

SIGOMA

Statement Debate and Comments on Planning White Paper

May 21st 2007

House of Commons Main Statement

- [Kelly outlines the Planning Reform White Paper](#)

Opposition Responses

- [Spelman attacks plans for a planning quango](#)
- [Stunell welcomes the opportunity to debate planning issues](#)

Government Press Release

- [DCLG - Planning White Paper launched](#)

Political Party and Politician Comment

- [Lib Dems - Brown mustn't sacrifice local say in planning says Rogerson](#)
- [Welsh Lib Dems - Willott comments on expected publication of Planning White Paper](#)
- [Daily Politics - Labour's Starkey hopeful over planning white paper](#)
- [Kelly insists white paper will end 'baffling' planning system](#)
- [Politics Show - Darling voices support for nuclear power](#)

Stakeholder Responses and Comments

- [Freight Transport Association - Planning White Paper: Good news for transport](#)
- [CPRE concerned over planning system changes](#)
- [Today - National Grid welcomes new planning proposals](#)
- [Wake Up To Money - FoE raises concerns over new planning proposals](#)
- [Today - CBI argues need for reform in planning system](#)
- [Wake Up To Money - BPF welcomes proposed relaxation of planning laws](#)
- [News at Noon - BWEA warns of 'huge backlog' in wind farm planning applications](#)

House of Commons Statements

Kelly outlines the Planning Reform White Paper

Mon, 21 May 07 | House of Commons - Main Statement

Summary

Communities and Local Government Secretary Ruth Kelly has outlined the Planning Reform White Paper, insisting that climate change and sustainable development would be put "right at the heart" of the planning system.

Speaking during a statement in the House of Commons on the 'Planning Reform White Paper', Ms Kelly noted that this year marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, which had laid the foundations of today's planning system and helped to produce thriving towns and protect green spaces around towns and cities.

The Government now faced challenges of climate change and energy security, she noted, asserting that planning in its current form was "not up to the task", referring to the conclusions of the Barker Review and the Eddington Review.

Too often the planning consultation system favoured the well-resourced over the less wealthy, she maintained, adding that decision-making could sometimes be "painfully" slow.

Where good and necessary development was delayed, society missed out and the costs of not taking action were clear, Ms Kelly asserted, emphasising that an effective planning system was vital for implementing a range of Government policies.

The White Paper set out a series of proposals to continue to reform the planning system and was a result of joint planning across Government, she explained.

Ms Kelly noted that the planning system had grown up "piecemeal" over the decades, highlighting the need for a simpler system. The White Paper would ensure transparency and encourage timely decisions to be made, she maintained.

Ministers would issue policy statements which the country needed over the forthcoming years, which would be subject to Parliamentary scrutiny, she said. The Government was also replacing the numerous consent regimes with a single system, she added.

The Government proposed to create a separate independent Planning Commission, Ms Kelly said, explaining that the Commission would listen closely to local concerns and would take the final decisions on planning applications. It would be accountable to Ministers and Parliament, she stated.

Ms Kelly assured that these reforms would achieve speed in processing planning applications and also ensure public engagement in the planning process, insisting that these two aims were not opposed to one another. Consultation must not be a "box ticking" process, she maintained, acknowledging the need for proper consultation.

She added that additional resources would be increased to Planning Aid. The White Paper outlined proposals to improve the town and planning system, she assured.

It was important to create a "level playing field" and to integrate economic, social and cultural development, Ms Kelly stated, adding that planning policy documents would also be streamlined and devolved to local bodies where possible.

The current "needs test" was sometimes too blunt an indicator of how new developments would impact on town centres, she said. The greenbelt policy had served well for sixty years and would continue to do so in the future, she insisted.

Under the new White Paper, it would be easier to address the issue of climate change through measures such as solar panels, Ms Kelly stated. The role of local government was being strengthened in planning as well, she assured, adding that the Government would continue to work with the Local Government Association in this respect.

