

NEWS

Planning reforms could save £300m per year

Marguerite Lazell

Leading figures from the architecture, construction and planning sectors have welcomed the findings of a major review of the planning system, which recommends slashing red tape to save up to £300 million a year.

The Killian Pretty Review, commissioned by the secretaries of state for communities and business, was published on Monday. It recommends 17 actions, including streamlining the planning process by reducing paperwork; allowing more permitted development; and dropping the eight- and 13-week targets for evaluating applications.

The government has yet to respond in detail, but the RIBA, the British Property Federation, the Home Builders Federation and the Royal Institute of Town Planning all heaped praise on the report, by chief executive of Essex County Council Joanna Killian and former Barratt Developments chief executive David Pretty.

Anna Scott-Marshall, head of

public affairs at the RIBA, told BD: "It's really strong, focusing on the process of the planning system. It addresses many of the points we raised [in our consultation response], in particular the amount of information required, and getting rid of unnecessary planning conditions — things that make the system stodgy."

Andrew Whitaker, planning director at the Home Builders Federation, said: "These changes are a challenge for central government, local authorities, applicants and their agents, and local communities — but the prospective benefits for all surely justify such effort."

The government said it would publish an implementation plan early in the new year, setting out its detailed response, but housing and planning minister Margaret Beckett vowed to act quickly.

"Where we can, we will act immediately to take forward the recommendations as a matter of urgency to deliver savings to the UK economy quickly," she said.

REVIEW'S KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand the scope of permitted development to take up to 40% of minor, non-residential development out of the planning system.
- Reduce the amount of information and paperwork required with planning applications.
- Strengthen and clarify national policy guidance.
- Allow applicants to make

- slight changes to applications after planning has been granted without a full new application.
- Improve engagement with local communities and elected members.
- Address skills shortages in council planning departments.
- Abandon timescale-based targets for evaluating applications.

Moh wins competition for Walsall waterfront

Vienna-based Moh Architects has won the RIBA competition to design a new waterfront project in Walsall for Urban Splash.

The Lex project, a 0.9ha, mixed-use scheme bounded by two canals, is the second phase of Urban Splash's development of the site. The first featured buildings by Will Alsop and Shed KM.

Moh's entry was praised for "its ability to bring out what is special about the site and use the waterfront location to its full potential."

The design features four low-rise buildings with commercial

and residential units, plus public courtyards.

Architect and founder of Moh, Jörg Hugo, said: "We are thrilled... and are really looking forward to working with Urban Splash, its partners, and the local community to refine the proposals."

Nathan Cornish, Urban Splash's managing director for the Midlands, said: "The panel was looking for a concept that was right for Walsall, which would not only complement the waterfront plans, but also had a vision that would work this site to its full potential."



The winning design made the most of Walsall's waterfront site.

FIRST LOOK



Since being selected, the scheme has grown to include 7,200sq m of office space, 9,900sq m of retail, and a hotel and restaurant.

Panter Hudspith's forthcoming attraction for Tunbridge Wells

Panter Hudspith has revealed designs for its competition-winning redevelopment of the former Ritz cinema in Tunbridge Wells, Kent.

The practice submitted the proposals for the hotel, office and retail scheme last week to the borough council.

It beat Fat, Stanton Williams, Avanti, CTM, and Hazle McCormack Young last March in an RIBA competition, but has since expanded the plans to encompass 7,200sq m of office floorspace, 9,900sq m of retail and café space, and a 137-bedroom hotel and restaurant.

Key challenges for the project included the evolution of a design that would both complement the site's historic 17th and 18th century surroundings and deal with the sloping terrain.

"We were trying to create a building that was considerate of the valuable buildings around," said Mark Panter, partner at Panter Hudspith.



Complementing neighbouring 17th and 18th century buildings was a key challenge.

"When you have a single building on a sloping site with multiple units, entrances end up at different levels.

"You don't want to reduce the entrances but want to create active frontage."

The project, which creates new public space and courtyard

gardens, also had to address the concerns of local residents, who had wanted to see a cinema retained on the site.

"There was a lot of local attachment to the cinema," Panter added. "Many would like to see a cinema in the centre of Tunbridge Wells, but they have

come to realise that it's not going to be viable."

Materials to be used in the scheme include local Wealden Sussex sandstone, yellow stock brick and bronze anodised aluminium.

Work is expected to start on site in the new year.

SECTION

