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YOUR RESIDENTS



May 2022

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Update: The dearth of news over the past months has been that very little has emerged from the government about the anticipated proposed changes in planning legislation and the housing problem last year, with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, civil servants working from home, the Ukraine crisis, the rise in the cost-of-living etc.

It seems that the government may abandon the White Paper¹, which was published two years ago, and may “reset” the housing targets. There is also the possibility that the strategy will include the updating of Neighbourhood Plans.

As the renaming of the MHCLG to the **Department of Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities** indicates, there will be the introduction of a **Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill**, which might be more oriented to the North rather than the South.

Local Authorities appear to be adopting a “wait and see” strategy which will include the updating of the Neighbourhood Plans.

Another problem is that Local Authorities are struggling to find resources and planning personnel and are having difficulty in replacing those who have retired. Politicians are more in favour of, say, keeping the local library open and concentrating on social services rather than be concerned whether the local Planning Department loses a few officers until the government allow Local Authorities to set their own fees.

There will probably be a **new Infrastructure Levy** which will replace the Community Infrastructure Levy which will have a nationally set charge for developers building more than ten residential units that individual Local Authorities will collect and they will be allowed to spend that money as they see fit which may preclude the arguments by developers as to viability. Local Authorities will also be able to consider design, of which local communities will be enabled to comment upon. Local Authorities will also be permitted to set their own charges as well. Part of the Levy will be ring-fenced.

N.O.R.A. Annual General Meeting 2022



One benefit that has emerged from the Covid lockdown has been the emergence of the ease of online video conferencing, which the N.O.R.A. committee has put into practise of late, for face-to-face meetings as an additional adjunct to communicating by email.

The AGM has been held physically in London, save for the past two years, which involved the expense of hiring a venue and the necessity for members to travel, also at some expense for a day, especially in view of the recent increase in rail fares and fuel costs.

At a recent committee meeting, it was proposed that this year's AGM could be held via Zoom. Documentation will be sent to all members by email prior to the AGM and therefore a greater time could be devoted to the Q&A and discussion session. Members will be invited to submit comments, matters of concern and questions beforehand.

It was also proposed that the AGM would be held in September on a day most convenient to members, decided by a consensus. **More details will follow in due course.**

¹ View at

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?tab=rm&ogbl#inbox/GTvVlcRzBWWrsxWSmgjxDQdZBGcbtQmKSXILDDXzdWpSttVRKPNjxDMLrNpgCxtgNfbHLtDRgNXNv?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>

The Queen's Speech



Of especial interest to members is the **Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill**. The government has pledged to enshrine the 12 national missions of Levelling Up outlined in its **White Paper** in law to ensure progress is made on them by this and future parliaments. The missions include increasing productivity, devolution deals and investment in public transport and education.

But last year's planning reform bill will look likely to be a "watered down" version.

This has now been published and can be found at

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3155>.

● A PDF file (58 pages long) can be downloaded at: [convert](#)

The Bill has received its first reading in the Commons. It will have the following stages: 2nd reading, Committee stage, Report stage, 3rd reading. It will then go to the Lords, 1st reading for a 2nd reading, Committee stage, Report stage and a 3rd reading. The final stages are Consideration of amendments, and the Royal Assent.

● What we know so far...

- **Housing target abandoned.**

The government has dropped its pledge to build 300,000 homes a year, proposes to enable communities to block new housing developments. **Michael Gove**, the Secretary of State for **Levelling Up, Housing and Communities** is supporting streamlining building procedures for brownfield land

- **Design.**

Local referendums will enable communities to have a greater voice on developments and make sure 'beautiful' homes are 'built in the right place', rather than 'shoddy' properties in the wrong areas.

- **Street votes**

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill will allow 'street votes' where most loft conversions, conservatories and extensions can be built quicker, without full planning permission, as long as a third of local residents don't object but if a two-thirds 'super-majority' of residents do not agree to support a plan then the proposed development will be refused.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill aims to take power out of the hands of developers and councils and give it to homeowners. However, small builders will be put on a 'level playing field' with bigger developers by exempting them from certain planning fees and creating a new category just for them.

