

Planning for the Future White Paper Briefing Note – October 2020

The Government has long been signalling its intention to make radical changes to the planning system in England. The COVID-19 pandemic spurred some immediate changes to certain aspects of current planning policy, such as enabling pubs to offer a hot food takeaway system.

The Government intends to create a new planning system which is “suitable for the 21st century” and is currently running a consultation on the *Planning for the Future* white paper. Separately, the Government intends to make smaller changes to the current planning system, and a concurrent consultation has been conducted on these changes, which closed on Thursday, 1st October 2020.

Dan’s Position on Housing Developments in Suffolk

1. Dan has consistently opposed inappropriate large-scale housing developments in Suffolk and successfully opposed the Ipswich Northern Bypass, which would have seen approximately 50,000 new houses built as a consequence.
2. Dan acknowledges the need for housing developments in the county but wants to see greenbelt land protected whilst brownfield sites in the centre of Ipswich and surrounding other town centres should be used for development.
3. Proper infrastructure must be guaranteed for new housing developments.
4. Community consultation is vital in the planning process and all local residents should be able to access consultation documents without issue – including those who do not have good access to the internet.
5. Dan has been very vocal on the Sizewell C Power Station development, including all new housing developments that may come with the construction of this site. Dan is clear that all local residents and councils should be effectively communicated with and consulted at all relevant stages.

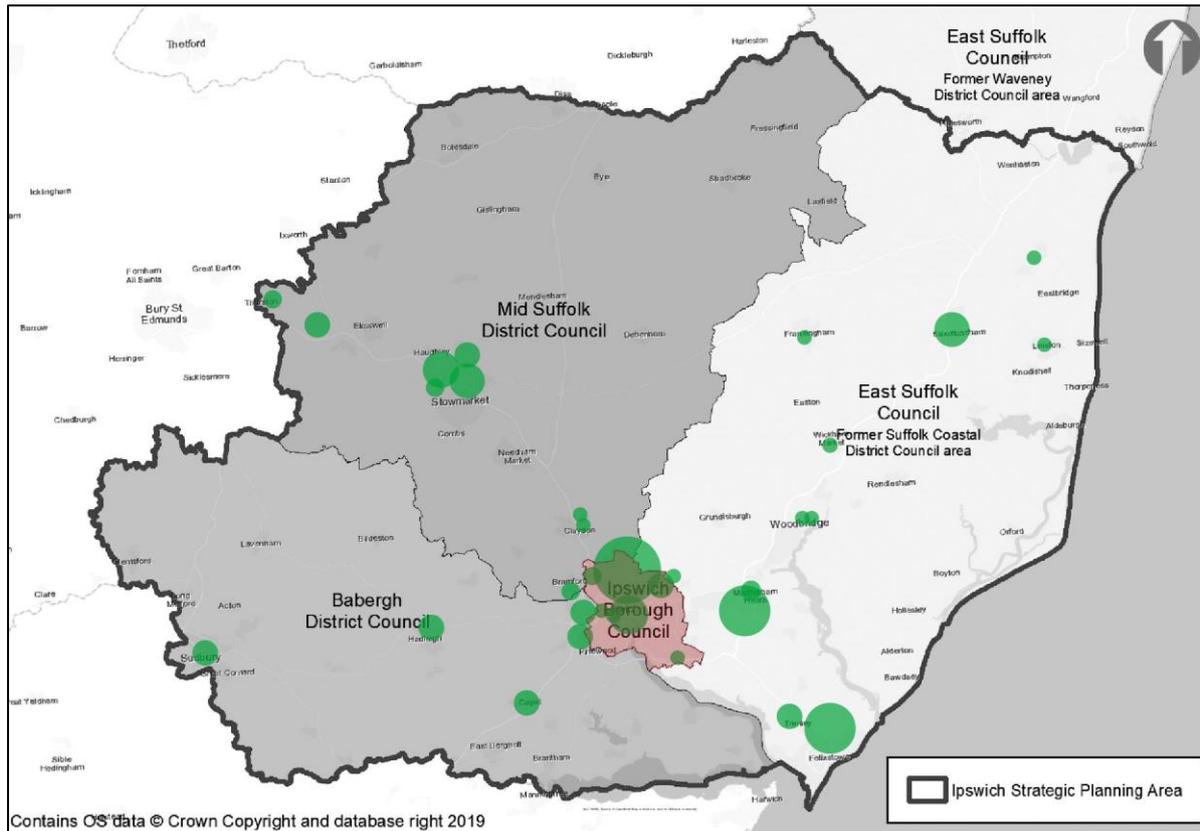
Proposed Housing Developments in Suffolk

6. The standard method Plan Period (2018 – 2036) currently sets out the developments of 34,200 new dwellings across Babergh, Ipswich, Mid Suffolk, and East Suffolk (Suffolk Coastal) Councils.
7. The *Planning for the Future* white paper would allow for an addition 15,678 dwellings across all council areas noted above.

