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WELCOME
TO OUR
VILLAGE
PLEASE BUILD
CAREFULLY

COMMENT

The Coalition has pulled off the remarkable trick of making land use planning interesting. As someone who worked in a local authority planning department early in my career I know the process can be deeply dull. The battle over planning reform has demonstrated that the outcomes are not. This edition tackles the purpose of planning, which is inextricably linked to the big question of what role the state should have in shaping our environment, and may explain why some ministers have chosen to raise the stakes so rapidly in this dispute.

When Mr Pickles tells visitors to his office that he has a loaded gun ready to shoot anyone who proposes a replacement for defunct regional spatial strategies, he's reflecting his belief that the state should never get involved in the sort of planning that involves drawing lines on maps, as well as his unique negotiating style. Similarly, the chancellor has signalled that the planning proposals are at the heart of his political mission to generate growth by releasing business from regulation. But it's not clear that this project will work at either a policy or political level. It's not just conservationists and greens who want the state to use planning to balance different interests. It matters to business too. Many loathe local planning and will sympathise with government, but they should be careful what they wish for. As the CBI has pointed out repeatedly business needs certainty that vital infrastructure can be delivered in a timely and efficient manner. That's hard to do without the strategic mapping that these reforms have scrapped, and impossible without public consent, which is being undermined by this dispute.

If government chooses to make short-term economic growth the primary objective of the planning system we will definitely get poorer environmental outcomes, but we could lower the UK's economic productivity as well. We may get more retail parks and freight depots but other businesses will suffer increased congestion, and more uncertainty about the energy and transport infrastructure they need to grow. This is a dispute in which all sides could lose. The government would be wise to go back to first principles if it wants to find a solution that works for the economy and the environment.



Matthew Spencer, director

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF GREEN ALLIANCE

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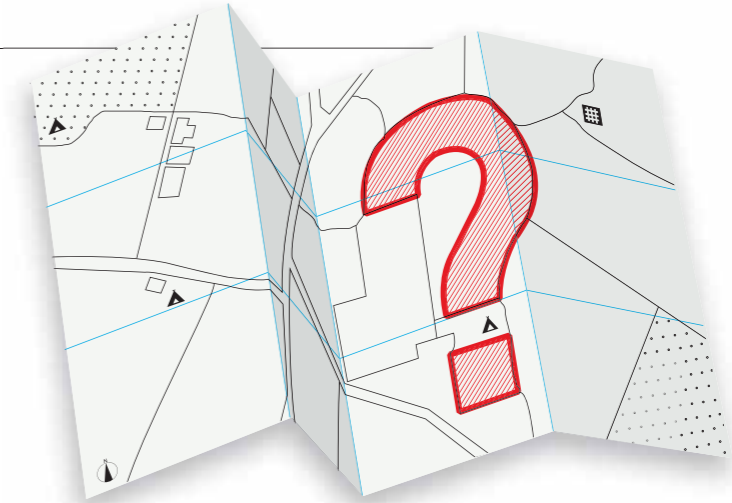
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THE PURPOSE OF PLANNING

Deregulating planning is flavour of the month, but **Hugh Ellis** says it shouldn't just be about delivering economic efficiency



The planning movement has, over the past 100 years, been one of the most influential mechanisms for delivering sustainable development and social justice.

It began as a visionary and progressive force, a movement which blended utopian garden cities with environmental protection and a radical idea about redistributing resources for ordinary people. It was expressed as much in art and poetry as in technicalities but it had a pragmatic

“we are now alone amongst advanced European nations in having no national or regional spatial plan for our development”

“heart. It knew the importance of getting the right investment models and it also knew how important a rational landscape for growth was to private sector investors.

The delivery of this vision in the post-war period combined provision of unprecedented housing for working people along with the greatest environmental protection achievements in public

policy, from national parks to listed buildings.

But its legal and bureaucratic development has meant that a once dynamic and radical force for change has become, to many, a political millstone, appearing unresponsive and remote from communities and geared to development control rather than creating quality places.

Current reforms are based on the assumption that the planning system is a barrier to a competitive economy when, in fact, the most productive economies of north west Europe almost all have a planning system, typically more interventionist than our own. We are now alone amongst advanced European nations in having no national or regional spatial plan for our development. Instead, there is a growing commentary that we should support a more free market approach.

However, on a national scale we need a planning framework which allows us to think about how climate or demographic change will play out over the long term. The Netherlands can plan for fifty years ahead but we as a nation have no sense of where our population will need to live or how we will deal with food security or biodiversity change.

Whilst there were many democratic questions over the now revoked regional strategies, they did allow us to gather the vital data and expertise necessary to deal with key issues from housing to transport. In a small island we need a way of negotiating change, such as an ageing population, not only to ensure the

outcomes are both fair and sustainable, but also for very pragmatic reasons, such as pressures on water supply in the south east from continued growth.

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) wants to see an effective planning system which is responsive to people's needs and aspirations and promotes sustainable development. No doubt there is much we could do better. The challenge is that on demographic and climate change we have little time to waste and our policy response must be based on clear evidence.

