

Dear Residents and Neighbours,

I have copied, below, today's Times summary of proposed changes that will relax certain restrictions on "permitted development" (options to build without planning permission) – for example, to add up to two floors to existing residential buildings and to knock down existing (disused) buildings to 'build out' further homes. Part of the thinking is to invest in new homes on brownfield sites more easily and to regenerate abandoned or unsustainable town-centre buildings. Underpinning this Policy Paper is the realisation that their target of 250,000 new homes last year only reached 241,000 – a shortfall of 9,000 homes or just under 0.04%... This figure of 9,000 really does have to be put into perspective!

However, **central government** believes it can use this small figure to add pressure on local authorities to meet their current Borough Plan commitments and adhere to 'enhanced' future targets.

Although the Times doesn't pick up all the points in the Paper, there is a nod towards trees being part of all developments – we can but hope!

Remember, this is a "Policy Paper" – the devil will be in the detail as each objective is launched in new and amended regulations and laws.

I attach a PDF copy of the Policy Paper in question for those wanting to read the whole thing. It is quite readable at 11-pages... "Pollution" isn't mentioned at all – but that linkage between planning approvals and pollution is firmly the legal responsibility of local authorities under the existing National Planning Policy Framework (which will be amended to promote 'better homes', green infrastructure – in short firming up the need for good quality homes rather than the disgustingly shoddy building being churned out by many developers.

Kind regards,
Nigel Heriz-Smith

Door slams on building flats with no windows

Andrew Ellson, Francis Elliott from - Friday March 13 2020

A planning loophole that lets developers build properties without windows will be closed under reforms outlined by the government.

Since 2013 landlords have been allowed to convert offices, commercial and industrial buildings into flats without obtaining planning permission. The policy was designed to boost the supply of new homes.

However, the government said some developers had exploited these "permitted development" rights to create sub-standard homes, many of which had no natural light. One recent plan for a warehouse conversion in Barnet included 57 homes with no windows. One architect described the project as "more like a battery farm than a housing development".

In a policy paper on planning published yesterday, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government committed itself to a regime of permitted development rights that would "meet natural light standards".

[Nigel's Note: The "Planning for the Future" Policy Paper is attached to this email for reference]

The paper said the government intended to expand permitted development rights to encourage developers to demolish vacant buildings and replace them with "well-designed new residential units".

A source close to Robert Jenrick, the housing secretary, said that from the summer the conditions would apply to all homes constructed under the permitted development regime whether they were new builds or conversions. It was less clear when, or whether, the government would set tighter conditions on minimum size standards.

There are no minimum space standards for such conversions at present, and some buildings have been converted to contain flats as small as 13 sq m (140 sq ft). Last year plans were submitted for homes of 8.3 sq m — about the size of a London taxi — on a site in Purley, south London.

Councils can refuse such developments only on the grounds of environmental, noise or transport problems. Local authorities have demanded greater powers over conversions, but the new regime is unlikely to provide them because ministers consider permitted development necessary to meet its ambitious target of 300,000 new homes a year. Last year only 240,000 were built.

The planning paper said that the government would also widen permitted development rights so that developers could extend existing residential blocks by two storeys. In addition building in high flood-risk areas would be reviewed and the planning process shortened and simplified, with planning fees linked to performance.

More extensive planning reforms are expected this year. “The government will bring forward a series of major publications and legislate to deliver lasting change,” the report said. “This will start with an ambitious planning white paper in the spring to modernise our planning system, ensuring it supports the delivery of homes that local people need.”

Labour said the Conservatives still lacked a plan to fix the housing crisis after ten years in power and the budget had been a “golden wasted opportunity” to tackle the issue.

Mark Crane, of the District Councils’ Network, said: “We have significant concerns with proposals to extend permitted development rights for upward extensions so that developers can avoid paying what they owe for local infrastructure and for local affordable homes.”

But the reform of planning fees was “an opportunity to resolve the significant under-resourcing of council planning teams”, he added. “We believe councils should be able to set these locally to cover the cost of processing applications.”

Planning pledges at a glance

- New rights to extend upwards on existing buildings without planning permission by this summer, including to extend residential blocks by up to two storeys.
- New rights to demolish vacant commercial, industrial and residential buildings and to replace them with residential units without the need for planning permission to be obtained.
- New rules to force developers of all buildings to provide minimum standards of natural light.
- Higher targets for housing developments in each local authority with new incentives and punishments if councils do not deliver.
- A new register of brownfield sites to encourage councils to make the most of this land first.
- A new deadline of December 2023 for all councils to have up-to-date local housing plans.
- Planning white paper with more radical reforms imminent.