

# Local Government Association briefing

## The role of local communities in the planning system

House of Commons  
23 May 2018



### Key messages

- The planning process needs developers, councils and local communities to work together to create effective partnerships. The earlier in the planning process these relationships are built, the more likely it is that positive outcomes will be achieved for local communities from new development.
- Councils are working hard to use planning effectively to deliver the right kind of homes. However, planning departments are severely under-resourced, and need to be given the flexibility to set appropriate fees to reflect local circumstances.
- Planning is not a barrier to building. Councils are approving 9 in 10 planning applications and last year worked with developers to permission over 350,000 homes, an 11 year high. House builders currently have 423,000 homes with permission that they are still to build.<sup>i</sup>
- We welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the revised draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The revised NPPF must ensure that nationally-prescribed targets for housing do not impact on local community support for development.
- There are clear benefits to a standardised methodology for assessing housing need. However, the Government must ensure that the revised NPPF puts a strong emphasis on plan-making involving communities, in order to create attractive, high quality and sustainable places to live.
- A proactive, well-resourced planning system could do far more to deliver the additional homes the country desperately needs. It could also help to deliver them in ways that meet wider national objectives on infrastructure, public health and the environment.

# Briefing

## **Background information**

### ***Involving local communities in planning***

The planning process needs developers, councils and local communities to work together to create effective partnerships. The earlier in the planning process these relationships are built, the more likely it is that positive outcomes will be achieved for local communities from new development.<sup>ii</sup>

Early discussions between councils, developers and communities during local plan-making is important for the direction and scale of future development in an area. Where developers are engaged in the local plan process, they have an increased understanding of plan policies. This means that development proposals that meet the plan's objectives can be brought forward more quickly, and be less subject to delays. It is important to actively involve communities and ward councillors at an early stage of the planning process. As well as providing an opportunity to inform the community about proposals, it is an ideal time to seek views on local needs, which can help to shape content and design. This can build trust and acceptance from local communities, as well as leading to better quality development and improvement in the quality of place.

The overarching role of democratically-elected councillors in planning is crucial. The involvement of councillors, who are elected to voice communities' aspirations for their local area, is central to successful partnership working. Elected members are active at every stage of the planning process – as representatives of their communities and democratically accountable decision makers.

We welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the revised draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).<sup>iii</sup> The revised NPPF must ensure that nationally-prescribed targets for housing do not impact on local community support for development. There are clear benefits to a standardised methodology for assessing housing need. However, the Government must ensure that the revised NPPF puts a strong emphasis on plan-making involving communities, in order to create attractive, high quality and sustainable places to live

In particular we urge the Government to scrap proposals that would mean a presumption in favour of sustainable development through the housing delivery test from 2018. Councils are committed to building homes where they are needed but do not have the power to actually ensure homes are built once planning permission has been granted. Under these proposals, councils and their communities will be penalised by the housing delivery test for under-delivery even when planning permission has been granted. This is likely to have unintended consequences, including on impacting upon community support for development.

## ***The benefits of a well-resourced planning system***

A proactive, well-resourced planning system could do far more to deliver the additional homes the country desperately needs. It could also help to deliver them in ways that meet wider national objectives on infrastructure, public health and the environment.

We are pleased that the Government has passed regulations enabling planning authorities to raise fees by an initial 20 per cent.<sup>iv</sup> However, a further 20 per cent increase, which the Government has recently consulted on, should be allowed for all local planning authorities, so that councils are fully able to facilitate local housing and infrastructure development.

This flexibility should not be dependent on meeting nationally-set performance criteria which risk creating perverse incentives and unintended consequences. Alongside this, government should test a fair and transparent scheme of local fee setting, giving councils the flexibility to set appropriate fees to reflect local circumstances.

The recruitment and retention of trained planning officers is also a challenge for local planning authorities. To address some of these issues the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should work with councils, national and local partners to attract and retain the next generation of planners and place-makers. A collective effort would increase the capacity of planning services to deliver housing growth.

Planning is an exciting and meaningful profession with a range of career development opportunities that should be better promoted to young people. Assistance in raising the profile of local authority planners as a desirable career and promoting the opportunities that exist for driving forward best practice and innovation, could bring significant benefits in addressing recruitment and retention issues. Initiatives could include building on the approaches adopted by TeachFirst or FrontLine, or the Come back to social work programme run jointly by the LGA, Department of Health and Department for Education.

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<sup>i</sup> LGA, Planning Positively through Partnership, February 2018  
([https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/5.24%20Planning%20positively\\_v06.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/5.24%20Planning%20positively_v06.pdf))

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<sup>iii</sup> LGA, Response to MHCLG consultation on the draft revised text of the National Planning Policy Framework, May 2018 (<https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/lga-response-mhclg-consultation-draft-revised-text-national>)

<sup>iv</sup> The Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1314/introduction/made>)