

# The Budget 2011

## Response from the Historic Towns Forum

This response looks at those parts of the 2011 Budget that most affect historic towns through the planning system.

### **Planning, Enterprise and Growth**

The fact that planning featured strongly in the budget speech served to show how important sound, evidence based planning is to the future of individual communities and the country as a whole. However, **the Forum** believes that the Chancellor's introduction to the planning system as something that is a "chronic obstacle to economic growth" is both ill-informed and profoundly unhelpful in a reasoned debate about the planning system we need.

The Minister of State for Decentralisation made a Written Ministerial Statement on 23 March 2011, setting clear expectations that local planning authorities and other bodies involved in granting development consents should prioritise growth and jobs and should have up-to-date development plans. The benefit of having an up-to-date development plan is undoubtedly true and **the Forum** believes that planning is essential to growth and it promotes an approach to planning that seeks to reconcile the triple objectives of environmental conservation, social cohesion and economic prosperity.

### **A new presumption in favour of sustainable development**

This was announced in the May 2010 Coalition Agreement. The 2011 Budget announcement described sustainable development as meaning that 'the default answer to development is 'yes' except where this would compromise the key sustainable development principles set out in national planning policy.'

**The Forum** is concerned to wonder where, under this definition, the incentive will be for developers and local authorities to address issues such as climate change, environmental protection, heritage conservation, design quality and affordable housing. **The Forum** believes that this must be addressed in the forthcoming National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

### **Producing a pro-growth National Planning Policy Framework**

**The Forum** welcomes cautiously the proposal for a NPPF. It has submitted evidence to the Decentralisation Minister's call for evidence on the content of the NPPF and will be working closely with others, especially in the heritage sector, to try to ensure that it is effective, focused and invaluable to the planning system.

### **Enabling businesses to bring forward Neighbourhood Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders**

**The Forum** supports the involvement of business in neighbourhood planning. However, this must be done in partnership with local residents, who should lead the process in mixed residential and commercial areas.

### **A pilot of a "land auctions" model, starting with public sector land**

**The Forum** is not clear how the current proposal – for Government bodies to auction land with planning permission – differs from current processes. To really shift the balance and encourage land to be brought forward at reasonable prices, especially for housing, **the Forum** considers that there is a strong case for extending of this scheme to privately owned land to ensure that sites are evaluated against both sustainability and financial criteria.

### **Removing the 60 per cent national target for the re-use of previously developed land and allowing local planning authorities to set their own targets**

This change from national to local targets is sensible in that the targets can reflect local conditions. However, **the Forum** believes that the principle of regenerating brownfield land before greenfield land should be maintained and embodied in the NPPF.

### **Retaining existing controls on Green Belt**

**The Forum** understands the commitment to this policy. However, evidence suggests that Green Belts are not always the best way of ensuring sustainable development if they are treated as sacrosanct. The NPPF must address how the strengths of the Green Belt concept can be retained while allowing flexibility to accommodate the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Consulting on proposals to make it easier to convert commercial premises to residential**

This is a new idea. **The Forum** will respond robustly to the consultation if this does not involve a formal planning application process, which would be contrary to the spirit of localism in denying communities the opportunity to express their views. It may lead to unintended and undesirable environmental impacts on localities. It also appears to conflict with the Government's aim to prioritise jobs.

### **Undertaking a full review of the Use Classes Order**

**The Forum** will contribute fully with this review

### **A 12 month guarantee for processing of planning applications, including appeals**

**The Forum** understands that the eight and thirteen week targets for dealing with planning applications will remain. Hence, there may well be consequences for the time taken by PINS and by Ministers in dealing with appeals. Is the implication that if the target is not met the default position is approval?

### **Ensuring a fast-track planning process for major infrastructure applications through the Major Infrastructure Planning system**

**The Forum** has no particular view on this at the present time.

### **Legislating to introduce a duty on local authorities and public bodies to require them to co-operate on planning issues**

The Localism Bill contains a proposed duty to co-operate (Clause 90), which **the Forum** supports in principle.

### **Local planning authorities should reconsider S106 agreements where these make a scheme unviable**

**The Forum** believes that this shows a misunderstanding of the nature of S106 agreements: they are negotiated with developers on the basis of sound evidence; and they are designed to make a scheme approvable and implementable.

### **Setting up 21 Enterprise Zones with simplified planning approaches, e.g. using Local Development Order powers**

Enterprise Zones are not new and research on their effectiveness shows that: the jobs created were not necessarily new, but often simply diverted from other places; jobs were created at significant cost; and development resulted more from other incentives than the relaxation of planning control. **The Forum** will be engaged in the debate on the regimes for the Zones. In particular, it will argue that proper planning – involving environmental, social and economic issues - is essential for successful and attractive zones, especially where this involves regeneration in historically important areas.

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