

RESPONSE TO PLANNING WHITE PAPER FROM THE WNYCC

This letter is a response from the West and North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce (The Chamber) to the Government's consultation on the 'White Paper - Planning for the Future'.

The Chamber represents businesses of all sizes and sectors who collectively employ ¼ of the population of our region. The business organisation supports the growth of companies from start-up to maturity providing access to markets both home and abroad, facilitating international trade, providing finance, premises and support; it also provides a voice for the region's business community, facilitating dialogue and contributing constructively to policy strategies and consultations.

The Chamber is part of the British Chambers of Commerce and supports its consultation response. In addition, the Chamber has, through consultation with its focus groups, identified matters of particular importance to it which are set out below by reference to an answer to question 4 in the White Paper. The points made also have relevance in relation to other questions raised, for example the final bullet point under 2 below is relevant to question 25 in the White Paper.

The Chamber welcomes the aspiration and ambition set out in the forward to the White Paper to produce a planning system 'that is simpler, clearer and quicker to navigate, delivering results in weeks and months rather than years and decades' and the fact that the proposals 'seek a significantly simpler, faster and more predictable system'. The need to maintain a high-quality environment, in which communities and businesses can prosper together, is of crucial importance. Now, more than ever, as we adapt to the social and economic impact of the Coronavirus pandemic, we need a planning system that recognises the importance of sustainable economic growth and the social and environmental benefits it brings to local communities. The Chamber broadly welcomes the intention of the reforms and is pleased that the Government has identified deficiencies in the planning system and aims to address them. It agrees there is a need to streamline and speed up the system, improve consistency of decision making, and to give greater certainty to all stakeholders. However, a lot of detail is still to be developed and it is important that when it is it does deliver the vision and bring about the intended benefits.

Q4. What are your top three priorities for planning in your local area?

1. That provision should be made for employment land in the same way as new housing

There is concern that the proposals disproportionately focus on housing and as a result insufficient employment land and premises will be available to meet future economic needs. Housing is mentioned approximately 162 times in the document, compared to

only 5 mentions of jobs and employment (of which 4 are in the foreword). Mining and renewables are hardly mentioned at all.

There is a clear need to deliver more homes, more quickly, where people want to live. House building creates opportunities for many sectors in the economy and helps to provide homes in local communities for skilled employees. But a policy focus on housing must be balanced with other demands for land use. In recent years, there has been growing tension between building more homes and the need for business to have access to quality and affordable employment land and premises. Increasingly, prime employment land with good transport and communication links is being given over to residential uses. Offices and shops are being converted to homes. Long-established firms have seen legitimate operations interrupted, and expansion plans curtailed, when new housing is developed too close to their boundary.

Whilst the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital communications across the public and private sector and there is greater use of agile and flexible working practices, social distancing and public health requirements have prompted employers to re-think how they use buildings to ensure a safe workplace environment. While firms may use their space differently it does not necessarily mean that they will need less space. Access to affordable employment land and premises will remain essential for business innovation, expansion and long-term competitiveness. It is critical that the planning system recognises and implements the needs and aspirations of businesses and does more to ensure they are on an equal footing with other stakeholders. Planning for jobs and homes, together with up-front government investment in modern, smart infrastructure, will give businesses the platform to compete globally and the strategic certainty to make their own investment decisions.

The Chamber recommends that in developing the proposals in the White Paper

- Employment land and uses should be given equal priority to housing in all spatial planning, transport planning and area master planning initiatives
- Councils should be required to objectively plan for employment land, and for a variety of employment types, to ensure that the imperative to meet demand for housing does not force out other uses and create problems for the future.
- Local planning authorities should be enabled to gain the expertise needed to promote an understanding of how business operates in a global economic environment.

2. That the 'levelling up' agenda is given priority.

The disparity between the North and South is well known. The North continues to be at a disadvantage. In developing the details in the White Paper it is essential that they facilitate the levelling up agenda. The following need to be addressed.

- Any standard methodology introduced to assess housing requirements should support regional rebalancing and the growth ambitions of areas in the north. There is concern that the minimum level will become the target level, resulting in less housing development than is required.
- Enabling joined up planning across the whole of the north so it can best contribute to the UK economy. The White Paper proposes the replacement of the Duty to Cooperate with something else yet to be determined. The Chamber supports its replacement as it has never worked well, however it is important that its replacement can capture the significant contribution a planned northern region could make to the UK economy and enable overarching effective joined up planning and delivery of key infrastructure.
- The suggestion that any new Infrastructure Levy can set rates on a geographical area basis is welcome. It is important that the details of the Levy recognise the different economy in the northern regions including the Chambers. The need/ambition to capture more value from development is understood but It is much more difficult to make it work in some parts of the north, especially with difficult areas of brownfield land where the value might be too low to cover remediation costs. There needs to be more clarity on how infrastructure will be funded in these areas and it is important to ensure that any new system introduced is sufficiently flexible to meet changing economic circumstances. It would also be helpful to provide that the funds collected can be used more widely for example on skills and training.

3. That Local Planning Authorities have sufficient resources

The resources of Councils in the Chamber's region are stretched, more so because of the pandemic. Change on the scale proposed will inevitably require significant resources. Local Planning Authorities will need to be resourced properly in terms of the quality and quantity of staff to respond to the scale and speed of change. Without such investment in resources and skills the reforms could fail at the first hurdle. The recognition in the White Paper that resources are needed is welcomed. The details of this will be important and will need to attract people into the industry and also ensure that council members must train and maintain their knowledge.

We trust the above is helpful. The Chamber would be happy discuss further how the proposed reforms could be developed to meet the priorities set out above.

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