

Subject:	Report on the Central Government White Paper, 'Planning For The Future,' – Implications for the Council.	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Development Control Committee	Date:	3 rd November 2020
Report of:	Planning Manager	Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Adrian Lythgoe
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required:	No	Attached: No
Contact Officer:	Mike Atherton	Telephone:	01706 252420
Email:	MichaelAtherton@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

	RECOMMENDATION(S)
	Members are advised to note the proposed Government changes in the White Paper and for the Council to plan ahead accordingly. However, the provisions outlined may be subject to significant change prior to becoming statute and therefore, it is not yet practical for the Council to make any changes as a result of the White Paper.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. The Emerging Rossendale Local Plan is going through the examination stage and following further work requested by the Planning Inspectorate which is ongoing, it is currently forecast that the Emerging Plan is likely to be adopted in the Summer of 2021. We are likely to receive notification later this year or early next year from the Planning Inspectorate, whether they find the Emerging Plan to be sound and legally compliant, to enable it to proceed towards adoption.
- 1.2. In August, Central Government published it's, '*Planning for the Future,*' document. The new Planning White Paper proposes a radical overhaul of the current planning system and to replace it with zonal planning, centralised decisions and new local design codes
- 1.3. If these changes are implemented, it will require a substantial amount of work on a new type of Local Plan which will be extremely time consuming and costly when the Council has just undertaken a huge amount of work on preparing the Emerging Local Plan under the current arrangements

- 1.4. It is worth noting that the reforms in the *Planning for the Future* document are a long-term project, as they require primary legislation before they become law. Therefore, it is expected that it will be several years before the new arrangements are in place.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The principal components of the reforms and their potential implications for RBC are as follows:

2.2 Land categorisation

A new approach to land categorisation is proposed which represents a step towards a zonal planning system. Local Authorities will need to divide all sites in their area into one of three categories: protected, renewal and growth. This is how Councils will decide where the housing they have been told to build by the Government will go. The intention is that in growth areas developers would get automatic planning permission which may impact upon the quality of homes delivered through this route. There is a concern that this could deliver unregulated development which is just about volume numbers.

The other principal concern with this approach is that it is overly simplistic to put all the land in the borough into three categories which could be time consuming for the Council to gather the evidence to justify the categorisation which may well then be open to lengthy challenge from developers, residents and other interested parties. Deciding development standards in these areas may also be a long process.

2.3 Housing targets

A significant departure from the existing system is that under the new planning regime, Central Government will dictate how many homes are built in each area. Councils currently calculate the number of homes they need as part of their Local Plan and then decide the number they feel can actually be delivered based on land constraints in the area. However, the White Paper proposes that Whitehall dictates to each local authority how much housing it must deliver over the next decade, taking the 300,000-a-year national target as a starting point and including a centrally made decision about what is realistically deliverable. The figures will be based on levels of unaffordability, so more expensive areas will likely get higher targets. Therefore, Rossendale may not receive a substantially higher housing target as house prices are lower than the national average.

The Government has indicated that these targets will be binding though, as yet, there are no details on potential sanctions. At the same time, the duty

to co-operate will be scrapped, meaning Councils with high targets will find it harder to strike deals with their neighbours to take on some extra development.

This will also mean that Central Government is now ultimately responsible for the amount of housing development that is planned, hence, communities angry about perceived over-development in their area can focus that displeasure directly at Ministers.

2.4 Local Plans

The role of Local Plans will be dramatically revised under the proposed new system. Currently, these are the route through which we decide how much housing will be built in the Borough and where. The Government are seeking to streamline these aspects of Local Plans, as outlined above, whilst significantly enhancing their role in other respects. Most importantly, Local Plans will become the primary vehicle for community engagement with planning policies and development.

At the moment most of this process happens further down the line with residents commenting on individual planning applications. It is now proposed that these matters will be agreed at the Local Plan stage, and the community won't be able to have a say in the future, at the development stage. This will be extremely contentious with local politicians and communities. It is unlikely that most people will be satisfied with exchanging the ability to object to individual schemes for greater engagement earlier on in the planning process.

At the same time, the government intends to legislate so that Local Plans must be developed within two-and-a-half years, when the current average is seven. The logic is that the process and detailed evidence base associated with preparing Local Plans can be stripped out in favour of more detail in terms of actual specific policies on matters like housing density.

2.5 Design Codes

An essential aspect of the new-look Local Plans will be their Design Codes. We will need to prescribe what we want from housing delivered in our area over a range of topics including aesthetics, transport links and energy efficiency credentials, amongst many others.

The Codes will be the primary tool for ensuring homes built in growth and renewal areas are good quality and they are intended to give developers certainty over what is acceptable. It marks a considerably enhanced role for Design Codes, which currently tend to be piecemeal, as they are only really developed for a handful of major sites.

The use of Design Codes to uphold development standards puts a big expectation on local areas and Council design teams producing the codes are going to be very busy. As we do not have an in house design function,

this will be extremely expensive to Rossendale to use Consultants to produce Design Codes for specific areas and potentially, different sites within the Borough. This work will also have a significant impact on the quality of resulting development and it is important that we seek to use Design Codes to drive up standards.

In order to successfully speed up the system as Ministers intend, the codes will need to be highly specific in order to avoid extensive dialogue between the Council and Builders over the details.

2.6 Digitalisation

Local Plans should be “based on the latest digital technology,” the White Paper says, with much greater use of data. Meanwhile, it envisages that “new digital engagement processes will make it radically easier to raise views about and visualise emerging proposals while on the go on a smart phone.”

These changes, if done well could make the system more accessible and revolutionise public involvement in planning. However, careful consideration will need to be given to resourcing this and how representations are enabled & recorded.

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 Whilst the proposals are probably several years from being implemented and may be subject to significant change before they become statute, they represent a major alteration to the current system which will be resource intensive for Local Planning Authorities. It is therefore, beneficial to monitor the progression of the White Paper through Parliament and review the proposed changes and their implications as they become legislation.
- 3.2 The Government are currently consulting with all Local Planning Authorities on reforms to the Planning System and we intend to respond in line with the views expressed in this report by the consultation deadline of October 29th.

Background Papers

Central Government White Paper – Planning For The Future

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>

