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# the future of planning report: distilling the tcpa roundtable debates





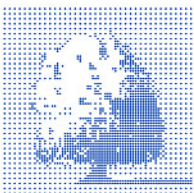
## **The Future of Planning Report: Distilling the TCPA Roundtable Debates**

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Town and Country Planning Association  
17 Carlton House Terrace  
London SW1Y 5AS  
020 7930 8903  
[www.tcpa.org.uk](http://www.tcpa.org.uk)  
[www.grabs-eu.org](http://www.grabs-eu.org)

## **Acknowledgements**

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This report aims to reflect the opinions of a wide range of private, public and voluntary groups, but not every detail contained within it will reflect the opinions of all the supporters of and contributors to this work. It should, however, reflect the spirit of constructive collaboration and considered debate.

# The Future of Planning Report: Distilling the TCPA Roundtable Debates

## Foreword

Reforming the UK's planning system to make it more responsive to people's needs and aspirations and to promote sustainable development has always been at the heart of the TCPA's mission.

While planning can claim many substantial achievements, the current system has often been criticised as out of touch with ordinary people's lives and not fit for purpose in securing lasting progress on key issues facing us today. The new coalition Government is advocating much greater collaborative democracy and placing a strong emphasis on localism. Recognising that one of the key challenges to the planning system is public trust, the Government is proposing to 'radically reform the planning system'. Therefore, the TCPA could not have picked a more appropriate moment to undertake a constructive cross-sector dialogue on developing a leaner, more focused, fairer and more effective planning system.

Drawing on feedback from over 100 participants in five cross-sector roundtable debates organised and hosted by the TCPA in spring 2010, plus extensive feedback received from the wider profession, this report aims to address key issues for the future of planning. The roundtable events looked closely at the proposals set out in the Conservative Party Policy Green Paper, *Open Source Planning* – the foundations for the new Government's reform package. The debates strongly benefited from the TCPA's uniquely broad support from, and links with, the public sector, the development industry, the environmental movement, and those concerned with social justice.

We hope that this report on the roundtable debates will act as a catalyst for politicians, decision-makers, planners and other interested professionals to work towards creating a fairer and more efficient planning system. By undertaking this thorough analysis of the challenges facing the system, a series of solution-focused recommendations have been compiled, as set out within the report and listed together on the inside back cover.

The TCPA is grateful to everyone who contributed to this report, for their time, enthusiasm and willingness to engage in the process. Very valuable debates have been started, although not all could be resolved in the limited time available for the preparation of this report. The quality of the dialogue highlights the benefit of cross-sector engagement in any future reform process.

Finally, this document would not have been made possible without the input of the Association's Trustees and Policy Council and the hard work of the TCPA staff team – particularly Dr Hugh Ellis, TCPA Chief Planner, who astutely distilled this report from an analysis of the roundtable debates and subsequent feedback.

Whatever the future holds for planning, the TCPA will seek to influence the debate and forge solutions to the challenges facing society which are not just effective but deliver a just future for all.

**Kate Henderson**  
Chief Executive, TCPA

## 1 Introduction

The planning system is a vital enabler in securing the long-term well-being of our local communities through sustainable development. While planning can claim many significant achievements, there has been growing criticism of the current system on the grounds that it is out of touch with ordinary people's lives and is not fit for purpose in securing lasting progress on key aspects of the economy or in tackling climate change. Building on the Conservative Party Policy Green Paper, *Open Source Planning*, and the announcements made in the Queen's Speech, the new coalition Government has begun a programme of major structural changes to the system, including the abolition of regional planning.<sup>1</sup> The Foresight *Land Use Futures* report has also suggested that existing planning regulation might be better delivered through forms of cost-benefit analysis, thus challenging the very foundations of our spatial planning system.<sup>2</sup>

Given the new Government's drive to 'radically reform the planning system',<sup>3</sup> now is the right time to set out how the system might be most efficiently transformed, by testing to ensure that its structures are fit for purpose and that its radical guiding principles are relevant to 21st century Britain.

The TCPA's manifesto *Towns and Countryside for a New Age of Challenge*, published in June 2009, sets out the terms of the task in hand: 'We must secure more sustainable patterns of development, offering a better match between the demand for, and the supply of, homes. This is key to ensuring that our regions, cities and towns are economically competitive. To achieve this, we need better plans and a more transparent and simplified planning system based on widespread community engagement.'<sup>4</sup>

This report builds on a series of wide cross-sector conversations hosted by the TCPA on the future of planning, based on five roundtable debates and drawing on extensive feedback from participants and the wider planning profession. It has not been possible

to capture all the wealth of analysis (including European best practice) offered during this process in this short report. However, the quality of the dialogue has emphasised the benefit of cross-sector engagement in any future reform process.

This report is not intended to be a 'final blueprint' for reform or a detailed critique of any particular reform agenda. Instead, it uses the debate sparked by the general election to examine the five key themes which emerged from the roundtable debates:

- **the shape of strategic planning;**
- **the shape of local planning;**
- **the future of housing and planning;**
- **the climate crisis;** and
- **the guiding principles for planning.**

The purpose of this report is to promote and inform wider debate as well as provide a solid foundation for the TCPA's engagement with future planning reform.

## 2 What problem are we trying to solve?

The point of departure for reform must be a clear and rounded understanding of the performance of the current system.

*Open Source Planning* concludes that planning is 'broken' and requires reform. This case is made in two parts. The first asserts that centralised planning carried out through unelected regions and target-driven plans has disempowered communities and discredited planning. The second relates to the complexity of planning procedures and to delay in delivering the Local Development Framework (LDF) and Regional Strategy (RS) system.

One of the most important issues raised in the roundtable debates was the need for a robust evidence base, to ensure that any measures introduced to

1 Conservative Party (2010) *Open Source Planning*. Policy Green Paper. Conservative Party, London

2 Foresight Land Use Futures Project (2010) *Land Use Futures: Making the Most of Land in the 21st Century*. Final Project Report. The Government Office for Science, London

3 HM Government (2010) *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government*. Cabinet Office, London

4 TCPA (2009) *Towns and Countryside for a New Age of Challenge*. TCPA, London

improve the planning system are grounded in detailed analysis. This is a vital issue since past planning reform has often failed to define precisely the problem it was designed to solve. For example, 'delay' in planning has been a constant source of reform measures, but the notion of delay has never been adequately defined to allow it to be distinguished from 'due process' or 'quality decision-making'. Likewise, the UK planning system is often portrayed as a major source of competitive disadvantage within the EU,<sup>5</sup> despite the absence of clear evidence to support this view.<sup>6</sup> As a result of the lack of evidence, major reform has sometimes taken place without consensus on analysis or on the objectives being pursued.