The White Paper would make town and planning more efficient and enable councils to focus resources on the most complex applications, she insisted, also assuring that the planning system would be made more straightforward.

She insisted that these reforms would be good for business, good for sustainable communities and good for the country as a whole. The Government's reforms would put climate change and sustainable development right at the heart of the planning system, she emphasised.

Spelman attacks plans for a planning quango

Mon, 21 May 07 | House of Commons - Main Statement

Summary

Conservative shadow Communities and Local Government Secretary Caroline Spelman asserted that it was three years since planning reforms, adding that guidance had just reached local authorities.

Planning was 'sclerotic', she argued, adding that the number of home owners was falling and the number of homes being built was actually declining.

The Deputy Prime Minister's planning bodies needed to be scrapped, Ms Spelman insisted.

Kate Barker had reported that a planning quango was needed, leading to greater centralisation, she added, stressing that this had been accepted. This would be an unelected and unaccountable body, she added, adding that the Conservatives would fight such a proposal.

On plans to relax building restrictions on green belt land and the building of out of town shopping, Ms Spelman stressed that town centres would be further eroded by such a relaxation.

The government should apologise for increases in stamp duty and council tax which stopped people moving house, the Conservative spokesperson argued.

'Garden grabbing' was a growing problem she added, highlighting that using such land for building was unpopular.

Key workers could not live near to their work and young people could not get on the property ladder, Ms Spelman asserted.

Communities and Local Government Secretary Ruth Kelly replied that she was 'staggered' by the response, adding that it was unclear whether her party was in favour of the changes or not.

Terminal five at Heathrow took five years to complete, she argued, stressing the complexity of the system at present. The new system would allow a greater say from local people, the Minister insisted.

More planning resources would also be provided, Ms Kelly stated, adding that planning decisions would be taken at the appropriate level, whether at local or national level. The Local Government Association was backing the proposals, she highlighted.

On town centres, the 'need test' had a perverse effect at present, the Minister asserted, adding that a stronger 'impact test' would look at the impact of planning on town centres.

The package would deliver 'speed and certainty', Ms Kelly concluded.

Stunell welcomes the opportunity to debate planning issues

Mon, 21 May 07 | House of Commons - Main Statement

Summary

Liberal Democrat communities and local government spokesperson Andrew Stunell has welcomed the opportunity to debate planning issues.

Speaking in response to a statement in the House of Commons, Mr Stunell highlighted that there needed to be a balance between economic and environmental sustainability, asking why the Government was favouring economic sustainability in their Planning Reform White Paper.

He asked about how national policy decisions would be taken under the new proposals and whether the new independent Commission would have the capacity to refuse a project.

Mr Stunell asserted that the "devil was in the detail" in relation to town centre development, asking what discussion the Government had had with large retailers in this regard.

He welcomed proposals to work closely with local communities, asking whether local councillors would have the right to vote and speak on planning applications.

The Liberal Democrats welcomed the opportunity which the White Paper represented to have a national debate on these issues, Mr Stunell stated.

In response, Communities and Local Government Secretary Ruth Kelly assured that the Government had not taken an approach which favoured either environment or economics in relation to town and planning.

In relation to major infrastructure projects, the new proposals would allow people to have a greater say and there would be a statutory duty to consult local people for the first time, she noted.

The independent planning commission would certainly have the power to turn down planning applications, she assured.

There would be a stronger impact test in relation to town centre development, Ms Kelly explained, believing the proposals to be a sensible package.

Government Press Release

DCLG - Planning White Paper launched

Mon, 21 May 07 | Government Press Release

Summary

The Department for Communities and Local Government has unveiled significant reforms for the planning system in a new White Paper that aims to enable planning structures to tackle the challenges of the new century.

The White Paper sets out four main ambitions. These are to provide a better and quicker system to decide major infrastructure projects, a simplified local planning system for householders planning home improvements, a greater role for planning in tackling climate change, and a system better able to support vibrant town centres.

