



Planning paperwork to be radically cut back to help communities drive development

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A radical overhaul of planning policy cutting out thousands of unnecessary central instructions and putting communities at the heart of decision making, has been announced today by Decentralisation Minister Greg Clark.

In recent years, the planning system has become overloaded with central guidance and statements, with vast amounts of paperwork making it too cumbersome for councils, developers and local people to use effectively.

Too much unwanted detail has resulted in a system full of contradictions and has acted as a brake on growth, hindering rather than helping local communities to shape development in their neighbourhoods.

Today Mr Clark is announcing an end to the centralist approach to planning with an ambitious plan designed to consolidate dozens of existing policy statements, circulars and guidance documents into a single national planning policy framework.

The new framework will:

- hand power back to local communities to decide what is right for them - instead of imposing excessive rigid rules from the centre
- be more user-friendly and accessible, so that it is easier for members of the public to have a meaningful say in planning decisions
- make sure that planning is used as a mechanism for delivering Government objectives only where it is relevant, proportionate and effective to do so
- establish a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Planning professionals, local authorities, community groups and members of the public will have an opportunity to shape the new framework. Mr Clark is today inviting organisations and individuals to offer their views to the Department on what priorities and policies the Government might adopt to produce the shorter, more decentralised and less bureaucratic national planning policy framework.

Mr Clark said:

"We have over 1000 pages of policy and guidance that have made the planning system unclear and burdensome.

"This creates vast amounts of paperwork and bureaucracy that burdens developers and limits the power of local people to shape their neighbourhoods around their vision.

"The new framework will integrate our current suite of policy statements and guidance into a single concise document. It will focus on the Government's key priorities for planning and help deliver a more effective, decentralised system."

Today Mr Clark also set out a Work Plan on major infrastructure planning reform to deliver nationally important new infrastructure that will drive economic growth. This includes the steps to be taken to abolish the Infrastructure Planning Commission and drive major planning reform.

Securing investment in new infrastructure is essential to delivering growth over the coming decades. There is expected to be £200 billion of private and public sector investment in infrastructure over the next five years.

Planning decisions on infrastructure of this scale are so important that the Government believes it is right that these decisions should be taken by democratically elected representatives and not by the Infrastructure Planning Commission, an unelected quango.

A new Major Infrastructure Planning Unit, established within the Planning Inspectorate, will take over the IPC's responsibilities once it is abolished. The new Unit will provide advice to Ministers who will take the decisions on nationally important infrastructure projects and grant permissions.

The Government has committed to making decisions at least as quickly as the twelve months allowed under the major infrastructure planning regime and is considering whether we can reduce the timeframe further.

Mr Clark also confirmed the Government's commitment to the delivery of critically important National Policy Statements for new infrastructure. These will set out the Government's policy on major infrastructure projects such as ports or power stations.

Mr Clark added:

"Securing investment in new infrastructure is essential to help rebuild the UK economy and provide new jobs. We cannot expect to meet the needs of tomorrow with yesterday's infrastructure and reform of the planning system is vital to securing essential investment and achieving economic growth."

Notes to editors

National Planning Policy Framework

1. The National Planning Policy Framework will streamline the national planning policies set out in Planning Policy Guidance notes, Planning Policy Statements, Minerals Policy Statements and Minerals Policy Guidance notes, plus a number of related Circulars. There are around 40 such documents.
2. The guidance notes and statements cover various planning aspects of climate change, housing, renewable energy, flood risk, Green Belt and waste, and procedural advice such as how to compile development plans.
3. The Government will continue to maintain Green Belt protection, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and other environmental designations which protect the character of our country's landscape, stop unsustainable urban sprawl and preserve wildlife.
4. There are also over 100 advisory guidance notes including best practice guides. These will be cut back. Too much weight is often given to this kind of guidance, especially when many professional bodies produce high quality advisory material that is equal or of more use to users of the planning system.
5. National Policy Statements, which will set out the Government's policy on major infrastructure projects such as ports or power stations, will not be included in the Framework.
6. Organisations and individuals will be invited to offer views on priorities and policies that should be included in the new slimlined framework before a draft is produced and available for formal consultation.

Major Infrastructure Planning Reform Work Plan

1. For the majority of schemes, decisions will be taken by the Secretary of State responsible for the policy: the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change will take decisions on major energy

infrastructure and the Secretary of State for Transport will take decisions on major transport infrastructure.

2. We envisage that applications relating to hazardous waste will be determined by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and that applications relating to waste water and water supply will be determined jointly by the Secretaries of State for Communities and Local Government and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

3. Subject to Royal Assent of the Localism Bill and commencement of relevant legislation, the Infrastructure Planning Commission will be abolished and its functions transferred to the Secretary of State.

4. The Localism Bill was introduced to Parliament on 13 December. Subject to parliamentary time being made available we anticipate that commencement of the relevant parts of the Act will be in April 2012.

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