This is not to play down the scale of the fitness for purpose challenge or the poor performance of some aspects of planning practice. The time taken to achieve LDF coverage (the current state of LDF Core Strategy preparation is set out in Table 1) is undoubtedly a cause for serious concern, but the question is: what is the precise cause of this apparently poor performance?

**Table 1**  
**Progress in the preparation of Local Development Framework Core Strategies, as of 1 May 2010**

Stage	Number of LDFs	% of total
Adopted Final Version	57	17
Examination in Public	20	6
Submission	48	14
Publication	41	12
Preferred Options	98	29
Issues and Options	41	12
Unclear timescales*	30	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>335</b>	

\* Exact progress of Core Strategy preparation difficult to ascertain, as timescales are out of date or unclear – despite PPS12: *Local Spatial Planning* (para. 4.54) stating: 'If there is slippage from the agreed timetable, local planning authorities should provide real time public information on progress with core strategies.'

Source: TCPA research, 2010

## 2.1 The causes of delay

There is no single cause of such delay, but the roundtable debates and background literature research distilled some common concerns, as outlined in Box 1.

### Box 1

#### Commonly identified causes of delay in the current planning system

##### Structural causes

- **Planning reforms:** In 2002, the ODPM Committee concluded that improving the planning system is not about changing the rules; but there have nevertheless been periodic reforms – in 2004, 2008 and 2009 – and changes resulting from the recent Killian Pretty Review
- **Evidence base:** Excessive requirements (actual and perceived) for preparing Development Plan Documents
- **Changing policies:** Problems caused by constantly changing additions and revisions to central government policy and guidance
- **Policy alignment:** Synchronising with the Regional Spatial Strategy/London Plan timetable and regional policies

##### Cultural causes

- **Leadership stability:** High staff turnover at all levels, from Ministers and civil servants to a skills drain in planning authorities
- **Local politics:** Changing and competing local political priorities and commitment
- **Council resources:** Local authority cuts to the planning department, due to a loss of revenue as a result of a decline in development
- **Capacity:** Problems with recruitment and retention of staff and qualified planners, despite town planning being one of the fastest growing occupations; and a lack of dedicated local authority forward planning teams
- **Skills base:** Lack of skills (particularly project management related skills), effectiveness and access to professional development and support activities
- **Understanding:** Growing burden of the information and evidence base, and a lack of understanding among planners and government departments and offices of the spatial planning system and the 'soundness' tests

Source: TCPA research, 2010

5 Growing Communities Coalition (2010) *Making Localism Work*

6 GMA Planning, P-E International, and Jacques & Lewis (1994) *Integrated Planning and the Granting of Permits in the EC*. Department of the Environment Planning Research Programme. HMSO, London

Some local authorities have found opportunities in the new system, but there has been a significant difference between the perception of the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and local authorities on the purpose of the LDF framework. The LDF process was designed to be more structurally flexible, but this flexibility has been perceived as complexity on the ground, despite efforts by CLG to clarify the position.<sup>7</sup>

The roundtable debates acknowledged the difference between problems relating to legislative frameworks and associated policy guidance, and problems in the delivery on-the-ground of a planning service whose performance was heavily influenced by factors such as resources, skills and professional and political leadership. There was a general consensus that **skills, resources** and **leadership** are the issues which require immediate attention and that structural reform of local planning should be tightly focused and carefully justified. This view is reinforced by the prospect of much improved rates of LDF delivery in the near future – as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
Likely progress in the preparation of Local Development Framework Core Strategies, as of 1 May 2011

Stage	Number of LDFs	% of total
Adopted Final Version	162	48
Examination in Public	76	23
Submission	37	11
Publication	12	4
Preferred Options	8	2
Issues and Options	0	0
Unclear timescales*	40	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>335</b>	

\* Exact progress of Core Strategy preparation difficult to ascertain, as timescales are out of date or unclear – despite PPS12: *Local Spatial Planning* (para. 4.54) stating: ‘If there is slippage from the agreed timetable, local planning authorities should provide real time public information on progress with core strategies.’

Source: TCPA research, 2010

The prize of total plan coverage should not be discounted lightly given the resource commitment to the process made to date – by all sectors. Historically, complete coverage has always taken much longer to deliver than anticipated, and the failure to achieve it under the 1990/91 reforms was one of the drivers of the 2004 planning reform package.<sup>8</sup>

### Recommendation 1

Further reform measures must be based on a clear evidence base, rigorous analysis and clear guiding principles.

### Recommendation 2

Reform measures should focus on skills, resources and leadership, and should not undermine the delivery of the current Local Development Framework system.

## 3 A route map for strategic planning

A planning system which is truly fit for purpose must offer a strong narrative of strategic spatial policy, from national through sub-national and city-regional to local and neighbourhood levels. This is simply because the challenges we are confronted with in infrastructure investment, housing, climate change and social inclusion are played out at differing spatial scales. The roundtable debates made clear the need to integrate the ambitions of the wide range of key investment stakeholders, from Network Rail on a long-distance strategic route, to a Primary Care Trust whose remit may cover a number of local authority areas.

This narrative is not about a simplistic top-down imposition. Instead, it must recognise the need to integrate the differing spatial challenges into a coherent framework which can help guide decision-making in all sectors. **A position where there is no linkage between high-level national policy and localised planning strategies is neither practical nor**

<sup>7</sup> S. Quartermain (2009) ‘Planning with confidence’, *Town & Country Planning*, Vol. 78 (12 – Dec.), pp. 518-521

<sup>8</sup> Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

### in the best interest of the sustainable development of the nation.

However, the roundtable debates recognised that the existing national strategic policy framework does not reflect this narrative and requires reform. Currently, there are two sets of national guidance. The Planning Act 2008 set out a powerful new regime for the approval of major infrastructure, guided by National Policy Statements (NPSs). Generic planning policy on a range of issues is set out in Planning Policy Statements (PPSs). These documents are not generally spatially literate (the draft NPS for new nuclear power stations is an exception), and there is currently no coherent relationship between PPSs and NPSs.

While the Planning Act 2008 aimed to set out a new framework to shape long-term infrastructure provision, the draft NPSs have not yet proved themselves fit for purpose. Issues such as adequate spatial guidance, proper environmental assessment or – even more basic – setting out the evidence of need for new port or energy infrastructure<sup>9</sup> must be addressed in the NPSs.

