

Item No. 17.	Classification: Open	Date: 20 October 2020	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Government's Consultation on the Planning White Paper's "Planning For The Future"	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Johnson Situ ,Climate Emergency, Planning and Transport	

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR JOHNSON SITU - CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE EMERGENCY, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT

Southwark is committed to improving the lives of our communities through providing genuinely affordable homes, green accessible spaces, affordable work space and reducing health and income inequalities. Our planning policies are also at the heart of our approach to ensure the benefits of growth in the borough benefit all. Consequently, we are incredibly proud that in recent years we have seen major increases in the number of social and genuinely affordable housing units approved, with the last financial year seeing Southwark top the list of London boroughs with social housing starts on site. We have also placed our response to the Climate Emergency at the heart of our vision for the borough, which we have already started introducing into planning policy.

However, all of our gains are now under threat with the current Government consultation on the Planning White Paper, which has been criticised by planning experts, community groups and politicians across the political spectrum. This Government will have the public believe that these proposals will enable more homes to be built, that another reform of the planning system will unlock the a wave of construction. We disagree and we point to a study by the LGA that found only half of homes consented in recent years have actually been built. We are clear, these proposals are flawed and will not provide the conditions in which we can improve the wellbeing of our residents. Our concerns are that these proposals are a threat to local democracy, a threat to delivery of genuinely affordable homes and they barely mention the biggest threat to our way of life in the coming decades, the Climate Emergency. These proposed reforms to the planning system are not based on evidence.

In short, this administration will not stand by as this Government introduces planning policies, which will risk the gains we have achieved in recent years. We acknowledge the planning system is not perfect and we will support changes that are considered, seek to retain the voice of local democracy and enable local authorities to continue to deliver for our residents. We will join our

community groups, local authorities across the country and planning experts in continuing to campaign against these regressive proposals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note the response to the Planning White Paper.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The Government are proposing to make regressive changes to the Planning System which they have set out in a White Paper. The Government makes the argument that the planning system is not working and that improvement is not an option as the transformation required is so radical. We consider the planning system to require improvement, however we have delivered very successfully in granting the planning permissions required to deliver our Fairer Future Promises. Our Planning Service focuses on Delivery, Diversity, Digital and Democracy.
3. Planning is supporting the hard work being done by our communities to transform our town centres and improve our successful neighbourhoods with considerable community engagement.
4. We are working with the Government at the forefront of digital technological improvements in planning, plan making and design exemplars to speed up decision making and make our services more accessible to all of our communities.
5. Whilst we are leading on these improvements and we embrace change and improvements we consider the White Paper to have missed the point. It does not need to be discarded and replaced with a new system. We are improving and delivering extremely successful development and that proves that incremental improvements rather than wholesale change are required.
6. Planning can be improved and modernised so that the essential aims of significant delivery of new homes and businesses, affordable homes and businesses, town centres that serve local communities, successful schools, healthy living facilities, and movement for everyone without using the car can be delivered. Key improvements are:
 - Jobs increase of 41% (74000) from 2000 to 2013 with a forecast of 84000 between 2011 and 2036,
 - Net retail space built of 30,775 sqm since 2011 adoption of the Core Strategy,
 - Protection of 660ha of Metropolitan Open Land, Borough Open Land and Other Open Space,
 - Community Facilities approvals of 44,536 sqm including health, education and religious facilities,
 - Leisure and entertainment including sports facilities approvals of

- 62,727 sqm since 2011,
 - Approvals of 43,107 housing units including 10,542 affordable units since 2004,
 - Completions of 22,516 housing units including 6,416 affordable housing units since 2004,
7. Our priorities for social rented housing and affordable business space that are developed as part of local communities with accessible, successful places can only be delivered by a democratic, representative process that fully involves local communities. Local development will not be successful without involving those who know the local areas and those who will use the developments
8. In order to achieve this we need efficient digital services, for sharing information, consultation, plan preparation and planning applications. We are committed to improving our planning service for all of our citizens so that our borough delivers the most effective digital offer possible. This should improve democracy rather than take away the opportunity of our citizens to contribute to the development that will have such significant impacts on their lives. Our local teams understand the issues and we have a new Statement of Community Involvement and Development Consultation Charter launched in 2019 to ensure that we fully understand all of the different equalities, health impacts and other impacts fully of anyone who is impacted by each development. The diversity of proposals and applications and the people who consider and use them is a significant contribution to the improvements within Southwark.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

9. The broad proposals are summarised as follows:
- Streamline the planning process
 - Digital first planning process
 - A new focus on design and sustainability
 - Improve infrastructure delivery
 - Make more land available for homes and development people and communities need.
10. The reform to the planning system is not based on evidence or consideration of local democracy. Wide ranging suggestions are made to streamline the planning process to speed it up. However the focus is not on the processes which slow down development such as delivery and instead place emphasis on the consultation and local provision of policy and decisions on planning applications which are delivering significant permissions for new development every year with considerable involvement from our local communities. The proposed reforms would significantly slow down delivery of new development, reduce the number of homes and affordable homes and business and all of the improvements to our town centres and neighbourhoods. Where development does take

place this would be of an inferior standard and would not integrate with the current communities who live in Southwark. In order to speed up regeneration we need direct Government funding to back plans and reduce risks for developers. The market works better when the state provides the infrastructure and consistent policy support with a local focus.

