



The Planning and Infrastructure Bill: A response from Civic Voice

April 2025

Executive Summary

- i. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill is mostly an exercise in promoting strategic planning and in facilitating investment through central intervention. Civic Voice accepts the case for a speedier and more effective planning system, but is concerned that the Bill is often vague, leaving key decisions to the Secretary of State and that, in addition, it fails to recognise the implications for local communities and for public engagement.
- ii. The scale of discretionary and other powers given to the Secretary of State is such that the government needs to work out new forms of spatial coordination and accountability at a national level. Civic Voice proposes therefore
 - a) the preparation of a national spatial strategy;
 - b) the establishment of a new national advisory and consultative body, comprising representatives of local groups.
- iii. Further, we object in Part 1 to the removal (disapplication in terms of the language of the Bill) of heritage protection for transport investment projects.
- iv. The delegation of decisions to planning officers already covers well over 90% of all decisions, as is acknowledged in the published background papers. The provisions in Part 2, together with regulations made by the Secretary of State may introduce more consistency in local delegation practices. However, a further significant national increase in delegated decisions looks unrealistic and is also undesirable, given its potentially damaging implications for local democracy.
- v. The delegation provisions should, in any case, be accompanied by a statutory requirement that every planning authority has a designated independent and planning-qualified Chief Planning Officer, with professional qualified staff, including staff trained or qualified in other specialist roles notably, heritage and conservation, and minerals and waste management. Otherwise, the delegation of decisions does not result in decisions made by qualified persons. Any additional staffing costs should be recognised by the government, with continued financial support to Councils. In addition, the government should work out contingency arrangements for those councils unable or unwilling to employ qualified staff.
- vi. The creation of new spatial strategies and planning boards will further raise the demand for professionally qualified staff. The environmental delivery plans, proposed in Part 3, will also require additional technical staff. The government needs a strategy

for professional staffing and planning skills as a complement to the Bill. No such strategy has been published.

- vii. While the background papers to the Bill recognise that community engagement in plan preparation will be crucial to democratic legitimacy, the Bill is silent on the subject. For local planning, the Bill should refer to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and should strengthen the provisions in the SCI to allow for consistency and good quality practice. In this context, Civic Voice asks for the establishment of a local consultative body in each local planning authority area. The role of the consultative body would be to advise officers of the views of local communities, covering both plan making and the control of development.
- viii. For the new Spatial Development Strategies, the Bill recognises a need for the establishment of Strategic Planning Boards, but does not say where or under which circumstances would justify this. Civic Voice is of the view that Strategic Planning Boards should be widely used for authorities that lack local ward councillors, such as the existing combined Mayoral authorities, and that the Boards should include membership from outside local government, including representatives of the civic movement and other local non-governmental bodies. Further, the Bill should specify the preparation of a SCI for strategic as well as local planning
- ix. The provisions in Part 3, 'Development and Nature Recovery' and Part 4 'Development Corporations' are about the provision of general enabling powers. The proposed Environmental Delivery Plan has the commendable aim of reconciling nature protection and development. It looks applicable only to large schemes. However, it is not possible to make further recommendations until detailed regulations or proposals are known. In relation to Part 3, Civic Voice wishes to promote, wherever practical, the potential for citizen science and community involvement, for example through the existing local Nature Recovery Plans.
- x. Finally, in Part 5, Civic Voice welcomes the compulsory purchase proposals as a way of speeding up urban regeneration, enabling more sensitive local planning and, in some cases, reducing the costs of social development. However, we are concerned that financial and staffing constraints in local authorities will continue to limit compulsory purchase to occasional ad hoc interventions.

