

Planning for the Future - White Paper, October 2020

CONSULTATION RESPONSE – BEECH PARISH COUNCIL (Hampshire)

1. **What three words do you associate most with the planning system in England?**

Inconsistent. Arbitrary. Unaccountable.

2(a). **Do you get involved with planning decisions in your local area?**

[Yes / No]

Yes – we are a parish council with a neighbourhood plan.

2(b). **If no, why not?**

[Don't know how to / It takes too long / It's too complicated / I don't care / Other – please specify]
n/a

3. **Our proposals will make it much easier to access plans and contribute your views to planning decisions. How would you like to find out about plans and planning proposals in the future?**

[Social media / Online news / Newspaper / By post / Other – please specify]

By weekly email notification of all planning applications in the district, with the same on social media. Email notification is already available in our district.

4. **What are your top three priorities for planning in your local area?**

[Building homes for young people / building homes for the homeless / Protection of green spaces / The environment, biodiversity and action on climate change / Increasing the affordability of housing / The design of new homes and places / Supporting the high street / Supporting the local economy / More or better local infrastructure / Protection of existing heritage buildings or areas / Other – please specify]

In our parish:

- More or better local infrastructure
- Other: protecting the surrounding countryside
- Other: Achieving a more balanced housing mix, with the appropriate design and space

5. **Do you agree that Local Plans should be simplified in line with our proposals?**

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. The proposals would require local authorities to map every settlement down to street level, or even more detailed to plot level, in order to identify suitable Renewal areas, i.e. those areas suitable for **new, additional** development. (These land categories don't apply to re-development, i.e. the replacement of an old house by a new house.) The local authority will have to negotiate maps showing the boundaries of Growth, Renewal and Protected areas with each town/parish council and with the public in each too. This is a fantastic level of detail for a local authority to have to negotiate in a shortened timeframe for local plan development. It is to avoid that level of detail, and amount of work, that local authorities adopt 'principles-based' policies in local plans.

It looks as though all currently developed areas, urban and rural, are to be categorised as Renewal areas, "suitable for development". This leaves no scope for protecting existing housing areas judged to be already at maximum housing density, such as our Special Housing Area. This would not be desirable or supported by the public..

Where do neighbourhood plans fit alongside such detailed land-use mapping (with explanatory text notations) at local authority level? Do they become subsumed into the more detailed local plan? If so, parish councils like ours will lose control of our neighbourhood plan policies to the local

authority. We already have enough trouble trying to get the local authority's planning officers to interpret our neighbourhood plan in the way it was intended when drafted.

The alternative of just identifying Growth areas, and leaving development elsewhere much as it is now, would be much more manageable and would leave a role for fully democratically generated neighbourhood plans.

A more radical approach would be to truly devolve planning decisions to a local level. Nationally determined new housing allocation numbers could be divided up and handed down (perhaps via county level) to each town and parish council, based upon local needs. Each town and parish council would then determine precisely where in its area to build the new housing.

6. Do you agree with our proposals for streamlining the development management content of Local Plans, and setting out general development management policies nationally?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. The proposed digital one-stop-shop will inevitably be developed and managed by the local authority, meaning that this parish council will lose control of its neighbourhood plan. Also, the blanket imposition of area-wide building height, scale and density limits has absolutely no nuance to accommodate factors such as topography and negative impact upon neighbouring properties, which are specific to each development site.

Local authorities will in any case need general development policies to cover aspects other than new development, such as redevelopment of existing properties, extensions, changes of use and so on. So retaining some general development policies covering new development will not look out of place.

Nationally mandated policy should just focus on minimum housing standards, such as room sizes, energy efficiency/conservation and building standards, in order to produce homes fit for the 21st century.

7(a). Do you agree with our proposals to replace existing legal and policy tests for Local Plans with a consolidated test of "sustainable development", which would include consideration of environmental impact?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Not sure. The entire need to specify 'sustainable development' would fall away if town and parish councils were given the power to determine development in line with their local needs, according to their own neighbourhood plans.

7(b). How could strategic, cross-boundary issues be best planned for in the absence of a formal Duty to Cooperate?

Not sure. We are not familiar enough with this process to give a view.

8(a). Do you agree that a standard method for establishing housing requirements (that takes into account constraints) should be introduced?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Not sure. We understood that our local authority (East Hampshire District Council) is already mandated to deliver a certain number of houses across the duration of the new local plan it is developing. So what would really change?

Any such standard method should definitely take into account local constraints. For example, in our district under the current system, the South Downs National Park Authority seems to be able to take

as few new houses as it likes, with the vast bulk of the district's housing allocation therefore having to be crammed into the 50% of the district outside the SDNP; the resulting housing pressures are absolutely unfairly distributed.

