

MEP'S VIEWS

It is without doubt that these reforms are ill-informed and will do little to resolve the current planning problems and conversely are likely to worsen the present position and make our communities socially and economically less sustainable. The Government has currently lost focus on some of the critically issues that we face. In the light of an imminent general election, they have forgotten that there is still a housing crisis with the affordability of housing being exacerbated by the lack of delivery of new housing through the planning system. This simply makes access to a new housing increasingly unattainable for those who need it most, strengthening the divide between the haves and the have nots. Equally, the reforms do little to address the climate emergency and following the release of the Climate Change Progress Report to Parliament by the Climate Change Committee on the 28 June 2023, it is apparent that there is a lack of urgency by the Government to meet its climate change targets and there is no national incentive or encouragement for us to change our lifestyles which will only worsen the current crisis. We believe that any meaningful reforms to the NPPF should focus heavily on these issues as well as improve the process and procedure of the planning system.

A summary of our views.

- The Government has consistently failed to meet its annual housing targets of 300,000 new homes and in our view, the proposed reforms will not resolve this problem. We believe the Government should adopt a strategic approach to address housing delivery. We have already seen many Councils abandon the production of an up-to-date local plan in anticipation of the forthcoming reforms that they foresee will remove their housing target completely and allow them to decide on the level of new housing and where it should go. It is quite clear that this is not a solution to the problem and will simply frustrate the delivery of new homes. It is unlikely that any Councillor is going to choose to deliver significant swathes of new housing where this is universally unpopular as this will simply prevent such politicians from being re-elected. Politicians need to learn "how to make difficult decisions and get re-elected".
- The provision of sustainable new garden communities is one of the most efficient ways in the delivering new sustainable development and large numbers of new homes. Such settlements offer the opportunity to lay down and deliver a sustainable new infrastructure that will address and tackle climate change and bring transformational change in the way we both live and work. The reforms should encourage the delivery of well-designed and suitably located new settlements that will help address both the housing and climate crisis.
- The Government has called for greater weight to be attached to the plan making system, but its watering down of the tests of soundness will make the whole system less robust. Whilst they encourage the speeding up of the delivery of new plans, there is no formula on how to do this whilst meeting all other regulation. Perhaps Ministers would like to join us at a local plan examination to understand the complexities of how a robust local plan is pulled together.
- The removal of the requirement for the 5YHLS will further constrain the delivery of new homes.
- The strengthening of Green Belt policy will only erode sustainability and shows a naivety of Ministers of what the Green Belt actually is? The [Metropolitan Green Belt](#) around London was first proposed by the Greater London Regional Planning Committee in 1935. The [Town and](#)

[Country Planning Act 1947](#) then allowed local authorities to include green belt proposals in their development plans. Despite the policy's age and era that it was designed to address, Green Belt remains largely unchanged preventing the growth of our towns and cities in the most sustainable ways. The reforms should have undertaken a comprehensive overhaul of the Green Belt Policy, with perhaps its abolition and replacing the five purposes of including land in the Green Belt into other chapters of the NPPF.

- We are of the view that extending the public's engagement in the decision-making process represents an unnecessary layer of democracy which will create further delays in the delivery of new homes and positive planning decisions. There has always been the ability for the public to engage in both the plan making process and planning applications and it is something that has the propensity to delay the delivery of positive decisions.
- There is insufficient reference to the need to increase the resourcing of the planning system which is, in our view, required to speed up the decision-making process. Long delays in the plan making system, pre-application enquiries, planning decisions and discharging of conditions are now the norm in virtually all authorities. We believe that this is having a significant impact on the delivery of new homes.
- The proposed amendments to the NPPF do not go far enough to underline the challenges posed by climate change. Further measures to improve policy is essential, not just to protect nature but also to create sustainable economic growth.