Main Report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Since coming to power in the summer of 2024, the Labour government has consistently sought to ensure that the planning system in England does not block economic growth, does not block housebuilding and is efficient and speedy in its decision making. The Planning and Infrastructure Bill is a further measure in the same direction. As the national charity representing civic societies across the country, Civic Voice supports the main direction of the Bill. We must reiterate, however, the importance of community involvement in planning and urban development, as well as the importance of issues such as heritage and the quality of public space that are of common concern to local communities. Public involvement in planning and the urban environment is good for individuals, good for communities and essential for the creation and maintenance of civilised society.
In this context, we have a series of both general and specific concerns.
- 1.2 The general concerns of Civic Voice stem mainly from the way the Bill gives the Secretary of State additional, often difficult to assess powers of discretion and intervention. Additional discretionary powers are given, for example, in relation to national infrastructure policy and in determining matters appropriate to decision by officers rather than committee members. The discretion allowed to the Secretary of State in relation to the provisions in Part 1, Section 37, the disapplication of heritage protection, is particularly broad and vague. More detail should be included in the Bill. The provisions in the Bill also overlap the forthcoming Devolution Bill on, for example, the organisation of authorities charged with spatial development strategies. It is likely therefore that further representations on the matters raised by the Bill will be necessary.
- 1.3 In addition, in relation to the wider policy debate on which the Bill is predicated, Civic Voice is concerned about the risk of oversimplification. Planning can help in the implementation of infrastructure investment, notably through strategic planning and spatial coordination. As a result, we welcome the proposal in the Bill for Spatial Development Strategies. However, strategic infrastructure also needs to be planned at a national level and this is missing. A national spatial strategy would coordinate between infrastructure provision and other development and planning strategies. For example, if the aim is to increase residential living in town and city centres, investment in our invisible infrastructure is as important and the overground assets. If the aim is to develop in rural areas with high nutrient levels in local water courses, investment in water treatment by water companies and changed farming practices will be necessary. More emphasis at a national level needs to be placed on the interactions between trends and policy priorities.

- 1.4 Likewise, recent policy debates risk oversimplifying the relation between the planning system, economic growth and house building. Planning and other regulatory measures are only one consideration amongst many. Significant increases in affordable housing, in particular, can only be secured through public investment. Conversely, developers may block growth through holding back land. In addition, local planning as well as strategic planning can and does facilitate growth. The safeguarding of heritage, itself a form of planning control, has provided the foundation for economic growth in former industrial towns and cities in England, changing and improving their image. All advanced economies have planning systems, and for good reasons. Processes of urban development and change create a multitude of land use conflicts and a multitude of environmental and social side effects that have to be managed in the public interest.
- 1.5 Moreover delays to decision making can come from multiple sources within government, including the various quasi-autonomous agencies responsible for environmental protection and planning. For example, Highways England may delay decision making owing disputes about future traffic levels. The Environment Agency may delay decision making owing to uncertainties about the funds available for flood prevention work. The Bill assumes that Natural England will provide a more effective and efficient decision-making vehicle than local councils, including the city regions and Counties currently responsible for the preparation of local environmental protection plans. More attention should be paid to the circumstances and type of decision that is best given to a quasi-autonomous agency rather than a local council. Civic Voice favours decision making by local councils as the default option, mainly because local councils are democratically accountable in a way that quasi-autonomous agencies are not.
- 1.6 The Bill has five main parts, dealing respectively with national infrastructure, local authority planning, development and nature recovery, development corporations and compulsory purchase. To take each part in turn:

2. Infrastructure

- 2.1 Part 1 is about 'Delivering a faster and more certain consenting process for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs). Major infrastructure is held up unreasonably by the present planning system, it is suggested, so instead government wants to improve 'certainty and speed'. Government will produce 'National Policy Statements' every 5 years to drive and guide these projects. Amongst other proposals, the Bill permits central government (under the name of the Secretary of State) to allow development through an alternative consenting regime to the existing development consent procedure.
- 2.2 In a response to the Planning White Paper of 2020, Civic Voice argued that the existence of spatial inequalities, increased awareness of climate change and the

likelihood of infrastructure investment required the adoption of a national, all England spatial strategy.¹ This remains our position. Indeed the emphasis in the Bill on national infrastructure policy statements makes the preparation of a national spatial strategy even more necessary.

