

South West planning news

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Headline news

Preferred tunnel route for Stonehenge announced by Highways England

Highways England has published its preferred route for the A303 at Stonehenge. It consists of a tunnel under the present route, realigned by 50m, a northern bypass for Winterbourne Stoke and junction improvements to surrounding trunk roads. The tunnel would mean that the 26.6 sq.km. World Heritage Site would no longer be split by the road.

Highways England has indicated it will submit a development consent order (DCO) application to the Planning Inspectorate in late 2018, following an additional period of consultation. A final decision would then be due from the Secretary of State in 2020, with work to commence in 2021.

North Somerset Council identifies more housing sites

The Planning Inspectorate has required North Somerset Council to allocate more sites in order to meet the Authority's housing requirement to 2026. Following concerns about the deliverability of the present allocations, the Council has identified 22 new sites for a total of 821 homes. The consultation on these sites opened on 18 September and runs until 30 October 2017.

National news

Party Conference round-up on planning

With the conference season now over - and both Houses returning

on 9 October - it is easy to summarise how the planning focus of the three main parties continues to be on how they would go about providing more new homes, if remaining/when in power.

Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn set out what the Party would do, when it moves from being 'in the political mainstream' and 'on the threshold of power' to being elected. A Labour Government would use its proposed £250bn National Transformation Fund to coordinate and provide infrastructure and homes. The 'use it or lose it' principle would be introduced on undeveloped land held by developers. Alongside benefitting (and protecting the interests of) existing residents in estate regeneration projects, a review of social housing would be undertaken.

In response and for the Conservatives, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid and the Prime Minister could not have been clearer in accepting that the Party's 'failure on housing' was putting Jeremy Corbyn within reach of Downing Street. Theresa May added how the Government has listened and learned from the election result - recognising the need to do more on housing. Her key announcement was on how councils and housing associations would be encouraged to bid for £2bn additional investment in affordable housing that would allow homes to be built for social rent where 'need is greatest'. She also intends to dedicate her premiership to fixing the problem of people not getting onto the housing ladder, including 'reigniting' home ownership.

The tone of the Housing White Paper could also be detected in Mrs May's speech; she said how the Government would ensure that land is available for homes and in return, housebuilders must 'build the homes our country needs'.

The Communities Secretary spoke less of planning and home ownership, and more of measures that are to be brought forward for the private rented sector, mainly to protect ▶▶

QUOTE OF THE MONTH



[T]his major investment in the south-west will provide a huge boost for the region. Quicker journey times, reduced congestion and cleaner air will benefit people locally and unlock growth in the tourism industry.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling, introducing the £1.6 billion A303 upgrade near Stonehenge

THE LICHFIELDS PERSPECTIVE

The Department for Transport's publication of the proposed route and tunnel for the A303 marks a turning point in the progress of this project. It will be interesting to see how the issues of heritage and landscape impact are considered through the DCO process, for example in the context of the Navitus Bay decision.

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tenants. He made only passing reference to progress that has been made on boosting housing supply (higher numbers of completions and residential planning permissions) and how the Government has been 'getting on with major reform' (via the Housing White Paper, the consultation on a local housing need standard methodology and the proposed Social Housing Green Paper).

Lastly, Sir Vince Cable said that the Liberal Democrats would double the annual housing supply, councils would be allowed to build affordable homes, and new garden cities and villages would 'spring up' where housing demand exceeds supply.

New planning approach to speed up delivering homes

On 14 September, Communities Secretary Sajid Javid announced a consultation on the details of a new methodology to calculate local housing need, which would (on current figures) lead to an overall housing target of 266,000 homes per year in England.

The new suggested approach in 'Planning for the right homes in the right places' aims to give a realistic picture of how many homes each local area needs now and in future years.

The consultation document also covers other measures mentioned in the Housing White Paper; including the latest update on the expected 20% increase in planning fees (the necessary amendment regulations are to be brought forward 'at the earliest opportunity'). DCLG is also seeking views on the potential further 20% fee increase. The consultation mentions the fact that a draft revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) will be published in 'early 2018', with the aim being to finalise it by the end of March, next year.

Lichfields has produced an 'Insight Focus' on the consultation; it provides a summary and commentary on the consultation document.

The consultation will close on 9 November 2017.

Housing White Paper: Government remains committed

On 14 September, Housing and Planning Minister Alok Sharma spoke at the RESI conference in Wales, indicating the Government's continued commitment to 'fixing the broken housing market' - and more:

'[...] let me give you a categorical reassurance that I will not rest until we have not only turned the White Paper into action. But gone further. Improving fairness, safety, standards and redress for all home owners and tenants. And of course building more high quality homes.'

With regard to timing, in a Parliamentary written answer of 12 September, Housing and Planning Minister Alok Sharma had noted that the then proposed consultation on the new standardised approach to assessing local housing need '[...] will need to be read alongside our other White Paper proposals' and added that the Government does not expect to publish its response to the Housing White Paper submissions until after the completion of this further consultation.

For a limited period only: light industrial to residential changes of use are permitted development

Between 1 October this year and 30 September 2020, a permitted development right (PDR) is available to change the use of light industrial premises (Use Class B1(c)) to residential - a prior approval determination process has to be undertaken and the temporary PDR is subject to a long list of limitations and a series of conditions that have to be met. Whilst the PDR is temporary, the planning permission resulting would not be.

Improving the design of housing

The importance the Government places on housing design quality was emphasised by the Housing and Planning Minister at two events in September.

During a Westminster Hall debate on 5 September, Alok Sharma said the following, on the quality of design in new homes:

'We want to strengthen the National Planning Policy Framework to introduce an expectation that local and neighbourhood plans in development plan documents should set out clear design expectations. [...]

We also want to use national planning policy to strengthen the importance of early, pre-application discussions, as a means to encourage more valued discussion of the design of new homes between communities, developers and local authorities.'

Tony Lloyd MP asked the Minister whether the review of space standards (committed to in the Housing White Paper) will reduce the standards, rather than enforce them. Alok Sharma replied:

'...we are not talking about a race to the bottom. We want new development to be well designed, but that does not mean that current space standards are sacrosanct.'

The Housing and Planning Minister also commented on design quality at the RESI conference in Wales. Having said that the Government and the industry need to build more homes, and faster, he added that (amongst other things) 'we' need to:

'[...] improve the quality and design of those homes. We need to change the public mind set towards new development. [...] And, we need to encourage innovation and choice, and make sure that the skilled workforce that we need is in place to build homes at the rate that we want.'

Heritage Action Zone for Weston-super-Mare

A £600,000 Heritage Action Zone initiative has been launched in Weston-super-Mare, one of 10 schemes across the country funded by Historic England. The funding is intended to allow heritage to play a greater role in the regeneration of the town.

The initiative will assist conversions of unoccupied buildings into housing and offices, provide new pedestrian access to the Museum and seafront, and create better links between the town centre and railway station. A Great Weston Heritage Action Zone Project Officer has been appointed to lead the initiative. ■