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Dame Fiona Reynolds: now that the debate can begin, let's have a framework that works for all

Director-general of National Trust Dame Fiona Reynolds on the Coalition's controversial planning reforms

The Prime Minister's letter to me yesterday confirms that the purpose of the planning system has not changed. Of course planning policy must contribute to economic development. But it is about people and places, too. By stating unequivocally that "sustainable development" has "environmental and social dimensions as well as an economic dimension" and that "the purpose of the planning system is to achieve balance" he has confirmed the fundamental principle that planning exists to serve the public's present and future interests, and should not be used solely as a tool to promote the economy.

Now a true consultation can begin. So let's talk. Our starting point is not a Luddite or "Nimby" one. The National Trust has always said that there is a place for development, including more housing. Indeed, we ourselves are on occasions developers and sometimes even on green field sites — but only where it is appropriate. We also see the case for reducing bureaucracy. There is no case for a planning regime that takes over 1,000 pages to explain. It is, as the Prime Minister says, a question of balance. The first draft of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) eschewed all balance for a dash for growth and to hell with the long-term consequences. What we need now is a discussion about how to reflect the Prime Minister's words in a new framework that delivers for all of us.

It is clear to us where those changes need to happen — some of them outside the NPPF. If we are really determined to re-inject balance, then we must address the infamous Clause 130 in the Localism Bill that elevates financial considerations above all others in the planning process. The Bill also fails to provide a right of appeal against developments that are inconsistent with development plans.

There are other elements that need to change. Surely the default "yes" to all developments where there is no up-to-date local plan is not balanced. We need sensible transition arrangements to manage the risk of speculative development proposals. And is it really sensible to scrap the "brownfield first" policy that considers previously developed land before the consideration of green field sites?

There are a number of other contentious aspects to the framework document that need debate. We will now have those discussions. For all its flaws, the planning system has delivered well-thought development, sensible provision of infrastructure and the protection of landscapes, wildlife and historic buildings for decades. It needs to continue to do so, in a way that is transparent and fair to everyone.