

# Levelling Up – the role of planning

Janice Morphet reviews a pamphlet by a group of academics who note that planning is concerned with everywhere not just where new development is occurring

FROM: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/levelling-up-report>

REFERENCES:  
1 <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/levelling-up-report>  
2 <https://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/UTG-FINAL-4.pdf>  
3 <https://www.gbnews.com/gb-views/liam-halligan-why-arent-we-building-more-council-houses/169343>  
4 Morphet J. 2021 *The Impact of COVID-19 on Devolution: Recentralising the British State Beyond Brexit?* Bristol University Press



Dr Janice Morphet is a Visiting Professor at the Bartlett School of Planning UCL

Much of the debate about levelling up has been focused on the provision of specific funding for programmes and projects without much discussion of the ways in which day to day regulatory processes such as those for planning can make a contribution to achieving the changes England needs. In Wales, the planning system is focused on future generations and is seen to be an inherent part of government policy operated by central and local government. In Scotland a new planning policy framework is also focussed on shaping places.

In England, levelling up has not included the contribution of planning to place shaping, the location of housing, employment, community facilities or meeting our climate change commitments. A group of academics have decided to stimulate this debate through the preparation and publication of a pamphlet on this issue which was published last September. This short article provides a summary of its main contents and arguments.

The pamphlet is introduced by the lead author Bob Colenutt, who summarises the arguments made across all of the chapters – that planning has a major contribution to play and that its role has, as yet, been overlooked. The pamphlet opens with a chapter which considers the role and purpose of the 1947 Planning Act including its provision for zoning all land and removing land owners' development rights in order to achieve the best use of land for the community. This provision was challenged by the Prime Minister in his foreword to the Planning White Paper (2020) and subsequently by Steve Baker in his introduction to a Social Market Foundation report on planning reform (2021). In this introduction, Morphet argues that a loss of need to establish the principle of development by removing the 1947 Act would undermine the certainty needed for the due diligence required in all property development and encourage investment overseas.

The next chapters are concerned with the role that planning plays in the delivery of housing and land for employment uses. In the housing chapter, the role of housing, access to it, its value and its contribution to geographical inequalities is stated clearly. If levelling up is to be achieved, then it has to consider these issues and planning's role in delivering them, rather than just identifying sites for market housing. In order for the economy to work, there is a need for the government to support the delivery of Council housing by local authorities – an argument recently made by the economist Liam Halligan on GB News. In this chapter the authors argue that the Government's approach to planning reform is creating the opposite of levelling up and increasing inequality. In the next chapter on employment, the role of planning in supporting economic recovery through spatial policies and land allocations is considered. Without this approach, the pamphlet argues that social and spatial inequality will grow. The government's approach to Levelling up appears to favour specific locations for individual projects without taking an integrated approach to the location of work, public transport and housing. How can the country rebuild

## Levelling Up: the role of planning

By an independent group of planning practitioners and academics.  
The authors are grateful to the Town and Country Planning Association for hosting this pamphlet on the TCPA web site but stress that it does not represent TCPA policy.  
Available at <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/levelling-up-report>  
2021

its economy after Brexit and COVID-19 with these pepper-potting approaches?

The pamphlet next considers the Government's position in relation to local government. No longer a partner, local authorities appear to be classed as a sector with increasing centralised control over funding for projects and local determination of democratic decision making. This was illustrated in the absence of local authorities in managing the pandemic. The pamphlet argues that the restoration of the role of local government is central to achieving levelling up across the country rather than just acting as a tool of the centre. After 10 years of austerity, communities remain reliant on local authorities which can no longer meet the needs they are face every day. Communities need accountable politicians and if levelling up is to be achieved then fundamental democracy needs to be restored. Planning is a key local authority function because it is local, yet planners have been the group hardest hit by the austerity regime (NAO 2018). Planning is central to levelling up in ensuring that people have access to facilities, safe place to walk and enjoy their leisure and well-designed, healthy environments which contribute to meeting climate change objectives.

