

# The Daily Telegraph

## Planning reforms are 'fundamentally wrong', National Trust warns

*The Coalition's controversial planning reforms are "fundamentally wrong" and need more than a simple rewrite if the countryside is to be protected, the National Trust has warned.*

Opposition to the Government's draft National Planning Framework, which promises to radically overhaul the current planning system, has been growing amid concern it will lead to large scale developments springing up across rural Britain.

Organisations ranging from English Heritage to the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), have urged ministers to rethink the proposals.

Planning Minister Greg Clark has said he will sit down with opposition groups to discuss their concerns but has ruled out any U-turn on the policy. Mr Clark has indicated any changes will be to the "wording" of the legislation, rather than the theme.

But the National Trust's director-general Dame Fiona Reynolds has said while she is happy to talk to ministers, the plans are "fundamentally wrong".

She said: "It's not a case of a simple rewrite of a few words here or there – the general tone of the planning framework is fundamentally wrong.

"We fully support a simplified system and are not opposed to good development, but we need to get it right or the consequences could be disastrous.

"Over the last 60 years the planning system has helped guide good development to the right places. A bad reform of the system will lead to bad development."

Ministers have issued a resolute defence of the proposals, insisting they are necessary to help stimulate the economy and ease the looming housing crisis.

Speaking during commons questions yesterday, Mr Clark told MPs: "We have a crisis of housing and growth in this country that needs to be addressed by reforming the planning system in order to provide those things."

He added: "We are determined we shall preserve the character of middle England, but young England needs a roof over its head too.

"We have inherited a situation where the centralisation of the economy has led to depressed levels of growth under the previous government. We are turning that round by fundamental reforms."

The proposed legislation will see more than 1,000 pages of current planning regulations and red tape reduced to just 52, providing a much quicker and simpler system for builders.

But campaigners have expressed deep concern over the inclusion of a paragraph pledging a “presumption in favour of sustainable development”.

Opposition groups claim such a clause will amount to a developers’ charter and will override current safeguards which protect the greenbelt.

The Daily Telegraph's Hands Off Our Land campaign urges ministers to rethink the proposals. But with the Government having already caved in over plans to sell off parts of the nation’s forests, sources in the Coalition have insisted there will be no U-turn on this policy. Chancellor George Osborne and Communities Secretary Eric Pickles have insisted they are determined to “win the battle”.

But Shaun Spiers, chief executive of the CPRE last night criticised the Chancellor for getting involved.

He said: “The Treasury's ill-informed intervention in the planning debate reinforces the sense that the Government's planning reforms are more about boosting short term growth figures than about truly sustainable development.”

He added: “The Government's proposals to skew the planning system in favour of economic development at the expense of environmental and social considerations are unlikely to result in more development, just more poor quality development on greenfield land.

“Unless the Government thinks again, its proposals will cause irreversible damage to both our towns and countryside.”