

Policy Briefing: A Values-Based Approach to Planning

Planning is integral to realising the growth agenda. It is essential for creating economic, social and natural capital in the UK. However, it is no secret that the current planning system does not deliver the quality and scale of outputs necessary to meet society's needs. Moreover, distrust in planning processes and procedures also inhibits quality development from the get-go. Understanding what matters to key actors and getting them on board is therefore crucial for successful reform. Our report on "Planning with Purpose: A Values-Based Approach to Planning Reform" investigates how diverse interests are balanced within the system. We zoom in on three central aspects of planning - Community Participation, Land Use and Housing Delivery –to determine what a new generation of planning might look like and how we get there. The following recommendations are based on conversations with study participants.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation in planning is often perceived as an obstacle to progress. However, it is a cornerstone of democratic governance and legitimacy. Acknowledging the need to resource and deliver place-based solutions, we explored where and how communities participate in planning and situated successful participation as a critical building block to increase buy-in, uplift communities, and achieve the growth agenda.

We propose that the Government:

- **Refrain from scapegoating community participation. Instead, commission an official review of participation in planning** to (re)establish best practices, embed a blend of democratic mechanisms, and clarify the scope of stakeholders' participation, including increasing understanding of negotiable and non-negotiable aspects.
- **Strengthen democratic accountability in the forthcoming Devolution Bill** through the incorporation of statutory bodies such as national-level public assemblies, evaluatory regional public bodies in high-growth strategic areas and local community assemblies for continuous, transparent, actionable strategic engagement.
- **Adopt a broader definition of national strategic planning** (including economic, environmental and social spatial outcomes) that incorporates community participation at a national level to build a shared, actionable vision for the future and support a mission-driven government at the national, regional and local levels.
- **Encourage an iterative approach to strategic planning** to investigate complex problems and provide innovative solutions. Create a positive feedback loop based on lessons learned and provide space for an open conversation on the pros and cons of different options instead of relying solely on evidence-based critique.
- **Provide communities with the upfront tangible benefits of proposed developments**, such as GPs, schools and other social infrastructure funded through Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

LAND USE

While there is clear ambition from Government to deliver sustainable objectives through effective land use, several gaps remain between their aspirations and the practical policy mechanisms and financial structures in place to achieve them. A deliberate reshaping of the land market must be initiated in collaboration with landowners across sectors, creating an environment that fosters growth through their participation in value creation.

We propose that the Government:

- **Increase certainty for decision-makers and landowners** by establishing a cross-cutting, integrated database on land-use, which would facilitate the creation of a national-level land use framework, forming the basis for a national-level strategic plan.
- **Build trust in the public sector as an essential value creator and market shaper** by reinforcing the capacity of local authorities to de-risk development at an early stage and examining how councils can process developer contributions in a more strategic, transparent manner when reviewing viability guidance this year.
- **Make sustainable land use viable and attractive across various scales and financial situations** by incentivizing multisector partnerships and improving access to finance for smaller landowners.
- **Better enable public landowners to facilitate small-scale or community development** by adopting broader definitions of “valued community assets” in the forthcoming Devolution Bill and “best considerations” for the disposal of public land in line with an integrated duty of care to communities and climate.
- **Lay the foundations for a more long-term, intergenerational approach to land use and management** by mandating the land commissions proposed under the Devolution White Paper to drive national conversations on the future of land as a finite resource.

HOUSING DELIVERY

A historic shortfall in housing delivery has depressed growth and exacerbated intergenerational inequality, with younger generations bearing the brunt of the housing crisis. In response, the Labour Government has recently prioritised reforms to the English planning system aimed at increasing housing supply and driving economic growth. Tackling these challenges requires broader changes to housing and planning policies to promote sustainable growth, enhance social equity, and align with the evolving aspirations of younger generations.

We propose that the Government:

- **Integrate holistic design standards** by improving the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code on prioritising beauty that plays specific functions, such as

sustainability and community well-being, over rigid aesthetic standards.

- **Enhance affordability, rental security, and tenure choices to remove financial barriers for the 25–45 age group** through implementing stronger rent controls, prioritising affordable renting, and accelerating and funding alternative housing models, such as **cooperative housing and self-build projects.**
- **Ensure that local party politics does not interfere with land supply for housing delivery** by introducing an independent, third-party review of the Green Belt.
- **Consider creating an 'intergenerational commission' or a permanent 'intergenerational jury'** to better understand shifts in values among diverse groups. This could provide insights into important similarities and differences in attitudes toward housing delivery and broader planning issues, enabling more sustainable economic and social outcomes across generations.

LESSONS FOR THE PLANNING SYSTEM

Situating the planning system as a mechanism to achieve broader, integrated place-based solutions is a key opportunity for national renewal. We found a shared desire to work towards a common vision. However, participants cited a lack of clarity, co-ordination, funding and trust as key obstacles to securing positive outcomes for the planning system.

We propose that the Government:

- **Establish a renewed sense of purpose for the planning system** through open and deliberate conversation about its remit. A national forum for regional land commissions could also provide an inclusive space to develop a shared vision of the next steps for broad-reaching planning reform.
- **Provide sufficient resourcing for the planning system by loosening constraints for local government borrowing**, expanding their revenue-raising powers to equip them with the capacity to adopt long-term entrepreneurial approaches.
- **Reimagine the strategic planning process to foster a culture of continuous and “negotiated collaboration”** by engaging key actors in conversation about their roles and responsibilities, and the inevitable trade-offs needed to work towards a shared vision.
- **Build trust and legitimacy in the planning system** by ensuring that planning processes are easy to navigate for all stakeholders and strengthening evaluation mechanisms through citizen juries - centring future evaluation metrics on social outcomes.

For further details on key recommendations and findings, please refer to our report “Planning with Purpose: A Values-Based Approach to Planning Reform” available [here](#). For insights on specific policy challenges, we would be happy to set up a meeting.