



A Week of (Repeated) Announcements

It's been a frenzied week, with the government making a suite of announcements (sometimes three times) about planning, housing and infrastructure, including further planning reform.

Energy. During the week, energy secretary Ed Davey and the Treasury announced changes to levies and subsidies in an attempt to reduce household energy bills .

Plan. On Wednesday, treasury secretary Danny Alexander published an updated National Infrastructure Plan (NIP), with details of more than £375 billion of public and private projects to 2030 and beyond       . The NIP also contains proposals for planning reform.

NPS. Also on Wednesday, the government published the long awaited National Networks (road and rail) national policy statement .

Autumn Statement. On Thursday, George Osborne gave an upbeat view of the economy and again announced changes to the planning system  .

Town centres. On Friday, Eric Pickles launched a package of measures to support high streets .

Planning Reform

Announcing a yet another set of changes to the planning system , planning minister Nick Boles said:

These proposals mark an important next step in streamlining the planning system and ensuring it is able to work efficiently to support the development of the new homes, infrastructure and jobs we need. They will also ensure that communities are at the heart of planning.

Planning Court. A new planning court will be established in early 2014 to deliberate on infrastructure-related planning disagreements:

To tackle delays to infrastructure delivery and reduce the impact of meritless claims, the government will establish a specialist planning court with set deadlines to accelerate the handling of cases, and introduce legislation to ensure that minor procedural claims are dealt with proportionally and allow[some] appeals to 'leapfrog' directly to the Supreme Court.

The proposal for the court was consulted on by Justice Secretary Chris Grayling last September .

Local plans. The government is to consult on measures to improve plan making, "including introducing a statutory requirement to put a Local Plan in place." Three-quarters (76%) of councils currently have an up-to-date local plan.

Special measures. The government's much vaunted plan to put councils on special measures trapped only one council, Blaby in Leicestershire . Now ministers intend to allow developers to "apply directly to the Department for Communities and Local Government where a planning authority makes fewer than 40% of its decisions on time." Currently special measures are applied to councils that determine less than 30% of major applications on time. The government also intends to move the goalposts on the New Homes Bonus. From next April, councils will lose the funding for houses that are approved on appeal by the planning inspectorate or Secretary of State.

Payments. The government is to pilot payments to individual households to encourage them to accept development:

The government wants to ensure that households benefit from developments in their local area. [It]will work with industry, local authorities and other interested parties to develop a pilot passing a share of the benefits of development must be restricted directly to individual households.

David Orr, chief executive of the National Housing Federation said: "We are concerned that further attempts to dilute the Community Infrastructure Levy by passing a portion to individuals will prevent necessary infrastructure being delivered or increase CIL charges at the expense of affordable housing" . Andy Boddington said: "sustainable development will be undermined by neighbours that need to pay off their credit card bills" .

Planning permission. The government will look at reducing the number of applications "where unnecessary statutory consultations occur" and pilot a single point of contact for cases where conflicting advice is provided.

Housing

Affordable housing. The government is to consult on freeing developments with ten or fewer houses from making S106 contributions towards affordable housing .

Social housing. In the Autumn Statement, George Osborne said councils will be able sell off their most expensive social homes so that they can house "many more families for the same money." Run down housing estates will be regenerated using loans. The Right to Buy will be extended with extra mortgage finance and agents to help tenants purchase their homes. The cap on council borrowing will be lifted by £300 million over two years from 2015. A council will have to get its business case approved by their local enterprise partnership before bidding for the cap to be raised . The Chartered Institute of Housing has called the steps "far too modest" and warned any gains could be offset through boosting right to buy sales and selling off expensive council homes .

Housing. A £1 billion, six-year programme to fund infrastructure will unlock new “locally led”, large housing sites, delivering around 250,000 homes. The programme will begin in 2014-15, with investment decisions on nine sites, of unlocking around 27,000 houses. £50 million of the fund will be earmarked for LEP supported bids “to deliver on their ambitions for housing growth.” Plans to transfer part of the New Homes Bonus to LEPs have been abandoned outside London after protests from local councils [P](#). Family annexes will attract a council tax discount of 50% from April 2014 [C](#).

Review. George Osborne announced a review into the role local authorities can play in supporting overall housing supply, but gave no details of its scope and timing.

High Streets

Eric Pickles announced a package of measures to support the high street [C](#) [C](#) [C](#). The aims are to:

- ◆ Give business a “greater stake in their high streets” by reducing regulations.
- ◆ Make it easier to diversify town centres, through permitted development rights.
- ◆ Ensure town centres “remain accessible to visitors”, by rolling back parking rules.
- ◆ Promote technology to modernise town centres, through new research.