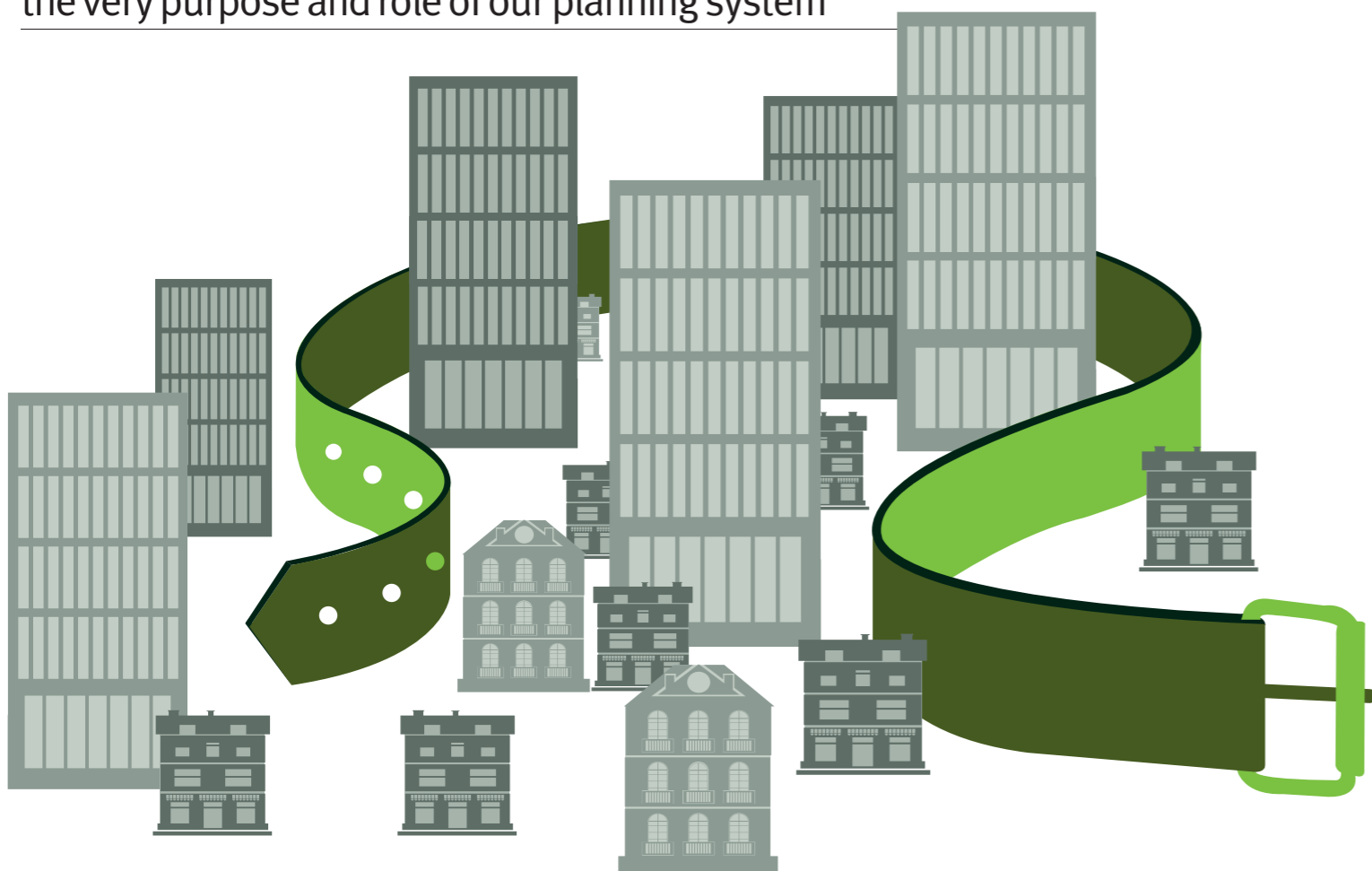
We must also be careful not just to make the case for planning based on pragmatism. The purpose of planning should be nothing less than to reconstruct the fabric of our nation in ways which meet the enormous challenges of the future but which also deliver hope to communities of a fairer, more responsible society.



Hugh Ellis is chief planner at the TCPA
www.tcpa.org.uk

PROBLEM OR SOLUTION?

What the government proposes on planning simply won't do, says **Fiona Reynolds**. We must reconsider the very purpose and role of our planning system



The government's consultation on the national planning policy framework (NPPF) has been a catalyst for everyone who cares about planning. At the National Trust we have a duty of care towards landscapes and environments of all kinds, not just the ones that we directly own and manage. That's why, when the consultation was launched on 25 July, we

responded instantly with a strong message that the proposals, as drafted, simply won't do.

Our campaign has been inspired by the idea that the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' at the heart of the NPPF is, in reality, a charter for development of any kind. Thousands of people have signed our petition, whether online or while visiting one of our properties over the summer.

We drew an immediate response from government, although it spectacularly missed the point by appearing to think we were campaigning about the specific protections for heritage and nature. These are, of course, important but our argument is a much wider one about the very purpose and role of planning.

What would the National Trust's alternative look like? There are four main elements:

1. A vision for land

The recent natural environment white paper set out a compelling vision: that this generation should seek to leave the environment in a better state than it inherited. The planning system needs to start from a similar strong guiding vision which would set the tone for the national outcomes it is seeking to deliver. This should firmly state the importance of planning in managing land for the benefit of future generations. In turn, this means finding ways to ensure that we build strong resilient communities that can make a living, safeguard their natural resources and enhance their environment.

2. Celebrating spirit of place

Our present planning system aims to arbitrate between different and often competing interests. However, it is not yet clear how communities will be supported and empowered throughout the development of neighbourhood plans. The danger is that developers could have too great an influence over the formation of these plans. It is therefore important that there is a means for communities to take a holistic view of their area.

A statement of significance defines what we value about a place and how we would like it to change in the future. We use such statements as the basis of all decision-making in the National Trust. The planning system should start from this point too. A statement of significance aims to reflect consensus and to define a broad set of outcomes. The existence of such statements would give communities confidence in understanding what they value most about their places, while giving developers clear guidance on what communities want and need.

3. Joining it all up

With the removal of regional spatial strategies it is vital that we find new ways of working to facilitate the delivery of ecosystem services at a landscape scale. This will involve government at all levels working across institutional silos. Not trying to promote biodiversity, for example, as a separate exercise from the wider reform of the planning system.

The National Trust supports the idea of local nature partnerships (LNPs) which the government adopted through the natural environment white paper. LNPs, if they are to be effective, should facilitate the 'duty to co-operate' set out in the localism bill. They would develop the framework within which local authorities and different stakeholders, both private and public, can work together across administrative boundaries to deliver shared environmental and land use objectives.

The areas where we believe co-operation is important to deliver landscape scale objectives and which should form the scope of LNPs are:

- Biodiversity improvement : conservation and enhancement of habitats and species
- Carbon storage: storing and sinking carbon from peat, soils and vegetation
- Engagement with local people: recreation, health and inspiration, discovery
- Flood control
- Landscape beauty, heritage and culture
- Production: food, energy
- Soil: healthy soils, peat
- Space for development: buildings and infrastructure
- Trees: woodland, timber
- Water management: clean water cycling

4. Delivering sustainable development

The current version of the NPPF uses the language of sustainability, but is worrying precisely because it will not deliver truly sustainable development. The NPPF is clearly only a small part of a much wider land use planning process, but it will become a critical document in guiding our approach to planning and in determining specific planning applications. Indeed, it is already a material consideration in the decision-making process. It is critical therefore that the wording is clear on what sustainable development is and that the bar for any presumption in favour of development is at the right level.

The three pillars of economy, society and environment are interconnected, and should always be considered together and with equal weight. The government's clear expectation is that we move to a system where the default answer to development is "yes" where it can be shown to deliver multiple outcomes in relation to economic growth, environmental protection or enhancement and social benefits. Where any one of these is compromised, any plan or development will not be consistent with national planning policy and should therefore be subject to a much closer degree of scrutiny which more fully explores whether the benefits are proportionate to the impacts.

A presumption in favour of development should therefore only be made where a plan or development proposal delivers:

- land use of the right type and in the right places, to allow growth and innovation; identifying co-ordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;
- protection or enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, the prudent use of natural resources and actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change and help in the move to a low carbon economy;
- strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing an increased supply of housing to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a good quality built environment, with accessible local services, that reflects community needs and supports well-being;
- consultation with the communities affected.