- 2.3 As envisaged in the Bill, the scope and form of the national policy statements is left vague. However, an infrastructure policy statement by its very nature is about a sector of the economy or sector of public intervention. The varied national policy interventions need to be brought together and given an explicit spatial dimension that aligns with other aspects of spatial planning, including measures specified in other aspects of the Bill, notably the location of new town or major urban development projects. As has been proposed by the Royal Town Planning Institute amongst others, the spatial strategy would be a non-statutory document that would facilitate investment, without the need for a cumbersome approval process.²
- 2.4 To ensure that local views are not completely disregarded, an independent and representative national advisory body should also be established with the aim of bringing together and articulating local and non-governmental views. The body would then report accordingly to government and in addition advise local authorities showing them what good practice looks like, helping them to replicate best practice and offering training for officers, councillors and other committee members. Part 2 admits the need for the training of councillors and committee members, but not officers. The establishment of an advisory body would complement a national spatial strategy, of the type that Civic Voice and others have proposed. However, an advisory body would also strengthen the accountability of the national infrastructure policies envisaged in the Bill in its present form. The Bill should include additional clauses to establish such a body.
- 2.5 In addition, in Part 1 Section 37, the Bill would allow central government to disapply heritage protection for transport investment. Under this provision, government could circumvent objections made on the grounds that, say road proposals would adversely affect listed buildings, conservation areas and ancient monuments, including heritage assets and ancient monuments of iconic and international significance. The Bill and a Parliamentary Briefing notes, however, that the Secretary of State may already grant listed building consent and this aspect of listed building procedure would remain unchanged.³
- 2.6 There is no indication in the Bill of the circumstances that would trigger the disapplication of heritage. The measure goes against over a century of heritage protection. It is essential that heritage, environmental and other matters are properly taken into account before the government gives the go-ahead for major projects. We

¹ Civic Voice, 2020.

² RTPI, 2024.

³ HM Government, 2025, Section 37 (2): Lewis et al, 2025, pp.45-46.

therefore seek assurance, either in the Bill or in a ministerial statement, that this will happen. Otherwise, Section 37 should be removed.

3. Local authority planning

- 3.1 Part 2 is about making local decisions more professional and more strategic in character. Decision taking in the planning system is too slow and variable says the Bill, so officers should be given powers to take delegated decisions. In addition, the Bill proposes that planning fees should be set by councils, more training for members of planning committees, the delegation of many more decisions to officers rather than councillors and the creation of a new tier of strategic spatial planning. We welcome the provision of training for members of planning committees and in particular for the training of ward councillors. We can only offer qualified support for other aspects of Part 2.

Fees

- 3.2 In relation to fees, the background to the Bill is an awareness that current fee income does not cover the cost of the planning service.⁴ Planning fees are likely to rise, but the scale of the increase will be determined locally. The proposal is acceptable subject to safeguards. The Bill makes provision for safeguards through the regulations made by the Secretary of State (Clause 44). Civic Voice can make few comments until the regulations are published. Some broad principles may be stated, however. Planning fees need to be set so that they do not deter individual householders from making applications. Otherwise, councils may face an increase in unauthorised small-scale development work. Fee income is likely to vary from region to region. Government should therefore continue to even out disparities through central grants. There is no mention in the Bill of any change in fees on Listed Building applications, which at the moment are free and need to be kept that way.

Delegation of decisions

- 3.3 In Clause 46 on the delegation of decisions to planning officers, the government should ensure that every local authority has adequate levels and variety of professional staff. Can government provide evidence to the effect that every local authority employs a core of professionally qualified planning staff under the supervision of a planning qualified head? Not all staff need to be professionally qualified, just a core probably of more senior staff. As an example, we know from a freedom of information of request response in 2024 that a London Borough had no designated Chief Planning Officer, no defined planning department, and no Royal Town Planning Institute members in the planning service. Under the Bill in its present form 'planning advice' might well continue to be given to a Council by an unqualified officer who may have other responsibilities and preferences, and any professional

⁴ Lewis et al, 2025, p.53.

town planning view will be marginalised. That is unsatisfactory. Additional staff can, of course, be appointed. Who will pay? And what happens if there are no relevant staff.

- 3.4 Professionally qualified staff fall into two main categories- generalist staff and specialised staff for such fields as heritage and minerals and waste management. Government needs to consider the possibility and work out contingencies for local authorities that lack the resources, the necessary scale or the will to employ the full range of specialist staff. Lack of qualified staff is an issue under present arrangements, as well as the proposals contained in the Bill. It needs addressing and resolving.
- 3.5 In addition to this, the delegation of decisions to officers raises obvious issues of local democratic control. According to government research 96% of planning decisions were made by officers in the second quarter of 2024.⁵ The scope for a substantial further increase is not large. Practice varies between authorities, however. Under regulations envisaged in the Bill, the delegation of decisions to authorities could and should be made more consistent.
- 3.6 The government should not seek a further significant increase in the delegation of decisions to officers. There is a risk that if more decisions are taken out of the hands of elected councillors - under a delegation scheme imposed by the government- local people will lose faith in the planning system as a whole, and that numbers of people who submit comments on individual applications will fall. The perceived loss of democratic accountability - and of any degree of trust that remains in the system - will be harmful, and will never be regained. Government should therefore be cautious in seeking further delegation.

