

## Further changes on the way, chief planner signals

16 September 2014 by Jamie Carpenter , [Be the First to Comment](#)

**Ministers' appetite for planning reform remains 'undiminished', with measures to tackle local authorities' failure to plan for an ageing population next on the government's agenda, the chief planner said today.**



DCLG chief planner Steve Quartermain at today's event

Speaking today at the inaugural Planning for Housing conference in London, Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) chief planner Steve Quartermain said that ministers' "appetite for further change is undiminished".

"You can see that in the recent consultation document, which even we refer to as the 'bumper consultation document', Quartermain said.

The technical consultation on planning, [published by the DCLG in July](#), included a range of changes, including a further expansion of permitted development rights and measures to streamline the neighbourhood planning process.

The chief planner told the conference, organised by *Planning*, that ministers believe that measures recently put in place have made a difference, pointing to progress on local plan adoption and the uptake of neighbourhood plans.

But Quartermain added that tackling councils' failure to plan for an ageing population is "an issue we need to address".

"You will have heard ministers talk quite recently about the approach to housing for an ageing population," the chief planner said.

"I can point to the National Planning Policy Framework and say, 'Well it does tell you to plan for a mix of housing uses', but I can then point to on ground and it isn't actually happening."

Quartermain added that the government is examining measures to turn planning approvals into starts. "We need people to start building," he said.

The chief planner also told delegates that the DCLG is continuing to work on its Right to Build initiative to give custom builders the right to a plot from councils. The government will consult on the details of the initiative later this year, he said.

And he added that a £3.5 million fund would fund efforts to examine "how people's attitudes to development can be changed".

"We're looking at pilots, we have a £3.5 million fund to look at how we might address those issues," Quartermain said. "That's an approach we are looking to design and implement in partnership with local authorities."

Speaking during a Q&A session later at the conference, Quartermain dismissed suggestions that the government's new online planning practice guidance is unsuitable for use at public inquiries and examination hearings.

He said: "Strictly speaking, you can print the guidance ... if you want to create a paper copy. Our view is that it is usable. You can take it into village halls in Northumberland."

Quartermain also reiterated that decisions about garden cities and new towns are "decisions for local councils". He said: "If the community take a view that is a way forward for their plan then they can do so, but it needs to be locally-led, locally-driven and locally delivered."

## Politicians 'will need to use electoral legitimacy more forcefully' to drive through development

16 September 2014 by Michael Donnelly , [Be the First to Comment](#)

**Politicians will have to increasingly 'use their electoral legitimacy more forcefully' to drive through development in order to avoid problems with the provision of key infrastructure, according to a leading economics academic.**



Tony Travers, director, London School of Economics  
Greater London Group

Speaking this morning at the Planning for Housing conference in London, professor Tony Travers, director of the London School of Economics Greater London Group, said that politicians "are going to have to use their credibility and legitimacy to enable decisions to be made and not delayed".

"This is not just for housing but for airports, roads, railways - the lot. Simply they are going to have to put their legitimacy on the line. If politicians don't do this, what we end up with is simply crowding. Crowded homes, crowded trains, crowded airports, crowded everything. And that means a worse quality of life, and that, frankly, is good for nobody", he said.

Travers said the introduction of the post war planning system had effectively "nationalised use of land and buildings and created a rationing system".

He said the consequence of this was that more "top down powers will be required to drive through development".

"If you have a rationing system in a country with a rapidly growing population in which there are lots of pressures against developments, in the end politicians have to use their authority and their legitimacy to drive through positive development policies".

Travers said if the focus for new development is to be on brownfield rather than greenfield development, then public policy would need to focus on cities.

"If we're going to concentrate development in urban areas, on brownfield land, we would have to redevelop cities and invest in cities more than green areas, he said.

"One of the oddest things about public policy is that, because of the powerful rural lobby, ministers are endlessly sucked into making policy announcements about improving life in the countryside – rural broadband being an obvious example. It makes perfect sense – who wouldn't think it was fair to have high-speed broadband everywhere.

"The difficulty with that of course is that it makes those areas even more attractive. So, if we try to have public policy delivering exactly equal services - no postcode lottery - everywhere, then why shouldn't people choose to live in the countryside because you get all the same services".

Government should devolve powers and divert spending to make cities more attractive places to live, Travers said.

"Make [the big cities outside London] really attractive, make sure they have the best schools. That would mean people wanted to live there.

"But this isn't great for rural areas because the implication is that, at a time when public spending is going to fall for the foreseeable future, investment would have to be shifted to urban areas", he said.

Elsewhere, Travers said city regions are "a very good basis" for "radical, pro-development policies".

"The great thing about city regions is that their leaders, be they Greater Manchester, Birmingham, London, want development. The question of how the drive it through isn't that easy for them because they don't have the powers, but they want to. So it seems to me city regions to offer an opportunity".

## Green belt review could allow cities to prosper, says housebuilder

16 September 2014 by John Geoghegan , [Be the First to Comment](#)

**The 'strict' containment of UK cities by green belt is limiting their prosperity and should be reviewed, according to the planning chief at one of the country's biggest housebuilders.**



(from left) Philip Barnes, Paul Miner, Chris Cousins and Mike Kiely at the

Planning for Housing conference

Philip Barnes, group land and planning director at Barratt Developments, told *Planning's* Planning for Housing conference this morning that a small amount of green belt around city regions could be released for development.