#### Recommendation 3

**There must be an integrated and consistent approach across the National Policy Statement series, informing a joined-up national infrastructure framework to enable confident and sustainable local, sub-regional and national decision-making.**

The TCPA is a strong believer in the need for a national spatial framework, and made the case for such policy in its 2006 report, *Connecting England*.<sup>10</sup> *Open Source Planning* commits the new Government to a new 'national framework' for planning policy,<sup>11</sup> which the roundtable debates supported. However, it was felt that important questions about the scope, detail and preparation of this document had yet to be addressed.

A national spatial framework would need to draw on both UK experience, such as the Welsh and Scottish models, and European examples (such as that outlined in Box 2).

The new framework would require a strong spatial expression and clear guidance to inform decision-making and guide investment. It would need to integrate generic high-level planning guidance in the PPSs and NPSs with an explicitly spatial approach. It would be the primary framework for dealing with the national spatial inequalities which lie at the heart of many of the economic, infrastructure and housing issues that England needs to address. These challenges were set out in *Connecting England*, but our collective failure to address them now requires urgent remedy. It was felt that, as a result of our failure to take action to date, any new national framework would need to deal with far-reaching demographic change and provide

#### Box 2

##### Case study: Spatial planning in the Netherlands and the Randstadt

The Netherlands' new Spatial Planning Act 2006 signalled a shift from planning to development-led planning. It retains a strong plan-led orientation with the strengthening of central government planning powers through the National Spatial Strategy (*Nota Ruimte*). The National Spatial Strategy designates six national urban networks where development will be concentrated. Provinces, urban regions and municipalities will incorporate these development areas into their plans and elaborate on the urbanisation policy.

The Randstadt is one of these national urban networks and is the political, administrative, social and cultural heart and the most important economic motor of the Netherlands. It is also a region that has highly complex spatial and administrative needs, with a voluntary partnership among four provinces and municipalities. The region is experiencing pressures on available space and has obsolete urban areas that urgently need major spatial and social renewal. The region's structural vision, *Randstadt Towards 2040*, illustrates how policy areas such as the economy, traffic and transport, housing construction, nature, landscapes, and water management are connected for long-term sustainable development.

9 House of Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee (2010) *The Proposals for National Policy Statements on Energy*. Third Report of Session 2009-10. TSO, London

10 TCPA (2006) *Connecting England. A Framework for Regional Development*. Final Report of the TCPA-Appointed Hetherington Commission on the Future Development Needs and Priorities of England. TCPA, London

11 Conservative Party (2010) *Open Source Planning*. Policy Green Paper 14, p.15

strategic guidance on housing needs and demands. It would have to take a long-term view, perhaps 50 to 100 years ahead, and anticipate the challenges of climate change in relation to sea level rise, population redistribution, food security, and energy needs.

#### Recommendation 4

**Planning reform must embark on a comprehensive national spatial framework which can deal spatially with the provisions of a wide range of social, economic and environmental infrastructure. Such a framework should have a clear legal status in the overall plan-making framework.**

Even with an explicitly spatial national strategy the roundtable debates offered much evidence of the need for effective strategic planning at the sub-national level (see Box 3). While strong criticism of the value of current regional strategies was expressed, particularly regarding their lack of accountability, a very powerful case was made for a strategic tier. **This case is based on the hard reality that many planning issues are most efficiently and effectively dealt with at sub-national and sub-regional rather than local level.** Energy, housing, waste and minerals are some of the examples of policy areas in which the pooling of shared expertise can be a major benefit in a cost-effective planning process.

There are widespread concerns about the significant implications of the abolition of regional planning for cross-border working, and the roundtables reached some consensus – with all the key stakeholders – on the need for some form of strategic planning to connect the local and national levels. *Open Source Planning* suggests both a local authority ‘Duty to Co-operate’ and the voluntary preparation of infrastructure plans by top-tier authorities. Further detail is required on how these proposals will secure an effective strategic approach. There is a substantial risk of fragmentation and confusion, creating uncertainty in local decision-making. Current proposals for Economic Prosperity Boards and Combined Authorities which incentivise collaboration on regeneration and transport<sup>12</sup> may help, but are not directly linked to any requirement to produce strategic spatial plans. Equally, any attempt to defend the existing regional boundaries, given their lack of connection with either functionality or community, is not tenable.

## 3.1 Strategic solutions

The roundtable debates recognised the value of a new strategic framework based on voluntary associations of local authorities. The most obvious pattern would be based on city-regions; an idea debated for many years and only recently piloted in England through the Multi-Area Agreement arrangements. The city-regional model is used to good effect in some parts of the EU (see, for example, Box 4).

### Box 3

#### The case for strategic planning

Effective strategic planning reduces costs, promotes efficiency and reduces conflict, while protecting the environment and promoting development in the right places, by:

- providing clarity, certainty and confidence for private sector investment;
- providing sharp priorities for public investment (which, under current circumstances and in the immediate future, is likely to be highly constrained);
- providing clear directions for public and private investment, ensuring that they are aligned – and by bringing national and local spending plans together;
- giving clear directions for local decision-making and avoiding unnecessary disputes;
- reining in unrealistic aspirations – and by reducing the potential for massive over-bidding for land or resources;
- acting as an intermediary between central and local government and reducing the potential for conflicts which land on Ministerial desks;
- providing a context within which local government can agree on issues such as housing, waste and minerals;
- counter-balancing the tendency towards undue influence by single-issue lobbying and politics;
- providing capabilities and capacity only available to a small number of larger authorities (i.e. promoting economies of scale); and
- providing planning frameworks which can relate to functional areas such as travel to work areas and housing market areas.

<sup>12</sup> Part 6 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

A voluntary approach implies that such associations of local authorities can be formed quickly and will function coherently despite the radical institutional changes

### Box 4

#### Case study: Regional planning in Germany and the Ruhr Area

In Germany, spatial planning is decentralised among three levels of government: the federal state (*Bund*), the local states (*Länder*), and the local municipalities (*Gemeinde*). While each are legally, organisationally and substantively defined and clearly independent, they are interlinked by the mutual feedback principle, as well as by complex requirements on notification, participation, co-ordination and compliance.

The Ruhr Area is situated in the Federal State of North-Rhine Westphalia and is the largest economic area in Europe. It is not a political or administrative entity but an agglomeration based on the economic functional area. The challenges facing the Ruhr Area are legacies of the Industrial Revolution. Population forecasts for 2020 will see the Ruhr Area lose a higher proportion of population than the State.

The Ruhr Regional Association (Regionalverband Ruhr or RVR) was founded in 1920 and is governed by its 'Ruhr Parliament' – the assembly of the member towns. This guarantees regional consensus and fair co-ordination of interests within the region. Each authority contributes funds to finance the RVR through a levy. The rationale for the establishment of the RVR is that the problems of the Ruhr industrial conurbation could only be managed and solved by inter-local co-ordination and co-operation in planning.