8(b). Do you agree that affordability and the extent of existing urban areas are appropriate indicators of the quantity of development to be accommodated?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. Affordability largely depends on land prices. Existing urban areas have grown not because of local housing needs (e.g. to support employment in the immediate local area) but because of desirability of location. Criteria based upon affordability are likely to reinforce the direction of new development to areas already considered 'desirable', and will not help the creation of self-sustainable local communities nationwide.

9(a). Do you agree that there should be automatic outline permission for areas for substantial development (Growth areas) with faster routes for detailed consent?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. So long as the Growth area is designated in the local plan with a mandatory range of dwelling numbers and/or density level.

But if no other action is taken then automatic outline permission will not accelerate the rate of build of new developments, which will continue to proceed at a pace determined by developers' commercial interests. There is already nationally a large number of houses for which planning permission has been granted but which have not been built.

9(b). Do you agree with our proposals above for the consent arrangements for Renewal and Protected areas?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. Planning applications in Renewal and Protected areas need to be viewed not only in the context of raw data in the local plan, but also with regard to topography, neighbouring dwellings and/or nearby open spaces (which are site-specific and application-specific considerations), and any other aspects covered in neighbourhood plans (which are already required to deal with renewal and protected areas).

9(c). Do you think there is a case for allowing new settlements to be brought forward under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects regime?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. As long as the new settlement, such as a New Town, is consistent with the relevant Local Plan.

10. Do you agree with our proposals to make decision-making faster and more certain?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. The purely data-driven approach you describe may possibly work for a new housing estate or a new block of flats. It certainly doesn't work for small developments or single infill (or replacement) housing where topography, neighbouring dwellings and/or nearby open spaces have to be taken into consideration – i.e. where there are necessarily judgements on 'quality' on a site-by-site basis. And improving the quality of new developments is claimed to be a key driver of these reforms. These are the sorts of judgements on new developments that we, as a parish council, have to take the most care over, in our role as protectors of the interests and amenity of existing residents.

The proposals would seem to increase central control and bureaucracy, rather than diminish it, and make decision-making more of a difficult burden for local planning authorities.

11. Do you agree with our proposals for accessible, web-based Local Plans?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. We would prefer to see accessible, comprehensive, community-developed neighbourhood plans backed by national planning and building standards. We are sceptical about the ability of Government to deliver the IT necessary for fully web-based Local Plans accessed by digital tools.

12. Do you agree with our proposals for a 30 month statutory timescale for the production of Local Plans?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. The proposed process does not incorporate a stage during which the local authority considers the public's consultation responses (including representations made by the democratically elected district and parish councillors), and amends the local plan as appropriate, before the plan goes to the final planning inspector stage. The public will have had no say in the initial drafting of the plan, and the planning inspector (who is not democratically accountable at all) has the arbitrary power to dismiss consultation comments as he or she sees fit. This would be a major retrograde step in terms of public input to the local plan.

We would also wish to retain community-developed neighbourhood plans and it is not clear how they would be able to fit into the proposed 30 month process for Local Plans (with which the neighbourhood plans must integrate).

13(a). Do you agree that Neighbourhood Plans should be retained in the reformed planning system?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. Neighbourhood plans should be the prime drivers in development. But somehow the neighbourhood needs to keep control of its plan content, and not merely see it subsumed into the local plan with loss of control.

13(b). How can the neighbourhood planning process be developed to meet our objectives, such as in the use of digital tools and reflecting community preferences about design?

Integrating neighbourhood planning into local plan development (digital tools and all) would be highly beneficial, as the neighbourhood plan and local plan would always be in lockstep (instead of having the inevitable lag between a revision of a local plan and the subsequent corresponding revision of a neighbourhood plan to fit with the new local plan). Provision would need to be made for amendments to a neighbourhood plan to be made at times in between revisions of the local plan, if necessary. Don't forget, the local authority will be setting standards for design etc across all areas, including those that have no neighbourhood plan area designation; such standards setting could be delegated to existing neighbourhood planning groups where they exist.

We are sceptical about the ability of Government to deliver the IT necessary for fully web-based neighbourhood plans and Local Plans accessed by digital tools. And digitisation does not necessarily equate to better accessibility.

14. Do you agree there should be a stronger emphasis on the build out of developments? And if so, what further measures would you support?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. Developers should be fined (or have a higher number of affordable homes imposed upon them) if the construction timeline (which should form part of their application) is not adhered to. Being hit in the pocket is the only effective sanction.

Also 'land banks' should be identified and taxed if they lie unused for development (or development is not applied for) within three years of acquisition.

15. What do you think about the design of new development that has happened recently in your area?

[Not sure or indifferent / Beautiful and/or well-designed / Ugly and/or poorly-designed / There hasn't been any / Other – please specify]

Other: In our parish recent developments are generally only of 1, 2 or 3 houses. Experience has been mixed, from the good to the indifferent to the bad.

