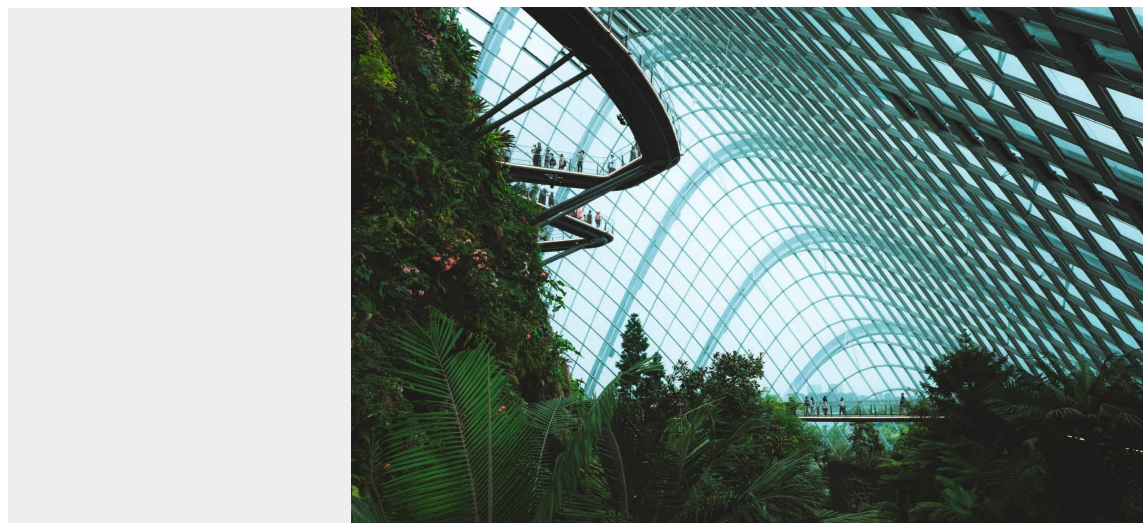


PLANNING FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

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Since 2010, the British planning system has been subject to an intense period of structural and legal change, shifting from regional-level strategic planning towards localised planning and the introduction of the neighbourhood plan.

Most notably, since the introduction of the NPPF there has been significant impetus put on addressing climate change through achieving sustainable development. Subsequently, the planning system has adopted three overarching objectives; an economic objective, a social objective and an environmental objective. The latter is summarised,

“to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, build and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.”

The role of the local plan in tackling climate change

The ‘Local Plan’ plays a central role in meeting the national environmental objective. Effective plan making can deliver a range of solutions to climate change issues, including public transport initiatives, reliable and accessible recycling services and more recently, ensuring the availability of electric charging points. Accumulatively, local plans should reflect the local authorities overarching aim in building up resilience to climate change and managing long term risk.

Action on climate change should be an integral part of the culture of plan-making and should be embedded

and integrated in policy preparation. Only by treating climate issues as central to formulating policy, will local authorities effectively have discharged their duties.

Existing Legislation

- Section 19 (1A) “Development plan documents must (taken as a whole) include policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the local planning authority’s area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaption to, climate change.”
- The Climate Change Act 2008 forms the basis for the UK’s approach to responding to climate change. It requires reduced emissions from devolved administrations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, and preparation for the risks of climate change.

Together these documents install the responsibility of Local Authorities to form plans and policies to help meet national targets. However, each fails to specify the legal requirements concerning climate change, leaving localised targets and decision-making processes vague.

Climate practice in local plan making

Involving communities in plan-making from the earliest stage. Give them the information and support they need to engage effectively in decision-making and to identify locally based low-carbon measures. Neighbourhood plans in particular are a means of working with the community and third-party groups.

Opportunities to secure decentralised energy to meet the needs of new development, greater integration of waste management, co-location of potential heat suppliers and users, and the use of renewables in public buildings; acting as a critical mass for district heating systems.

Understanding the supply and demand potential for localised renewables to help identify and map the sustainable resources within an area, enabling a strategic approach based on community-led spatial planning to evolve.

Recommendations for government

Provide clarity on the legal requirements of climate change.

The Climate Change Act 2008 identified a statutory target of reducing carbon dioxide emissions to at least 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. The act also required compulsory reporting on climate change impacts and adaptation plans for certain public bodies and organisations.

However, the clarity of legal requirements for local authorities regarding climate change are poorly spelt out. The Department for Communities and Local Government could issue a clear statement which defines the statutory requirements for Local Authorities in tackling and resisting the impacts of climate change but have so far not done so.

Provide adequate resources to plan for climate change.

Similarly, lack of clarity is symbiotic with lack of dedicated resources. Central government needs to provide a stronger evidence base on climate change for local plans to draw upon, supported by joint commissioning to enable limited resources go further.

Unfortunately, any general increase in grant aid for plan-making under the current government structure is unlikely. However, since action on climate change holds high public interest, local governments will remain under pressure to ensure that minimum service standards are maintained.

Case Study

Druridge Bay open cast coal mine

Sajid Javid recently refused planning permission for an open cast coal mine proposed at Druridge Bay in Northumberland. The mine would provide at least 100 jobs and inject £87m into the local economy. In refusing permission, Javid overturned the previous planning permission granted by Northumberland County Council in 2016. He cited concerns over landscape and the climate change impact from the development, concluding that the benefits of coal extraction and employment were outweighed considerably by the adverse effect of greenhouse gas emissions that would result from coal mining.

However, a High Court judge has decided to uphold the legal challenge made by the operators Banks Mining, quashing the government's rejection of the proposal on the grounds that the minister failed to provide adequate evidence for his decision. Whilst this does not indicate a reconsideration of the proposal would result in approval, it does highlight the unremitting battle between capital and climate.

Conclusion

Whilst there has been notable national statutory action in responding to climate change, devolved powers and resources are failing to reach local authority level where the most vital action can be taken. In the absence of devolved climate change frameworks, authorities must take responsibility for locally identified low-carbon measures, in doing so they must engage with their communities to create sustainable and achievable targets. If these requirements are ignored, the related costs, impacts and insurance will continue to rise, threatening the local economy and social fabric.