These tests should form the basis of any presumption in favour of sustainable development.

Too often, planning is highlighted by government as part of the problem for the economic and social ills of the country, rather than part of the solution. But planning should be a positive force for good. It should provide the framework within which we protect the things that are most important to our quality of life. It should enable people to articulate what matters to them about their local area, and provide the tools to keep that 'spirit of place' alive. Not by blocking all change, but by managing change and growth in ways that are sensitive to local needs and the public benefit.



Dame Fiona Reynolds is director-general of the National Trust and a trustee of Green Alliance.



Simon Roberts looks at how the planning system could embrace change and reinvigorate itself through localism with a low carbon twist

From the ministerial rhetoric and drastic culling of planning policy guidance, you'd have thought that England's rules-based planning system needs to be dismantled because it had single-handedly reduced the country to an economic backwater devoid of development and lacking basic infrastructure. The accompanying pro-growth anti-regulation analysis brings to mind Thomas Edison's comment: "Hell, there are no rules here – we're trying to accomplish something."

Meanwhile, from the protestations of the conservation lobby, you could easily develop the sense that change to the planning system threatens to breach the last line of defence against the destruction of our landscape and built heritage.

Yet we're talking about a planning system which, through its permissions rather than its refusals, has enabled the rapid decline of our high streets and given the green light to thousands of poorly designed, car-oriented, butt-ugly developments. Often against both the better judgement of local planners, constrained by central government edicts, and the wishes of local people.

At the same time the planning system has become almost entirely detached from the people whose places the planning system is designed to shape; public engagement is reduced to confronting proposals rather than shaping local planning policies and holding local policy-makers to account.

The planning system is broken. We need to fix it. We need development, but not the less

fettered development for anything-goes economic growth that the government is seeking to enable. The conservation lobby is right to hold fast against that.

We need development that helps achieve the huge transformation in our energy system and built infrastructure that is central to addressing the challenge of climate change. After all, planning is meant to be about preparing for the future we both need and want. On that basis it has to have a low carbon future at its core. This is where 'low carbon localism' comes in.

So what's the fix? It's the same for planning as for tackling climate change; the public have to be engaged and involved and the costs and benefits of change have to be fairly shared.

Without public engagement in local planning, from planning policy development to development control decisions, we can be confident that the public would, in the end, chew up and spit out both those imposing their policies or developments and those restricting desirable initiatives and undermining meaningful local economic opportunities. This may not be a quick or explicit process, but we may be seeing just such a spitting out in the current overhaul of the planning system.

So, whether it is ministerial diktat imposing or removing requirements on localities; or local planning elites failing to engage their local public effectively; or multinational companies developing renewable energy projects and offering local communities a



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derisory share of the benefits; there's only so long these can survive without the involvement and consent of the public. Distrust and uncertainty in the planning system is slow poison for development of any kind.

The same is true of tackling climate change. It is inconceivable that, without the involvement and consent of 'the people', we could achieve deep cuts in carbon emissions. This is partly because achieving these cuts requires people to change their habits, homes and modes of transport and to accept the upfront costs of change. It is partly because the main remedies, from individual energy saving to large renewable energy projects, need to happen somewhere, so they often need planning permission.

There were early signs that this public engagement fix might be central to the overhaul of the planning system in the emphasis given to localism. This has faded somewhat recently and been given a distinctly centralist cloak. But there remains an enticing prospect of a system which just might reconnect citizens with their elected representatives and local officials, and allow them to see their shared priorities adopted and

enacted in local policies and decision-making. There is the potential for a process that will enable communities to recognise that global challenges like climate change have a meaningful local dimension.

But none of this positive social transformation is inevitable. There are strongly ingrained cultural, political and economic patterns which will counteract any shift promoting localism. More than 30 years of centralisation in England has left local authorities and communities stripped of serious power and autonomy; de-skilled in the art of consensus-based local plan making; essentially disconnected from one another; and largely desensitised to the vital local dimension of global issues.

For some 70 years UK energy policy and markets have favoured large-scale, utility-owned energy generation. This has detached our experience of using energy from its production and the associated environmental and social costs. We have become passive energy consumers instead of active citizens accountable for the impacts of our lifestyles and engaged with local opportunities to curb energy use and exploit local renewable energy resources. The exploitation of those resources, where it does happen, is left to distant corporations, extracting value from local economies and leaving local communities with the impacts but with little or none of the benefits.

Meanwhile, rhetoric about localism and existing approaches to neighbourhood planning tend to ignore this vital wider context. This leads many to take an essentially elitist position, deriding localism as synonymous with parochialism – a nimby's charter – thus exposing their deep distrust of the public to make sensible decisions about the places it lives in.

However, there are new models of practice, based on trust, which can avoid this risk. Through a programme called PlanLoCaL at the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) we have been making low carbon issues the centrepiece of efforts to put localism into practice. This is creating exemplars of how to connect key local priorities, such as health, jobs, heritage, and housing, with global concerns and responsibilities. Resources have been developed to empower communities to share the rewards that come from the ownership and management of low carbon assets.

Rachel Coxoon, who developed and leads the programme for CSE, explains:

"Through PlanLoCaL we have found if you ask a community 'What are you going to do about climate change?' they tend to throw it back and ask what government is doing. But if you pose a more inclusive question like 'How are we going to make our contribution to tackling climate change?' it focuses people on playing their part and they start exploring options. Most

encouragingly, it also stimulates communities to think about how they can reap some of the economic benefits of delivering a low carbon future."

The programme has included a fledgling example of neighbourhood planning in the *Low Carbon Bath* project. CSE worked with the Bath Preservation Trust using an extensive process of



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public engagement to bring together heritage and green interests. The resulting guidance, *Warmer Bath*, demonstrates the significant common ground that existed between interest groups with apparently conflicting agendas, and has resulted in the development of a supplementary planning document on sustainable retrofit of heritage buildings. This is low carbon localism in action.

Through PlanLoCaL, we have found that communities can take on their responsibility for tackling climate change and think constructively about how they can use low carbon development to support other local priorities. They can even start seeing large scale renewables as something desirable, almost enviable, as locally owned income generating assets. But we also know that this thinking is very unlikely to emerge unsupported. It requires structured and trusted advice, training and confidence building initiatives to re-engineer local politics, re-engineer the local planning process and re-establish a local sense of responsibility to use new powers to build a sustainable future. As the Chinese proverb concludes; "if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people."



