



# Planning White Paper – What does it mean for Environment and ‘Beauty’?

**Jan Bessell**  
**Strategic Planning Advisor**

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Pinsent Masons



# Simplification of Assessment Processes – what is it about?

- Seeks to identify the challenge we face:
  - Not enough focus on design
  - Little incentive for high quality new homes and places
- Identifies that Planning Matters – Places affect us from the air we breathe to our sense of purpose and wellbeing
- A question of Social Justice
- Wish to promote stewardship of countryside and environment, ensuring:
  - Important natural and heritage assets are preserved
  - Development potential of brownfield land maximised
  - Support net gains for biodiversity and wider environment
  - Actively address challenges of climate change



# Pillar 1 – Planning for Development

- **Proposal 3** – single statutory “*sustainable development*” test, replacing existing tests of soundness
  - Simpler test – fewer requirements for assessments
  - Specifically:
    - Abolish sustainability appraisal
    - Develop simplified environmental impact of plans – to continue to satisfy UK and international law and treaties
  - Alternative option:
    - Reform tests of soundness – less prescriptive



# Pillar 2 – Planning for beautiful & sustainable places

- **Proposal 11** – more binding design guidance and codes prepared locally
- **Proposal 12** – body to support provably locally-popular design codes and chief officer for design and placemaking
- **Proposal 13** – national leadership, delivering better beautiful places through Homes England strategic objectives
- **Proposal 14** – fast track for beauty – policy/legislative change – incentivise and accelerate high quality development
- **Proposal 15** – reform to mitigate/adapt to climate change – maximise environmental benefits
- **Proposal 16** – quick simpler assessment of environmental impacts and enhancement opportunities – protecting and enhancing most valuable and important habitats and species
- **Proposal 17** – conserving and enhancing historic buildings and areas
- **Proposal 18** – ambitious improvements in energy efficient standards – delivering net zero



# Opportunities and Risks - 1

## Abolition of sustainability appraisal and soundness

- What will statutory “sustainable development” test be – do we really know what sustainable development is and how it will ensure same level of protection and compliance?

➤ **Opportunity** – Holistic approach, better transparency and diagnoses of the challenges, including: housing; climate; natural capital; health; poverty/social justice; engagement and interactive planning; and integrated interventions and outcomes

➤ **Risk** – Endless debate on definition of “sustainable development” – No detail on how simplified process to provide level of protection and legal compliance with Strategic Environmental Assessment. Particular concern, given rules based proposals and local area-based planning system that would grant automatic outline planning permissions



# Opportunities and Risks - 2

## New focus on design and sustainability – priority for beautiful developments

- Will potential be realised by standards, codes and design Chief Officer?

➤ **Opportunity** – Ensure design codes and standards inspire, incentivise and encourage innovation and integration with constantly improving standards requiring strategic coordination of infrastructure investment with high quality development set within an ecosystems and net zero framework

➤ **Welcome** – an improved role for Homes England and real investment in local authority skills and resources

➤ **Risk** – loss of diversity, uniqueness of place and innovation – visual over substance. Will “provably locally-popular design codes” create new vision, sustainable development and equitable, rich and diverse communities for future generations? Will we lose the rich tapestry that is England?



# Opportunities and Risks - 3

## New system of environmental assessments

- Rightly acknowledges need to consider environment properly and critical role of planning system. Light on detail at the moment – more to come
  - **Opportunity** – to rationalise duplication of effort and make proportionate and more transparent – aligning assessment against a unified set of "legal tests" and the use of a combined baseline methodology, big data and digital inclusive platforms
  - **Risk** – Un-identified and un-mitigated harm – failure to meet legal and international obligations – needs to be fully integrated with government's [25 Year Environment Plan](#), published in January 2018, and with the proposals set out in the Environment Bill published in January 2020
    - “Fast track for Beauty” – will this just be de-risked standardisation?





**Jan Bessell**

Strategic Planning Advisor

[jan.bessell@pinsentmasons.com](mailto:jan.bessell@pinsentmasons.com)

**Thank you for listening**

[Outlaw Article](#)

Planning White Paper:

What it means for Design and the Environment

<https://www.pinsentmasons.com/out-law/analysis/planning-white-paper-design-the-environment>

