

27 September 2020

Dear NDF member,

You may have heard in the news about the Government's proposals for almost complete replacement of the Town and Country Planning system that has existed since 1947. The proposals have received criticism from many professional bodies in this field. A key feature of the proposals is a reduction in the scope for local people to object to new developments. **The NDF will be responding to this consultation and you may also wish to respond direct yourself.**

To help you understand the proposals and how they might affect Camden, the West Hampstead NDF, in conjunction with WHAT, are holding a joint **Zoom meeting on Tuesday 13th October at 7.30pm**, at which a senior Planner from Camden Council will speak and take questions. Further details of this online-only event will be supplied nearer the date.

We are indebted to John Saynor, the chair of WHAT, for the following summary of the main features of the two consultations.

The proposals are contained in two White Papers: "**Changes to the Current Planning System**" and "**Planning for the Future**" and are the subject of two separate consultations. The closing date for responses to the first consultation is **1st October 2020** and the closing date for the second is **29 October 2020**. The documents can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>

(you can download the "web accessible version" for ease of reading on your computer)

The motivation for the changes is a desire on the part of the government to get more homes built, to address what is generally agreed to be a shortage of housing in England. This is a laudable aim, but there are questions as to whether this is the right way to go about it, and whether the changes will deliver the quantities and types of housing and housing tenure that are most needed. In the White Papers, there is an emphasis on owned rather than rented housing. Moreover, throughout the proposals, it appears that the scope for local people to object to developments – whether large or small – is being curtailed.

The overall scheme in the "**Planning for the Future**" White Paper is that every bit of land in the country would be zoned into one of three categories – "Growth", "Protected" and "Renewal". Growth zones are sites for major

expansion of housing and other development. Protected zones include Conservation Areas in towns and villages, and countryside protected by measures such as the Green Belt. All other land would be in Renewal zones, where controls on development are loosened, thanks to a new statutory “presumption in favour of development”. In addition, the government has set greatly increased targets for housebuilding that local councils must meet.

It is likely that the interchange area round our stations on West End Lane would be classed as a Growth Zone, as it was until recently in the London Plan. Some parts of the area covered by our Neighbourhood Plan fall within the West End Green Conservation Area, and to a lesser extent the Swiss Cottage Conservation Area.

At present, all developments require Planning Permission from the Council, and residents, Councillors and Council planning officers are able to object to proposals or get them modified. In the proposed new system, it seems that, except in the “Protected” zones, individual applications for planning permission will be abolished. As much as 50% of Camden is in some kind of Conservation Area, which will almost certainly be in a “Protected” zone. The risk is that, in neighbouring areas, unfettered development may result, and that local people may not be consulted and may not be able formally to object. There is also a threat of relaxing development controls on the large parts of the English countryside that will not be in Protected zones.

The zones will be defined in a new Local Plan drawn up by every Council. The proposal is that local people will have 6 weeks to object to and contribute to the zoning proposals, but that will be it for another 5 years. Once the Plan is agreed, permission for some developments may be automatically granted within Growth and Renewal zones. The proposals also make it harder for local councils to object to developments on the grounds that extra infrastructure – such as transport or medical facilities - would be needed. The scope for specifying sustainable transport solutions, and sustainability generally, would be diminished. The future of Neighbourhood Plans – such as that which we as the West Hampstead Neighbourhood Development Forum have successfully drawn up and had adopted – is not dealt with in any detail in the White Paper, except for their role in drawing up a design code.

The proposals in the consultation that ends on 1st October include the concept of “First Homes” – whereby a developer would sell a proportion of new homes at a discount to first time buyers, with the discount funded by profit from the sale of full price homes. This would replace some or all of the subsidy that developers can currently be made to pay towards affordable rented homes. This is important, as an important aspect of the

housing shortage is that many can't afford to buy somewhere at any price and just need somewhere to rent. In London, even at a discount, the First Homes idea would not help the vast number of people who just need somewhere to rent, and cannot afford to buy at London prices, whether discounted or not.

There are positives in the proposals. The planning system is complicated and paper-heavy, and some reform is needed. The proposals support use of brownfield land and densification of suburbia, in preference to greenfield sites.

We do hope that as many of our members as possible will be able to "attend" the online meeting. Some of us have already seen the Camden presentation and it is very clear and helpful.

Whether or not you can attend the meeting, we would urge you to respond to the consultations, and in particular to the consultation on the "**Planning for the Future**" White Paper – and to make positive suggestions as to how the proposals could be improved.

Best wishes,

Nick and Keith

**Nick Jackson and Keith Moffitt**

Co-Chairs

**Fortune Green and West Hampstead Neighbourhood Development Forum**