much wider effort to invigorate local democracy – planning reforms cannot be promoted in isolation;
- remain based on representative democracy, avoiding distortion by narrow sectional interests; and
- ensure that reliable, independent evidence is available to help support and inform key decisions about a community's future – and to monitor the impact of these decisions.

## 2 A national spatial framework

The TCPA strongly believes there is a need for a national spatial framework and made the case for such policy in its 2006 report, *Connecting England*, and in a subsequent report, *Connecting Local Economies*, published in February 2010. The new framework would guide public investment and address how best to accommodate growth and renewal across the nation. We welcome the coalition Government's commitment to a 'national planning framework covering all forms of development and setting out national economic, environmental and social priorities'.

In our view the new framework should:

- guide national infrastructure investment, setting out the indicative timing, broad location, and scale of key infrastructure projects;
- address national spatial inequalities, particularly to create a better economic balance between London and the South East, and the Midlands and the North;
- address the challenges arising from population change in different parts of the country and provide strategic guidance on housing needs and demands; and
- address investment and spending across government.

## 3 A duty to co-operate – useful strategic planning

The national spatial plan should be accompanied by appropriate sub-national strategic planning, but only where necessary. Most planning decisions can be made at the local level, but some decisions, particularly relating to transport and other infrastructure, need to be made by partnerships of local authorities working together where there are natural economic synergies – sometimes this may be a city-region, elsewhere it may be a county council area. Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs) are one method of bringing together key players in flexible ways to tackle issues that are best addressed in partnership. *Open Source Planning* suggests a local authority 'Duty to Co-operate'; we strongly support this proposal.

Effective strategic planning reduces costs (to the public sector and for private investors), secures efficiency

savings, and protects the environment. Strategic planning by groups of authorities can:

- provide certainty and generate confidence for private investors;
- set clear priorities for public expenditure;
- make best use of resources and specialist skills in plan-making; and
- align public and private investment, and national and local spending plans.

## 4 Incentives for growth

The TCPA welcomes, in principle, the proposals from the coalition Government to introduce incentives to encourage local authorities to promote growth. These incentives should not be considered in isolation, but within the wider context of the coalition Government's proposed review of local government finance as a whole.

The proposal that local authorities should be allowed to retain the increases in council tax generated by new housing for six years may be effective in some communities (possibly where high rates of development are planned). However, these incentives are unlikely to be sufficient to encourage growth where housing needs are most severe, and may also exacerbate inequalities between communities. Nor will they deliver, on their own, the social, physical and green infrastructure that underpins the development of sustainable communities. In our view, more radical reforms of local government finance, such as those being proposed for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), are more likely to provide incentives for growth.

## The way forward

**The TCPA has developed these principles through the five cross-sector roundtable debates that it held earlier this year. We are inviting a wide range of organisations with a stake in effective planning to join our 'Making Planning Work' coalition to develop these principles. These will provide the 'peaceful path for real reform' of planning. We would welcome dialogue with Government about these principles.**



**tcpa**

- **we are:** independent and open to all who want better places
- **we have achieved:** greener cities, new towns, and better homes
- **we create:** ideas, knowledge, publications, campaigns, and independent policies
- **we aim to:** secure homes, empower communities, and deliver a sustainable future  
**...through planning**