

Housing White Paper Summary and initial reaction

7 February 2017

The Heritage Alliance

The Government has published its housing white paper '[Fixing our broken housing market](#)' setting out its vision to 'reduce the obstacles to house building and help local authorities, developers and SME builders build the homes Britain needs'.

The Heritage Alliance welcomes Government action to solve the housing crisis provided these plans promote sustainable development and future policy both protects and promotes heritage as one of our greatest national assets - vital to creating places people want to live. From our rich architectural tradition to our distinctive landscapes, our heritage is a source of national pride and a catalyst for economic growth. The White Paper only mentions heritage four times - in its footnotes. We are, of course, much more than a footnote in this space and we will respond to the [Government's consultation](#) to ensure that heritage issues are emphasised and more general plans do not inadvertently damage our sector. You can also submit your own response online before 11:45pm on 2 May 2017.

What does the White Paper say?

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, set out the main themes of the White Paper in a [statement to Parliament](#). The main issues we have identified include:

- **Increased funding for planning departments.** The Government intends to boost local authority capacity by increasing nationally set planning fees. Local authorities will be able to increase fees by 20% from July 2017 if they commit to invest the additional fee income in their planning department. The Government is also considering a further 20% increase for authorities that are delivering the homes their communities need. There will be a further consultation on the detail of this plan. Planning capacity and the scrutiny of planning applications by a conservation team is vital to properly protect England's heritage [see 2.15];
- **Building up on existing buildings.** Q13 in the consultation seeks views on proposals to amend national policy to make clear that plans and individual development proposals should, among other things, address the scope to extend buildings upwards in urban areas. This follows an earlier consultation on a similar proposal for London, to which the [Government has now responded](#). Over half of respondents considered a one-size-fits-all permitted

development right approach unworkable. However, the Government states that 'it is clear that building up has a role to play in meeting the need for new homes across the country, not just in London, and the Housing White Paper proposes a package of measures to support building at higher densities and using land more efficiently for development';

- **Greater protection for non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest as well as ancient woodland.** The Government proposes changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to clarify which national policies provide a strong reason to restrict development when preparing plans, or which indicate that development should be restricted when making decisions on planning applications. Under the proposal these restrictions are limited to the policies listed in footnote nine of the NPPF (which includes Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coasts, National Parks and designated heritage assets) with the addition of Ancient Woodland, aged or veteran trees' and 'those non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest that are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments'. These will no longer be set out as 'examples', as they are currently in footnote nine of the NPPF, but as a list to 'provide a clearer position for both plan makers and those making decisions on applications' [See A.38];
- **Green belt protection.** The Government will maintain 'existing strong protections for the Green Belt'. Stating that 'Green Belt boundaries should be amended only in exceptional circumstances when local authorities can demonstrate that they have fully examined all other reasonable options for meeting their identified housing requirements'. Prior to the White Paper's publication there had been concerns that this protection could be watered down making the more difficult development of brown field and heritage assets less attractive. [See 1.37];
- **Disposal of publically owned land.** The Government will 'work harder' to make public land available and ready to build on. It will also work with local authorities to help them bring forward their own sites. The Government states that in this process it will seek to 'obtain best value for the taxpayer'. The Alliance will seek to ensure that the significance of heritage assets is properly considered in this disposal process and emphasise that 'best value' needs to be set within a context of what is best for communities and historic assets rather than a purely monetary concern [See 3.12];

- **Development of public sector land.** The Government wants to support hospitals, schools and other public sector landowners to deliver more homes for their employees within new and existing sites. This could include infill development, building on top of existing buildings or making better use of land within existing boundaries, whilst maintaining protections for green spaces and school playing fields. In many cases such buildings will be heritage assets and careful thought should be given to how this policy can be achieved. The Government seeks views on how the planning system can best support such development, including through strengthening planning policy to help provide greater certainty when applications come forward, or through a new permitted development right [see A.71]. Appropriate consideration of archaeological concerns at an early stage will be crucial in any plans to speed up planning processes;
- **Developer track records.** The Government is interested in views on whether an applicant's 'track record of delivering previous, similar, housing schemes should be taken into account by local authorities when determining planning applications for housing development'. The Government would only intend for this proposal to be 'used in considering applications for large scale sites, where the applicant is a major developer' [see A.102]. This would appear to be a sensible consideration when considering development of heritage assets;
- **Implementation of planning permissions.** The Government is seeking views on shortening the timescales for 'developers to implement a permission for housing development from the default period of three years to two years, except where a shorter timescale could hinder the viability or deliverability of a scheme' [see 2.41]. The Government also proposes to simplify and speed up the completion notice process, whereby if development on a site has stopped and there is no prospect of completion, the local authorities can withdraw planning permission for the remainder of the site [2.42]. These changes could have a positive effect for owners of heritage assets which have been granted permission but are deteriorating as no work is carried out;
- **Compulsory purchase powers.** The Government states that it will prepare new guidance for local planning authorities, following separate consultation, encouraging the use of their compulsory purchase powers to support the build out of stalled sites. The Government will investigate whether auctions, following possession of the land, are sufficient to establish an unambiguous value for the purposes of compensation payable to the claimant, where the local authority has used their compulsory purchase powers to acquire the land. Encouraging local authorities to use compulsory purchase powers could have a positive outcome for heritage assets where development has stalled. [See 2.44]; and

- **Transparency of land ownership.** The Government states that it will consult on improving the transparency of contractual arrangements used to control land and how the Land Register can provide a 'clear line of sight' across a piece of land setting out who owns, controls or has an interest in it. In addition, HM Land Registry will make available, free of charge, its commercial and corporate ownership data set, and the overseas ownership data set [see A.34]. This could be a positive move for heritage if greater access to this data means local authorities can easily identify the owners of heritage assets which have fallen into disrepair and take enforcement action.

The Government has also published a number of other consultation responses which have fed into the White Paper and a further Call for Evidence. These include:

- [Rural planning review: call for evidence](#). As well as setting out the Government response to the consultation, this document also seeks views on extending the thresholds for agricultural permitted development rights to help farmers, and on a new agricultural to residential permitted development right to help provide housing for rural workers;
- [House of Commons CLG Committee report on the consultation on national planning policy](#) launched in December 2015;
- [National Planning Policy: consultation on proposed changes](#). This considered, among other things, increasing the density of development around commuter hubs, development on brownfield land and small sites and delivery of housing agreed in Local Plans; and
- [Implementation of planning changes: technical consultation](#). This consultation sought views on the implementation of measures in the Housing and Planning and other planning measures such as changes to planning application fees.

Members of The Heritage Alliance which have responded to the White Paper so far include:

- [Civic Voice](#)
- [The CLA](#)
- [CPRE; and](#)
- [The RTPI](#).