Secretary of State Ruth Kelly commented 'It is 60 years since the Attlee Government introduced the Town and Country Planning Act - the system has created thriving towns and protected our green spaces. But today we face challenges that the Attlee Government could never have foreseen - the need to cut emissions from climate change, or the need to support high-quality jobs and build more homes. If we are to thrive, we need a better system for taking the difficult decisions. If we do not the risks are significant - energy shortages, mounting congestion and increasing pollution.'

(c) Crown Copyright

Political Party and Politician Comment

Lib Dems - Brown mustn't sacrifice local say in planning says Rogerson

Sun, 20 May 07 | Political Party Press Release

Summary

Liberal Democrat Housing Spokesperson, Dan Rogerson MP, has commented ahead of the expected publication of the Planning White Paper on May 21st, 2007.

Mr Rogerson said: 'There's a real risk the White Paper will change the planning system to benefit the few at the expense of the many. All the indications suggest the changes will help Labour's friends in the nuclear and supermarket industries, rather than giving local people a genuine say in planning. Gordon Brown mustn't sacrifice local say in planning and sustainable development in a bogus quest for faster decisions.'

Welsh Lib Dems - Willott comments on expected publication of Planning White Paper

Sun, 20 May 07 | Political Party Press Release

Summary

Welsh Liberal Democrat MP for Cardiff Central, Jenny Willott, has commented ahead of the expected publication of the Planning White Paper on May 21st, 2007.

Ms Willott said: 'Local people in Wales deserve a genuine say in local planning applications that directly affect them. There's a real risk that this White Paper will distort the planning system to the benefit the few at the expense of the many.'

Daily Politics - Labour's Starkey hopeful over planning white paper

Mon, 21 May 07 | DeHavilland Report - Broadcast

Summary

A Labour member of the select committee shadowing Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly has outlined her thoughts on the decision to produce a white paper on the future of the planning system.

Phyllis Starkey made her comments on BBC Two's 'Daily Politics', insisting that any proposals included in the white paper had to take into account the views of local people and provide them with sufficient power to make a difference.

She said: "The Government is certainly unhappy about the way the planning system works in relation to large infrastructure projects, but so are various other groups.

"Because these inquiries on nuclear power stations or whatever take so long at the moment, it casts a planning blight for a very long time over local areas. That is not to the advantage of local people either."

She advised: "The devil is going to be in the detail, but this could be a helpful development, not only for the national interest in getting large infrastructure projects decided, but also for local people in making sure that the opportunity to have their say when the facility is planned in their particular area."

Dr Starkey concluded: "[That needs to be] effective as long as it needs to be for them to make their point, but that it is not endlessly dragged out giving uncertainty for a whole local area."

Kelly insists white paper will end 'baffling' planning system

Mon, 21 May 07 | DeHavilland Report - Broadcast

Summary

Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly has insisted a new planning white paper to be published today will simplify the planning process for major infrastructure projects, and denied that it would remove the ability of the public to protest against developments in their area.

Ms Kelly spoke to BBC Radio 4's 'Today' programme as environmentalists and pressure groups complained that the new system could narrow their means of commenting on planned projects.

She said: "They are broad and far reaching reforms. It's 60 years since the Attlee government introduced the Town and Country Planning Act which at the time was incredibly important in creating the thriving towns and communities that we have today.

"But I think since then we face challenges that the Attlee government could never have foreseen; the need to cut carbon emissions, to support the building of more homes, to tackle congestion, to meet the needs of energy and energy security."

Ms Kelly said the Barker and Eddington reports on the planning system had said its "complexity" was a failing.

"They highlighted that it was incredibly baffling, not just for the professional applicants who were trying to put forward proposals, but also for the local people who have had to struggle with those applications," Ms Kelly argued.

She used Terminal 5 at Heathrow Airport as an example: "That took seven years to go through the planning application process. It had to be considered under 37 different applications, seven different pieces of legislation.

"Now local people find that an incredibly difficult system to manage. In fact I would argue it only favours the well resourced and people who can afford to pay professional lawyers' fees."