- **Infrastructure Levy.**

In return for permission for housing developments, developers will have to pay a 'non-negotiable levy' to deliver the infrastructure that communities need, such as housing, schools, GPs and new roads. This may raise far more than the £7 billion already raised each year from Section 106 agreements.

- **Changing street names.**

Residents will have more of a say over changing street names to stop local heritage being wiped out by woke campaign groups.

- **Digitisation of the planning system.**

The planning system will be fully digitised to make local plans easier to find and engage with. Landlords will have to rent shops out to the highest bidder if they have been vacant for over a year.

- **Pavement Licences.**

Licences granted to pubs and restaurants that have been allowed to serve food and drink outside during lockdowns will be made permanent.

The move comes as the number of empty shop-fronts has soared to one in seven, rising to one in five in the North East, according to the British Retail Consortium.

Many fear boarded-up and derelict shops are blighting high streets and leading to ghost towns. New 'compulsory rental auctions' will ensure that landlords must sell shops that have been vacant for over a year to prospective tenants.

Ministers have pledged to provide £1.7 billion of temporary business rates relief in 2022-23 for up to 400,000 retail, hospitality and leisure properties.

- **More power to local leaders.**
The Bill will also enable every county in England to apply for devolution by handing more power to local leaders by 2030.
- **Vacant premises.**
Local Authorities will have new powers to bring empty premises back into use and instigate rental auctions of vacant commercial properties in town centres and on high streets. They will be able to initiate measures to revive England's high streets, and powers to take control of buildings for the benefit of their communities.
In effect, planning reforms are also largely dropped, with the government stating that the current system will be “strengthened and digitised”.
- **The National Planning Policy Framework.**
There are indications that this will be reviewed it and changes made though this is not likely to be in the immediate future.
This might be an opportunity to have HMOs included.
- **Permitted Development.**
This is being claimed as successful but here have been reports in the press that some Inner London Councils have applied for A4Ds to remove the rights to change shops into residential accommodation without planning permission but this has not found favour with the government. As far as commercial properties in the same street are concerned, it would probably not include them. It is probable that the safe option would be to apply it to residential properties only.



A new Minister of State



is **Stewart Andrew** (Minister of State for Housing at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) will be responsible for the whole planning portfolio, and all planning appeals will come under his aegis and he will be the most influential politician in planning.

Cabinet reshuffle before summer?

The Conservative Party sustained substantial losses in the local elections on Thursday, including some key London councils. There is speculation that the Prime Minister may change his top team before the summer recess, which is currently set to begin on 21 July.

Government plan “to give millions the right to buy their homes”

The Prime Minister has told officials in the last fortnight to develop the proposals to help members of 'generation rent' This may be “reheated”, depending on the results of the 5th May elections.

Under the new proposals, officials are also considering using taxpayer money paid out in housing benefits to help recipients secure mortgages.

The Government is desperate to find ways to make it easier for younger people to get on the housing ladder, but its plans for housing reform were left in tatters late last year after a backlash from Tory MPs.



Short-Term Letting and Airbnbs

There is a general consensus that short- and long-term lets are being badly affected by landlords changing from existing letting to the Airbnb construct.

In June last year, the government announced that it would be consulting on this but nothing has transpired. The introduction of a Tourist Accommodation Registration Scheme which would be a method of getting control of the Airbnb phenomenon which has been done in Amsterdam and at a stroke, 80% of the listing disappeared. The present government has been completely against any such control. N.O.R.A. has asked the Bath MP, Wera Hobhouse, to table a question in the HoC asking whether the consultation would take place. This is yet to appear in Hansard. It is interesting to note that the Airbnb has published a statement which indicates that it would be in favour of urgently introducing such a scheme for a healthy tourism commitment covering a call for a short-term let register and support for local tourism taxes where local communities want that and to end the practice of S21 evictions. It is evident that a sizeable proportion of people will never own a house and therefore dependent on the long-term rental sector. The government seems to be blind to this. The Airbnb organisation, the largest of its kind in the world, ran a series of conferences, and is saying that it is in favour of such controls. It may be

that they are recognising a trend towards controls and that by so doing they will preserve their image. The new Housing Minister may not be of the same mind as those in the Cameron administration. There have been a number of articles and programmes in the media and reference made to the housing problem in Cornwall and in other areas.