	Standard method (dwellings per annum)	Standard method Plan Period (2018 – 2036)	<i>Planning for the Future</i> (additional uplift per annum)	<i>Planning for the Future</i> (Plan Period)
Babergh	416	7,488	+373	+6,714
Ipswich	460	8,280	+93	+1,674
Mid Suffolk	535	9,630	+219	+3,942
Suffolk Coastal	489	8,802	+186	+3,348
Total	1,900	34,200	+871	+15,678

8. The locations for the housing growth shown in the table above are outlined on the map below. Significant developments can be seen in the Stowmarket, North Ipswich, Martlesham Heath, Woodbridge, Framlingham, Saxmundham, and Felixstowe areas.

(Source: Ipswich Borough Council)



Key Changes Outlined in the White Paper

9. In the Government's own words, these proposals will:
 - a. Provide consultation for local communities from the beginning of the planning process.
 - b. Green spaces will be protected by encouraging building on brownfield land and providing that all new streets must be tree lined.
 - c. Homes will be built quicker by ensuring local housing plans are developed and agreed in 30 months rather than the current 7 years.
 - d. Every area must have a local plan in place.
 - e. A new system of a national levy to replace the current system of developer contributions.
 - f. A new fast-track system for beautiful buildings and stabilising local design guidance to preserve communities.
 - g. All new homes must be 'zero carbon ready'.
10. The Government will commit to building 300,000 new homes per year.
11. Simplified Local Plans would place land in three categories:
 - a. **Growth areas**, which would be suitable for substantial development and outline planning permission would be automatic with no involvement from local residents.
 - b. **Renewal areas**, which would be suitable for some development including housing on small sites within or on the edge of existing villages, with councils able to resist proposals.
 - c. **Protected areas**, which would have more stringent development controls. There is no detail on how local residents could influence planning processes on this type of zoned land.

Criticism of the Proposed Changes

12. The Chief Executive of the Royal Town Planning Institute has voiced concerns about the approach that the white paper was expected to take, coining the phrase, “planner bashing rhetoric”.
13. The President of the Royal Institute of British Architects agreed with the government to the extent that the planning system needs reforms but branded the white paper’s proposals as shameful.
14. CAMRA have voiced concerns about how community consultation would work within a zoning system and noted the “missed chances” around carbon-neutral affordable housing.
15. The Local Government Association said it was vital that new homes should be delivered through a locally led planning system and communities should retain the right to shape the areas in which they live.
16. Professors Wilson and Vigar from Newcastle and Professor Tewdwn-Jones from UCL state, “Rather than see people as objectors, we should value their vital knowledge and experiences that can improve development proposals.”

Community Consultation

17. The Policy Exchange made the case for the new consultation process in a January 2020 report: *“The planning system has been captured by the ‘noisy minority’. Low turnouts in local elections and the demographic of voters – typically older people and homeowners – means there is an incentive for parties and candidates in local elections run on antidevelopment policy platforms. Unless they have the time and patience to attend local planning committees, ordinary citizens are detached from the planning process.”*¹
18. The white paper proposed a stronger system of digital engagement in the planning process and the desire for more engagement to take place at the Local Plan phase.
19. The white paper also expresses a desire to see information relating to planning applications easier to find and understand for residents by utilising neighbourhood groups and social networks.
20. Local groups acknowledge that digital communications could encourage wider participation in accessing planning materials, but this will not be of any use if the ability to contribute to the consultation is reduced.
21. Local community groups and councils are concerned that residents will have less of a voice in consultations as land will be ‘zoned’ as above with planning permission-in-principle granted. If an area is zoned as ‘Growth’ or ‘Renewal’, the influence of local residents and councillors will be greatly reduced.
22. Permitted Development Rights will be extended in all zones, which could permit more development without consent of the local community.

Housing Targets and the Housing Delivery Test

23. This part of the white paper has proved to be very contentious, and often referred to as the new “planning algorithm”.
24. The new formula would provide a percentage of housing stock level and an affordability adjustment within Local Planning Authorities calculated in two steps:

¹ Jack Airey and Chris Doughty, Rethinking the planning system for the 21st century, Policy Exchange, January 2020: page 9

- a. Setting the baseline requirement – whichever is higher of 0.5% of existing housing stock in each local authority OR the latest projected annual household growth over a 10-year period.
 - b. Adjusting for market signals on a local level – calculated by using the workplace-based median house price to median earnings ratio.
25. The white paper proposes removing the cap on the level of increase in areas with identified housing need.
 26. The Housing Delivery Test is an annual measurement of housing delivery in LAs, intended to hold LPAs to account. It is the percentage of homes delivered against the number of homes required, as set out in the strategic plans and policies for the area.
 27. From November 2020, LPAs will need to meet a threshold of 75%. If this figure is not met there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development planning applications in the area.
 28. The main proponent of this new ‘algorithm’ will be house price, allocating a greater need for more housing to those areas with higher average house prices. This would likely see a disproportionate level of housing pre-approved for countryside areas and London, whilst omitting the areas in the North which have significant brownfield sites.
 29. The map below shows the areas which will be set to have the largest development under the proposed algorithm in darker colours, in which the emphasis on London and the countryside should be noted. An interactive map can be seen at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/planning-algorithm-may-destroy-suburbia-tory-mps-warn-boris-johnson-dhd5r6j7r>

