

Briefing

The Planning White Paper

The planning system is a vital tool which should ensure development contributes to our social, environmental and economic wellbeing. Wildlife Trusts around the UK monitor and influence planning decisions about the use and development of land at local, regional and national levels.

Against the backdrop of the Barker and Eddington Reports, the Planning White Paper proposes a new system for dealing with Major Infrastructure Projects (MIPs) including the production of National Policy Statements (NPSs). MIPs will be determined by a separate Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) consisting of appointed individuals. The White Paper also proposes some streamlining of existing national planning policy and a new Planning Policy Statement on economic development.

In our view, to be effective, the White Paper should:

- **Value the natural environment.** The right planning framework could contribute to reducing carbon emissions and helping our natural environment adapt to the now unavoidable consequences of climate change, and benefiting the economy. The natural environment provides us with essential services such as minimising flood risk, breaking down pollutants and regulating our climate.
- **Include rigorous environmental assessments** of development proposals at the different levels.
- **Facilitate public confidence** in decisions by allowing stakeholders and the public, including local communities, to have their say and views reflected.

A Planning Bill is expected in the autumn to implement the new MIPs proposals. **Please support us by pressing for a planning system that can better deliver sustainable development. The minimum should be a strong sustainable development duty.**

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Key facts

- In an recent opinion poll 71% said they wanted to see land with important or endangered wildlife protected from development
MORI poll for the Treasury, 2006
- **Wildlife Trusts** monitor more than 90,000 planning applications each year and improve the environmental outcome more than 1,200

“The impacts of climate change on species and biodiversity are expected to be harmful for most levels of warming, because of the limited ability of plants and animals to migrate fast enough to new areas with suitable climate.

“.... the effects of urbanisation, barriers to migration paths and fragmentation of the landscape also severely limit species ability to move.”
Stern Review 2006

What do we want from the planning system?

The Wildlife Trusts agree that the planning system must be fit for purpose and able to stand up to present and future challenges. There are some key principles which should be inherent in any planning system - the White Paper fails to live up to these.

Valuing nature, coping with climate change

Land use decisions must respect environmental limits and the services the natural environment provides. They must work with nature rather than against it. They should facilitate adaptation to climate change at the landscape-scale. The planning system should also value and protect the designations that currently exist – even more important with climate change.

We can build new communities and infrastructure that is good for wildlife, promotes healthy economic growth and improves people's quality of life. For example, creating wetlands as part of sustainable drainage schemes can protect new housing developments from flash flooding. Green corridors can allow wildlife to move more easily as the climate changes and improve the quality of the environment for people. These considerations are given minimal consideration in the White Paper.

Environmental input

We are concerned about the minimal environmental assessments proposed in the White Paper. We propose the following:

- All National Policy Statements should be subject to statutory **Strategic Environmental Assessment**. Environmental Impact Assessments should also be required for site-based statements.
- The IPC should include independent **environmental representation**, eg ecological expertise where necessary.
- A **statutory sustainable development duty** should be embedded into future planning legislation for MIPs.
- A **statutory carbon duty** should be included in legislation on MIPs to assess their emissions.

Public confidence and involvement

The public must have confidence in the planning system, and be involved at different levels and feel that decisions are taken fairly and democratically. There should be no reduction in their right to have a say. The proposals should include:

- A right for local communities to be heard in the MIPs process.
- The provision for the IPC to hold public inquiries into all MIP applications and to allow independent cross-examination of evidence.

Planning and the Marine Bill

The White Paper proposes that the IPC should take decisions about MIPs at sea (such as offshore wind farms and ports) rather than the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). The MMO will have the appropriate expertise for taking decisions in the marine environment and is therefore best placed to do so.

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The Wildlife Trusts There are 47 local Wildlife Trusts across the whole of the UK, the Isle of Man and Alderney. We are working for an environment rich in wildlife for everyone. With 720,000 members, we are the largest UK voluntary organisation dedicated to conserving the full range of the UK's habitats and species whether they be in the countryside, in cities or at sea. 108,000 of our members belong to our junior branch, Wildlife Watch. We manage 2,200 nature reserves covering more than 80,000 hectares; we stand up for wildlife; we inspire people about the natural world and we foster sustainable living. www.wildlifetrusts.org

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