

The State of Planning

Samuel Stafford



"When two Englishmen meet, their first talk is of the weather."

Samuel Johnson, 1758.



“When two English property professionals meet, their first talk is the state of the planning system.”

Samuel Stafford, 2022.



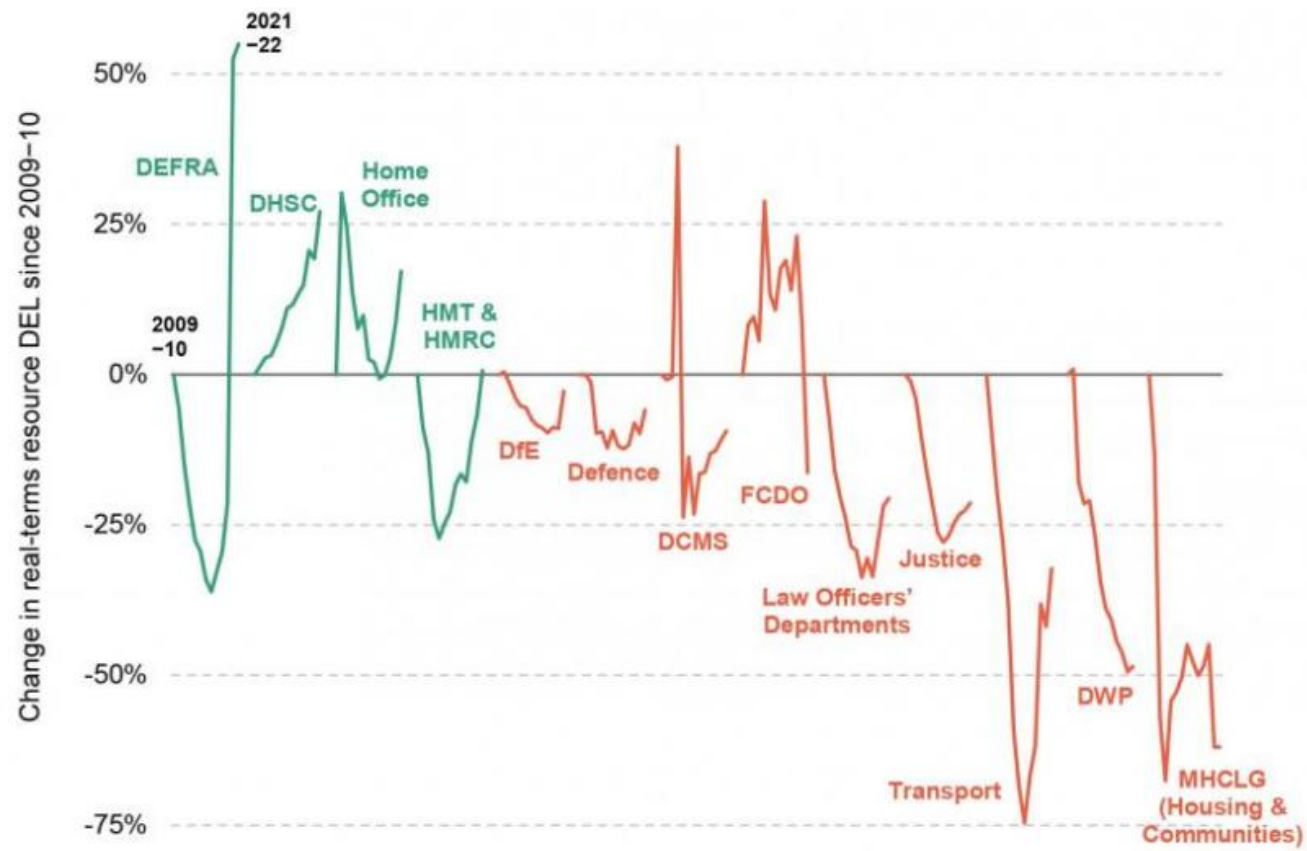
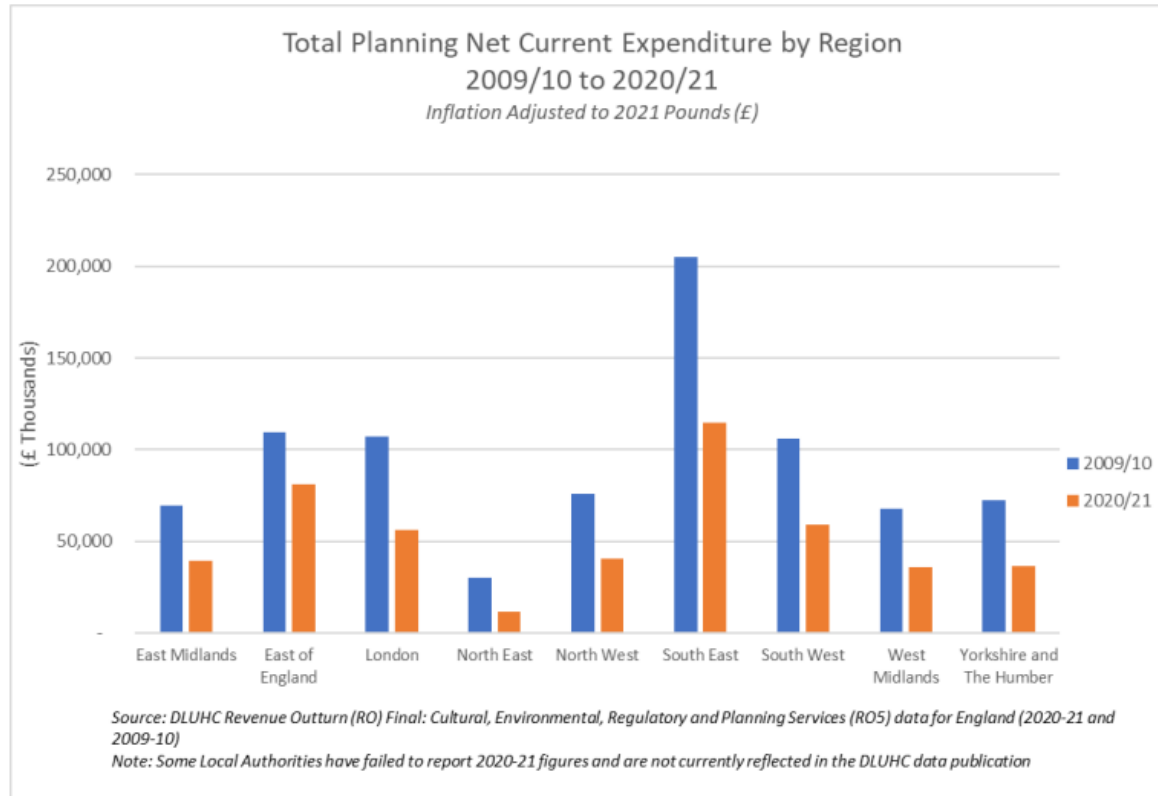