It is to this issue of climate change that the pamphlet addresses at the end in its last but not least chapter. Here arguments are made for green recovery as part of levelling up and planning as a critical component in its delivery. Planning is concerned with everywhere not just where new development is occurring. It is about making locational decisions that can support the community's requirements now and in the future. Land is a unique resource and since 1947 we have been using it in the community's interest – the pamphlet concludes that the climate emergency means that planning needs to address this even more urgently if levelling up across England is to be successful. ■

# The Environment Act 2021: a guide for planners and developers

In future developments must deliver measurable net gains in bio-diversity, explains Tom Graham, author of this valuable new guide

£40 Bath Publishing



Tom Graham

The Environment Act 2021 is, among other things, intended to cause a sea-change in the way that the development industry delivers its products by setting out a framework within which they and local planning authorities tackle the difficult topic of protecting and, in some cases, enhancing the environment. This book is intended to provide a guide to those principles which underpin the Act and which will bear upon those preparing, assessing and deciding planning applications in the near future.

In days gone by, a developer's promise to deliver 'ecological improvements' was not given great importance and, certainly, the planning obligations which accompanied the grant of permissions did little, if at all, to provide that those promises were transmuted into measurable and enforceable results.

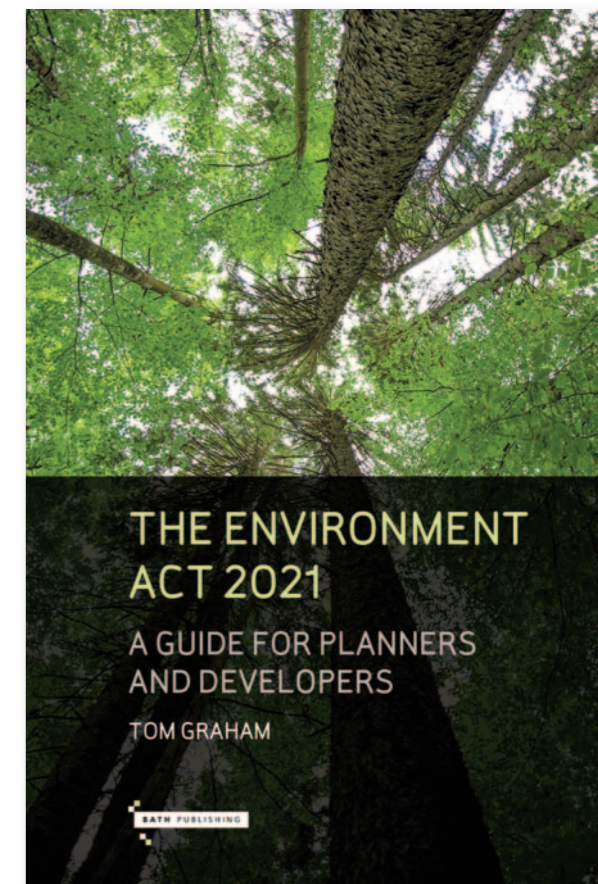
The modern reality is that such a promise will, in future, carry weight in the consideration of the application and should be secured by legal mechanisms which provide measurable and enforceable outcomes. This sea-change means that all professionals involved in the property development process must learn a new language and tackle subject areas which had, previously, been of peripheral concern. The change is a challenging one. Planners, developers and lawyers now spend as much time talking about

All professionals involved in the property development process must learn a new language and tackle subject areas which had, previously, been of peripheral concern. The change is a challenging one.

ecology, chemistry and engineering as they do about pure planning. They have to steep themselves in esoteric books in these subjects in order to keep up.

Even the seemingly straightforward process of settling a 'section 106 agreement' requires close collaboration between ecologist, planner and lawyer and, so far as the lawyer is concerned, there is little point in tackling a planning obligation without a basic understanding of ecology. Likewise, there is little point in a planning advocate attempting to cross-examine an expert in ecology unless he or she (the advocate) has a good grasp of topics such as the Biodiversity Metric and, hopefully, the computer-based mapping and information system which underpins it.

This book is intended to provide some brief guidance to those



who are, or will be, involved in this changing paradigm in the hope that it, in some ways, eases the passage.

The topics covered include the new mandatory statutory planning condition requiring that future developments must deliver measurable net gains in bio-diversity, the Biodiversity Metric, and the use of planning conditions, planning obligations and 'conservation covenants'. Relevant extracts from the 2021 Act are included and annotated. ■

Bath Publishing offer readers of PiL a 20% discount with ref PIL120 if purchased at <https://bathpublishing.com/products/the-environment-act-a-guide-for-planners-developers>