Simon Roberts OBE is chief executive of the Centre for Sustainable Energy, www.cse.org.uk
For more information about PlanLoCaL visit www.planlocal.org.uk

GREEN AND PLEASANT DEVELOPMENT

The debate shouldn't be about whether development is good or bad, says **Alex Morton**, but about a better planning system for better development

Growth, planning and the environment are not mutually exclusive. The right development in the right place can improve lives and communities immeasurably. The most depressing thing about recent debates is that they seem to pit a development free for all against total opposition to it. There is little recognition of the middle ground and the vital role that communities can play in securing beneficial development. We share the disappointment that environmental groups have with the government's intention to make "yes" the default answer to development, albeit for different reasons. Here, we make the case for development and call for the more nuanced debate that something as significant as re-imagining the planning system requires.

Development can enhance not detract from an area. Imagine if, in 1700, the green belt policy was implemented in London. The attractive suburbs of Hampstead, Fulham and Richmond wouldn't exist. Instead, a tiny grey overcrowded speck would be London; squashed, crammed, constrained, and ugly. Development is not all bad, it depends what you build and what it replaces. Research shows how suburban gardens are actually flourishing with animal life, far more than many pesticide and fertiliser drenched fields. We should stop pretending that because land isn't built on, it is somehow 'natural'.

What we need is to rebalance the planning system so we start building better quality developments. Policy Exchange has always been in favour of allowing local people to have the final say on development through referendums and neighbourhood plans. The fact that development hasn't been allowed for so long means that land values are often over £1 million per hectare, some of which should be recycled to local people and to local amenities, not councils. Developers should have to win a local referendum to get planning permission. This would force them to become better at using local materials, using green space and landscaping. Similarly, while parts of the green belt are desirable, other parts are not and could be enhanced. If we kept 90 per cent of the green belt but more of this was open to the public, and consisted of meadows, parks and wildlife

reserves, this would be an improvement. With just ten per cent of England built up, the idea that building on the green belt means concreting over the countryside is nonsense.

We need to turn planning permission on its head by putting local people at the heart of the planning system. They could drive changes to plans in relation to green spaces, local materials and changing density. Architects, councils and others could all compete to win approval for planning permission, offering competing visions. The goal would no longer be fighting development but ensuring its quality. There would be the option of some financial incentives to those located near to development, but this is

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only a small part of the overall vision. No one would allow shoddy development near them, but they are likely to support high quality design if it comes with additional cash for those living in an area.

Before throwing up their hands in horror, those who oppose development should consider who really suffers from the current system. First, everyone who pays tax loses out. The housing benefit bill has spiralled out of control in recent years. It is predicted to reach £22.5 billion by 2014-5; more than we will pay for farming, rural life, justice, the prison system, the police and law and order, culture, sports, energy policy, and climate change combined. There are 1.75 million households waiting for a council home, while the government is now having to support people on incomes of up to £60,000 to afford housing in the south.

While this partly reflects ridiculous lending, we have been close to the bottom in terms of new homes built per person in the EU for decades. Nearly half of home-owners have homes with two or more 'spare' bedrooms, often former family homes now largely empty. No one who is young wants to see their parents forced out of their homes, but young people need homes to move into and are increasingly frustrated by the opposition to new development.

Family life in this country is being crippled. The average age of an unassisted first time buyer is now the late 30s. The last decades saw the first reversal in home ownership for 80 years. This isn't just buying a family home, for many renting one is also becoming impossible. Rents rose 64 per cent between 1997-98 and 2007-8 and are now rising sharply again.

In making "yes" the default answer to development, the government repeats the failure of the 1980s, when developers were allowed to build where they wanted to, but many just built up land banks and cherry-picked the most expensive and desirable sites. And where developers do decide to build, a default "yes" will allow them to push through poorly thought out development proposals that may not fit the local context. It won't lead to that much getting built and it won't be at the quality we need. So we join groups like the National Trust in opposing such an approach and take issue with suggestions from groups like Reform that all development is good.

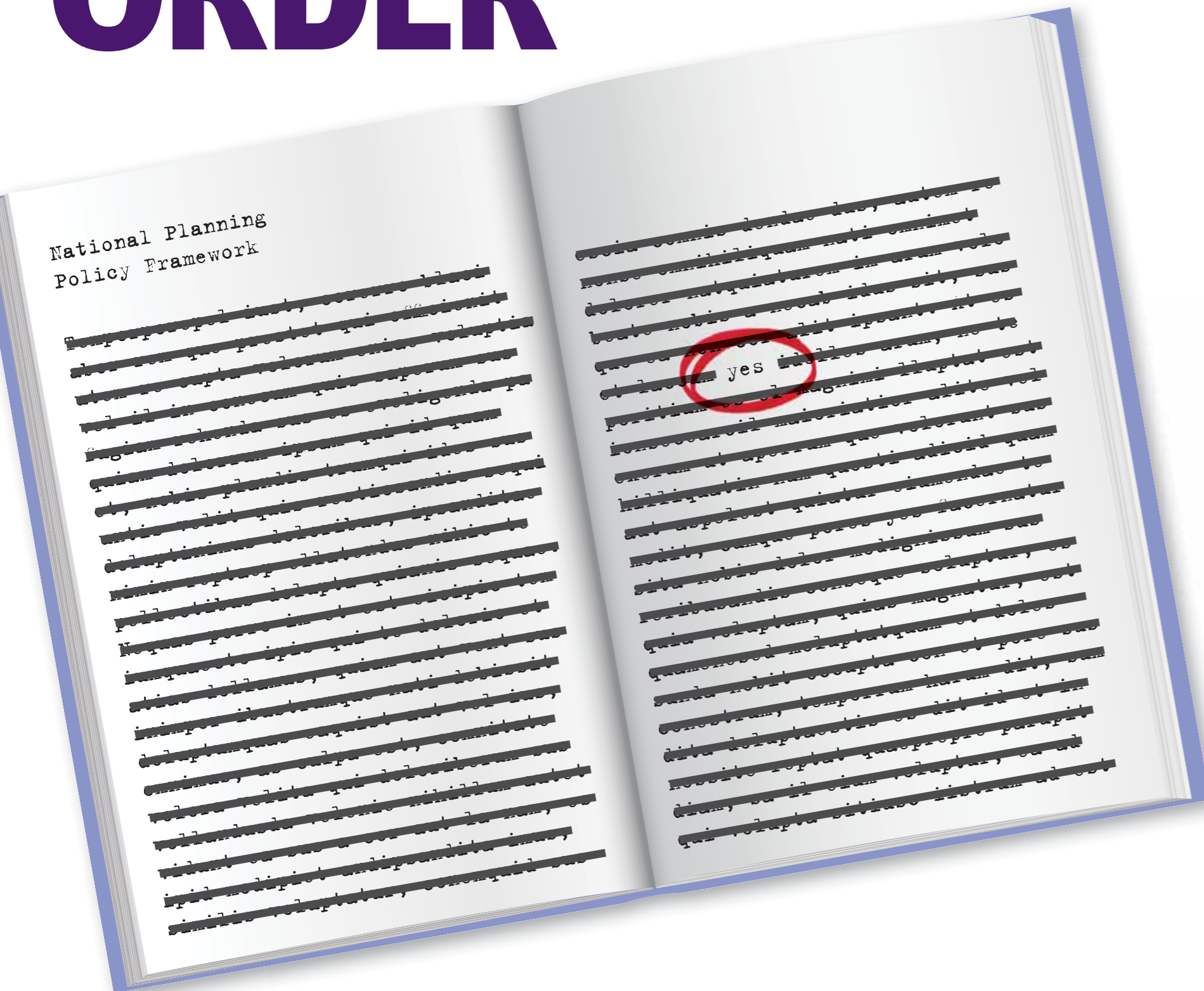
We support Greg Clark in his attempt to reform the planning system, but are disappointed with what has come out of government so far. Development should be used as a tool to drive improvement in our lives. More desirable homes in nice areas, more parks and more wildlife reserves; none of these are bad things.

