
Planning Reform in England

The coalition government has initiated fundamental reforms to the English planning system. At the same time it has set a tough agenda to revive the economy and cut public debt. Nevertheless, the planning challenge remains the same. The system must continue to protect and enhance the natural environment whilst ensuring its resilience and adaptation to climate change. This requirement must be reconciled with the expectation that planning should encourage house building and stimulate economic growth. Planning structures may change, but good practice and the policies which support it should not be lost.

The purpose of planning must be to achieve sustainable development. This means bringing about genuine improvements in environmental and social well-being. Across the UK we share the principle that we must live within environmental limits locally and globally. Planning is an essential tool for managing the use of our natural resources and for minimising the impacts of development on the environment. A high-quality natural environment is important for business, for people and in its own right. Present and future generations deserve the best possible standards for their communities and the countryside they care for.



climate change. We believe that planning policy must reflect the urgency and scale of the challenges facing the natural environment.

The natural environment cuts across administrative boundaries. In recent years, planning beyond the local level allowed for joint local authority policy development and greater involvement of partners in the delivery of positive outcomes. For example, identifying appropriate sites for wind farm developments, managing coastal realignment, restoring habitats following minerals extraction and so on. A new framework for local authority cooperation is needed to enable strategic planning across local authority boundaries where this is required.

Local plans should be built on a robust, up-to-date evidence base and be the cornerstone of local decision-making. Planning gains its legitimacy as a decision-making process by being trusted. Local communities and voluntary groups should be involved at all stages in a process which must be as transparent, accountable and accessible as it is speedy and efficient. Developers often have the advantage of a seat at the table and the resources to buy-in the right expertise. A public right of appeal against decisions not in line with the local plan is vital to give the Big Society and local planning real teeth. Speak to us about how you can help communities to have their say.



The Big Society really cares about the environment. Our 6.5 million members and thousands of volunteers make it possible for us to do the work that we do. They demonstrate people's passion for a healthy natural environment and why decision-makers should listen to our concerns and draw on our knowledge.

Let's be realistic about the hurdles we face: halting the loss of biodiversity and aiding its recovery, adapting to and mitigating climate change, and making the fundamental shift towards a green, low carbon economy won't be easy. But solutions are available. People and their communities should be inspired to participate fully in the new planning system, to pick the best solutions and shape the city, town, village and countryside in which they live.

A national planning framework, spatial but not site-specific, would help people to visualise the scale of the challenges ahead and how their local community relates to it. Provide the Big Picture for the Big Society and engage partners! Show how England's economic, social and environmental objectives fit together and what these mean at the local level. Assess the environmental impacts and consider all the reasonable alternatives to damaging proposals. The NPF should provide the canvas for people's creativity. Think Big: identify ambitions, like restoring and creating new habitats at a landscape-scale or leading a revolution towards community owned renewables, and help people to be a part of it.

Planning policy should set the benchmark for the quality of development and how it relates to the natural environment. We need to reduce our ecological footprint. Existing planning policy statements do need to be aligned and updated, without losing valuable environmental policies. Reforms should retain objectives to restore and create new habitats, maintain and improve the Green Belt and nationally designated landscapes, and to adapt to and mitigate



The Localism Bill will be a significant landmark in the coalition government's planning reform agenda. In order to be the 'greenest government ever', the Bill should:

- Reiterate that sustainable development, delivered within environmental limits, is the purpose of planning
- Provide a statutory basis for the national planning framework
- Introduce new arrangements for strategic planning across local authority boundaries
- Ensure that local plans provide a fair and transparent approach to community participation
- Provide a limited public (third party) right of appeal
- Establish robust criteria for the new local green space designation

Planning helps to deliver outcomes the market alone does not provide, such as, affordable housing, urban regeneration, biodiversity protection, habitat creation, green infrastructure, community facilities and renewable energy. It can improve the space we live in and help to reconnect people with nature. Incentives to secure the necessary development need to be applied in a balanced, fair and transparent way.

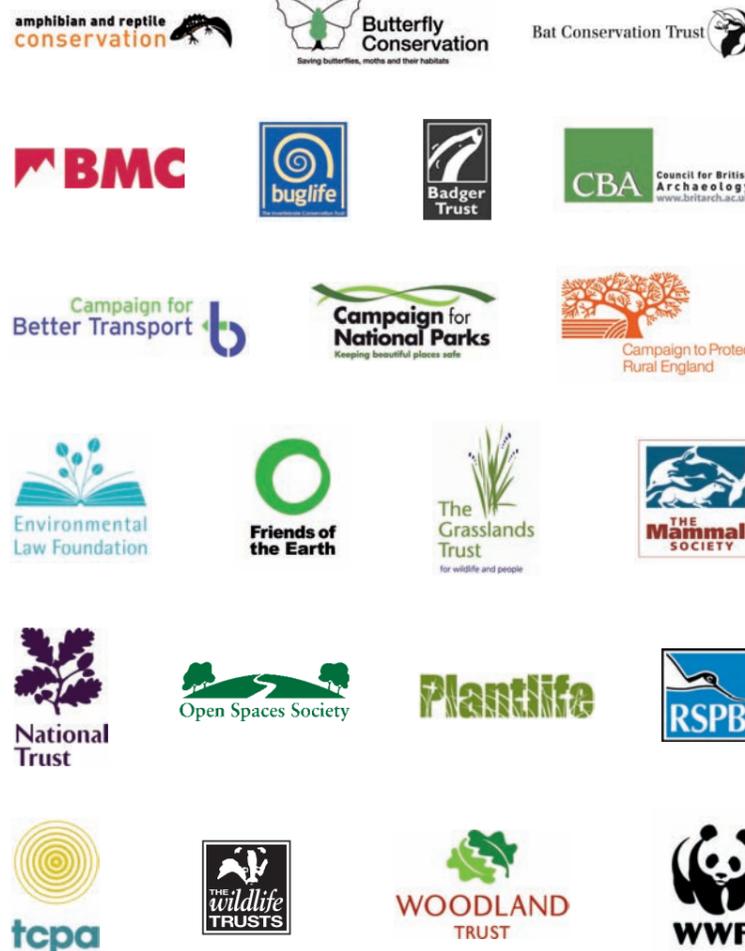
New proposals for conservation credits and a protective designation for local green spaces, must add to, and not detract from, the existing system of biodiversity and landscape protection. Planning is essential to fulfil the government's own aspirations to put the value of our natural environment at the heart of policy making.

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Our Vision for the Future of Planning



This vision is supported by the following organisations



For more information about this Vision please contact:
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 Wildlife and Countryside Link, www.wcl.org.uk

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