The RVR has a number of statutory duties, including developing regional open space, undertaking regional and local planning services, and regional economic development. Over the years it has developed regional development plans, and it is responsible for investment programmes and projects in the sustainable spatial and economic development of the Ruhr Area, such as the Emscher Landscape Park and the Industrial Heritage Trail.

needed to move from the existing system. But such a change may set back progress on housing provision and climate change, and to ensure swift delivery any new framework should be guided by a set of clear tests, including the following:

- **Functionality:** The idea of using functional economic and social characteristics to define planning areas is well established and is best expressed by the city-region, based on factors such as travel to work areas. In fact there can be competing functional areas, requiring a flexible and holistic approach to defining boundaries. However, pragmatically we already have models of city-regions in places like Manchester and Leeds, which are actively defining functional areas and seeking joint working arrangements.<sup>13</sup> Manchester has moved further to establish a joint authority for some planning functions. There are, however, holes in the city-region approach, both for deep rural areas and in areas of competing city influence (Leeds-Bradford and Manchester, for example). There is therefore a need for flexibility to deal with the diversity of needs and aspirations, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. An effective national spatial framework would provide a measure of coherence between this mosaic of strategic plans.

The roundtables also identified some very serious unintended potential consequences of the city-region approach – particularly the prospect of an all-powerful Greater South East mega-region which, while functionally coherent, might reinforce already acute regional disparities between the North and South unless it were set within a strong national spatial framework.

- **Accountability:** The discussion on people and planning in Section 4.4 of this report provides more detail on rebuilding trust in the planning system. It is, however, vital that regional planning units resonate with communities in a way that the standard regions do not, and that direct democratic accountability is provided through the partner local authorities.

- **Effectiveness:** There are two major lessons to be learnt from previous methods of regional planning. The first is that voluntary collaboration between local authorities can be hard to achieve and can disintegrate following a change of political

<sup>13</sup> Cities such as Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield submitted bids to central government to become a 'forerunner city-region' which gives them statutory city-region status. The 2009 Budget confirmed Manchester and Leeds as England's first statutory city-regions, with employment, housing, transport and planning as well as economic autonomy

leadership. Second, the Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) system in place prior to 2004 created plans whose uncertain status as 'guidance and advice' limited their effectiveness. These problems were not universal, but they were particularly acute in areas of high development pressure and competing demands.

These lessons imply that if a voluntary approach to forming functional planning regions is adopted, there must be safeguards to ensure effectiveness and coherence and to make sure that peripheral communities are not left out.

In addition to these safeguards, the new system must address the issue of the evidence and expertise required to inform strategic planning decisions. As regional planning structures are abolished, it is vital that respected technical advice bodies provide advice on issues such as housing, waste and climate change. The roundtable debates broadly supported the view that the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit (NHPAU) should be sustained, and agreed that urgent consideration should be given to the establishment of an integrated policy advice unit on climate, as recommended in the Planning and Climate Change Coalition report.<sup>14</sup>

### Recommendation 5

**All local authorities should be enabled to become members of a strategic planning association. These associations should be required to submit a strategic planning scheme, formalising the extent and membership of the body, and a project plan and timetable for delivering a strategic plan. The final plan would be independently tested by public examination and would have equal status with the local development plan. Both the planning scheme and the final plan would be subject to approval by the Secretary of State.**

## 4 The shape of local plans

The reform of local plans proposed in *Open Source Planning* envisages a collaborative democratic model in which neighbourhood bottom-up plans are bolted together to form district-wide local plans framed within national policy. The merits or otherwise of a collaborative model are considered in Section 4.4 of this report, but the basic notion of encouraging bottom-up community engagement in the production of powerful local plans is welcome. Significantly, the roundtable debates noted that much, if not all, of such an approach could be delivered through the LDF system without legislative change, as long as resources were provided to deliver meaningful public participation.

*Open Source Planning* does not provide detail on the shape of the proposed local plans, but the roundtable debates distilled a broad choice between the current flexible shape of plans, with a minimal Core Strategy and a number of optional components, or the Welsh model, which more closely resembles the pre-2004 regime, with, broadly, the requirement for a single planning document.

Some participants suggested that if the real objective is to give local authorities and communities choice about the shape and content of their plan, then the LDF system might better meet this requirement. One example of the opportunities the system provides is the legal power to prepare joint LDFs across a number of local authority areas, under Section 287 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This voluntary approach offers major efficiency and cost-saving benefits through pooling resources, and has often produced more effective spatial boundaries for issues such as housing and regeneration.

Any reform of local plans should consider how the 2009 simplification to the plan-making process has played out. Core and other important elements such as the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which sets out participation standards, should be kept. Reform must not discard elements of the current soundness test, and particularly the requirement for a

<sup>14</sup> Planning and Climate Change Coalition (2009) *Position Statement*. London, TCPA

clear evidence base for policy development. The suggested removal of the binding Inspector's report was welcomed by some roundtable participants, but views were divided. It is important to note that binding reports were introduced to make the process more efficient and to ensure that the views of communities and business that had invested time in taking part and making representations could not simply be ignored by the local authority.

*Open Source Planning* proposes to 'legislate that if new local plans have not been completed within a prescribed period, then the presumption in favour of sustainable development will automatically apply...all planning applications will be accepted automatically if they conform with national planning guidance'. **This received no support during the roundtable debates or in any of the extensive feedback received.**

Although the proposal is presented with caveats requiring a planning applications to comply with sustainable development and national planning guidance before being approved, the idea was perceived to be unfair to local communities who had invested in the development of the plan and so would undermine efforts to build trust. It was felt that implementation of the idea would also lead to short-term speculative investment decisions which would compromise long-term sustainable development.

However, the fact that local authorities can depart from agreed project plans (Local Development Schemes) with little or no apparent or effective sanction does need to be addressed.

### Recommendation 6

The legislative framework of the Local Development Framework system should remain, but stronger guidance is needed on how the approach can be used flexibly and simply at the local level.

## 4.1 The nature of local decision-making

*Open Source Planning* proposes a radical shift towards a more zonal planning system. This results from the suggested removal of a local authority's discretion to consider any other material considerations in addition to the plan. Significantly, there was little or no support

for this move from any sector, mainly because of the inflexibility it would introduce into the system. Discretion allows for sensible consideration of unforeseen issues not reflected in the plan, of which there are bound to be a significant number, and reflects the considerable complexity of interpreting plan policy.

### Recommendation 7

A strong plan-led system should be the cornerstone of local decision-making, but communities must have some flexibility to consider relevant and important issues not reflected in plan policy.

