

Dear Sir/Madam,

Planning For the Future White Paper Consultation Response

I wish to respond on behalf of Milton Conservation Society (MCS) and Hamlet Court Conservation Forum (HCCF). The writer is respectively Vice Chairman and Chairman of these two groups. MCS has been working since 1987 to protect a Victorian and Edwardian part of Southend-on-Sea and has considerable local experience how planning impacts on our heritage (a designated conservation area). HCCF has worked since 2017 to protect a local historic high street, Hamlet Court Road, Westcliff-on-Sea and has been able to influence prospective designation.

Our comments relate to 'Proposal 17 Conserving and enhancing our historic buildings and areas in the 21st century'. We have two main points.

1. Our primary concern relates to adapting planning to concentrate on protecting the most significant historic buildings. Whilst this may seem a sensible approach it appears to work only for the most significant towns and villages and does little to emphasise the protection needed for the vast majority of towns where Scheduled Ancient Monument, Grade I or Grade II* Listing is rare or far from commonplace and Grade II Listing and Conservation Area status is readily found. Moreover a focus on higher significance appears to do little nothing for locally listed assets, outside current statutory protection.

These buildings and areas of lesser historical significance play a far, far bigger role in most peoples' lives across our country; it is where people live, work and play. Therefore the developing framework needs to embrace the buildings and areas at this end of the significance spectrum, to give local people the confidence that the planning system really is written with them in mind and not just for the best preserved places around our country such as York, Bath and Stamford. With such a framework in place and accepting and understanding that the best modern development has an important role to play in the future of historic places, we could hope to see real advancement in town planning.

2. Our experience has led us to know that whilst enthusiastic, conservation minded property owners protect and bring back the historic fabric of buildings to the benefit of the wider community, the historic significance of many local buildings continues to erode due to the shortcomings of the existing planning system. Too often we see planning consents poorly realised or partially ignored or unauthorised works allowed to pass without question or with just token intervention. 'Not in the public interest' and 'not proportionate' are too often the preferred language of authority. Then follows a great reluctance from the local authority to step in and either use substantive (person to person) persuasion or clear enforcement. All that results is the basis for a poor and deteriorating relationship between the public and the local planning authority.

There needs to be a far more inclusive way for the public to engage in resolving and being seen to resolve these commonplace issues. But mostly there needs to be a framework that sets good basic protective measures as the common goal, in the public interest, set up to encourage protection and easily achievable by a local authority.

We also support the efforts to really improve the democratisation of planning and to seek both beauty and environmental sustainability in the places we cherish.

We respectfully await the further development of local planning.

Yours faithfully,

Andy Atkinson MSc FRSA

Vice Chairman **Milton Conservation Society**
Chairman **Hamlet Court Conservation Forum**