But to get there we need constructive debate from both sides, something that has been lacking from a government that thinks ignoring local people makes it pro-growth, and from groups like the National Trust who are pursuing their campaign, at the cost of letting down the millions desperate for a home of their own. It is worth considering this issue from a personal perspective and that of your extended family, and not just give in to the warm glow of opposition. We need to create a system where we both enhance our natural environment and build the homes that we need.



Alex Morton is senior research fellow for housing and planning at Policy Exchange which focuses on free market and localist solutions to public policy questions. www.policyexchange.org.uk

THE NEW ORDER



Trudi Elliott urges more debate about how the planning reforms will work in practice and wonders about their influence on the rest of the UK

On the face of it, the government's proposals for reform of the planning system in England seem to be based on sound objectives, but will they really work in practice, and what are the implications for the rest of the UK?

English reforms are focused on the localism bill and the draft national planning policy framework (NPPF). Their main objectives seem to be to remove so-called barriers to development to enable, particularly, housing and economic growth, while at the same time making planning more accountable to local communities, and protecting the environment in a more coherent manner. These are all laudable objectives, though not necessarily always mutually supportive.

One rallying cry has been the intention to change the default response to planning applications from "no" to "yes", although government statistics show that the response to 80-90 per cent of applications is already "yes", with countless schemes taking place under permitted development.

The proposed "presumption in favour of sustainable development" is key to addressing this perceived "yes/no" issue. Setting aside the semantics of defining sustainable development, it is clear that national policy and standards should define broad criteria for sustainable development. Evidence-based local plans should, in turn, define how much development, of what kind and in which locations would be sustainable for their area. In which case, the new presumption in favour of sustainable development will largely be the same as the old "presumption in favour of the development plan". The only grey area is how decisions will be made in the absence of an up to date local plan. As a result, the definition of an 'up to date plan' may be more important than any other single aspect of these reforms. Perhaps there should be a "presumption in favour of conformity of local plans", ie the default position being that local plans are found to be in conformity with the NPPF.

The bill also introduces a system for statutory planning at the neighbourhood level, which is complex and cumbersome. This is astonishing given the drive to reduce bureaucracy in government. It seems to be tailored to the needs of a handful of cases where a community might want to pursue a policy or proposal that does not have the support of their district council. The NPPF makes clear that neighbourhood plans can only be used to deliver or exceed district level proposals. Such plans will deliver nothing that cannot be achieved through existing mechanisms, including non-statutory community-led planning.

The narrative of the reforms has raised well documented concern about environmental protection. This is characterised by the NPPF's focus on promoting economic growth above other factors, the central revocation of locally led environmental policies in regional strategies, the conflation of sustainable development with sustainable economic growth, the lack of geography in the NPPF, and the headline default response being "yes".

There is a need for those engaged in planning to seize on ministers' protestations at face value. We need to ensure that the government's desire to



what we need is a reasoned debate about how we effectively balance and deliver our environmental, economic and social aspirations



be the greenest ever and to transfer power meaningfully to communities is given the teeth to bite through these reforms. What we need is a reasoned debate about how we effectively balance and deliver our environmental, economic and social aspirations. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is now promoting broader public debate through its Planning Myths campaign.

Planning reforms are also affecting Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, within the context of their devolved administrations. Many in England look positively to the other nations' systems as having experience to learn from, particularly in national spatial planning, and yet, rather than learning from their successes, around the edges of the Treasury's *The plan for growth* lurks the threat of imposing elements of the new English order.



Trudi Elliott is chief executive of the Royal Town Planning Institute www.rtpi.org.uk
The Planning Myths campaign was launched on 6 September, 2011.

The day before the 2011 Budget, communities secretary Eric Pickles joined the band of ministers busy re-configuring their departments to deliver growth instead of their day job: “The planning system should act as a driver for growth. But if I am being completely frank with you, it’s the drag anchor to growth.”

Many might sympathise with Pickles. The BBC’s eccentric but gripping documentary ‘Wind farm wars’ gave viewers an embedded reporter’s view of the day-to-day skirmishes being fought between the wind industry and local people. The theatre of conflict is the planning inquiry.

On a smaller scale, as chronicled previously in the *The economical environmentalist* (Earthscan, 2009), efforts to install external insulation in my own home attracted scolding emails from the council; as though a few inches of insulation would somehow topple western civilisation.

It was never intended to be this way. The UK’s first housing and planning act of 1909 was distinctly utilitarian in its intentions, seeking simply to ensure that suburbs had proper sanitary conditions, amenity and convenience in connection. This prosaicness was a natural codification of the Victorian municipalities role in provision of water, electric and gas infrastructure.

In *Repowering communities*, co-authored with Stephen Tindale, we look at pioneering policies and programmes from Europe and North America which have allowed communities and cities to produce heat and power locally and cost-effectively.

In the 1970s Denmark, scared by the oil price hikes, introduced the Heat Law as a way of weaning the country off fossil fuels. Local government had to create zones, in consultation with local people, and settle how each community would be heated. Would it obtain warmth from gas, biomass or district heating? This decision to plan heating provision and the use of regulations to mandate compliance, where home owners have to connect to the heating network within ten years of its completion, has paid off. Densely packed cities like Copenhagen now use city-wide district heating networks to convey centrally produced hot water. The energy needed to heat the water is slowly decarbonising as district heat companies have switched from coal and gas to biomass, large scale combined heat and power or heat produced from burning waste.

But maybe the Danes are too Scandinavian to be an appropriate role model for us? Perhaps we can learn from city of Berkeley, California, instead? In 1987 the city authorities created the Residential Energy Conservation Ordinance. This

regulation required home-owners to install basic energy and water conservation measures when they sell their homes or undergo a major renovation.

These are just two examples of how planning can be used to shift a community’s default position to a more sustainable place. Over the past sixty years planning has been applied to create and maintain aesthetic quality. Used wisely, planning can make a community more sustainable and, ultimately, more wealthy too.