N.O.R.A. has written to **Stewart Andrew** (Minister of State for Housing at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) asking for more information as to the progress of the consultation and has asked for a meeting with him. Members will be informed in due course as to the outcome.

Any MP can also table a question and N.O.R.A. members can write to their own MPs to do the same, and this might be a way of embarrassing the government to take action.



Our last update on Seagulls was by the Chairman in her June 2021 AGM report, where she told of **Natural England's** reluctance to make practical the new gull control regime in Bath and Worcester. This regime had been introduced in response to pressure from **Wild Justice** to reduce control measures on 'endangered' species, but the result has been further proliferation of gulls (Herring and Lesser Black Backed) nesting on roof top sites in inland cities. In July, NORA led a team from several gull-infested cities in co-signing a Daily Telegraph letter, casting doubt on the veracity of this 'endangered' categorization. This has resulted in statistical work by neutral scientists, using recently released figures from **Natural England** which show that, far from these gulls being in danger, their populations are growing, albeit mostly in cities, where nesting sites are sheltered, and safe from predators. Over the winter there have appeared increasing numbers of well-informed press articles, and interviews in the broadcast media, calling for removal of both gull species from the endangered listing and for reinstatement of the **General Control Licences** which would allow Local Authorities to resume non-lethal methods, such as removal of nests, oiling of eggs and replacement of eggs by dummies. Nine 9 MPs from infested towns wrote to the **DEFRA Secretary of State, George Eustice MP**, about this in February, but without effect. Both **Natural England** and the **RSPB** seem impervious to reason and fact. The campaign continues, but meanwhile our citizens in growing numbers of affected places are daily assailed by aggressive squawking from 4.00am until late at night, bombarded by infected gull faeces, and have their sandwiches and other foods plucked from their hands, or even from their mouths! Is this democracy?

If any member is experiencing problems with an influx of gulls, please let us know and email the Secretary at norasecretary@gmail.com.

Legislation and Matters Arising (as at April 2022)

Note that, following the Queen's Speech and the subsequent debates, this information will be updated in due course.

Emerging Legislation Government Bills Private Members' Bills

- **Planning (Proper Maintenance of Land) Bill:** The Bill makes provision for increased fines for failures to comply with a notice under section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. It was introduced to Parliament under the Ten-Minute Rule. **A date for the Bill's Second Reading in the House of Commons has not yet been confirmed.**
- **Planning and Local Representation Bill:** The Bill includes granting local authorities' power to apply local design standards for permitted development and to refuse permitted development proposals that would be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of an individual or community. It was introduced to Parliament under the Ten-Minute Rule on 15 July 2021. **The Bill will be given its second reading in the House of Commons on 6 May.**
- **Green Belt Protection Bill:** A Bill to establish a national register of Green Belt land in England, to restrict the ability of local authorities to de-designate Green Belt land and to make provision about future development of de-designated Green Belt land. **The Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 21 June 2021.**
- **Onshore Wind Bill:** The Bill started in the House of Lords being introduced in June 2021. It would require the Government to amend planning guidance to enable local planning authorities to grant more onshore wind applications for the purpose of meeting the UK's carbon targets. **The Bill had its third reading in the House of Lords on 18 March and has now passed to the House of Commons.**
- **Planning (Street Plans) Bill:** A Bill to make provision about the creation and operation of street-level plans for local development. **The Bill was introduced and passed its first reading on 13 September 2021, with the second reading scheduled to take place on 6 May.**



**PLEASE LET US HAVE YOUR COMMENTS ON THIS NEWSLETTER AND YOUR VIEWS UPON ANY ISSUES OR MATTERS OF CONCERN THAT YOU MAY HAVE.
EMAIL US AT norasecretary@gmail.com**

And finally,
Laughter is the Best Medicine