In contrast, she claimed: "The system that we want to set up is one that is much simpler to understand and where the public is locked in at every stage of the consultation process.

"So for example we would have a national debate about the need for a particular infrastructure project, or a particular sector of the economy. Local people would be involved in that debate, as would the environmental groups, as would other sectors of society.

"Then the developer would put forward their proposals, again having consulted with local people. And there would be a third possibility, a third potential opportunity for people to have their say, at the stage when it needs the local inquiry stage."

It is believed that the new proposals will suggest ministers outline the infrastructure developments needed, with an independent planning inquiry deciding the location of such projects. A local inquiry would then look at the details of such projects.

Politics Show - Darling voices support for nuclear power

Sun, 20 May 07 | DeHavilland Report - Broadcast

Summary

Alistair Darling, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, has today voiced his support for nuclear energy, insisting it should form part of Britain's future energy generation mix.

His comments, on BBC One's 'Politics Show', come after it was reported that Gordon Brown will support the building of new nuclear power stations when he becomes prime minister.

"I think it's important that we concentrate on the two big challenges we face," said Mr Darling. "One is climate change, where the science and the knowledge of the science has advanced very rapidly in the last few years.

"The other is security of supply. For the last 30 years we've depended on North Sea oil and gas. In the future we could be 80% dependent on imports.

"Now I firmly believe that we need to have a mix of energy generation. I believe that nuclear ought to be part of the mix. I think that over the last few years many people have changed their mind on this.

"I certainly started off as a sceptic as far as nuclear was concerned, but I think that if we don't keep that open as an option then we're not going to be able to reach our targets to reduce the amount of carbon going in to the atmosphere and we run a grave risk of not having our electricity when we need it."

He explained: "At the moment about 20% of the electricity that we get comes from nuclear. That will steadily decline because the power stations will become older, they'll go out of commission. If we don't replace them, the chances are they'll be replaced by gas or coal with all the carbon."

And he added: "To say 'no we're not having nuclear under any circumstances' does mean you are very heavily dependent on renewables, which of course do have their own difficulties.

"The trouble with renewables is they're very good in providing you with low carbon electricity generation, but of course on very hot days or very cold days, if the wind doesn't blow, then you would have a big problem, and that's where nuclear has provided a base load of electricity for many years now.

"So we've got to strike a sensible balance and I think including nuclear as an option would do that," Mr Darling concluded.

Stakeholder Responses and Comments

Freight Transport Association - Planning White Paper: Good news for transport

Mon, 21 May 07 | Campaign Organisation Press Release

Summary

The Freight Transport Association has welcomed proposals for an Independent Planning Commission which will result in a vastly improved process for the progress of major infrastructure projects including trunk roads and motorways, rail freight interchanges, access to ports and national distribution centres.

FTA Chief Executive ,Richard Turner, said: 'As the user and the paymaster, industry should define the service outcomes it requires - journey time reliability, freight capacity, performance and safety levels etc - and then expect the government to deliver appropriate facilities to meet those needs. That is not presently the case. However, the new White Paper lays out that highly attractive prospect.'

CPRE concerned over planning system changes

Mon, 21 May 07 | DeHavilland Report - Broadcast

Summary

The policy director of the Campaign to Protect Rural England has expressed concern over future changes to the planning permission system for major infrastructure projects.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's 'Today' programme, Neil Sinden said he feared the natural environment would be harmed by the provisions in a white paper to be published by the Government today.

“In all the discussions we have been having with ministers and officials over recent months we are not as reassured as we would like to be about those safeguards.

“We are all in favour of an efficient system which delivers good decisions within a reasonable space of time but I have to say that a lot of the so-called evidence that the business sector has brought to this debate is pretty skimpy.”

Mr Sinden argued that streamlining and speeding up the planning permission system for such projects as airport expansion and motorway widening would disenfranchise local people.

“There are going to be great debates around these national policy statements that are meant to be setting the framework for these decisions on big infrastructure. Will they actually examine in detail the need for such big infrastructure in an era of climate change?