Prashant Vaze is chief economist of Consumer Focus. He is co-author, with Stephen Tindale, of *Repowering communities: small-scale solutions for large-scale energy problems* (Earthscan, June 2011). www.repoweringcommunities.co.uk

REPOWERING COMMUNITIES

Planning has ended up a long way from its original intentions, but **Prashant Vaze** says that we can learn from abroad how we could use it now to make communities more wealthy and sustainable

POWER IN PARTNERSHIP

The dual goals of economic recovery and action on climate change can find synergy at the local level in creative partnerships. **Faye Scott** describes some findings of Green Alliance’s latest research

The pursuit of a localist agenda, twinned with budget pressures, has seen radical changes across the board in local authorities and among their partners. Structures that shaped activity are gone. Instead, local authorities are encouraged to set their own priorities and to consider themselves accountable to their citizens rather than central government.

When it comes to climate change, local action has always varied, even when there were



local authorities are encouraged to set their own priorities and to consider themselves accountable to their citizens rather than the government



directions from government to act. Our forthcoming report explores the impacts of the localism agenda on climate change action. We have found that local authority commitment falls into three, broadly even-sized groups. One group remains committed to climate change and are maintaining their leadership position on the issue.

Another have narrowed their ambitions to focus on emissions from their own estate and nothing more, reining in broader work on climate change strategies, adaptation or community engagement. The third group is simply opting out, cutting staff and programmes dedicated to climate change and significantly deprioritising the issue. Compounding this narrowing and deprioritisation, many of the partnerships between local authorities and civil society groups that were enabling greater progress on climate change have been falling away. Overall, local capacity to act on climate change is being eroded.

Perhaps foreseeing the challenge that localism presents for a collective issue like climate change, central and local government are aspiring to a partnership approach. The department for energy and climate change (DECC) and the Local Government Group have jointly acknowledged that the level of local action influences the ability of national government to meet its climate change targets, and vice versa. But, in the face of our evidence, it is unclear whether local authorities will be able to step up and play their part in this relationship.

Making demands of local authorities, asking them to do their bit on climate change, is seen as undesirable in government’s current view of localism. But the approaches being developed to ‘sell’ action on climate change to local authorities will only speak to the already committed or those with an interest. They will

fail to capture those that are opting out, which is a challenge we will be looking into over the autumn. In the shorter-term, our report examines the new avenues that exist for strengthening local action on climate change.

New local partnerships

Local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) have received a lot of attention as one of the more tangible outcomes of localism agenda. Local authority and private sector partners have come



many of the partnerships between local authorities and civil society groups that were enabling greater progress on climate change have been falling away



together in ways that reflect natural local economies, with the exclusive aim of securing local growth. LEPs have also developed proposals for enterprise zones, which will benefit from business rate reductions and simplified planning to accelerate development. Twenty two such zones have now been designated.

POWER IN PARTNERSHIP

→

This focus on growth inevitably raised concern that their attitudes to considering climate change impacts will be lax. The secretaries of state for the departments for business, innovation and skills (BIS) and communities and local government (CLG) have included the transition to a low carbon economy in a list of issues they suggest LEPs may want to tackle. Chris Huhne, the DECC secretary of state, noted his hope that LEPs would capitalise on low carbon opportunities. But beyond that, there has been nothing to indicate that LEPs need to worry about anything other than growth. The enterprise zone application process, for example, did not require proposals to indicate the environmental or climate change impacts of their ambitions.

Even so, 29 out of the 37 LEPs refer to the low carbon economy in their priorities or visions. Some mentions of low carbon are clearly thrown in for good measure and nothing more, but ten LEPs have set out their low carbon plans in more detail, or even include climate change targets in their priorities. Among the enterprise zones, four focus strongly on renewable energy. For example, the Humber renewable energy super cluster aims to attract manufacturers of renewable energy equipment and the businesses that make up their supply

“local authority and private sector partners have come together in ways that reflect natural local economies”

chains. Ten others make some reference to attracting low carbon businesses to their enterprise zone, or their intentions to integrate sustainability into their development.

There is definitely the potential for tension between LEP ambitions and tackling climate change. But there are also interesting parallels with the need for action on climate change, as

they too are making a local contribution to a national challenge in targeting growth and economic recovery. They have the potential to be important new avenues for local climate action. They can provide it with a valuable economic framing, push local authority partners

“tackling climate change depends on a partnership between the centre and the local”

”to think more creatively about the nature of growth and identify and the pursue more tangible benefits of climate change action.

We urge the government to think strategically about harnessing the evident potential for LEPs to play an important role in meeting climate change objectives. This doesn't have to be directive. There are already positive stories to tell on climate change and low carbon activity among LEP plans. They should be used to make a compelling case for the role that LEPs could play, grounded in economic realities and growth opportunities. This would be a valuable complement to the Green Deal pitch being made to local authorities by central government, which aims to secure action on climate change by appealing to their bottom line, not their morals.

Making the most of what we've got

Tackling climate change depends on a partnership between the centre and the local. But there is no single partnership; there are multitudes in play at the local level. We need to capitalise on the fact that they bring different actors together in new combinations, and take advantage of their potential to strengthen local ability to tackle climate change. Variations in approach, ambition and progress are the only constants in a localist world. We should mine this variety for all the opportunities it offers.



Faye Scott is senior policy adviser leading Green Alliance's programme of work on localism. She is author of Green Alliance's forthcoming report on localism and climate change, to be launched in October 2011, which explores the issues discussed here in more detail, alongside other opportunities for strengthening local action on climate change. fscott@green-alliance.org.uk

CATALYST DEBATES

To dig deeper into some of the big political agendas affecting the environment, we are running a series of six Catalyst Debates for experts and opinion formers.

So far, we have held two of these debates at the Ideas Space in Westminster, overlooking the Houses of Parliament. High level panels coupled with an intimate audience and an inspiring setting, have led to lively and thought provoking evenings and the airing of a range of perspectives.

“What role can green growth play in the UK's economic recovery?”

Wanting to continue discussion around green growth with senior players and following the spring *Inside Track's* exploration of the subject, our first Catalyst Debate in June asked “What role can green growth play in the UK's economic

recovery?” Chaired by Oliver Morton of *The Economist*, the panel featured Paul Johnson, head of the Institute of Fiscal Studies; Professor Tim Jackson of the University of Surrey; Tera Allas, director general of economics, strategy and better regulation at the department for business, innovation and skills; Rhian Kelly from the CBI; and Michael Jacobs of the LSE. Further views on the subject, from Tom Burke, Dr Matthew Lockwood and Jules Peck, are also on our website at www.green-alliance.org.uk/catalystforum

“What will it take for localism to work for the environment?”