## 4.2 Transitional arrangements

There was a strong consensus in the roundtable debates on the need to manage change effectively during the reform process. Uncertainty about policy and over planning structures and timescales for making the transition will lead to a hiatus in action, causing further delay and hindrance to critical progress on housing and climate change priorities. One suggestion already being considered is that top-tier authorities should adopt relevant parts of the Regional Strategy as their own policy as soon as possible.

### Recommendation 8

Regional Strategy and Local Development Framework policies should be saved in their current form until new working arrangements are fully established. Local Development Frameworks currently under preparation should be allowed to go forward to adoption.

## 4.3 Transforming the planning profession

The roundtable debates highlighted the need for stronger action in transforming the education and skills of the profession. There were specific calls for greater emphasis on community development and communication skills and better knowledge of climate and energy issues. There was an acknowledgement that some progress had been made, but there was also

criticism that the pace of change was too slow and that more needed to be done to challenge some of the negative public perceptions of planning and planners. This could only be achieved by some risk-taking in showing the transformational potential of planning to improve people's lives and well-being.

### 4.4 People and planning

One of the most striking features of the roundtable debates was the consensus on the loss of public trust in planning. A stark comparison can be drawn between the post-war consensus on development and the highly polarised contemporary arguments which play out over issues such as housing. The roundtable participants agreed that this process was part of a profound change in civil society, manifest in declining political participation. Clearly planning is not solely responsible for this wider political trend, but planning decisions were acknowledged to be one of the greatest catalysts of local political activity because of their direct impact on people's lives.

Planning has always been explicitly democratic, with decision-making located largely at the local level. Planning also led the way in the 1960s in developing participative practice, culminating in the groundbreaking Skeffington Report<sup>15</sup> and implemented through techniques such as Planning for Real.<sup>16</sup> Over the last ten years there has been much less clarity about the value of public participation. While policy was clearly set down in 2004 in *Community Involvement in Planning: The Government's Objectives*,<sup>17</sup> little effort has been made to communicate its principles. There are no financial incentives for delivering effective community engagement.<sup>18</sup>

While there are excellent examples of best practice in participation at every level of the planning system,<sup>19</sup> overall delivery has been patchy, raising very significant questions about the skills set of the profession (in both the public and private sectors) in relation to communication and community development. In addition, the roundtable debates identified a problem in

multiple local authority consultations leading to confusion in the mind of the public. Feedback from third-sector participants suggested a growing cynicism about how seriously community views are taken and about the 'equality of arms', where the private sector had access to overwhelming resources and expertise. Direct action and legal challenge were now often seen as more effective ways forward, particularly in response to the 2008 Planning Act.

All this reinforces the fear that there is no longer sufficient trust in the system to enable it to function fairly and efficiently. In this context the idea of 'collaborative democracy' appears attractive. But there are a number of real problems. There is no academic consensus that collaborative or even participative democracy provides a safe model for decision-making. This is largely because of the real risk, reflected in the literature, that collaborative and participative process can be hijacked by powerful but unrepresentative local interests.<sup>20</sup>

The important conclusion from the roundtables is that we should honestly admit that there are and should be limits to local decision-making. Local planning processes have to comply with important legislation on equality, disability and the environment. Local planning also has to acknowledge wider strategic needs agreed democratically at the national level. Crucially, it must take responsibility for meeting the social needs of the local community and the wider needs of other communities. We must also be honest about where the resources will come from to deliver collaboratively developed plans. These constraints are real and provide the context for community empowerment measures.

### 4.5 Finding solutions

There is a wealth of research and thinking about local governance which must be considered in any planning reform process. Of particular relevance is the exploration 'Trust in planning' and very valuable experience from North West Europe.<sup>21</sup> It is not

15 A. Skeffington (1969) *People and Planning*. Report of the Committee on Public Participation in Planning ('Skeffington Report'). HMSO, London

16 See the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation website, [www.nif.co.uk/planningforreal](http://www.nif.co.uk/planningforreal)

17 ODPM (2004) *Community Involvement in Planning: The Government's Objectives*. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London

18 In reference to the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant

19 See the Planning Aid website, [www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk](http://www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk)

20 N. Wilson (2005) 'The dark side of community planning', *Planning Theory & Practice*, Vol. 6 (4), pp.519-526

21 L. Laurian (2009) 'Trust in planning: theoretical and practical considerations for participatory and deliberative planning', *Planning Theory & Practice*, Vol. 10 (3), pp.369-391; and S. Abram (2002) 'Enhancing local democracy – the Scandinavian connection', *eg magazine*, Vol. 8 (2), pp.11-12

possible to do justice to this work within the space constraints of this report, but the roundtable debates identified three issues which must be addressed if we are to rebuild trust in the system:

- **What is our objective in encouraging greater engagement?** The benefits of public engagement are well established and are often described in terms of better-informed decision-making, and greater ownership of decisions, leading to greater civic engagement. Less well discussed but equally important is whether the planning community regard engagement as positive. People have a **civil right** to be fully engaged in decisions which affect their lives. Such rights have a variety of legal foundations, but the best and most coherent expression of them is the Aarhus Convention, which grants rights to information, participation, and legal redress in environmental decision-making.<sup>22</sup>
- **Can we be clear about language?** Clarity about language may appear trivial, but there are very important differences between *consultation* and *participation*, and between *collaborative* and *representative* democracy. In practice, we have variously wanted to engage, empower, and involve people. If our objectives are to allow participation – i.e. give people the power to influence decisions meaningfully – then we must say so. It may not be a surprise that the public are disengaged when many processes are in fact consultations, where the opportunity for any meaningful influence is negligible.
- **Do we have clear democratic model for community engagement?** Here, we can outline some key elements. First, planning must be seen as part of wider project of invigorating local democracy: it cannot work in isolation. Second, representative democracy **must remain** the final arbiter of the **outcome** of decision-making: despite its drawbacks it provides the most accountable model we have. It is less open to distortion by one narrow sectional interest compared with participative democracy. Third, we must be clear that participative democracy should govern the **process** of decision-making. This implies a framework with clear opportunities to shape decisions at the earliest possible opportunity.

It requires honesty about constraints combined with enthusiasm about opportunities. This creative process is one of mutual learning and understanding; one of mediation of competing views, consensus-building and facing responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> Effective participation also requires resources and skills, and needs to be linked to the wider process of shaping communities, such as the local Sustainable Community Strategy.

