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Raynsford “deeply sceptical” of planning reforms

By Nick Johnstone

The coalition’s proposed overhaul of the planning system lacks an evidence base and is “completely untested”, according to a “deeply sceptical” former housing minister Nick Raynsford.

Speaking today in London at the Town and Country Planning Association’s ‘Making Planning Work’ conference, Raynsford said he had deep concerns over the government’s plans to increase localism in planning and scrap regional spatial strategies.

Raynsford said: “We are living in a period of unparalleled uncertainty and flux. I’m deeply sceptical about the proposition of a wholesale overhaul of planning.

“This is completely untested. Not one small locality or community has had this new system tested on it. We are being asked to do something that has no evidence base.

The coalition intends to introduce sweeping reforms to the planning and housing system as part of a Decentralisation and Localism Bill, announced in the Queen’s speech last week.

“The Conservatives claimed that the short-term decline in housing proved the planning system was bust,” said Raynsford. “This apocalyptic critique frankly doesn’t stack up.

“Now, we are likely to see a period of confusion, uncertainty and conflict, resulting in fewer homes and a more polarised housing market.”

Raynsford, who is also vice-president of the TCPA, said he was fearful of plans to cut down on the number of quangos, including the potential abolition of the Homes and Communities Agency. He said the HCA was vital in giving an early boost to developments, bringing housing forward, and fuelling the private rented sector.

“The HCA’s Private Rented Sector initiative is one of the great objectives that we need to pursue,” he said. “One of the reasons the HCA is necessary is because you need a body like that to get the scale that institutional investors need in order to invest.”