Reforming the local plan- an omission from the Bill

- 3.7 Planning decisions are delegated successfully to officers on the basis that they can be assessed in accordance with the Council's adopted policies or clear national guidance. The existence of an up-to-date Local Plan is crucial in this context. The government's guide to the Bill states that,
'The best way for councillors and communities to engage in the development proposed for their areas is through the local plan process, which will be agreed by the council.'⁶
- 3.8 The Bill is silent on the form and content of the Local Plan, however. Local plans in England and Wales are not binding documents (or zoning plans as this type of document is also called) as they are in some countries in Europe and elsewhere. Decisions are always discretionary to an extent, as they may take into account 'other

⁵ MHCLG, *Planning Reform Working Paper: Planning Committees*, 2025

⁶ MHCLG, *Guide to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill*, 2025. The document is unpaginated and the paragraphs are not numbered.

material circumstances'. Moreover, departure from a Local Plan is commonly a matter of judgment as a Local Plan may have multiple policies affecting a site and the site itself may be subject to multiple land use classifications or subject to a further exercise in masterplanning. Continued interpretation and therefore continued consultation is commonly necessary.

- 3.9 The discretionary character of the Local Plan is a further reason why Civic Voice insists on the significance of professionalism and professional qualifications in planning. Even in the presence of an up-to-date plan, development decisions are more than an administrative or clerical exercise. Moreover, if there is doubt about which aspect of a Local Plan should be prioritised, the officer should under any democratic planning regime be able to refer the application to the Committee for decision.
- 3.10 Putting aside the question of delegation, local groups, including local civic societies, have not found involvement in plan making to be an easy exercise. Many groups and the public generally prefer to comment on concrete proposals, rather than the relatively abstract principles of a Local Plan. The procedures and methods of plan making are often confusing, especially to non-professionals. Moreover, the plan making process and the associated Examination in Public is typically dominated by property interests and their consultants. The plan making process should be open, clear and accountable, using statistical material and visual material wherever practicable.
- 3.11 In a background paper, the government has recognised the need to reform plan making and has proposed placing more emphasis on the production of a 'vision' and the use of templates.⁷ Much of the detail awaits publication. However, the provisions in the background paper are, as stated, out of line with the main direction of the Bill, with its concern to simplify planning and to increase its effectiveness and efficiency. In particular, the production of a vision risks increasing the wordiness that is already a problem in Local Plans. For example, the vision might declare that the council wants a district or borough to be safe, attractive, prosperous, resilient, carbon neutral and sustainable supporting a healthy, active and high quality of life etc, etc, while the actual development strategy favours the continued promotion of car-based journeys to work and involves big box warehouses being built around motorway junctions. We are not convinced that the government has an adequate strategy on how to prepare clear and accountable Local Plans.
- 3.12 In any case, though local practice varies, some authorities seem incapable of working in partnership with local people and their groups. Fundamental changes in their attitudes, approaches and ways of working are required. This will not happen without pressure from planning legislation and central government support. In 2019, Civic

⁷ MHCLG, Government response to the proposed plan-making reforms, 2025, paragraphs 17-21.

Voice reviewed and investigated the contents of Statements of Community Involvement (SCI), prepared under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 of an earlier Labour government. The SCI should be a building block of the planning system, ensuring that communities everywhere have a voice at every stage of the planning system. However, the SCI is not working well. The Civic Voice review established that most local societies were not even aware of the SCI.⁸ An independent, university examination of the SCI likewise states that ‘expectations from communities about the usefulness of SCIs were low or absent’ and that there has been ‘little or no community involvement in their production, use or monitoring’.⁹