Package. The government has issued a red tape challenge, calling for ideas on how regulations can be simplified in high streets. Closes 17 January [C](#). Eric Pickles has also launched a consultation on local authority parking. Closes 14 February [C](#). Parking penalties have been frozen until the next election. New guidance will insist that parking charges and fines should not be used to subsidise other areas of local government spending. The communities department will publish guidance to ensure that councils review their retail land to take account of the changing local market. A new multi-million pound competition will “support business-led digital town centres.” In partnership with business, the Economic and Social Research Council will fund £4.7 million of research on innovation in e-commerce and digital high streets.

Permitted development. The government is to consult on extending permitted development rights to change of use from retail (A1) to restaurant or assembly and leisure uses, such as cinemas, gyms, skating rinks and swimming baths (A3 or D1). It will also consider “liberalising planning restrictions on mezzanine floors in retail premises, where this will support town centres.”

Business rates. Business rates will rise by 2% next year, not 3.1% as planned and the bill can be paid over 12 months. There will be a £1,000 discount for retail properties, pubs, and cafes (excluding banks and betting offices) with rateable values below £50,000 for two years. The doubling of Small Business Rate Relief will continue for a further year and. New occupiers of former retail premises which have been unoccupied for a year will receive a 50% discount for 18 months.

Energy Subsidies

Subsidy changes. The set prices for onshore wind power and solar energy will be cut from 2015 by an extra 5%, while those for offshore wind power will be cut less than previously planned. The government said that revised subsidies will unlock £40 billion in renewable energy investments by 2020, doubling the current 20 gigawatt UK renewables capacity [C](#) [CB](#) [P](#) [G](#). In the Autumn Statement, the Chancellor cut taxes for onshore oil and gas exploration and development from 62% to 30% with immediate effect [T](#). Earlier in the week, ministers announced a package of measures which they claim will cut household energy bills [CB](#).

Reaction. RenewableUK said that the onshore subsidy cut could lead to community schemes being abandoned [C](#). Environmental groups and green businesses called the statement “a missed opportunity” [BG](#) [S](#). Friends of the Earth said: “The long-term health of our economy has been completely undermined by the Chancellor’s short-sighted determination to keep the nation hooked on dirty and increasing costly fossil fuels” [G](#). Shaun Spiers for CPRE welcomed the lower subsidies for onshore wind and solar farms: “Onshore wind is having a damaging impact on precious landscapes that is quite disproportionate to its benefits in terms of delivering clean energy” [CPRE](#).

National Networks NPS

Consultation. The government has at last published the road and rail networks draft national policy statement (NN NPS) for consultation. Closes 26 February [C](#) [D](#) [S](#).

Policies. The NPS reiterates that the government will not introduce national road pricing to choke demand on the strategic road network. Ministers will consider tolls to fund new road capacity on the strategic road network. River and estuary crossings will normally be funded by tolls or road user charges. Planners of new schemes must take into account aesthetics as well as functionality.

Protected landscapes. For rail and road schemes in national parks and AONBs, the Secretary of State may grant consent in “exceptional circumstances” where there is a national need. Strategic rail freight interchanges “often may not be considered suitable adjacent to residential areas or environmentally sensitive areas such as National Parks and AONBs.” “Local landscape designations should not be used in themselves as reasons to refuse consent.”

Projects. The NPS does not specify particular projects, but makes it clear that “new road alignments and links, including alignments which cross a river or estuary, may be needed to support... economic and demographic growth.” Similarly, the government will “consider new or re-opened [rail] alignments.”

Scope. The NPS will apply to nationally significant infrastructure projects and potentially local schemes. It “may also be a material consideration in decision making on applications that fall under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 or any successor legislation.”

National Infrastructure Plan

Top 40. The government plans to give its Top 40 projects an option to use the streamlined Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project process under the Planning Act 2008 (currently some communications and innovation projects, for example, are excluded). Not all of the Top 40 are actually projects; “onshore wind” and “offshore wind” are each classified as a project, as are the Growing Places & Regional Growth funds. Shale gas is also included, leading to the possibility that fracking applications will be determined by the government despite previous assurances that decisions will be made locally.

Top 40 projects. Among the priority projects are:

- ◆ £50m to redevelop Gatwick Airport railway station.
- ◆ A government financial guarantee for a new nuclear power station at Wylfa, north Wales [TC](#).
- ◆ A financial guarantee for the £1bn Northern Line extension to Battersea.
- ◆ A guarantee for £8.8 million to finance installation of energy saving lighting across NCP car parks.

The [Lower Thames Crossing](#) is singled out as a priority road investment, along with the [Mersey Gateway Bridge](#) and the 20-mile [A14 improvement](#) between Cambridge and Huntingdon, which will now not be tolled [L](#) [BBC](#) [S](#).

Funding. The government will raise money through sale of corporate and financial assets, which will be doubled from £10bn to £20bn between 2014 and 2020, including selling the government’s 40% shareholding in Eurostar [g](#). The insurance industry also said it will invest £25bn in infrastructure projects in the next five years, though there are no details of which projects it will support [FT](#) [C](#).