Building on our new programme of work looking at the issues around localism and the environment, our second Catalyst Debate in July featured a panel which included the director-general of the National Trust, Fiona Reynolds;

Simon Marsh of the RSPB, a member of the government's practitioners' advisory group which prepared a proposed draft of the National Planning Policy Framework; Tony Travers of LSE, a leading thinker on local and regional government; Alex Thomson, head of the think tank Localis; and Faye Scott, of Green Alliance, who leads our localism work. It was chaired by Peter Hetherington, a writer with extensive knowledge of the issues.

Four further debates in this series will take place during the rest of this year and into 2012. They are available to watch in full on our website at www.green-alliance.org.uk/catalystdebates

The Catalyst Debates are kindly supported by Rockwool

THE HOLY GRAIL OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Rebekah Phillips explains why energy savings are the solution to a number of sticky problems

In the recent leak to the *Daily Telegraph* of a memo from Number 10's energy adviser, Ben Moxham, it's clear that the difficulties of working to decrease energy use in our homes are starting to hit home.

For months the department for energy and climate change has been trying to convince a sceptical audience that the Green Deal is the answer to energy efficiency in the UK. Finally, it seems that the government, or Number 10 at



our climate targets cannot be met without widespread increases in household energy efficiency



least, is realising that it won't be possible without some supporting policies.

This discussion has taken on even more piquancy since the energy companies put up their costs just before the start of the heating season. With suppliers hiking bills by up to 25 per cent, it's going to be a cold, hard winter for some households. The *Daily Mail* and others have been using this to argue against the additional costs to energy bills resulting from environmental levies.

Energy efficiency has never been needed more to counteract both the increased financial pressure households will be under and the

increased political pressure that will come from the costs of other environmental measures. And, of course, our climate targets cannot be met without widespread increases in household energy efficiency.

Yet figures show that even now energy companies are falling behind on their insulation targets and that new policies, such as those for electricity market reform or smart meters, are missing the opportunity to tackle energy use head on.

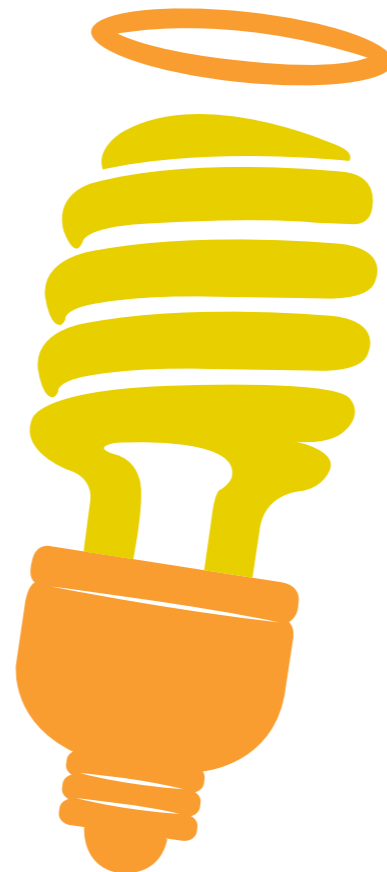
Cracking the problem is not simple. As Green Alliance argued in *Bringing it home*, and as other evidence from abroad shows, it will need a reinforcing set of policies, infused with an understanding of human behaviour.

But it is the holy grail, which will satisfy politicians and the public alike, because it will deliver more secure energy supplies, lower and more predictable heating bills and reduced carbon emissions.

This autumn, under our Green Living theme, we will be exploring a number of perspectives on this issue: how we can get affordable green living; what is really needed to get widespread energy demand reduction in our households; how green living can become more than just an elitist pursuit and its benefits be made accessible to all; and how it can save people money by reducing waste.

Keep up with this work on the Green Living blog www.greenlivingblog.org.uk

For more information, please contact **Rebekah Phillips**, senior policy adviser, rphillips@green-alliance.org.uk



CLIMATE CHECK

Commitments to drive a low carbon economic transition in the UK are being held back by discord within the Coalition, says **Amy Persson**



The Coalition government was formed in May 2010 on the basis of a common policy platform thrashed out over several politically charged days. That platform, the Coalition programme, contains some significant commitments to the UK's low carbon transition which should increase the UK's economic resilience by decreasing dependency on fossil fuels. It is rare that an incoming government commits to implementing such a comprehensive agenda over the course of its term. On the basis that it should be judged on what it said it would do, Green Alliance, in collaboration with WWF, Christian Aid, RSPB and Greenpeace, has assessed the government's progress against these commitments in the report *Climate check*, published in time for the party conference season.

Our analysis reveals that the government has made some good decisions on the low carbon agenda in challenging economic times. Highlights include: the government's acceptance of the Committee on Climate Change's (the CCC) fourth carbon budget recommendation, setting stretching UK carbon reduction targets; the introduction of the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme; positive engagement on moving the EU to a 30 per cent emissions reduction target by 2020; good progress on supporting aspects of low carbon transport; and the cancellation of the third runway at Heathrow.

However, lack of support from across the government means that positive outcomes on some high profile decisions are being undercut by the poor design of other central policies. The absence of a strong, low carbon transition strategy and narrative from senior ministers is hampering the overall delivery of the Coalition's low carbon



let me be absolutely clear that we are committed to the [EU] 30 per cent target and nothing is going to change that

Prime Minister David Cameron, June 2011



commitments. Very public interdepartmental battles over decisions, such as the acceptance of the fourth carbon budget and the Green Investment Bank, convey the perception that core departments have to be dragged over the low carbon line, which undermines investor confidence.

We found little evidence of divisions along party lines. Rather, it is clear that both Liberal Democrat and Conservative proponents of the low

carbon transition are being held back by their peers in other departments who don't see this as a priority and who, in some cases, are actively working against it. The Treasury and the department for business, innovation and skills (BIS) stand out as curbing (or attempting to curb) the government's ambition at crucial moments, or causing unnecessary delays. Without stronger direction from the Coalition leaders these departments will continue to hold back progress and the government's overall performance will be weak. Investor confidence in the clean energy sector will remain low and the UK will have less ability to influence international negotiations on a binding and ambitious global deal.