The final component of our democratic model is clear citizen rights in the planning process. There are already rights in relation to freedom of information. The roundtable participants maintained that in plan-making the ‘right to be heard’ in the examination of plans must be preserved, and the current discretionary opportunities to speak at planning committee should be transformed into a qualified (by, for example, limiting speaking time) civil right. The issue of a right to challenge decisions is much more complex and contested. There is a consensus that current legal opportunities for judicial review are complex and exclusive in terms of costs, but there is no consensus on the *Open Source Planning* proposals to introduce a third-party right of appeal. However, the issue cannot be ducked, since a perception of unequal rights will undermine any attempt to rebuild trust. The question of how to define proper limitations to such rights remains, along with the need to find the right forum to hear appeals.<sup>24</sup>

### Recommendation 9

There should be a restatement of the primacy of representative democracy as the final arbiter of planning decisions, along with effective participative democracy in the process of decision-making.

### Recommendation 10

There should be a clear and simple articulation of citizens’ rights in planning based on the Aarhus Convention framework.

<sup>22</sup> Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. Jun. 1998

<sup>23</sup> The National Planning Forum is finalising its findings on the Mediation in Planning project. See [www.natplanforum.org.uk/projects.html](http://www.natplanforum.org.uk/projects.html)

<sup>24</sup> TCPA *et al.* (2002) *Third Party Rights of Appeal in Planning*. TCPA, London

# 5 The housing crisis

There is no doubting the scale and urgency of the unprecedented housing crisis which now confronts us. It is also apparent that there is little consensus on a coherent housing supply model for the future which might encompass issues of social justice, investment patterns, housing quality, tenure patterns, and planning policy.<sup>25</sup> The Conservatives' interesting proposals for Local Housing Trusts to deliver social housing are potentially a useful part of the solution, but they could never meet the scale of the housing challenge that our society faces. It is beyond the scope of this report to adequately grapple with this challenge except to say that a cross-sector consensus about the future of housing has never been so vital to the well-being and future of our communities.

However, the roundtable debates identified both short- and long-term challenges for housing delivery.

In the short term we face the removal of Regional Strategies and the nationally derived housing targets they contain. The roundtable debates acknowledged that regional housing targets had been deeply controversial in many communities. **However, there was also a strong feeling at the roundtable debates that a locally determined housing needs process would lead to a significant under-supply of housing.** The principal reason for this is the failure of local needs assessments to anticipate displaced demand from other constrained areas or from urban areas suffering from overcrowding and poor housing conditions.

There was no consensus that the Conservative Party's incentive regimes – such as local authority retention of council tax per unit of new housing built for six years – would compensate for the absence of nationally derived targets.<sup>26</sup> Affluent communities were thought unlikely to be susceptible to the level of financial

incentive envisaged, while poorer communities may accept development which they were less well able to service and support.

### Recommendation 11

**Current housing targets agreed in the Regional Strategy must remain in place at least until a sensible alternative forecasting regime is agreed.**

**In the longer term there is need for a complete re-evaluation of our housing delivery model and of spatial planning's role within it.** The roundtables highlighted a number of important background issues which must be addressed.

The background political and economic context to housing provision is now complex and contested. For a large section of society, house price inflation has become a desirable if not essential part of their financial future, and it has been a significant contributor to UK economic growth, fuelled by cheap credit. For others in society, the same process has led to a dramatic decline in affordability. As a result there is no longer a clear political consensus about meeting the key needs of existing and future generations for a decent home.

The dominant policy model for dealing with affordability and social housing has been a free-market approach, where a proportion of social housing or affordable market housing has been provided by a form of *ad hoc* taxation secured through Section 106 agreements. There have been attempts to codify such agreements by embedding them in plan policy, but the percentage of social and affordable housing thus delivered is still highly variable. A market-based approach has led to a drastic decline in both overall provision and social housing in the wake of the economic downturn.

Direct investment in the provision of social housing has increased but remains inadequate when set against current need and the loss of housing from the social sector through the Right to Buy.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> CABE (2009) *Who Should Build Our Homes?* Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, London

<sup>26</sup> The prime incentive would be a payment subsidy equivalent to 100% of council tax raised per unit for six years (Policy Green Paper No. 10, p.21). Social housing will receive an incentive of 125% of council tax raised per unit for six years and will be exempt from Section 106 payments. This will be paid for by cancelling the HPDG and by top-slicing a proportion of the annual increase in formula grant for local councils. While the planning service is the obvious loser, it is important to explore whether the incentives will outweigh either the increased real cost of servicing new development or entrenched political resistance. For example, the contribution of 100 houses in tax band D in a Derbyshire district would yield an additional £150,000 per annum for six years and the yield from social housing is of course proportionally less because social housing is generally in the lowest tax bands

<sup>27</sup> See recent Homelessness and Local Authority Housing Waiting Lists statistics from CLG, [www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/statistics/subject/housingstatistics](http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/statistics/subject/housingstatistics)

The housing forecasting regime which embeds a price mechanism to deal with affordability has failed to address the problem adequately. The Barker formula essentially saw the housing crisis as one of supply and demand in a simple rational market. The decision to focus high growth in areas of high demand was not taken with an adequate understanding of the complex implications of such an approach, such as:

- the level of over-provision of housing necessary to bring prices down to affordable levels for lowest-quartile income groups;
- the fact that housing demand is driven by speculation and not simply by social needs (the market in buy to let is one example);
- the fact that focusing growth in areas of high demand can fuel further demand and so fail deliver any advance in affordability; and
- the complexity of differing housing markets.

In some areas of high demand there are also real planning constraints related to water resources, flood risk or other statutory designations which cannot be ignored. (It should be noted that at the same time the private sector has identified planning as a key barrier to delivery because of its failure to provide sufficient viable sites for housing. Local authorities dispute this view, and the lack of evidence on the actual, rather than the perceived, extent of this problem is a barrier to progress.)

Views were again divided on housing standards. Some roundtable participants argued that housing design standards must be transformed both aesthetically and environmentally and to address the urgent Lifetime Homes agenda. However, some private sector contributors suggested that the removal of such standards could speed up housing delivery.

Finally, insufficient attention has been paid to critical social infrastructure to support communities that have seen rapid growth.

### 5.1 Finding solutions

The foundation of a new housing supply model must begin with a political acceptance of the acute shortage of homes when compared with both current real needs and future projections of demographic change. The scale of housing delivery required to meet these needs will

require development levels not seen since the 1950s.<sup>28</sup> We must also remind ourselves of the profound impact that poor housing has on people's lives and life-chances.

Breaking the dependency of the supply of social and affordable housing on private sector housing provision for general demand is the second important requirement. Social housing needs must be met regardless of short-term fluctuations in housing market conditions. It was broadly felt in the roundtable debates that the direct provision of a high-quality social rented sector would do more than anything to meet the acute needs from homelessness and overcrowding, as well as substantially increase the affordability of market housing by creating a real choice of tenures. Feedback from the roundtables also stressed the need for a more European-style pattern of tenure, with a well regulated but vibrant private rented sector component.

