

# Planning for a sustainable future consultation

## A response to the Communities and Local Government consultation paper

From the Shelter policy library

17 August 2007

[www.shelter.org.uk](http://www.shelter.org.uk)

© 2007 Shelter. All rights reserved. This document is only for your personal, non-commercial use. You may not copy, reproduce, republish, post, distribute, transmit or modify it in any way.

This document contains information and policies that were correct at the time of publication.

# Shelter

Shelter is a national campaigning charity that provides practical advice, support and innovative services to over 170,000 homeless or badly housed people every year. This work gives us direct experience of the various problems caused by the shortage of affordable housing across all tenures. Our services include:

- A national network of over 50 housing aid centres
- Shelter's free housing advice helpline which runs from 8am-midnight
- Shelter's website which provides housing advice online
- The Government-funded National Homelessness Advice Service, which provides specialist housing advice, training, consultancy, referral and information to other voluntary agencies, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux and members of Advice UK, which are approached by people seeking housing advice
- A number of specialist projects promoting innovative solutions to particular homelessness and housing problems. These include 'Homeless to Home' schemes, which work with formerly homeless families, and the Shelter Inclusion Project, which works with families, couples and single people who have had difficulty complying with their tenancy agreements because of alleged anti-social behavior. The aim of these particular projects is to sustain tenancies and ensure people live successfully in the community.
- We also campaign for new laws and policies - as well as more investment - to improve the lives of homeless and badly housed people, now and in the future.

## Introduction

Shelter broadly welcomes the measures set out in the Planning White Paper and in this consultation. We share the Government's recognition of the importance of the planning system to ensuring the timely delivery of the Government's target of 3 million new homes by 2020. We believe that, taken together, the measures proposed will help to better link housing and economic development, and to coordinate overall infrastructure planning to make new homes sustainable in both environmental and economic terms.

## Consultation response

### Nationally significant infrastructure projects

- Shelter welcomes the suggested range of improvements to the efficiency of planning for infrastructure development. We agree that it is useful to take a national view of infrastructure planning in some instances. This helps ensure consistency, and also aids developers' forward-planning. Clarity around decision-making processes should enable local developers and others to have confidence in the timely delivery of infrastructure to support new housing.
- The delivery of infrastructure ahead of new housing completions is crucial. Infrastructure planning must anticipate demand from new developments by providing, for example, adequate water, and transport links ahead of developments being occupied. Infrastructure planning should also ensure that adequate schools and other community infrastructure are available for new residents.
- We also recognise the vital role infrastructure planning has in preparing for climate change. Planning in key aspects of infrastructure such as sustainable urban drainage systems can help make a community sustainable over the longer term.
- The powers of the new Infrastructure Planning Commission are welcome. These provide a practical means to improve both the speed and the efficiency of housing delivery through provision of sufficient and timely infrastructure.
- The proposal to introduce national policy statements presents a real opportunity to streamline the strategic planning framework and reduce delays in applications. National policy statements should also add consistency to treatment of applications across different local authorities. Shelter welcomes the suggestion that these statements should be the primary consideration for the infrastructure planning commission, prioritised above other

considerations, as this should ensure the statements do not simply add another layer of approval and complexity into the system.

- We support the Government's proposal for a timescale of 10-15 years for national policy statements. This length of time should enable better long-term planning for development in an area, providing confidence to both house builders and residents about infrastructure decisions around housing development.
- Shelter strongly supports the proposal that planning applications in full should not be necessary for smaller developments where both the developer and the neighbours affected are in agreement. Currently, the processing of uncontroversial applications causes delays to the delivery of other larger developments and this helps to slow down the overall rate of house building.
- Extending opportunities for microgeneration is a helpful proposal. Shelter recognises the importance of generating more energy locally to realising the Government's goal of creating more sustainable communities and reaching the target for zero carbon homes by 2016. In Shelter's view, the widest possible range of land-types should be considered for appropriate methods of microgeneration.

## **Consulting effectively with the public**

- We believe that it is vitally important for Government to do everything possible bring along public opinion and local officials where decisions on infrastructure planning are made at national level. If local opinion-formers are not informed about or supportive of national policy Government could risk a backlash. We believe that Government should ensure that early training and education is provided for local planning decision-makers, and that genuine consultation takes place. We agree that consultation of local authorities is useful. In addition, we believe that Government should not overlook the importance of training local planning officials, to help them to take a wider (regional) approach to planning applications.
- We are broadly supportive of the proposed 'duty to involve' as a best value duty replacing the Statement of Community Involvement. Shelter recognises the need for more effective engagement with the public over planning decisions and we would be interested to see more details concerning this duty, including guidance on how it will be carried out, and how compliance will be measured.

- Shelter believes that transparent and inclusive consultation with local communities is essential to the successful handling of planning applications. We strongly believe that the duty to involve should constitute a genuine opportunity for local people to provide input and influence decisions made.
- We welcome the streamlining of the consultation process as outlined in the consultation. Shelter believes that providing a genuine process of consultation followed by clear decision-making should enable planning applications to progress more quickly while providing vital community input. This reflects local authorities' increasing role in place-shaping, and implies that local authorities should consult widely with local stakeholders, but then take a lead, holding clear decision-making authority. Shelter supports this greater place-shaping role, which we believe should enable local authorities to take a clear lead to ensure that local housing targets are delivered in a timely fashion.
- The 'effective consultation' set out in the White Paper must include those groups of people who are often excluded from decision-making, such as non home-owners in temporary or private rented accommodation. It should also include some effort to consult with potential future residents where new developments are planned and such future residents can be identified.
- We welcome the proposal to increase grant funding to Planning Aid and others to enable residents to engage with planning decisions. We suggest that further work to enable this engagement should involve the provision of opportunities for residents to give verbal feedback on plans rather than relying on formal written consultation, and working with existing community groups and advice agencies such as Citizens Advice, residents groups and other community based associations.

## Related consultations

- Shelter broadly welcomes the proposals in *Changes to Permitted Development: Consultation Paper 2 - Permitted Development Rights for Householders*. These changes should reduce delays caused by minor planning applications in the planning system, enabling decision-makers to focus on larger developments. Making progress on larger scale developments is essential to achieving the Government's new and stretching housebuilding targets in each local area.
- The proposals contained in the consultation *Planning Performance Agreements: A new way to manage large scale major planning applications* should ensure greater consistency and clarity. These should create greater confidence on the part of local authorities when

negotiating terms of development, and should also reassure house builders around their expectations and long term planning.

**Shelter Policy Unit  
August 2007**

**For further information please contact Sarah Mitchell, Senior Policy Officer, on 0844 515 1219 or at [sarah\\_mitchell@shelter.org.uk](mailto:sarah_mitchell@shelter.org.uk)**