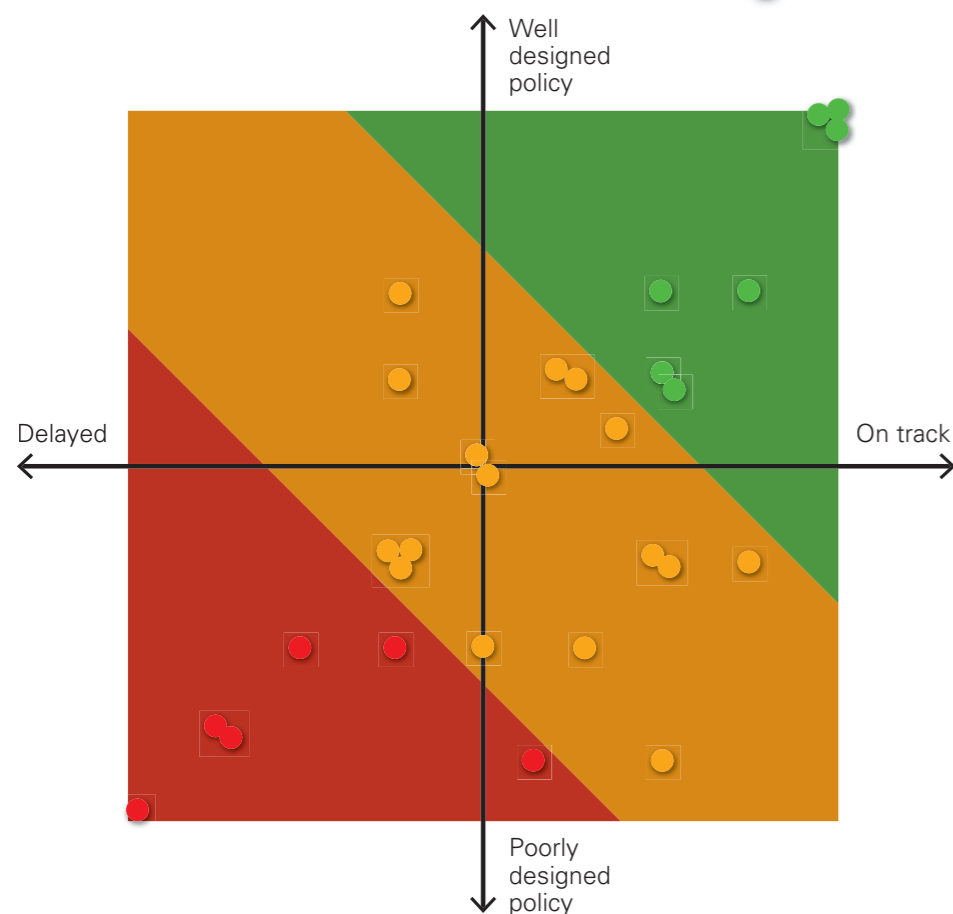
Climate check makes three high level recommendations (see page 18) to increase the level of cross-government accountability for decisions that impact on the delivery of low carbon commitments, and to increase prime ministerial engagement with the major and very tangible opportunities that the low carbon transition offers for the UK economy.

This government has the potential to turn the UK into a world leading destination for green investment. It could achieve much greater public benefit from the significant public expenditure it is investing in the low carbon transition if it tackled the barriers to progress we have identified. For us, *Climate check* sets out an agenda for the discussions we will be seeking to have with government over the next year.

**The results**

This graph shows **overall government progress** on 29 policies. Download *Climate check* from www.green-alliance.org.uk for the full analysis of each policy.

● = 7 good
● = 16 moderate
● = 6 failing

**Climate check's recommendations****Low carbon in the Star Chamber**

The government should establish a cross-government process, led by the prime minister or deputy prime minister, to review departmental performance on the low carbon agenda and drive cross-government thinking and action. Ministers should report to the Star Chamber on progress made on the Coalition's low carbon programme and justify decisions that work against it. This should also ensure its low carbon programme is at the heart of the government's plan for growth.

Step up international engagement

The UK has a proud history of international leadership when it comes to climate change. This is currently at risk. The government should increase the momentum for a low carbon transition in the European Union by pushing for a redirection of spending on climate and clean energy as a result of a reformed EU budget, and driving policies that will stimulate green

economic growth. The UK's reputation for high level political interventions in the global climate negotiations should be reclaimed through the prime minister's support for ministers' and diplomatic efforts towards delivery of an ambitious binding climate deal and long term climate finance.

Set out a high profile green economy vision

During March-April 2012 London will host the next G20 Clean Energy Ministerial meeting. This is a key opportunity for the prime minister to lay out his vision for the UK to be a clean energy leader. David Cameron should use it to launch the Green Investment Bank, accompanied by a decision to bring forward its borrowing powers to make the bank central to the UK's Plan B for economic recovery. He needs to send an unequivocal statement to his party, parliament, business and the public that the UK will be part of the vanguard of developed countries that are decarbonising their economies.



Amy Persson is senior policy adviser in charge of Green Alliance's Political Leadership theme apersson@green-alliance.org.uk *Climate check* (Green Alliance, September 2011) is published in collaboration with WWF, RSPB, Greenpeace and Christian Aid and is available to download at www.green-alliance.org.uk

GREEN ALLIANCE NEWS**WELCOME TO KATIE**

Katie Miller has joined Green Alliance's communications team as our new events co-ordinator. Katie recently worked on the Project Ocean sustainable fish project with Selfridges for the Zoological Society, and was previously strategic communications officer at the department for international development.

ELIZABETH SIDNEY

Elizabeth Sidney, who died in April this year, was a longstanding close friend and supporter of Green Alliance and our chair from 1983–1988. Elizabeth was dedicated to an extraordinary breadth of causes; green issues and sustainable development being just one, alongside campaigns against the arms trade and working to understand the role of fundamentalism in women's oppression. She was centrally involved in the Liberal Party, later the Liberal Democrats, and founded Women Worldwide Advancing Freedom and Equality. She remained interested in Green Alliance's work and was a regular attendee at our debates until very recently.

OPERA, ART AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In July we teamed up with the award winning Opera Group and the Royal Opera House to hold a very different and enjoyable summer reception. Following performance of a short extract of the Opera Group's *Seven Angels*, we hosted a debate *What have the arts ever done for the environment?* with a fascinating panel, including the artist **Peter Randall-Page**; **Jude Kelly**, the artistic director at the Southbank Centre; **Matthew Taylor**, chief executive of Royal Society of Arts; **Ben Todd**, executive director of the Arcola Theatre and **Dr David Frame**, deputy director of the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment at Oxford University. The debate carried on afterwards amongst the audience over drinks and we were pleased for the opportunity to meet so many new contacts from the arts world.

**NEW INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS**

welcome to:

Nigel Farren
Katharine Harborne
Roger Higman
Dr Mark Robbins
Liz Warren

BUSINESS CIRCLE

Welcome to **BAA Ltd**, the latest recruit to our business circle. For more information about supporting Green Alliance, contact [Laura Williams](mailto:Laura.Williams@green-alliance.org.uk) llwilliams@green-alliance.org.uk www.green-alliance.org.uk/businesscircle

Green Alliance is a charity and independent think tank focused on ambitious leadership for the environment. We have a track record of over 30 years, working with the most influential leaders from the NGO, business, and political communities. Our work generates new thinking and dialogue, and has increased political action and support for environmental solutions in the UK.

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