He said: "I don't think anyone is saying that green belt is not a good idea.

"We shouldn't be looking to release any more than a tiny amount and focus release on the most degraded land that least serves the green belt purpose.

"But we need to move back from hyperbole that if you build on any green belt then you lose the lot."

Barnes said that Barratt was carrying out work on the Manchester city region which found that its urban footprint had grown less fast in comparison to other European cities over a 10-year period.

It found that Rotterdam had grown eight times more than Greater Manchester and Marseilles eight times as much.

He said: "In Europe, there is greater recognition of the importance of cities and the policy of very strict urban containment isn't regarded as attractively as it is in the UK.

"If you want to attract more businesses and people to our best cities, we need to be more sensible about the policy of strict urban containment."

Chris Cousins, local government liaison manager at building research and accreditation provider BRE Global, said he also supported some development of the green belt, praising the [winning entry in last week's Wolfson Economics Prize](#) that was awarded to the best idea for a new garden city.

Cousins said the proposal by consultancy Urbed was "absolutely right to suggest taking 'a few confident bites out of the green belt'". He said some green belt development "seems the best hope around at the moment", adding: "I don't see many other options."

Cousins also said that a limited amount of green belt development could increase public accessibility to it, pointing out that most of the green belt was currently off limits in private ownership.

Current green belt boundaries were defended by Paul Miner, senior planning officer at campaign group the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), who said it has successfully prevented urban sprawl and allowed countryside to remain outside cities.

But he suggested that new towns beyond the green belt may be an answer to the housing crisis: "We should look at more sustainable alternatives beyond the green belt before looking at the green belt itself. It might be about building more settlements possibly."

Miner also said that old towns beyond the green belt could be regenerated to accommodate more housing.

## Labour to look at planning department resourcing

16 September 2014 by Michael Donnelly , [Be the First to Comment](#)

**The Labour Party is examining ways to get more resources into local authority planning departments, shadow planning minister Roberta Blackman-Woods has said.**



Shadow planning minister Roberta Blackman-

Woods

Speaking this afternoon at the Planning for Housing conference, organised by *Planning*, Blackman-Woods said planning for housing was "very close to Labour's heart".

She said the final report of Labour's Housing Commission, chaired by Sir Michael Lyons, which is looking at ways that housebuilding rates can be raised to 200,000 homes a year, including the building of new towns, will be published at the Labour Party conference this weekend.

Blackman-Woods said part of this would look at the issue of resourcing planning departments.

Blackman-Woods said planning could not work for and with communities unless planning departments have the correct level of resources.

She said: "We can't do any of that unless we have planning officers who have the time to be able to have those conversations with communities and who can encourage and support developers.

"One of the things that we are very concerned about at the moment is the capacity of planning departments. Absolutely everybody talks to me about this, and so we really have to think, and we've addressed this a little with Lyons, of how we get more resources into planning departments so they are able to undertake some of this preparatory work.

"I'm absolutely convinced that in the long-term it will speed up planning because if you get consent early on then we should be able to truncate some of the timescales in terms of getting planning approval", she said.

Elsewhere, Blackman-Woods reaffirmed Labour's intention to keep the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

She said: "I think Labour's been fairly consistent in saying we think we can live with the NPPF. We would make a few changes to it - over time we want to integrate neighbourhood planning into the planning system, we want streamlining.

"We also want to make it a statutory responsibility to make a [local] plan, we want to shorten timescales and we want to have a review mechanism so it's kept as a live document. We think that's necessary just to speed up the process, it doesn't mean we're throwing out the NPPF and the guidance that it comes with".

The shadow minister also said a Labour government would make some "minor changes in terms of brownfield first and the way housing need is assessed".

Blackman-Woods also said the supply of land was a key issue to ensure more homes are built.

"What we're looking at is how you get more land into the system. So we've asked Michael Lyons to look at how people can be incentivised to bring land forward, including public authorities, and whether they can put land up and get a longer-term return than they do at the moment.

"We're also looking at a compulsory purchase order for land assembly, where we think that is necessary, and only where we think people are not developing land that has planning permission will we look at perhaps at something which is more of a penalty", she said.

During a Q&A session after her speech, Blackman-Woods was asked if Labour would work to

introduce a strategic level of planning to deal with issues above the level of local authorities.

She said: "We asked Michael to look at what I call the larger than local problem"

"What do you do about planning beyond the level of the local authority? We are looking at local housing market areas, we're looking at city regions, combined authorities. So [we are looking at] what might be necessary in planning terms beyond the level of a local authority.

"But that doesn't mean that would necessarily bring forward specific projects, we're just looking at that more generally in terms of planning and [whether we have got] a missing tier".

Asked if Labour had "the courage to release the green belt" to allow towns and cities to expand outwards, Blackman-Woods was tight-lipped.

"The one thing I know not to do is mention the green belt", she said. "If I said anything about the green belt no one would hear anything else between now and the election. The current situation allows local authorities through their local plan making to be able to take land into the green belt and to take land out of the green belt and we're not proposing any change to the status quo."