

## HANSARD – WRITTEN STATEMENT

29<sup>th</sup> June 2010

### Communities and Local Government

#### Planning Reform

**The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark):**

Infrastructure is vital to the health and well-being of our nation. It is the backbone of our economy and its proper maintenance and renewal is critical for growth. We need to generate power and deliver it to our homes and businesses. We need ports to import and export goods and modern transport infrastructure to sustain a dynamic and entrepreneurial economy and to improve our quality of life. Without new infrastructure networks we risk the economic recovery of the nation.

Because decisions on new major infrastructure are so important and affect so many people we will be making a number of changes to the way in which policy is established, applications are handled and decisions taken. We will include the necessary measures within primary legislation to be brought forward in the current session of Parliament.

#### *Abolition of the Infrastructure Planning Commission*

The Government want a planning system for major infrastructure which is rapid, predictable and accountable. But we do not believe it is right that decisions on major infrastructure applications be taken by an unelected quango. They should be made by Ministers. We will therefore be abolishing the unelected Infrastructure Planning Commission and reintroducing democratic accountability in line with the coalition agreement:

“We will abolish the unelected Infrastructure Planning Commission and replace it with an efficient and democratically accountable system that provides a fast-track process for major infrastructure projects.”

Our intention is therefore to establish a Major Infrastructure Planning Unit as part of the Planning Inspectorate—an existing agency of Communities and Local Government—which will retain the strengths of the streamlined processes and the experience of the Planning Inspectorate. The Government will put these changes into effect as soon as possible. In the interim, we have asked the Infrastructure Planning Commission and the Planning Inspectorate to consider now how they can work together and identify efficiency savings. Further transitional arrangements are set out below.

#### *National Policy Statements*

We are committed to openness and transparency and it follows that planning decisions should be taken within a clear policy framework, and within clear time limits, making these

decisions as predictable as possible. The Government will therefore be pressing ahead with the development of national policy statements and will issue a more detailed statement on them later in the summer.

The Government also want to ensure that national policy statements, and the decisions that will be based upon them, are as robust as possible, thus minimising the risk of successful judicial review, particularly by those wishing to abuse the system. We believe therefore that the decision-making framework for major infrastructure should have the strongest possible democratic legitimacy. That is why we will be ensuring that national policy statements are ratified by Parliament. National policy statements are critically important documents and they should be subject to public consultation with appropriate local and community engagement, and both scrutinised and ratified by Parliament before designation.

### *Transitional arrangements*

Until new legislation is in place the Infrastructure Planning Commission will continue in its present role until it is abolished. During this interim period, should an application reach decision-stage and where the relevant national policy statement has been designated, the Infrastructure Planning Commission will decide the application. If an application reaches decision stage and the relevant national policy statement has not been designated, the Infrastructure Planning Commission will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State, who will take the decision.

For those applications under active consideration by the Infrastructure Planning Commission when it is abolished, transitional provisions will enable the examination of such applications to continue without interruption, through a seamless transfer to the new Major Infrastructure Planning Unit. There is no question of applications having to restart the process and we intend that the statutory timetable for decision-taking will be no longer than the current regime.

The Government want to have national policy statements in place as rapidly as possible. In particular, we intend to complete the process for making the energy (including nuclear) national policy statements, which are part-way through the scrutiny process, and will bring forward revised final texts and ask Parliament to ratify them. We are still considering how best to take forward the remaining national policy statements under development, and will be publishing a more detailed implementation plan—including transitional arrangements and a revised timetable—later in the summer.