Table 2.4. Net spending per person by service (2019–20 £ per person)

Service	2009–10	2015–16	2018–19	2019–20	Change, 2009–10 to 2019–20
Social care services	504	465	479	481	–5%
Other services	540	345	301	323	–40%
ASC	359	321	325	333	–7%
CSC	145	145	154	148	2%
Env. & reg.	120	98	91	92	–24%
Transport	148	86	70	86	–42%
Central & other	80	56	51	57	–29%
Culture	78	49	39	37	–52%
Housing	62	32	30	30	–52%
Planning	52	24	21	21	–59%
Net service spending excl. public health	1,044	810	781	804	–23%
Public health	–	63	59	58	N/A
Net service spending incl. public health	1,044	873	840	862	–17%



Figure 1 – Total Change in net Local Authority planning spending from 2009 to 2020



Apple Podcasts Preview



58 min

PLAY ▶

Life on the Front Line

The 50 Shades of Planning Podcast

Government

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"Are you planning a 50 Shades on the local authority staffing crisis?"

Sam Stafford usually likes it when people get in touch with him to suggest topics for 50 Shades episodes, but found this message from a team leader at a local authority striking and sobering.

Is there a local authority staffing crisis? If so why and what can be done about it? Informed by equally striking and sobering responses to Episode 57's 'Call for Evidence' (see below a link to the 'Life on the Front Line' Blog), Sam puts these questions to Catriona Riddell, Peter Geraghty and Paul Brocklehurst, who try to do as much justice to this most weighty of topics as is possible within an hour or so.



The last 24 months have been miserable. I work for an LPA that has never been fully staffed, the whole time I have been there. We had a load of people leave at once and it took forever to fill the positions, so as the pandemic started we had even less staff. Then we had countless IT problems, the system logged us off up to 10 times a day at the start of the pandemic - because the system wasn't designed to cope with so many people at home. It was beyond difficult to get any work done when the system was constantly kicking you out. It created a backlog - that's been difficult to get rid of and IT problems have continued...

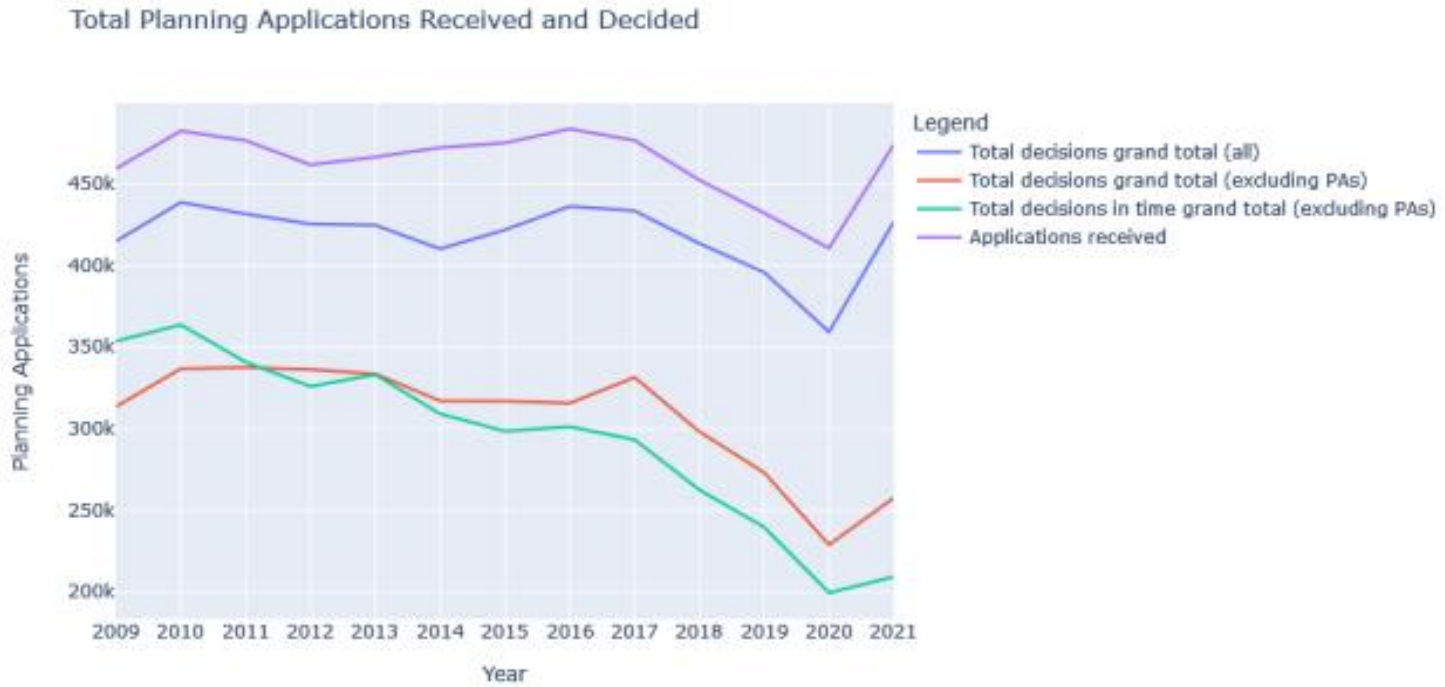
We don't have time to teach our newest recruits the broader stuff, the outcome we want rather than the process - we hope they will pick it up because I really want people to grow to love what we do not just churn out decisions. I'm not excusing everything, we have poor performance and the public sector is not good at dealing with it. And yes we make it hard for ourselves, arguing in public with internal consultees - no other business would do that. But at its heart we are trying to find the right answer and it's usually complex stuff (silly shed apps aside) - we are the LA diplomatic core.

