

Special Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20 December 2016



Housing White Paper: Local Plan Update

Report of Ian Thompson, Corporate Director, Regeneration and Local Services

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Housing White Paper which the Secretary for State has announced will be published in January and the impact this will have on the timing of the preparation of the County Durham Plan.

Background

2. In May 2016 Parliament enacted the Housing and Planning Act which introduced a number of changes including the provision of starter homes, widening the right to buy provisions and tackling rogue landlords.
3. Although subsequent regulations were the subject of consultation no final version has been forthcoming. Government is again focussing on planning to deliver more housing and to this end is seeking fast-tracked planning services. It is also expected to adopt a more flexible view on the provision of starter homes and affordable housing. The secretary for state has said that the Government will also use the White Paper to outline its response to the recommendations of the Local Plans Expert Group (LPEG), which reported in March 2016, in respect of the preparation of local plans.
4. The White Paper was originally expected to immediately follow this year's Autumn Statement however it is now expected in January. Reports in the planning and housing press and discussions with DCLG have signalled that the White Paper will mean significant changes to planning with particular fundamental changes to the local plan process.

White Paper – Expected Content

5. **Proposals to speed up plan-making.** The expectation is that the new white paper will change the way in which the numbers of houses needed in an area, the Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) is calculated. This, if accepted by Government, will fundamentally change the evidence base of all local plans, simplifying the process but providing a potentially different conclusion to current need and housing numbers required in an area. The paper will make further recommendations on the methodology for the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). The SHMA ultimately provides market evidence of the needs and type of housing required in a particular market area required in establishing where housing should go and the amount of affordable housing needed. Other changes significant in the preparation of a plan include the future Community Infrastructure Levy, the mechanism established to assist in the delivery of key infrastructure as well as a changing the requirement and content of the Sustainability Appraisal which at present is seen as a key strand in the plan process.
6. Other issues expected to be tackled include action to boost build-out rates. It is anticipated that the White Paper will include a provision to stop developers landbanking sites. Other potential housing delivery announcements are expected to include support for modular, or off-site, construction and more detail on garden city proposals and development around transport nodes.
7. Planning Minister Gavin Barwell told the Communities and Local Government Select Committee on the 28th November that the White Paper will contain the Government's response to consultation proposals on planning fees published in February, which proposed increasing fees by a proportionate amount, linked to inflation and performance
8. The Government is anticipated to take measures to strengthen national planning policy related to housing density, as part of a suite of planning changes designed to get more homes built. By increasing the numbers on site it will reduce the number of sites needed.

Conclusion

9. The White Paper is expected to be released early in the New Year, and is likely to have several implications for the preparation of the County Durham Plan, including potentially the evidence and assessment of housing need which is the most fundamental issue the Plan will seek to address.

10. Therefore if the Plan was to be progressed at this time it is possible that this stage of the plan preparation process may need to be repeated to take into account the White Paper and subsequent future legislation. This is because Inspectors will give weight to Government consultations and expect the Plan to reflect them when submitted for Examination. As local plans need to take into account changing evidence and legislation, it is sensible to review the position following publication of the White Paper before recommending a Preferred Option and proceeding to consultation. Not to take account of the White Paper could potentially affect the soundness of the Plan.

Recommendation

11. That the members of the Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the forthcoming publication of the Housing White Paper. Members will then be updated once the Housing White Paper is published.

Contact: Mike Allum, Spatial Policy Manager
Tel: 03000 261 906

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – The full financial implications will not be certain until the White Paper is published and the possible changes fully investigated. The costs of consultation including the printing of the documents, exhibitions boards and room hire could not be justified given the information and discussions that have taken place.

Staffing – None identified.

Risk – The implications of the White Paper need to be fully understood in order to progress the County Durham Plan.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – None identified.

Accommodation – None identified.

Crime and Disorder – None identified.

Human Rights – None identified.

Consultation – None identified.

Procurement – None identified.

Disability Issues – None identified.

Legal Implications – as identified in paper.