

PLANNING REFORM WORKING PAPER: PLANNING COMMITTEES

COMMENTS ON WORKING PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

1. BusinessLDN is a business membership organisation with the mission to make London the best city in the world to do business, working with and for the whole UK. BusinessLDN works with the support of the capital's major businesses in key sectors such as housing, commercial property, finance, transport, infrastructure, professional services, ICT, and education. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's working paper on modernising planning committees.

Do you think this package of reforms would help to improve decision making by planning committees?

2. Yes, the reforms outlined in the working paper lay a strong foundation for improving decision-making by planning committees. Proposals such as introducing mandatory training will help to provide greater consistency and a more informed approach to planning decisions.
3. The proposed delegation system would bring greater clarity and consistency to the planning process. In making the proposed changes, the Government should consider any unintended consequences such as the potential for a rise in Judicial Reviews which would clearly slow down rather than improve the efficiency of the planning system.
4. Improving the decision-making process at Planning Committees must be accompanied by clear communication with local communities and transparent rules and process regarding delegated planning decisions. The right balance must be struck between preserving democratic oversight and establishing a more efficient delegation system that enables streamlined decision-making.

Do you have views on which of the options we have set out in regards to national schemes of delegation would be most effective? Are there any aspects which could be improved?

5. We support the hybrid approach outlined in the paper. This would provide a robust framework, streamlining the process for policy compliant schemes while ensuring applications requiring more detailed consideration have a clear path to committee.
6. As suggested in the paper, the hybrid system should introduce thresholds for residential and commercial applications to go to committee. These thresholds should align with The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015's definition of major development: projects involving 10 or more dwellings or at least 1,000 square meters of floorspace for non-residential developments.

Are there advantages in giving further consideration to a model based on objections?

7. A model based on objections should be avoided as it can be exploited by vocal minorities and become mired in local politics, rather than focusing on objective planning decisions for the public good. Furthermore, a model based on objections risks undermining the plan-led system, which has already undergone democratic scrutiny and public engagement.

Do you agree that targeted planning committees for strategic development could facilitate better decision making?

8. Dedicated planning committees for strategic development could support a long-term vision for key areas and improve decision-making, especially if committee members are specially trained to consider large applications. However, in London, the Mayor already has call-in powers for schemes of strategic importance, raising questions about the need for such committees in the capital.
9. While strategic planning committees may be less relevant for London, the effectiveness of the Mayor's call-in powers underscores the value of strategic decision-making. Ensuring that planning decisions align with long-term strategic visions for key areas is essential for better outcomes.

Do you think the approach to mandatory training is the right one?

10. The working paper correctly highlights the importance of mandatory training for all members of planning committees. It is crucial that elected members involved in planning decisions are well-versed in the complexities of planning to ensure they can make informed decisions. Ensuring planning committee members are properly trained is one of the most effective ways to improve the quality of decision-making at a local level.
11. The proposed training topics, including planning legislation, development plans, national policy, the application process, and enforcement form a solid foundation for sound decision-making. The training should include two additional topics. Firstly, design, helping councillors to understand the principles of good urban and architectural design and secondly, development economics, providing councillors with a basic understanding of a development appraisal, how development is funded and the risks involved.
12. Offering online training would enhance accessibility, allowing a broader range of individuals to participate, regardless of time constraints. Additionally, exploring online or

hybrid planning committee meetings could further increase accessibility and encourage greater representation, ensuring that these committees reflect the diverse communities they serve.