

## RAPC 433-20

### NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE – 7 SEPTEMBER 2020

## WHITE PAPER: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

**Report by:** Steve Avery, Executive Director

### Summary

On 6 August 2020 the Government launched its Planning White Paper and ‘Planning for the Future’ consultation which in its own words *“proposes reforms of the planning system to streamline and modernise the planning process, bring a new focus to design and sustainability, improve the system of developer contributions to infrastructure, and ensure more land is available for development where it is needed”*.

The White Paper is wide ranging and proposes a *“a whole new planning system for England”* and so it is important that Members have sufficient opportunity to consider and shape the Authority’s response to the consultation which closes just before midnight on 29 October 2020.

The purpose of this report therefore is to seek the Committee’s views on how we might engage Members and our key stakeholders in formulating the Authority’s formal response to the White Paper.

### 1. Overview of the Planning White Paper

1.1 The Prime Minister’s foreword to the White Paper promises *“radical reform unlike anything we have seen since the Second World War”* to replace what is seen as an *“outdated and ineffective planning system”* with *“one that is simpler, clearer and quicker to navigate, delivering results in weeks and months rather than years and decades”*. The full consultation document can be viewed on the GOV.UK website via this [link](#).

1.2 The proposals in the White Paper have five keys strands:

- **Streamlining the planning process** “with more democracy taking place more effectively at the plan making stage”
- **Taking a radical, digital-first approach** “to modernise the planning process, moving from a process based on documents to a process driven by data”
- **Bringing a new focus on design and sustainability**
- **Improving infrastructure delivery** and ensuring developers play their part, through reform of developer contributions
- **Ensuring more land is available** “for homes and development that people and communities need”

1.3 The consultation then sets out a series of questions under three ‘pillars’:

- 1) **Planning for development** – focussing on local plans and decision-making

- 2) **Planning for beautiful and sustainable places** – focussing on design, environmental impacts and climate change
- 3) **Planning for infrastructure and connected places** – focussing on the infrastructure levy

1.4 There are 24 separate proposals set out in the consultation. The following are a list of some (but not all) of the main proposals:

- Simplifying Local Plans with a focus on identifying land under three categories:
  - **Growth areas** – automatic consent in the form of outline permission for the types of development specified in the Plan
  - **Renewal areas** - existing built areas for smaller scale development e.g. infill, small sites in villages, “gentle densification” – statutory presumption in favour of development.
  - **Protected areas** – where development is restricted (which it is assumed would include National Parks) – planning permission as now but assessed against NPPF policy.
- Local Plans would set clear rules rather than general policies, with a more focused role in identifying site and area-specific requirements, alongside locally-produced design codes. Should be significantly shorter (expecting a “reduction in size of at least two thirds”). More general development management policies would be set out nationally.
- Introducing a single statutory “sustainable development” test replacing the existing Local Plan tests of soundness and abolishing the ‘Duty to Cooperate’.
- Authorities “*should radically and profoundly re-invent the ambition, depth and breadth with which they engage with communities*” as they consult on Local Plans, using digital consultation methods.
- Local Plans should be “*visual and map-based, standardised, using digital technology and a new standard template*”. They would be subject to a statutory (and enforceable) 30 month timetable with a single period of public consultation
- There would be a new nationally binding housing requirement set that would take into account affordability and planning constraints – including for the first time in National Parks. This would be based on the least affordable places receiving most of the target, taking account of environmental constraints.
- The planning system would be digitised and standardised to make things quicker and easier, including new standard planning conditions.
- Develop a comprehensive resources and skills strategy for the planning sector to support the implementation of the reforms.
- Decision-making should be faster and more certain. Planning fees would be refunded if deadlines are not met or where an appeal is successful.
- Enforcement powers and sanctions would be strengthened (no details as yet).

- Each planning authority to appoint a chief officer responsible for design and place making
  - The cost of operating the new planning system should be principally funded by the beneficiaries of planning gain – landowners and developers – rather than the national or local taxpayer.
  - The Community Infrastructure Levy and the current system of planning obligations are proposed to be reformed into a single nationally set, value-based flat rate charge (the ‘Infrastructure Levy’).
  - Introduce a fast-track for beauty through changes to national policy and legislation, to incentivise and accelerate high quality development which reflects local character and preferences.
  - A simpler framework for assessing environmental impacts and enhancement opportunities, that speeds up the process while protecting and enhancing the most valuable and important habitats and species.
- 1.5 These reforms, as envisaged in the consultation paper, would have far reaching implications for the future delivery of our National Park Planning Service, not just in terms of processes and outcomes but also the resources required to support an enhanced technological and data driven planning system.
- 1.6 Of particular interest to the National Park is the Government’s wish to *“promote the stewardship and improvement of our precious countryside and environment, ensuring important natural assets are preserved, the development potential of brownfield land is maximised, that we support net gains for biodiversity and the wider environment and actively address the challenges of climate change”*.

## **2. Engaging Members and stakeholders in preparing the Authority’s response**

- 2.1 Members of the Planning Committee agreed at their meeting last month that a Members’ workshop should be convened before the next Authority meeting to help inform and prepare the Authority’s response. Dates and times have been suggested for either the week commencing 7 or 14 September, the final date to be confirmed at your meeting. All Members will be welcome to attend the workshop. We also propose to engage and seek the views of local councils through the current round of quadrant meetings and will be liaising with colleagues in partner organisations, as well as helping to raise a general awareness in the Forest about the consultation (such as at the meeting of the New Forest Consultative Panel on 3 September).
- 2.2 It is proposed to bring a report to the Authority meeting on 24 September, setting out in more detail the consultation proposals and how the Authority might respond to the individual questions asked through the consultation. National Parks England (NPE) will be preparing a joint response which we are helping to co-ordinate through the Heads of Planning Group. It is likely that each Park will want to supplement the NPE response with its own response, focusing on those matters that are of particular interest/relevant to each Authority.

### 3. Additional planning reforms

3.1 Anticipating that it may take a little while to bring into effect the proposed reforms set out in the White Paper (some of which will require changes to primary legislation) the Government also published a concurrent consultation on 6 August 2020 setting out proposed '[Changes to the Current Planning System](#)' and responses are due by 1 October 2020. This outlines a number of shorter-term measures designed to improve the immediate effectiveness of the current planning system, including:

- changes to the existing standard method for calculating housing need to feed into Local Plans. This is to help meet the Government's aim of delivering over 300,000 new dwellings per annum. The proposed methodology would result in an increase in the identified housing need in New Forest District, Test Valley Borough and Wiltshire.
- temporarily lifting the small sites threshold, below which developers do not need to contribute to affordable housing. The Government is proposing to increase the threshold above which affordable housing will be required to 40 or 50 units. This will potentially have a significant impact on affordable housing delivery in areas surrounding the National Park. It is proposed that designated rural areas – including National Parks – will be exempt from this change.

3.2 This consultation follows a series of extended permitted development rights and reform of the use classes order already introduced in 2020. NPE will be preparing a consultation response by the deadline of 1 October 2020.

### 4. RECOMMENDATION

**That the Committee note and agree the proposed means of engaging Members and other relevant parties in preparing the Authority's individual response to the White Paper: Planning for the Future and contributing to the wider NPE response in respect of the same.**

#### **Papers:**

White Paper: Planning for the Future

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>

Changes to the Current Planning System

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system>

The Town and Country Planning (Permitted Development and Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020

The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020

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#### **Equality Impact Assessment:**

There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report.