16. Sustainability is at the heart of our proposals. What is your priority for sustainability in your area?

[Less reliance on cars / More green and open spaces / Energy efficiency of new buildings / More trees / Other – please specify]

Other: Retaining existing green and open spaces in our parish.

17. Do you agree with our proposals for improving the production and use of design guides and codes?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. Although the National Design Guide, National Model Design Code and Manual for Streets would seem to be focused on urban and suburban environments, and not really of much use for semi-rural environments like ours. And it is imperative that national standards are adopted for the minimum sizes of rooms.

18. Do you agree that we should establish a new body to support design coding and building better places, and that each authority should have a chief officer for design and place-making?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. But local communities, through neighbourhood plans, are perfectly capable of putting in place their own design criteria. Appropriate design and place making for each settlement appears to be a weakness in local planning authorities.

19. Do you agree with our proposal to consider how design might be given greater emphasis in the strategic objectives for Homes England?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. Homes England should lead by example.

20. Do you agree with our proposals for implementing a fast-track for beauty?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. Beauty is subjective, in the eye of the beholder. The type of beauty that would be fast tracked would be that arbitrarily decided top-down by a committee. It would be iniquitous to impose some faraway body's idea of good design onto a local community through the anti-democratic mechanism of 'permitted development', with no scrutiny allowed at local (parish) level. Also, having copycat housing imposed on our village through permitted development would be highly inappropriate, since one of our characteristics is the variability of design of housing (whilst using locally prevalent materials and maintaining the village's character).

21. When new development happens in your area, what is your priority for what comes with it?

[More affordable housing / More or better infrastructure (such as transport, schools, health provision) / Design of new buildings / More shops and/or employment space / Green space / Don't know / Other – please specify]

Other: Road safety improvements.

22(a). Should the Government replace the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 planning obligations with a new consolidated Infrastructure Levy, which is charged as a fixed proportion of development value above a set threshold?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. But the Levy should apply to ALL housing developments where additional living space is created – extensions and conversions as well as all new (including infill) or replacement houses. And there should be no threshold (i.e. it should be set at development value = £0). In our district the parishes receive a % of the CIL received in respect of certain developments in the parish – much needed for our own infrastructure projects. Developments here are generally one or two houses. A threshold would cut out most if not all of the Infrastructure Levy in respect of those developments, depriving us of a revenue stream from which to pay for new, badly needed, local infrastructure.

22(b). Should the Infrastructure Levy rates be set nationally at a single rate, set nationally at an area-specific rate, or set locally?

[Nationally at a single rate / Nationally at an area-specific rate / Locally]

Locally. Development profit margins will vary right across the country, and area-specific rates can reflect this.

22(c). Should the Infrastructure Levy aim to capture the same amount of value overall, or more value, to support greater investment in infrastructure, affordable housing and local communities?

[Same amount overall / More value / Less value / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

More value. Greater investment in affordable housing is particularly needed.

22(d). Should we allow local authorities to borrow against the Infrastructure Levy, to support infrastructure delivery in their area?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. It will help overcome any cash flow issues around providing essential infrastructure in advance for a particular development.

23. Do you agree that the scope of the reformed Infrastructure Levy should capture changes of use through permitted development rights?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. The Levy should apply to all new development (including extensions, conversions and replacement houses) irrespective of the planning process that it went through.

24(a). Do you agree that we should aim to secure at least the same amount of affordable housing under the Infrastructure Levy, and as much on-site affordable provision, as at present?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. Greater investment in affordable housing is particularly needed.

24(b). Should affordable housing be secured as in-kind payment towards the Infrastructure Levy, or as a 'right to purchase' at discounted rates for local authorities?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes – as a 'right to purchase' by the local authority or a nominated housing association.

24(c). If an in-kind delivery approach is taken, should we mitigate against local authority overpayment risk?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. There should be a 'right to purchase' based upon a reduced price calculated using the market value of the land before planning permission was granted (rather than the market value of the land

with planning permission). The price should be the build cost plus the pre-permission value of the land, both of which should be agreed as part of the planning permission process.

24(d). If an in-kind delivery approach is taken, are there additional steps that would need to be taken to support affordable housing quality?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Yes. Building quality standards (including the equivalent of the NHBC 10-year guarantee) and design standards (including minimum room sizes) must be imposed.

25. Should local authorities have fewer restrictions over how they spend the Infrastructure Levy?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

Not sure. Preferably all of the Infrastructure Levy would be invested in affordable housing, for which there is a dire need. But this would entail other financial resources to be used for providing any essential other infrastructure provision in respect of a particular development.

25(a). If yes, should an affordable housing 'ring-fence' be developed?

[Yes / No / Not sure. Please provide supporting statement.]

No. This should be a local authority decision, to allow the maximum provision of affordable housing in line with local need.

26. Do you have any views on the potential impact of the proposals raised in this consultation on people with protected characteristics as defined in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010?

No.