- 3.13 The relevant background paper refers to a ‘Project Initiation Document’ (PID) as providing a framework for public engagement in Local Plan preparation.¹⁰ The Bill does not refer to either the PID or the SCI. As a result, the specified procedures for Local Plan preparation are not just confusing. They risk diluting or undermining the existing weak statutory provisions governing consultation and engagement. Public engagement is desirable in itself in maintaining civic involvement and citizenship. It also contributes to the quality of a Local Plan and its neglect leads to delays and conflicts at a later stage.
- 3.14 Civic Voice wants the Bill to encourage public engagement. This is not to endorse planning by referendum, however. There may be 1000 letters opposing a development but if the arguments in them are weak and the proposal complies with policy it should be permitted. Disagreeing with the views of objectors is not the same as ignoring those views. Moreover, taking local views into account is best regarded as a continuous process rather than a series of unrelated ‘consultations’.
- 3.15 To this extent, the establishment of an independent local consultative committee provides a suitable policy instrument, an inclusive measure that could include a wide range of interests and would not slow down the process of deciding planning applications. The meetings would instead allow a collective reflection on decisions and familiarise officers with local views. The Bill should specifically encourage or require Councils to set up a formal and independent consultative body most likely as an amendment of existing provisions for the SCI or possibly as a separate measure.
- 3.16 In addition to procedural and legal changes, there is a need for more training for professionals in such matters as public communication, the use of statistics and the use of visual material. When a plan is submitted to an Examination in Public, the test is soundness in relation to government policy and whether in addition it has met the minimal standards for the SCI. The quality and clarity of the draft plan is not a material issue as the Inspector is charged with clarifying matters that are drawn to

⁸ Civic Voice, *Press Releases*, January 20 and 23, 2020.

⁹ Dobson & Parker, 2023, p.509.

¹⁰ MHCLG, *Government response to the proposed plan-making reforms*, 2025, paragraph 111.

their attention. Clarifying a plan during a public examination is far too late as it does not prevent a vague, muddled or incoherent document being offered to the public. Again, the provision of additional advice and additional staff training will be necessary, funds should be found for this and new planning advisory bodies should be established to provide guidance.

The Spatial Development Strategy

- 3.17 A further provision in the Bill is a new form of strategic spatial plan, a Spatial Development Strategy, covering multiple council districts. Strategic planning, in the form of the London Plan, has existed in London for two decades. That system has generally worked without significant problems, with renewals of the Plan every five or six years. In other large cities, with mayors, the power exists for a Spatial Development Strategy to be prepared under regulations dating from 2018.¹¹ A House of Commons briefing states that Liverpool city region is the only authority to have started a development strategy under the relevant regulation.¹²
- 3.18 The introduction of strategic planning into rural areas, with small villages and towns and multiple strong local identities, may, in contrast, prove contentious. Like Local Plans, the preparation of a Spatial Development Strategy should be undertaken in accordance with a revised SCI and in a way that that is open, clear and accountable and that uses appropriate statistical material and visual material wherever practicable.
- 3.19 The proposed Spatial Development Strategy differs from a Local Plan in its form of accountability. A Local Plan is prepared for and adopted by a local authority comprising elected councillors representing local wards. Unless practice is changed in forthcoming legislation, the Spatial Development Strategy will be prepared in some cases by authorities without directly elected ward councilors.
- 3.20 Given the likely variability of practice, the Bill envisages the establishment of strategic planning boards, but only where the Secretary of State 'considers it desirable'. (Clause 47, 12B). Civic Voice suggests that a strategic planning board is established wherever a Spatial Development Strategy is prepared by an authority without directly elected councillors and that, further, the membership of the Board is extended beyond local government figures mentioned in the Bill, as currently presented, to include civic societies and non-governmental groups, and other relevant or knowledgeable persons. The model would be the existing membership of the Planning Boards for National Parks and National Landscapes or to give a slightly different historical example the membership of the Boards for New Town Development Corporations.

¹¹ Lewis et al, 2025, p.58

¹² Ibid

4. *Development and nature recovery*

- 4.1 The Preface declares that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill ‘will not have the effect of reducing the level of environmental protection provided for by any existing environmental law’. That declaration, which we support, is important in suggesting that government accepts and will work within existing environmental standards and levels of protection. ‘Development’ and ‘nature recovery’ are not necessarily mutually supportive and development may have a damaging impact on nature depending on the circumstances.
- 4.2 Civic Voice is aware of how strongly local communities feel about nature protection within urban areas just as much as in the countryside. The protection of street trees has generated much public support, for example and this support is likely to continue, irrespective of the provisions in the Bill. Street trees not only play a role in biodiversity, they make a significant contribution to the ‘feel’ of a place and may also mitigate some forms of flooding. Replacing mature trees with little saplings is not a satisfactory solution. In greenfield development, the retention of hedgerows and hedgerow trees during the process of development raises similar sensitivities. Planning authorities need to specify in a masterplan or similar document that existing trees and hedgerows are retained within new development. Moreover, staff resources need to be allocated to supervise contractors to ensure that they do not damage those trees and hedgerows. Such detailed measures should be routine. It is important that, alongside the new responsibilities given to Natural England, local authorities continue to maintain existing protections and environmental standards.
- 4.3 The main innovation in the Bill is a new type of Environmental Delivery Plan (EDP) prepared by Natural England. The scope of the EDP (clause 48) is narrowly drawn, as it applies only to ‘the environmental features that are likely to be negatively affected by the development’. A relevant background paper states that the aim of the Bill is to move ‘responsibility for identifying actions to address environmental impacts away from multiple project-specific assessments in an area to a single strategic assessment and delivery plan.’¹³ That aim is not reflected in the wording in the Bill, as presented, as each development will require a separate EDP.
- 4.4 In any case, the environmental features of any locality are usually affected by a combination of existing development, existing activities, including farming practices as well as the likely impact of new development. Historic activities such as mining or former polluting industries may also have lasting, negative effects. Moreover, the enforcement of standards for ground, water and air pollution as well as the mitigation of flood risk is the responsibility of the Environment Agency, rather than Natural England. As presented in the Bill, therefore, and unless used selectively, the proposals look like a recipe for institutional conflict about who pays for what in which development area. As a starting point, more co-ordination is necessary between

