

The new Planning system

Let us welcome the idea of a simple map setting out general uses for land in each designated area of a Local Plan. Let us also agree the government needs to cut inward migration and prevent people trafficking.

The government suggests 3 categories on a map. One is Growth, the second is Renewal and the third is Protection. Growth implies more or less any development is fine in principle, though subject to design and density requirements to be set in the Local Plan. Renewal we are told implies rebuild, change of use or some "gentle densification". Protection implies keeping areas green with little or no building.

Maybe the government should look at three other use categories instead. They could demark land for housing, land for commercial development be it retail or industrial estate, and land for green gaps, farming and outdoor leisure for sports fields and other green spaces. I am all in favour of eroding the current complex uses classes and allowing greater freedom for building owners to flex from retail to homes or to industry. There do need to be special controls on the location of industrial businesses or leisure businesses that create noise or other nuisance, so they do not conflict with housing areas. Adjusting their categories, they could make it clear Growth includes employment sites as well as housing sites, whilst Renewal might like to stay more in keeping with current uses and styles of development.

The big issue to be resolved is the process of forming the Map, and the extent to which local wishes will be fully reflected in the results. The present system is deeply distrusted and disliked for the simple reason that the compromise which is a local Plan is soon broken by appeal decisions, forcing fast growing communities to absorb more housing development than they wanted. In communities that lack growth and investment the same process fails to lift the area to attract the new people and new investment they need to boost living standards and enterprise.

There is enthusiasm for levelling up both in the fast growth areas suffering from too much building, and in the slow and no growth areas desperate for new investment. How will this new system level up? What does it bring to the areas without investment that will drive a better distribution of building around the country? The government needs to make sure this is not just a new variant of systems to increase the pace of housebuilding in areas that are already relatively well off.