There have been numerous other issues like key consultees having one junior member of staff. All the other team members left and consultations taking months to come back. Eventually they went off with stress for months and months (understandably) creating another huge backlog. Enforcement complaints are through the roof - we are often roped in to advise, which is just unseen work. Agents and applicants have been less than sympathetic, constantly threatening appeals or complaints. It's really demoralising and morale is at an all time low. Agents are refusing EOTs and just generally being helpful and unpleasant.

I loved working in local government a lot of the time, the chance to work on really important projects and to make a positive difference to the areas where I worked, but ultimately, all of the above was making it harder and harder and turning me into a different person who was cross a lot of the time and miserable at the end of the day. Once I realised that (or had it pointed out to me by my family) I knew that I had to make a change. I have recently joined a firm in the private sector and it's fine. I do miss my former colleagues and I miss how planning used to make me feel. Hopefully after a break I might feel able to return to an LPA role. I want that to be the case but at the moment, it seems impossible.



Figure 3 – Changes Planning Applications received and decided (2009 – 2021)



Source: DLUHC, 2022 District Planning Application Statistics (PS2)



CONSTRUCTION IMPACTS

Construction Value (2022 prices)	£10.14bn
Direct Construction Jobs (p.a.)	9,511
Supply Chain Jobs (p.a.)	11,752
Economic Output (p.a.) (GVA)	£1.95bn

OPERATIONAL AND EXPENDITURE IMPACTS

First Occupation Expenditure	£380.0m
Resident Expenditure (p.a.)	£795.8m
Jobs Supported	9,096

FISCAL IMPACTS

Council Tax (p.a.)	£145.8m
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During the Conservative Party Leadership campaign, the two candidates set out their future approach to planning and housing delivery. The statements made by both parties' support that there will be future changes to the planning system. They gave significant emphasis to the economy and the need for growth, although potentially with different timescales.

In relation to housing targets, the Prime Minister, Elizabeth Truss, in press reports, set out that her intension is to "put power back in local councillors' hands who know far better than Whitehall what their communities want". She has also stated that "I want to abolish the top-down, Whitehall-inspired Stalinist housing targets," which "I think that's the wrong way to generate economic growth." From statements made during the campaign, she believes that one of the problems around housing "is that we've taken a one size fits all policy approach to housing and we need different policies in different parts of the country. The situation in Cornwall is very, very different to that in London; it is very, very different than that in the north of England, or Scotland".

The Prime Minister appears to have moved from proposing development on the Green Belt in 2019 to now protecting the Green Belt. She has stated that she believed that in cities "we should be building up more" and "make more of the space we have", while in the countryside she is a "supporter of allowing incremental expansion of villages rather than these massive targets that land on the back of local councils".

Options

Within this context, the Council needs to consider what approach it should adopt to the emerging Local Plan. The broad alternatives are considered to be as follows:

- Option A – To continue to pause the emerging Local Plan.
- Option B – To take forward the Regulation 18 Draft Local Plan to a Regulation 19 consultation without significant changes.
- Option C – To take forward a revised Local Plan reflecting the recent national pronouncements on the Green Belt and housing numbers whilst continuing to emphasise the location advantages of Ashfield for employment and the skills growth associated with the Plan.
- Option D – Any other options previously considered in relation to the emerging Local Plan.



