



# RETHINKING PLANNING

## 10 CHANGES THE FORTHCOMING REFORMS SHOULD ADDRESS

AECOM's planners agree that the creaking planning system, weakened and complicated by repeated tweaks, does need a reboot. As a starter for 10, here are some of the changes we believe should be included.



### 01 EFFECTIVE STRATEGIC REGIONAL PLANS

Full national coverage of regional or corridor spatial and economic plans is needed if government is serious about place-based solutions.

Replace the Duty to Cooperate with a more effective strategic planning mechanism with joint plans or underpinned by a Duty to Agree.



### 02 A NEW ROLE FOR LOCAL PLANS: SUPPORT FOR BUILDING NEW HOMES IN THE RIGHT PLACES

The new regime needs to give local authorities more teeth to ensure that plans for new homes are built in the right places: where the infrastructure is, or can be provided and at a scale that means local facilities and services are viable and accessible to all.

Decisions on local housing targets should be based on sound economic, demographic and environmental data — not just market signals.



### 03 MAKE GARDEN COMMUNITIES A REALITY

The current system fails local authorities who think big on strategic growth, so alternative approaches are needed. Local Development Orders should be used to promote and consent Garden Communities.

Using LDOs means garden communities can be promoted along with the Local Plans, saving time and money on subsequent planning applications.



### 07 ALLOCATE SITES FOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IN LOCAL PLANS

Reserving space for natural or semi-natural features will ensure environment considerations are treated on a level playing field with housing and employment concerns. As well as on-site provision, there will also be the need to identify strategic off-site land resources which large-scale developments or high-density urban schemes can contribute towards.

Local authorities should effectively co-operate with others in their city region if environmental net gain is to be an enabler of growth and not a constraint.



### 06 REFORM STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

The SEA legislation aims are admirable and ensuring a systematic consideration of alternatives remains crucial. However, in reality, such assessments have often been done badly and are sometimes undertaken to justify the strategic development decisions already made rather than to inform options and policy development.

The legislation does not need reform: it needs boosting in importance as a tool to inform and justify land use planning decisions.



### 05 A FOCUS ON THE FUTURE OF TOWN CENTRES

Town centres need to be at the heart of places of all scales, and a focus for a levelling-up and wellbeing agenda. They need special attention in the planning reform package requiring thought through downsizing of protected retail-only frontage, promotion of new forms of local co-working space, encouragement of high-quality, mixed town centre living and the refocusing of public social infrastructure back into central areas.



### 04 ENHANCED USE OF DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS

The appropriate resources, including top-level political support and certainty of funding for infrastructure, should be provided to the promoters of new community and complex regeneration projects.

Such resources may include enhanced roles and powers for Development Corporations, blending local leadership and the heft of government resources.



### 08 MAKE THE MANUAL FOR STREETS MANDATORY

The aim of the Manual for Streets is to make development more people-oriented and reduce dependence on private motor vehicles. The recent National Housing Design Audit came to the same conclusion as those of a decade ago: highway design is dragging quality down to unacceptable levels, designing in private car dependency.

An updated Manual for Streets is being prepared; it should be made mandatory as part of the wider reform package.



### 09 ESTABLISH A DESIGN QUALITY UNIT

The government's increasing commitment to the importance of good design runs the risk of getting lost in the planning reform.

If planning is to be freed-up and sped-up there also needs to be an emphasis on quality of buildings and places, with a heightened role in design-making. To be effective, such ambitions need to be supercharged by a dedicated agency to support developers and local authorities in promoting good design practice.



### 10 PROPERLY RESOURCE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES

Resources are needed to meet the ambition of accelerating the delivery of homes and new communities, strengthening places and their economies, the enhanced emphasis on environmental considerations, and the 'levelling up' agenda, all of which are at the heart of the government's programme.

Whatever form planning reform legislation takes, there will need to be well-resourced and skilled planning teams in local authorities and devolved bodies to enable effective implementation.



## READY TO RESPOND

Planners have a significant role in helping to address the economic, societal and environment challenges post-coronavirus and deliver on the Government's levelling up agenda. When the government publishes its policy paper, AECOM's planning teams are poised to respond, arguing for the most effective framework for planners and the development industry to deliver.