

THE QUEENS SPEECH – PLANNING REFORM IN 2021

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The Queens speech on 11th May set out the government's legislative priorities for the year ahead. The main focus is of course on recovery from the Pandemic, whilst the government is also seeking to deliver on its levelling up agenda. One of the much-awaited reforms is through the Planning Bill.

Consultation took place last summer through the Planning Reform paper which much promise of speeding up the system.

The Bill proposes *"Laws to modernise the planning system, so that more homes can be built"*.

'The aim is to create a simpler, faster and more modern system to deliver homes and infrastructure, citing significant delays in both the local plan making and planning decisions.'

It is hard not to agree that the existing system is too burdensome and subject to delays, although this is certainly exacerbated by a lack of resources.

The Bill also seeks to transform the system from one which is focussed on documents, to a more efficient and digital service.

Our team, and clients, often grapple with requests for significant amounts of information to validate applications – which burdens applicants with delays and costs, doing little to improve decision making. Digital technology is so important to people and planning too needs to open-up to improve its service.

Consultation is also a focus from the Bill which looks to improve the rates that local people meaningfully engage with the process.

'From our experience, only the loudest and often those against development are heard during the planning process. Many people, including those most in need from housing, employment opportunities and infrastructure, do not have a voice.'

Improving the system that enables more positive engagement with local decision making, should be applauded.

Indications toward a change to local plans in order to provide more certainty over the type, scale and design of development were also mentioned. This alludes to the much discussed 'zones' and raises some interesting questions about the ability for people to participate in a planning system that is front-loaded.

Many organisations are already on the usual bandwagon about how this will be a developer's charter. I share some scepticism, but mainly at the ability to deliver such reform when this has been promised before.

I do, however, admire the challenge to change a system that is just plainly not working, to deliver the development that this country needs.

I look forward to reading the Planning Bill when published and the debate that will follow. I just hope that those people who really need the planning system to work are also given a voice in this debate.