We also need to break down the assumption that housing development is automatically an environmental cost. We now have the technical capability to develop places which can deliver environmental benefits through zero-carbon standards or accompanying green and blue infrastructure offering multiple biodiversity benefits.

A high-quality evidence base is vital in constructing a new housing supply model. There was strong feedback from some of the roundtable participants suggesting that the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit (NHPAU) was not performing as it might, and that it was regarded with suspicion by many local authorities. The lack of acceptance of forecast data by local authorities was attributed to a lack of planning expertise within the NHPAU.

Meeting housing needs arising from demographic change will require a major expansion in housing provision, but this can be squared with sustainable development only by dealing explicitly with regional inequalities and economic disparities across England. The continued development of the Greater South East will inevitably meet powerful constraints derived from congestion and resource shortages. The redistribution of these pressures can in part be achieved through a national spatial plan, but further detailed work on the future distribution of England's population is also required.

Additional work is also needed to secure consensus around new investment models. Increased public sector

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<sup>28</sup> A. Holmans, with C. Whitehead (2008) *New and Higher Projections of Future Population in England – a First Look at their Implications for Households and Housing*. Town & Country Planning Tomorrow Series Paper 10. TCPA, London

investment will continue to be an essential component over the longer term, particularly when housing has such profound impacts on health, well-being and life-chances. The Callcutt Review of Housebuilding Delivery identified the possibility of moving to an 'investor model' in private housing provision, whereby developers took a long-term stake in housing (particularly social housing) provision.<sup>29</sup> Progress in exploring such possibilities appears to have been slow. A range of community-based and co-operative models were also discussed at the roundtables, and these should play a valuable part in meeting needs.

### Recommendation 12

**A commission on population change and housing delivery should be set up to urgently address the distribution and amount of England's housing needs and the quality and accessibility required of the housing to be delivered. The outcome should be a national framework for housing delivery, including preferred housing investment models. The TCPA will be actively seeking the establishment of such a commission.**

## The climate crisis

Along with housing supply, tackling climate change continues to be a critical challenge for the spatial planning system. The Planning and Climate Change Coalition has published a report summarising the overwhelming force of climate science and setting out recommendations for action.<sup>30</sup> In response, the previous Government produced a revised consultation draft Planning Policy Statement on energy and climate change, which was strongly endorsed in the roundtable debates and subsequent feedback as a major step forward. However, overall, climate policy implementation remains unacceptably slow, and its outcomes, at a city scale, lag some way behind those delivered in North West Europe.<sup>31</sup>

There is no doubt that the University of East Anglia affair has created reservations in the minds of many local decision-makers – despite the fact that none of the researchers' supposed 'mistakes' threaten any aspect of the overwhelming canon of climate science.<sup>32</sup> But of much more concern is the growing weight of evidence that climate change is occurring faster and with greater severity than was previously anticipated.<sup>33</sup> There is now a real debate about the future of some key coastal cities and an active and growing interest in which cities will gain competitive advantage from successful climate adaptation strategies. The TCPA-led European project GRaBS (Green and Blue Space Adaptation for Urban Areas, [www.grabs-eu.org](http://www.grabs-eu.org)) has identified pan-European best practice on planning for extreme weather and identifying vulnerable people and places.

It is important to urgently address the barriers to progress in tackling climate change, which are focused on professional and political leadership, skills and knowledge, clear policy messages, and resources. This report has already made the case for long-term strategic planning to deal with climate change; a national spatial framework is the only sensible mechanism for dealing with the long-term redistribution of the population or the vulnerability of much of our most productive farmland to sea level rise.<sup>34</sup> The roundtable debates produced two priority recommendations.

### Recommendation 13

**Climate change mitigation and adaptation must immediately become a guiding thread in planning education and continuing professional development. Councillors must also receive compulsory training on planning in general and climate change in particular.**

### Recommendation 14

**The new Government must implement the draft Planning Policy Statement on climate and energy and continue to sustain and grow a consensus about the delivery of mitigation and adaptation strategies.**

29 Callcutt Review (2007) *The Callcutt Review of Housebuilding Delivery*. Department for Communities and Local Government, London

30 Planning and Climate Change Coalition (2009) *Position Statement*. TCPA, London

31 K. Henderson (2009) *The Case for Climate Change Adaptation*. GRaBS Expert Paper 1. TCPA, London

32 Countering Climate Controversy. Met Office, [www.metoffice.gov.uk/climatechange/science/controversy](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/climatechange/science/controversy)

33 J.E. Hansen (2007) *Scientific Reticence and Sea Level Rise*. NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, New York, NY, USA

34 Foresight Land Use Futures Project (2010) *Land Use Futures: Making the Most of Land in the 21st Century*. Final Project Report. The Government Office for Science, London

## 7 Guiding principles for a progressive planning system

A significant conclusion of the roundtable debates was that the nation would benefit from a period of settled consensus around the principles and structures of the democratic planning process. Broad continuity on planning comprehensively and in the long term exists in many North West European countries whose systems are subject to change but not on the continuing scale of the English system.

One of the key reasons for the repeated focus on reform in England is the tension between deregulation or a market-based approach to determining planning decisions and the wider social, economic and environmental considerations within which these decisions are made. Here, the roundtable debates highlighted two important perspectives. The first is encompassed by a view that price mechanisms can be central to determining land use and can be codified into various forms of cost-benefit analysis. These views are reflected in the Barker reports and most recently in the Foresight *Land Use Futures* report.<sup>35</sup> The second offers a free-market solution encompassed by proposals such as that made by the Growing Communities Coalition<sup>36</sup> for 'planning-free zones'.

Valuation and cost-benefit approaches may have a role in informing decision-making (although the price of carbon is one example where valuation has failed even in relation to just a single commodity); but those who favour them have not demonstrated that such approaches can deal with the complexity of planning decisions. One key example is the relationship of cost-benefit decisions to a democratic and participative governance model. While the *Land Use Futures* report acknowledges this tension, it does not resolve it.

The onus is on the proposers of these ideas to show that they are workable, legitimate and deliver

sustainable development in the round. In the absence of such a case (which is not made in the *Land Use Futures* report), our key objective should be to make the existing system work fairly and efficiently in achieving sustainable development.

