

South West planning news

MARCH 2017



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Headline news

First meeting of the West of England Combined Authority

The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) is now fully established, following final parliamentary approval.

The first public meeting takes place today (1 March) and papers for the meeting are available [here](#). At the meeting, the local authority attendees will be taking decisions to enable the WECA to begin functioning, including agreeing the new organisation's constitution, the statutory officer posts and the nominations for scrutiny and audit committees.

Following the West of England Mayoral election on 4 May 2017, the Combined Authority will be chaired by the new West of England Mayor. Known mayoral candidates are: Tim Bowles – Conservative; Aaron Foot – UKIP; Darren Hall - Green Party; Lesley Mansell – Labour; and Stephen Williams - Liberal Democrat.

Impact of cuts to LA historic environment services in the South West

The South West is home to the majority of England's listed buildings and scheduled monuments, and as such the loss of local government historic environment specialist advice could have a significant impact.

In order to understand the magnitude of the impact, South West Historic Environment Forum (SW HEF) has commissioned Historic England to undertake research into the recent experiences of service

users in the South West. The survey aims to produce robust evidence of the way changes in service delivery are affecting people who need information or advice about heritage matters from their local authority.

The survey will remain open until 17 March, and anyone who has used any of the South West's historic environment services since January 2013 can complete the questionnaire.

New motorway junction to unlock Avonmouth employment site

Highways England has announced its preferred option (chosen from a shortlist of three designs) for a new junction on the M49 near Bristol; it is expected to provide a motorway connection into the strategically important Avonmouth Severnside Enterprise Area.

As explained by Highways England, the port of Avonmouth and the Enterprise Area to the West of Bristol 'currently have no direct access to the M49, which is hindering proposals to support economic growth in the area'; the employment site is also considered 'the largest brownfield site in Western Europe', extending for five miles along the Severn Estuary and covering 1,800 hectares.

The works are expected to start by the end of 2017, as specified by Highways England.

South West receives £191 million cash boost

£191 million of Government funding has been awarded to the South West to help create jobs, support businesses and encourage growth.

The South West has already benefitted from the £12 billion Local Growth Fund, and this latest award is set to do even more to benefit the people living in the South ►►

QUOTE OF THE MONTH



It is now our task to ensure we establish robust systems [...] can help ensure the benefits of the deal can be used effectively within the region. We will also plan ahead to secure even greater opportunities offered by future devolution deals.

Cllr Tim Warren, Leader of B&NES Council, Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol and Cllr Matthew Riddle, Leader of South Gloucestershire Council, all speaking ahead of the first meeting of the WECA.

THE LICHFIELDS PERSPECTIVE

Formally establishing the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) is a major milestone and the election of the West of England Mayor in May 2017 will have a significant bearing on the Combined Authority's outcomes. With the mayoral candidates now known, it is an interesting time of change for the West of England.

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LICHFIELDS

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West. Notably, new projects include over £4 million for Enterprise Zone infrastructure to unlock a 91 hectare site at Huntspill Energy Park at Bridgwater, and support for space, aerospace and marine renewable energy activity in Cornwall's Enterprise Zones.

Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan

Public consultation on the draft Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan is due to start on 15 March 2017, once agreement has been reached between the three Councils. Work on the Plan has been progressing following public consultation last year.

The final draft Plan includes objectively assessed needs for at least 26,700 new homes and at least 312,700 million sq. ft. of new employment floorspace (which could support approximately 13,200 jobs).

National news

Housing White Paper: making connections to boost housing delivery

Perhaps no longer a headline, but still the biggest planning news in recent months, the Housing White Paper was published on 7 February, together with a raft of consultation outcomes, new consultations and other documents (see the collection here, and related summaries below).

'Fixing our broken housing market' mainly focuses on proposed measures to increase the supply of housing. Lichfields' review of the White Paper provides a summary of the proposals, analyses what the Government expects of councils in terms of development management, local plans and neighbourhood plans, and what is expected of private developers.

The Government categorises its proposals within the following four steps to achieving the objective of boosting new housing supply (most of which it is proposed will be implemented by changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - and national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)):

1. Planning for the right homes in the right places (principally by using local and neighbourhood plan policies):

- Ensuring local authorities (LAs) have an up-to-date local plan in place (to be reviewed at least every 5 years);
- Simplifying plan-making;
- Introducing a standardised approach to assessing housing requirement;
- A greater focus on joint local plans (through a 'Statement of Common Ground');
- Clear policies for addressing housing requirements of groups with particular needs, such as older people and disabled people;
- Making more land available (brownfield, public land, estate regeneration, small and medium sized sites, etc.);
- Keeping and reinforcing Green Belt protections;
- Reinforcing the need for good design;
- Encouraging higher densities; and
- Legislating to allow locally accountable New Town Development Corporations.

2. Building homes faster (mainly by better linking infrastructure with housing development, more efficient development management and addressing the construction skills' shortages):

- Local planning authorities (LPAs) having the opportunity to agree their housing land supply on an annual basis (for a one-year period);
- Increasing nationally set planning fees;
- Consulting on introducing a fee for making a planning appeal;
- Requiring more information to be provided about the timing and pace of delivery of new housing;
- Shortening the timescales for implementing a permission to 2 years;
- Speeding up and simplifying the completion notice process; and
- Introducing a new housing delivery test, to ensure that LPAs are held accountable.

3. Diversifying the housing market (focusing on increasing the numbers of small and medium-size builders, promoting more varied forms of tenure and encouraging 'modern methods of construction'):

- Supporting small and medium-house builders, custom build, accelerated construction and modular housing; and

- Introducing affordable private rental homes for Build to Rent schemes.
4. Helping people now (by meeting all of the population's diverse housing needs):
- Creating an income cap (£80,000 or £90,000 in London) for starter homes, and a 15 year taper period during which if the house is sold some or all of the receipts should be repaid, as well as a 10% affordable home ownership unit requirement for housing sites; and
 - Allowing more flexibility in terms of affordable housing tenures, including rent products.

More details and comment are provided in the summaries of the various consultation outcomes below.

Neighbourhood Planning Bill: Lords' Report stage ended

The Neighbourhood Planning Bill's Report stage in the House of Lords commenced on 23 February and has now been completed. On report, Amendment 18, moved by Liberal Democrat Lord Stunell, was added to the Bill; it seeks to ensure that the SoS cannot prevent LPAs from attaching conditions to planning permissions where those conditions meet policy tests in the NPPF. Government amendments to clause 13 were also agreed on report; they add requirements for public consultation and Government guidance on how the restrictions on conditions operate. At the time of writing, the date for its Third Reading has yet to be announced.

Key amendments at Committee stage in the Lords have included:

- Definition of when a neighbourhood development plan (NDP) is at examiner's report stage, or not (amendment to Clause 1);
- Circumstances where a neighbourhood planning body must be notified of a planning application in its area (amendment to Clause 2).
- A requirement of the Secretary of State to issue guidance for LPAs on how local development documents - taken as a whole - should address the housing needs that result from old age or disability (amendment to Clause 7(3)); and
- Various amendments related to compulsory purchase. ■