



Historic England

## **Raynsford Review: Interim Report Historic England Response**

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

Overall, the report is a cogent and incisive summary of the origins and purpose of the planning system, and the challenges and opportunities which it is currently facing. We welcome the opportunity to respond to those issues within the interim report which are most directly related to our remit:

### **PROPOSITION 1: Planning in the public interest**

Proposition 1 is very much supported. Housing delivery is, entirely appropriately, a Government priority. But housing delivery should not be the *raison d'être* for any planning system (particularly when the 'delivery' part is largely outside the capabilities of planning *per se*). Instead, a coherent and effective planning system, with public interest at its core (and meaningful public participation), should prove wholly capable of delivering housing, alongside all the other needs of communities – and the market. Historic environment conservation represents this in microcosm: heritage is a public benefit, and needs to be protected by the planning system, but also supports the delivery of wide-ranging economic benefits, including development (which, rather than restricting, it can in fact inspire).

### **PROPOSITION 2: Planning with a purpose**

Given the [initial clarity](#) of the 1947 planning framework, the lack of a formal definition of or statutory purpose for planning remains surprising. The emphasis within the proposed purpose on sustainable development is welcomed, as is the definition of what sustainable development means.

### **PROPOSITION 3: A powerful, people-centred planning system**

The implications of the on-going extensions to permitted development rights are a cause for concern (as noted in our original submission, the extension of permitted development rights actively undermines the objectives of sustainable development, by increasing the amount of development which is not subject to community influence, proactive planning, and detailed scrutiny, and also further complicates an already impenetrable technical landscape): the issue does need to be addressed if town and country planning of the sort outlined in this report is to be pursued.

As suggested in the report, a genuinely plan-led system would be both clearer and more effective, and do much to address some of the crises of confidence around the purpose, transparency and accessibility of planning.

In developing Proposition 3, particularly in respect of the powers relating to ‘the use and development of all land and property’, thought could usefully be given to the interrelationship between the provisions for heritage protection (most – but not all – of which are delivered through the planning system, and of course have been since the origins of the planning system) and wider planning, to ensure that the appropriate balance is struck.

The detailed wording of the proposition does not explicitly address the issue of timescales which is raised in the report. Strategic planning – at any geographic scale – does indeed require longer horizons, but the importance of policies and processes which are able to respond appropriately to shorter-term issues (within a plan-led system) could also be noted (this is of particular importance in relation to historic environment conservation).

#### **PROPOSITION 4: A new covenant for community participation**

Proposition 4 is broadly supported. As noted in our previous submission, some of these objectives could be addressed through the promotion of greater community participation in assessments of significance: this would provide a ‘way in’ to a number of planning discussions, and also increase the understanding of heritage.

#### **PROPOSITION 6: Simplified planning law**

The current fragmentation of the planning system across various pieces of legislation, geographical areas, tiers of governance, and so on, certainly needs addressing. Attempts have been made to this end with regard to the heritage dimension of planning (for instance the merger of conservation area consent and planning permission through the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013, and the proposals for unified heritage consents in the draft Heritage Protection Bill of 2008). More remains to be done, however, and Proposition 6 is therefore supported in principle (though further consideration is needed as to how far heritage and planning can be addressed in a single piece of legislation, and how far some separate provisions remain necessary).

#### **PROPOSITION 7: Alignment between the agencies of English planning**

Historic England differs from a number of the identified agencies in that it does not itself promote development such as roads, or flood defences. Historic England aims to support the delivery of successful planning, both as a statutory consultee (from the national to the local) and a grant-awarding body (increasingly with an emphasis on place-making).

The reference in the proposition to the coordination of investment in infrastructure with plans for housing could perhaps be addressed with a greater degree of caution. It might be interpreted as reinforcing the repeated statements in the revised NPPF which suggest that infrastructure should drive the planning process (specifically in

relation to the delivery of housing): this does not represent the delivery of planned, sustainable development that meets identified needs in the right locations, and rather runs counter to the overall thrust of the interim report.

The 'institutional foundations for local planning' are discussed in response to Question 7, but not addressed in the proposition: given the existing reference to this topic in Proposition 6, and the contribution of this 'mosaic' to the overall fragmentation of the planning system, could this be addressed in more detail in Proposition 6 rather than touched on in passing here? A more specific recommendation on this issue would be welcome (though the overall difficulty in identifying – and then delivering – such a recommendation is noted).

**PROPOSITION 9: A new kind of creative and visionary planner**

This proposition is very much welcomed. Giving individual planners greater motivation and opportunity to apply their wide-ranging skills – supported by improved training and ethical guidance – will be key to the delivery of proactive planning, as envisaged in the report, which makes a real, positive difference to both people and the environment.

In a related vein, Historic England is very conscious of the wider impact of the reduction of conservation expertise in local planning authorities on planning and heritage outcomes, and also the burden on planners to take on responsibility for another area of professional expertise – for which they may not have been trained.

*Government Advice Team, Historic England  
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