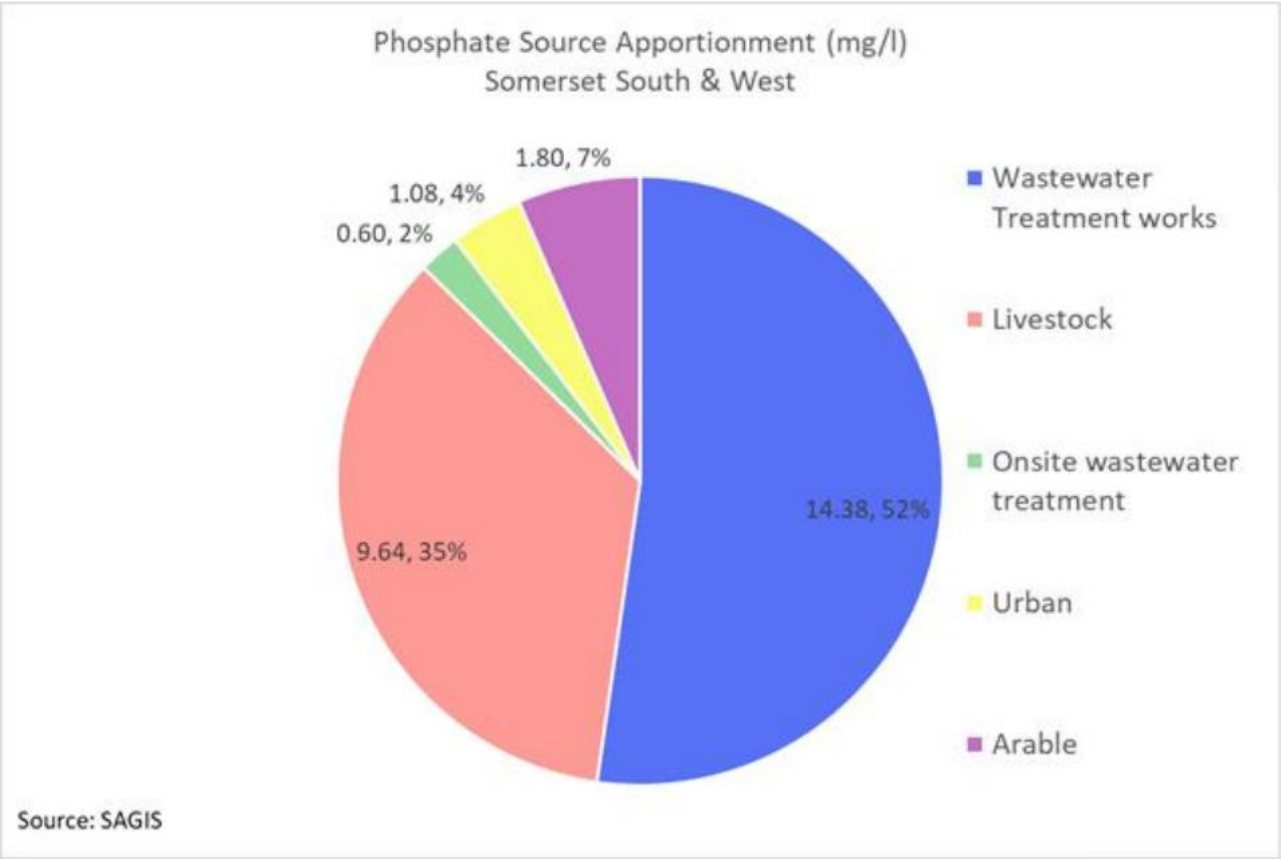


European protected sites requiring nutrient neutrality strategic solutions
Nutrient neutrality SSSI catchments

- SSSI subject to nutrient neutrality strategy
- Nutrient neutrality SSSI catchment

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CREATION OF INVESTMENT ZONES

Generous, targeted & time limited tax cuts for businesses

Liberalised planning rules to release more land for housing & commercial development

