
The end of democratic planning?

A briefing by the TCPA on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill for the House of Lords

June 2025

1 Overview

The TCPA believes that democratic planning is a vital tool for securing socially just and sustainable outcomes in an era defined by the housing, health, nature and climate crisis. Planning is not a blocker and consistently approves more planning consents for homes than the private sector can deliver¹. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill could be the platform for the delivery of healthy communities designed to enhance nature and secure healthy and resilient homes. To achieve that goal, however, the legislation requires significant amendment.

2 The elements of the Bill the TCPA support

The Bill includes some welcome measures that could be the foundation of a new generation of highly sustainable communities. The measures to modernise development corporations [part 4] and simplify the compulsory purchase process [part 5] are welcome. The TCPA also welcomes the emphasis on strategic planning and the creation of spatial development strategies (SDS), recognising the importance of addressing some issues at a more regional level. **It is positive that in preparing a SDS the strategic planning authority must 'have regard' to the effect the proposed strategy will have on people's health, but regrettable there is no requirement to aim to improve health outcomes** [12G within clause 52].

3 Strengthening the Bill

Currently the Bill has no content on a range of important planning outcomes. For example, the Bill does not contain any measures to secure affordable, healthy homes, create an effective link between the Climate Change Act 2008 and planning decisions, or give planning a positive, visionary purpose around sustainable development and the welfare of future generations. We urge peers to address the following issues as the Bill passes through Parliament:

- **Planning purpose:** The Bill should set out a clear purpose for planning which reframes the planning system, based on the United Nations principles of sustainable development. The legal purpose would require the Secretary of State to have special regard to present and future generations in relation to planning. This would explicitly recognise the needs of children and young people in plan making and decision taking.
- **Democracy:** There is an urgent need to rebuild public trust in planning. The Bill risks doing the opposite by further eroding the role of people in the planning process. The proposed national scheme of delegation [clause 51] creates extensive powers for the government to limit the applications which are determined by local planning committees. In a separate consultation it is now clear that the government intends to

¹ <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/resources/our-shared-future-a-tcpa-white-paper-for-homes-and-communities/>

use this power to severely restrict the role of elected members on planning committees which would remove democratic accountability for the majority of housing applications. This would also remove the opportunity of communities to be heard in committee when decisions are made². The government originally proposed this form of delegation would only apply to applications in conformity with local plans, but it now applies to all applications.

- **Climate:** The Bill fails to address the climate crisis. The Bill requires a new duty to explicitly require all elements of the planning system to have full regard to the achievement of the commitments under the Climate Change Act 2008.
- **Healthy homes and neighbourhoods:** It is essential that new homes are built to a high quality to support rather than undermine people's health, wellbeing and life chances. The failings of the current system are all too evident in the very poor-quality housing being produced through permitted development. The Bill should be amended to support Lord Crisp's long-standing campaign to place a duty on the Secretary of State to positively promote healthy homes and neighbourhoods.
- **Affordable housing:** The Bill should address the urgent need for good quality genuinely affordable homes, as the cornerstone for addressing health inequalities and promoting good health³. Over 1.3 million people are on council housing waiting lists, and a quarter of a million people live in squalid insecure temporary accommodation, where tragically eighty children and babies died in England in 2024⁴. Rising rental and housing costs are placing ever more pressures on people, especially those in more deprived areas⁵. Currently, there is no requirement for local planning authorities to plan to meet housing needs, and affordability is defined by price not household income which makes many 'affordable' homes beyond the reach of those on average and below-average incomes. The Bill should be amended to create a duty to meet housing need and have special regard to those on average and below average incomes⁶.

4 Conclusion

New homes, local democracy and enhancing nature are not incompatible objectives. A democratic planning system with the power to drive delivery can achieve all these goals as part of a vision led mission for sustainable development. In the context of a housing, health, nature and climate emergency communities must be part of delivering solutions that can provide healthy and resilient homes. None of this can be achieved by marginalising the voice of communities over decisions which have a profound impact on their lives.

5 Contact details

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² The UK ratified the Aarhus Convention in 2005 which requires provisions for the public to access environmental information, to participate in environmental decision-making and to access justice when challenging environmental decisions: https://bit.ly/UNECE_AarhusUK

³ The role of the property sector in improving health. *Safe as Houses*. Shelter report. Marmot, M., Allen, J., et al (2025) p53-58

⁴ *Child Mortality in Temporary Accommodation 2025* - Shared Health Foundation

⁵ *People without Decent Homes* - MHCLG, 2025; and *Evidence Review: Housing and Health Inequalities in London* – Institute Health Equity

⁶ *Housing Purchase Affordability, UK* - Office for National Statistics; and *Private rental affordability, England and Wales* - Office for National Statistics