“The critical point is that the inquiries into these proposals need to take time,” he added.

“There is a wide range of very complex issues and [Heathrow Airport's Terminal 5] is the exception that proves the rule. There are very few big infrastructure inquiries that have lasted more than two years.”

Mr Sinden said that the planning process has been reformed only two years ago and called for the changes to be given more time to bed in.

“We are very concerned about a general centralisation of the planning process. We think the

independent planning commission is another example of this centralisation.

"Unfortunately we believe it will not only exclude local communities from having a voice in the big decisions over development in their areas but also will make it very difficult for environmental information to be taken into account in those decisions."

Today - National Grid welcomes new planning proposals

Mon, 21 May 07 | DeHavilland Report - Broadcast

Summary

The chief executive of the National Grid has welcomed new proposals being put forward by the Government to speed up the process of building new national infrastructure projects such as new airport runways, power stations and wind farms.

Steve Holliday's comments, on BBC Radio 4's 'Today' programme, precede the publication of a planning white paper which is expected to recommend the creation of an independent planning commission that would take decisions on such projects, removing them from local authority control.

Mr Holliday praised the new proposals insisting that the existing planning system is "extraordinarily complex, slow, and very uncertain", citing examples of how it has delayed major investment in the energy sector.

"There is a wind farm off the Kent and Essex coast which has planning authority," he said. "It's 1,000 megawatts and it would be one of the largest offshore farms in the world, but the planning onshore is a different jurisdiction and we're waiting for authority to actually construct a substation to tie that wind farm in.

"The other example is in Wales where two LNG import terminals, very important that will bring in about 20% of the UK's gas eventually, have been built and we're building a pipeline. The pipeline itself then has the consent from the DTI but individual above ground installations require a local authority, so that is being delayed at the moment.

"What we need is a holistic approach," he stressed. "What we don't need to do is to circumvent local objections, local appeals, but make the process much more holistic and much more streamlined."

Mr Holliday admitted there is concern that by removing planning decisions from local authority control local people could lose their voice and their ability to object to new projects which could dramatically impact on their lives.

Therefore, he said: "What we need to do is to have a process where people have their say, first of all very early on in the project and then are kept in tune with it as it develops all the way through.

"As I understand it that's exactly what the new proposals are going to do. They are not intended in any shape or form to stop people having their say," he insisted.

Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly will unveil the planning white paper in the House of Commons later today.

Wake Up To Money - FoE raises concerns over new planning proposals

Mon, 21 May 07 | DeHavilland Report - Broadcast

Summary

New proposals being put forward by the Government to streamline the planning applications process will take away from local people their right to have a say on large infrastructure projects in their area, a campaigner at Friends of the Earth has warned.

Asad Rehman was speaking on BBC Radio Five Live's 'Wake Up To Money' ahead of the publication of a new planning white paper that is designed to speed up the process of building national infrastructure projects such as new airport runways, power stations and wind farms.

It is expected to recommend the creation of an independent planning commission that would take decisions on such projects, removing them from local authority control.

But Mr Rehman insisted that this would have a negative impact on the relationship between the Government and local communities, since local people would lose their right to have a say on such matters.

"Fundamentally the key issue is about involving communities in the decisions that affect them," he said. "If you don't involve communities in decisions that affect them all we are doing is creating a recipe for more conflict and debate.

"Heathrow Airport for example took so long because overwhelmingly the local people in the area, the local authorities, opposed it and still opposed it. So it's not like these decisions are happening with the consent of local people.

"That is what the overwhelming majority of not only environmental organisations but organisations that represents local people are all concerned about and will be launching a big campaign to actually say the Government must rethink these proposals."

He went on: "I think what will happen is that within 18 months to two years' time when people from all around this country go to their local authorities to try and have their voices heard and find out that they can't have their voices heard we'll be back to the bad old days of the 1980s and the road protests.

"It is important that we actually have partnership between government and local communities and that means local people have to have a voice in decisions that affect them," finished Mr Rehman.