Reforms to increase the speed of delivering development

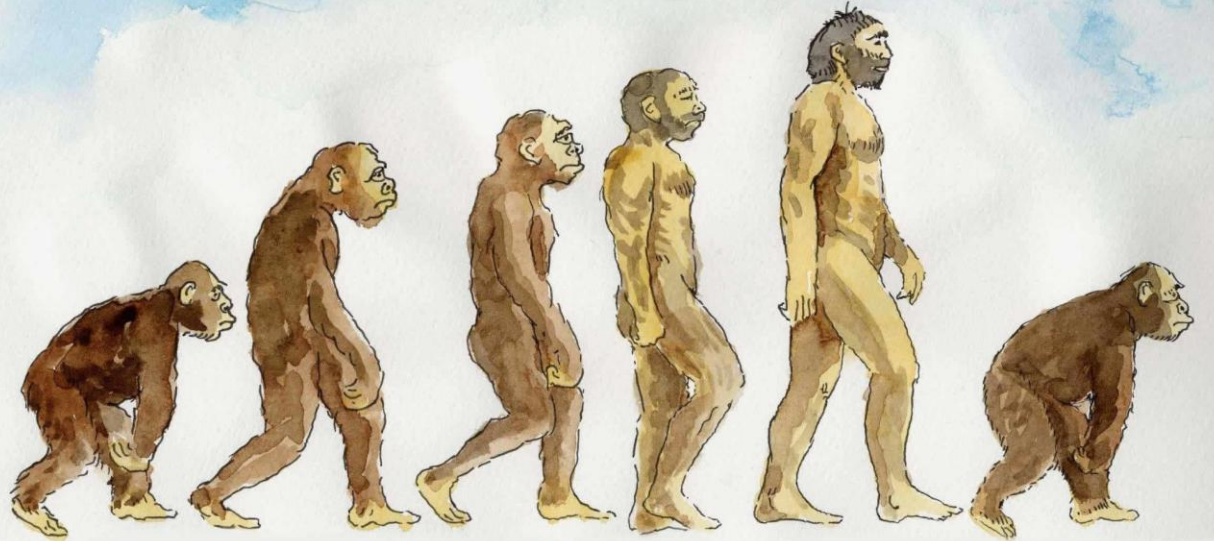


 HM Treasury



The making of a minister

Cowan



Planning minister appointed. Regards planning as the enemy of enterprise.

Minister wonders if the manifesto promise to 'boil planners down to make glue' might have been a little excessive.

Minister discovers that many of his party's supporters depend on planning to protect their quality of life.

Minister finds that the processes of urban change are more complex than the government had thought.

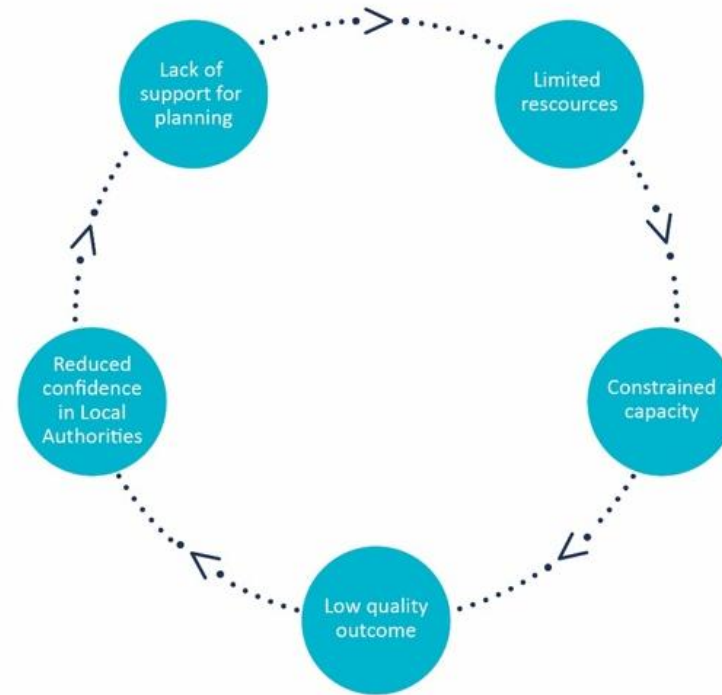
Minister discovers that planning is essential to achieving the government's aims.

New planning minister appointed. Go back to beginning.

www.plandemonium.org.uk



Figure 5: Starving the planning system of resources and capacity erodes confidence in institutions



Source: Vivid Economics





The only constant in life is
change

~ Heraclitus





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