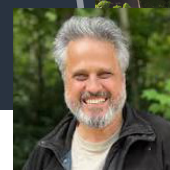


Roundtable on Planning and Environmental Regulations

with Alan Law - Deputy Chief Executive, Natural England

Online via zoom



Alan Law

Introduction

The latest PLG meeting hosted Alan Law, Deputy Chief Executive of Natural England, for an insightful discussion on the careful balance between environmental protection and development. The meeting emphasised the necessity for strategic, collaborative, and innovative solutions. The discussion called for reforms in local planning, better coordination across sectors, and a more sustainable approach to mitigating environmental impacts. Key challenges identified included the need for stronger accountability and more effective implementation of environmental regulations, particularly in addressing issues like nutrient neutrality and biodiversity net gain. Ongoing dialogue and engagement between stakeholders will be critical in advancing these objectives and achieving sustainable housing and environmental outcomes.

Key Takeaways

- The meeting highlighted the need for mechanisms to address environmental pressures such as nutrient neutrality, prior to the issues reaching critical emergency. Alan Law argued that by addressing these problems at a strategic level, for example by incorporating environmental issues into local plans, developers can be provided with the foresight to effectively address environmental regulations.



- Alan Law also expressed his desire to see more cross departmental and policy collaboration between DEFRA, DLUHC and the Health Department in order to balance often conflicting goals and level the policy playing field with regards to development.
- Participants also placed focus on the need for more innovative and readily available approaches to natural credit schemes and offsite BNG opportunities to ensure that developers can effectively offset environmental imbalances.
- Discussions underscored the need to consider innovative uses for the greenbelt, including reviewing areas of the greenbelt that contain little to no biodiversity (greybelt), as well as leveraging greenbelt areas for nature recovery, potentially sharing land value uplift between development and nature conservation.

Issues raised

- The meeting placed focus on the role of arm's-length bodies in properly balancing organisational goals with fairness towards the development sector. Participants felt that in their current form, statutory consultees hold unfair levels of power when halting development, which is reflected in their ability to call in schemes without reasonable timelines to respond to consultations.
- Participants highlighted the issue of environmental regulations as an example of how a zonal planning system could streamline planning while also delivering on conflicting policy objectives. Regional development plans with environmental regulations incorporated could allow Natural England to provide strategic support in the creation of robust long term plans, rather than intervening with development on a case by case basis.

We would like to thank the members of our Advisory Board for their contributions and continuing support.



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