Communities Secretary Ruth Kelly will unveil the planning white paper in the House of Commons later today.

Today - CBI argues need for reform in planning system

Mon, 21 May 07 | DeHavilland Report - Broadcast

Summary

The director general of the CBI has made the case for reform in the planning permission system.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's 'Today' programme, Richard Lambert said that the Government was due to publish a white paper on the planning system this afternoon.

He cited the building of a fifth terminal at Heathrow as an example of changes that may take place in the planning system.

"The idea that is going to be presented this afternoon is, I think, will be that it will be up to the Government to say in that case do we need more airport capacity.

"That would be the result of democratic debate and also the possibility of local objection."

He said such changes would result in a quicker decision on the building of such projects.

Mr Lambert insisted that the Government's plan to set up a new and independent planning commission to make decisions on major infrastructure projects would allow local people to have their voices heard.

"In the white paper it is going to propose that at every point down the way there will be scope for local consultation.

"If the local costs outweigh the national benefit then the new planning commission which is going to be set up will have the right to turn it down."

Mr Lambert said it was important for the planning system to be reformed quickly.

"Why this matters is that we have got the energy white paper coming out this week. A third of our electricity generating capacity has to be replaced. If we don't get on with it the lights will start to go out in 15 years time."

Wake Up To Money - BPF welcomes proposed relaxation of planning laws

Mon, 21 May 07 | DeHavilland Report - Broadcast

Summary

The chief executive of the British Property Federation has welcomed new proposals being put forward by the Government to speed up the process of building new national infrastructure projects such as new airport runways, power stations and wind farms.

Liz Peace's comments, on BBC Radio Five Live's 'Wake Up To Money', precede the publication of a planning white paper which is expected to recommend the creation of an independent planning commission that would take decisions on such projects, removing them from local authority control.

Ms Peace said that planning has become increasingly complex over the last ten to 20 years, partly because of legislation, partly because of changes in behaviour and partly because of the sheer volume of planning activity.

Any changes to the planning system that would streamline decision making and speed up the process should therefore be welcomed, she said.

"The whole thing has just become so long and drawn out to the extent that if you want to do anything, even if politically it's accepted as necessary for the country, it takes years and years and years to get it through," she stressed.

"Terminal five [at Heathrow Airport] is the classic example. Everybody agreed we needed a new terminal, it had to be there, and yet it still took something like five years to actually have the planning inquiry.

"There was much pre-planning and it has taken another few years to build after that, so the whole

thing we are talking about ten, 12, 15 years to get something done."

Put to her that terminal five took so long to win approval because there was such large public opposition to the project, Ms Peace maintained: "Unfortunately a lot of large developments are unpopular.

"I mean we have a dilemma here," she explained. "We demand a certain lifestyle, we demand to be able to fly, we want electricity, we want fast transport.

"It is the job of the Government to find a way of reconciling these irreconcilable differences. Let's do it efficiently," she finished.

News at Noon - BWEA warns of 'huge backlog' in wind farm planning applications

Mon, 21 May 07 | DeHavilland Report - Broadcast

Summary

Around 6% of our potential energy supply is currently sitting on local planning authorities' desks, Chris Tomlinson of the British Wind Energy Association has claimed.

Speaking on Channel 4's 'News at Noon', he voiced concerns about backlogs in wind farm applications ahead of a new planning white paper set to be outlined by the Government today that hopes to help improve planning rules for big infrastructure projects.

New measures being proposed will allow wind farm and nuclear power station developments to be approved much more quickly.

At the moment, Mr Tomlinson warned: "There's a huge backlog; there are currently 174 planning applications at local authority level awaiting determination. Many have been there three, four, five years."

"We have eight gigawatts, let me translate, that's 6% of our electricity supplies, sitting on local planning authorities' desks awaiting determination.

"We simply have to make decisions on those right now if we're going to meet the Government's 2010 target," he stated.

The Government hopes to produce 10% of the UK's electricity from renewable sources by 2010.