¹³ MHCLG, *Planning Reform Working Paper: Development and Nature Recovery*, para 13a

national agencies and between national agencies and government. Without national ground rules, how will local communities be able to contribute or even understand the ensuing financial wrangles? Each draft EDP will be published ‘for public consultation’ but Natural England is not required to seek the views of local groups (clause 54).

- 4.5 For the future, much will depend on the resources available to Natural England and to the Environment Agency. The procedures for the EDP, including the procedures for enforcement and for levying funds from developers are likely to prove staff intensive and this will surely limit their use to very large projects such as New Towns or the route of major infrastructure projects. In such contexts the provisions may prove useful. However, the full implications will only become apparent when more detail, including the funding arrangements, are known.
- 4.6 Much will also depend on how the provisions in the Bill interact with existing statutory requirements, for example for Environmental Impact Analysis or the promotion of biodiversity on specific development sites or the existing local, mostly County or city-regional, Nature Recovery Strategies. If adequately staffed and appropriately designed, local nature recovery strategies offer a potential method of encouraging citizen science and community involvement- in documenting natural assets and in identifying risks to nature. We would not want citizen involvement to become diluted.

5. *Development corporations*

- 5.1 Part 4 of the Bill updates the legislation on development corporations and ensures that the designation of relevant development areas will be more flexible. The measures are unobjectionable in themselves, but their inclusion in the Bill should not lead to a neglect of small scale, locally sensitive forms of intervention.

6. *Compulsory purchase*

- 6.1 Part 5 offers, in principle, a means of strengthening the development function of local authorities. At the moment, compulsory purchase is often ‘ad hoc’ rather than strategic. Buildings are bought up when they become dangerous rather than when the land is needed to fit into the broader development for an area. Facilitating compulsory purchase might in contrast facilitate the implementation of development plans and urban regeneration projects, enabling the development of small, unused sites and sites characterised by multiple land ownership constraints or disputes over land values. Depending on the financial terms, the public purchase of sites also reduces development and infrastructure costs in a way that is beneficial to consumers.
- 6.2 The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 gave public authorities powers to ignore both ‘appropriate alternative development’ and ‘hope value’ in assessing compensation for compulsory purchase, by issuing a direction to this effect. These

powers enable a reduction of land acquisition costs but only apply to compulsory purchase for the development of housing, education, or NHS health facilities. Furthermore, their use must be approved by a government minister, who must be satisfied that it is in the public interest for compensation to be limited. The Bill proposes instead that a public authority itself may proceed with purchase at a discounted valuation either in the unlikely case where objections are absent or where approved by an Inspector. Other proposals include the introduction of electronic service of documents and of a speedier, 'expedited procedure' where land is unoccupied or there is no identifiable interest holder.

- 6.3 For Civic Voice, the main question in relation to Part 5 is whether legislative changes alone are sufficient to encourage local authorities to use compulsory purchase powers more frequently. Staffing shortages and staff training are a recurrent issue in relation to most aspects of planning, including provisions for compulsory purchase. Financial management is another consideration. Compulsory purchase of land will commonly offer value for money in the long term, reducing for example the cost of social housing. If the resulting development is of a commercial character, public land purchase may generate a surplus. However, the initial costs are high and councils face many financial constraints. The powers in the bill need to be accompanied by more financial support for housing, regeneration and development.

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