11. Southwark Council's planning team are at the forefront of improving services for citizens. They are carrying out a digital transformation so that everyone can access the services easily, simply and efficiently. This includes how residents and local businesses apply for planning permission, information on policy, and data to inform policy making and decisions by the Council. We recognize that the MHCLG have been supporting us and other councils to take forward these changes to improve our service. We value this support and we will continue to work in partnership to improve planning services for all of our citizens.
12. However this is in stark contrast to the changes suggested for consultation, local policy making and decision making on planning applications. The measures with the most significant impact for Southwark would negatively impact on all of our citizens and would have considerable equalities impacts. The most marginalized people in our society who are in most need of affordable housing and support services would have their opportunities severely reduced with far reaching consequences particularly for many families.
13. The most significant impact would be the threshold for affordable housing changing from 10 to 40 or 50 units. This would reduce the number of affordable homes built over the next 10 years by 37% or 3050.
14. The new housing targets would increase from 2,736 to 3,547 per annum. This is not based on any evidence and uses new measures based on affordability which would have significant negative impacts for affordable housing and the quality of new housing with reductions in standards for our residents and tenants. The securing of First Homes sold at a discount to market price for first time buyers would reduce the opportunity to provide affordable housing and affordable rent where there is the most acute need for citizens in Southwark.
15. Introducing Growth, Renewal and Protection zones which do not fit with the complex local urban environment in London would damage our historic environment and allow development that is out of place and poor with substandard accommodation. This would ignore the presence of buildings and places and would just focus on land use reinforcing spatial inequalities. Along with extending the Permission in Principle to major development so landowners and developers have a fast route to secure the principle of development without working up detailed plans. This would take away local democracy and the ability of the council to secure affordable housing, affordable rent, measures to deal with the Climate

Emergency and many other measures. The significant importance of the Windfall category would also be missed reducing flexibility and opportunities for new development.

16. Changes to the policies allowed in development plans may reduce the ability to negotiate affordable housing, affordable business space, infrastructure to improve places and town centres.
17. Changes to the way Community Infrastructure Levy is calculated and abolishing section 106 would reduce local democracy, the opportunity to raise money for local priorities, reduce the overall amount raised despite the measures suggesting that more money will be raised. This would be compounded by the suggestions that planning is stifling growth rather than the recommendations as set out in the Letwin report which was the Government's review. This White Paper completely ignores the fact that the issue is about delivery and if there was a national system of support and infrastructure and barriers to building are reduced then that would solve the issue. A useful improvement to the current planning system would be to introduce a clear, national standard for assessing the viability of developments to remove from the system all the unhelpful uncertainty that the current system causes which is, in itself, a cause of delay in planning decisions.
18. The White Paper proposes the introduction of Design Codes which would replace the ability for design frameworks that set out how design will be negotiated locally and how design should be presented. This would reduce the vibrancy and opportunity to maximize development's contributions to local areas. Development plans should be setting out how design and land use work together to influence places rather than treating them as separate entities. The shape of the site and size of development can be changed and improved as detailed local issues are taken into consideration and this approach completely removes the opportunities for local communities to be involved and for democracy to take place.
19. The White Paper proposes taking a radical, digital first approach to modernise planning to move from a process based on paper to based on data. Local Plans should be visual and map based, with interactive maps and technology and standardised templates based on the latest digital technology and supported by a new standard template. Development management systems should be digital with shorter, standardised applications. Decision making should be more certain with greater use of technology. Monitoring, using data with digital systems and a streamlined approach, will be introduced. We are already working on clearer, better laid out plans and decision making based on the newest technology. Southwark will be the first borough as far as we are aware to have a digital website with simplified data tools for all the different planning systems and data searches in 2021. This needs to be alongside the consideration of local planning issues, democracy and design of places.

The digital transformation can improve the application, consultation and decision process. However it cannot be a substitute for consideration of larger and complex sites and smaller sites where there are local planning issues. Digital services need to enhance local consideration of planning issues and not remove the careful balancing and understanding of complex environments and issues.

Community impact statement

- 20. Views are being asked for views on the potential on proposals raised in this consultation on people with protected characteristics and whether further reforms could broaden access to planning for people in diverse groups. The most significant impact would be the reduction in affordable housing and affordable business space.
- 21. Along with the lack of local democracy and opportunity to be involved in planning decisions that impact on local communities.

Consultation

- 22. There has been no consultation on this response to the Government consultation.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (FC20/012)

- 23. This report is requesting cabinet to note the response to the Planning White Paper.
- 24. The strategic director of finance and governance notes that there are no financial implications arising from this report.
- 25. Staffing and any other costs connected with this report to be contained within existing departmental revenue budgets.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Planning for the Future White Paper	Planning Policy	Planpol@southwark.gov.uk
https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Planning for the Future consultation – response letter

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Situ	
Lead Officer	Eleanor Kelly	
Report Author	Juliet Seymour	
Version	Cabinet version Final	
Dated	12 October 2020	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	Yes	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	Yes	Yes
List other officers here		
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	12/10/2020	