Rural broadband. The Treasury also announced a £10 million competitive fund to open in early 2014 to test innovative ways to deliver superfast broadband to remote areas.

Cars. The government aims to make the UK a world centre for the testing and development of driverless cars, with a £10 million prize for a city prepared to be a testing ground.

Recycling. The government is to renegotiate EU limits on the quantity of biodegradable municipal waste that can be sent to landfill.

Review. The government is seeking views on the operation of the nationally significant infrastructure planning regime. Ministers are aiming to streamline consultation and environmental information requirements to speed up the pre-application phase. They also want flexibility to make changes to [Development Consent Orders](#) (DCOs) after a decision is made. They are suggesting that that non-material changes to a DCO would not be subject to consultation. Minor material changes would receive “limited consultation and publicity.” Procedures for significant changes would be more stringent, though still subject to shortened consultation and simplified procedures. Closes 24 January [C](#) [ID](#).

The CPRE eBulletins

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Top 40 Infrastructure Projects

Roads

- 1. Accelerated road construction pilots:** M3 Junction 2 to 4a; M6 Junction 10a to 13; M1 Junction 28 to 31; A160 / A180 Immingham.
- 2. Highways Agency new capacity:** A1 (Leeming to Barton); M1 / M6 Junction 19; A556 (Knutsford to Bowden); A453 widening; A5-M1 Link Road (Dunstable bypass).
- 3. Smart Motorways:** M60 Junction 8 to M62 Junction 20; M25 Junction 23 to 27; M1 Junction 39 to 42; M25 Junction 5 to 6-7.
- 4. A14.**
- 5. Lower Thames Crossing.**

Rail

- 6. High Speed 2.**
- 7. Northern connectivity:** Northern Hub; North West electrification; Trans-Pennine electrification.
- 8. Electrification:** Electric Spine; Great Western; Midland Main Line; Welsh Valleys.
- 9. Line capacity improvements:** Midland Main Line capacity; East Coast Main Line; West Coast Main Line; Southern Train lengthening; East-West Rail; East Coast connectivity.
- 10. Major station improvements:** Birmingham New Street; Bristol Temple Meads; Manchester Victoria; Peterborough; Reading.
- 11. Intercity Express Programme.**
- 12. Strategic Rail Freight Network:** Felixstowe to Nuneaton route.
- 13. Crossrail.**
- 14. Thameslink.**

International gateways

- 15. South East airports:** Gatwick capital investment programme; Heathrow capital investment programme.
- 16. Regional airports.** Birmingham Airport runway extension; A6 Manchester Airport relief road.
- 17. Container ports.**

Energy

- 18. Electricity generation – gas.**
- 19. Electricity generation – nuclear:** Hinkley Point C; Wylfa Newydd.
- 20. Electricity generation – wind:** Onshore; Offshore.
- 21. Electricity generation – other renewables:** Biomass; Solar PV; Marine.
- 22. Carbon capture and storage:** Peterhead project; White Rose project.
- 23. Energy transmission and distribution:** Western Link; Beaulieu-Denny upgrade; London Power Tunnels.
- 24. Unconventional gas production:** Shale gas exploration.
- 25. Smart Meter rollout.**

Digital communications

- 26. Superfast broadband.**
- 27. Super-Connected Cities.**
- 28. Mobile Infrastructure Project.**
- 29. 4G commercial rollout.**

Water and flood defences

- 30. Water supply and sewerage network programmes.**
- 31. Thames Tideway Tunnel.**
- 32. Flooding and Coastal Erosion Management Programme:** Clacton and Holland on Sea; Exeter Flood Defence Scheme; Ipswich Main Stage: Tidal Barrier; Leeds City Flood Alleviation; Lower Derwent Flood Alleviation; Lower Don Valley Flood Protection; Northwich Town Centre; Salford Flood Alleviation; Skipton Flood Alleviation; Thames Estuary.

Science and innovation

- 33. Science majors:** The Francis Crick Institute; Diamond Phase 3; Skylon SABRE; ELIXIR; Pirbright Institute Phase 2; Agri-tech Innovation Centres.
- 34. Research Partnerships Investment Fund.**
- 35. Science and innovation Catapult centres:** National Composite Centre expansion; National Biologics Manufacturing Centre.

Local infrastructure

- 36. Local authority major transport schemes:** Manchester Metrolink extensions; Nottingham NET2; Leeds New Generation; Norwich Northern Distributor Road; Sunderland Strategic Corridor; A380 South Devon Link Road; Croxley Rail Link; Midland Metro extension.
- 37. Mersey Gateway Bridge.**
- 38. London Underground investment:** Northern Line upgrade; Sub-surface Line upgrades (Metropolitan, Circle, Hammersmith & City, and District Lines).
- 39. Northern Line extension to Battersea.**
- 40. Local infrastructure funding:** Growing Places Fund; Regional Growth Fund.