The creation of planning-free zones is equally unworkable – not just for pragmatic reasons, because of the obligations of EU environmental law, but because relationship between the planning system and the market is complex. The regulation of land creates long-term values as well public interest outcomes – perhaps the best example of this is found in retail planning and the continued attempt to defend the economic viability of town centres. As a result there are significantly differing private sector views on the value of spatial planning, depending on the nature of the investment model used. All regulation must be efficient and proportionate, but **strong interventionist spatial planning is part of the long-term solution to the nation's complex problems.**

There are other challenges confronting the values of planning, not least greater awareness of equality, environmental justice, and health and well-being. Here, roundtable debate was again polarised, with third-sector and community organisations pushing for such issues to be embedded in decision-making and some private sector participants arguing for health impact assessments to be removed from the planning process for large-scale development.<sup>37</sup>

It is also important to reflect on planning's explicitly radical and progressive founding principles. These principles had social justice at their heart and were openly co-operative and where possible redistributive. The sustainable development ideal is an evolution of this progressive past, encompassing clear aspirations for justice for both existing and future generations. It attempts to value social, market and environmental outcomes.

The roundtable participants maintained that sustainable development should remain the guiding principle of the spatial planning system. However, like all ideas, it needs to be refreshed and redefined to reflect contemporary pressures.<sup>38</sup> *Open Source Planning* suggests a presumption in favour of sustainable development, but that sustainable development might

35 Foresight Land Use Futures Project (2010) *Land Use Futures: Making the Most of Land in the 21st Century*. Final Project Report. The Government Office for Science, London

36 *Growing Communities Coalition* (2010) *Making localism Work*

be determined on a local basis. However, sustainable development **does** have a set of clear guiding principles which must be respected, and it requires a holistic and viable approach to delivery. The 2005 UK Sustainable Development Strategy remains an effective foundation, but its values are rarely reflected in planning decisions. This is partly because of the weak legislative duty to promote sustainable development in both the 2004 and 2008 Planning Acts.

### Recommendation 15

**Sustainable development must remain the key guiding principle of the spatial planning system, with an enhanced legal duty placed upon decision-makers to deliver the principles set out in the 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy.**

### Recommendation 16

**Spatial planning must fully reflect existing legal obligations on equality.**

## 8 Conclusion: the need for a lasting settlement

Prior to the election, the roundtable debates did not find an overwhelming case for major structural change. However, such change is now under way, and regardless of their impact on the planning community we will need to rigorously test whether the proposed changes will deliver real improvements for individuals and communities.

The roundtable participants agreed that changes to strategic planning must acknowledge the value of moving efficiently to new, more voluntary arrangements which can build upon and not waste the expertise, evidence and policy which is vital to our collective future. Renewed attention should be focused on driving culture change to enable more visionary and inclusive outcomes to be delivered. This requires a new engagement with the values of planning, along with a reassessment of planning education. And if we are serious about reconnecting with people, then

resources must be available to allow the job to be done properly and in the long term.

It may not be a matter of chance that our increased fixation with detailed procedure and our lack of engagement with values coincides with planning's political decline. Re-engagement with our guiding principles is a vital part of making the case for planning.

While sustainable development is plainly at the heart of these values, there is also a need to reconnect with our progressive past. Those who founded the planning movement saw their work as overtly value driven, as well as technical and professional. They were motivated by a keen sense of social justice, manifest through campaigns for better housing and for collective and co-operative social organisation. Any kind of planning movement has long since fragmented and been replaced by planners' own keen sense of professionalism – which is, of course, important. But in these difficult times, a defence of professional credentials will simply not be enough to successfully communicate both the value and future capability of spatial planning. Of course we have to make the technical and economic case for planning, but we also urgently need to resurrect an explicitly political planning movement that speaks powerfully and passionately about the case for spatial planning and its value in forging a new society.

## Summary of recommendations

### Planning reform and the need for an evidence base

- 1** Further reform measures must be based on a clear evidence base, rigorous analysis and clear guiding principles.
- 3** Reform measures should focus on skills, resources and leadership, and should not undermine the delivery of the current Local Development Framework system.

### A route map for strategic planning

- 3** There must be an integrated and consistent approach across the National Policy Statement series, informing a joined-up national infrastructure framework to enable confident and sustainable local, sub-regional and national decision-making.
- 4** Planning reform must embark on a comprehensive national spatial framework which can deal spatially with the provisions of a wide range of social, economic and environmental infrastructure. Such a framework should have a clear legal status in the overall plan-making framework.
- 5** All local authorities should be enabled to become members of a strategic planning association. These associations should be required to submit a strategic planning scheme, formalising the extent and membership of the body, and a project plan and timetable for delivering a strategic plan. The final plan would be independently tested by public examination and would have equal status with the local development plan. Both the planning scheme and the final plan would be subject to approval by the Secretary of State.

### The shape of local plans

- 6** The legislative framework of the Local Development Framework system should remain, but stronger guidance is needed on how the approach can be used flexibly and simply at the local level.
- 7** A strong plan-led system should be the cornerstone of local decision-making, but communities must have some flexibility to consider relevant and important issues not reflected in plan policy.
- 8** Regional Strategy and Local Development Framework policies should be saved in their current form until new working arrangements are fully established. Local Development Frameworks currently under preparation should be allowed to go forward to adoption.

- 9** There should be a restatement of the primacy of representative democracy as the final arbiter of planning decisions, along with effective participative democracy in the process of decision-making.
- 10** There should be a clear and simple articulation of citizens' rights in planning based on the Aarhus Convention framework.

### The housing crisis

- 11** Current housing targets agreed in the Regional Strategy must remain in place at least until a sensible alternative forecasting regime is agreed.
- 12** A commission on population change and housing delivery should be set up to urgently address the distribution and amount of England's housing needs and the quality and accessibility required of the housing to be delivered. The outcome should be a national framework for housing delivery, including preferred housing investment models. The TCPA will be actively seeking the establishment of such a commission.

### The climate crisis

- 13** Climate change mitigation and adaptation must immediately become a guiding thread in planning education and continuing professional development. Councillors must also receive compulsory training on planning in general and climate change in particular.
- 14** The new Government must implement the draft Planning Policy Statement on climate and energy and continue to sustain and grow a consensus about the delivery of mitigation and adaptation strategies.

### Guiding principles for a progressive planning system

- 15** Sustainable development must remain the key guiding principle of the spatial planning system, with an enhanced legal duty placed upon decision-makers to deliver the principles set out in the 2005 Sustainable Development Strategy.
- 16** Spatial planning must fully reflect existing legal obligations on equality.



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Town and Country Planning Association  
17 Carlton House Terrace  
London SW1Y 5AS

020 7930 8903  
[tcpa@tcpa.org.uk](mailto:tcpa@tcpa.org.uk)  
[www.tcpa.org.uk](http://www.tcpa.org.uk)  
[www.grabs-eu.org](http://www.grabs-eu.org)