

Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

LORDS AMENDMENT: Spatial Development Strategies

Currently in the Bill

Schedule 7 'Plan-making' in the Bill would:

- Introduce a new power for at least two local planning authorities to work jointly together to produce a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). These would replace Joint Strategic Plans (JSPs) and set a strategic policy framework for an area (without allocating sites).
- Exclude County Councils from taking on responsibility for the preparation of a SDS within their area
- Exclude Combined Authorities, Mayoral Combined Authorities and Greater London from taking up the power. The [Bill's explanatory note](#) justifies "the principle being that either the combined authority already has a duty to produce an SDS or that it could seek the duty to produce an SDS through a devolution agreement."
- The power is optional for local planning authorities to use at their discretion. Once established, local plans would have to be in conformity with the SDS - which will form part of the statutory development plan

RTPI Proposal

Strengthen requirements and access to new 'Spatial Development Strategies'

Support amendments to Schedule 7 allowing all tiers of local government covering a geographical area to participate in spatial development strategies (SDS), joining up the provision of homes and other local assets with the infrastructure and services needed to support them.

The Bill would currently prevent County Councils from taking on formal responsibilities to prepare a Spatial Development Strategy covering their areas. The majority of Combined Authorities would also be excluded from preparing SDS in the Bill and by recent devolution deals in the North East, York and North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Cornwall and the East Midlands omitted duties to engage in strategic plan-making.

Without the 'duty to cooperate' or further detail on the alignment tests proposed in recent policy documents, SDS are the only remaining mechanism that local planning authorities can use to make important spatial choices and take democratic decisions about proposals and assets across jurisdictions.

More can be done outside of London to incentivise development by supporting local areas to align plans for homes with new infrastructure (incl transport improvements) and public services that meet communities needs. That is why the RTPI support changes to strengthen this mechanism and believe it should be a core provision in all devolution deals.

RTPI Rationale

- Strategic planning, i.e. planning for growth on a scale larger than single authorities, provides communities and local leaders with more choice about the spatial distribution of homes and services and ensures that public and private investment is used effectively and focused in the areas where it is needed the most. This is important to align long term economic, infrastructure, environmental priorities around a shared vision.
- RTPI [research](#) has demonstrated how geography, the environment and infrastructure can necessitate differing policy requirements in urban and rural areas who face very different constraints and have different assets and opportunities. Locally-specific policy approaches and spatial choices about the environment, housing, transport and energy decisions must reflect that:

The RTPI encourage peers to support the improvements outlined. To arrange a briefing please contact, Senior Public Affairs Officer, Joel Cohen: joel.cohen@rtpi.org.uk



- People living in rural areas travel almost twice as far per year than those in the most urban areas.
- Typically a rural household requires a mortgage of 9 multiples of their income to afford a house, compared to 5.5 multiples in urban areas.
- The fuel poverty gap is higher in most rural areas (£585 compared to the England average of £216)
- **Without Upper Tier engagement, it is unclear how many local planning authorities would participate in an SDS without the benefits of integrating key public services – provided in two-tier areas at the county level –** like transport, waste and mineral management, flood risk prevention, public health and local nature recovery strategies. As a result, any SDS that does proceed will be less likely to align with housing, local growth plans and infrastructure.
- **Without improvement, the Bill prevents areas taking new devolved responsibility from doing strategic planning in primary legislation.** Statutory spatial planning duties assumed by the Bill are [absent from ALL recent devo deals](#) incl East Midlands, York and North Yorkshire, Cornwall, Norfolk, Suffolk and the North East.
- **It would also miss opportunities to strengthen strategic planning in areas who've previously taken on devolved duties to do so.** As the table below makes clear, central government has allowed Metro Mayors and Combined Authorities to continue neglecting spatial plans and has allowed others to be abandoned without sanction.

Combined Authority Strategic Planning Powers (Jan 2023)

Metro Mayor/ Combined Authorities	(Strategic) Spatial Planning Powers
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough MCA	The MCA has powers to prepare a non-statutory spatial framework but no longer being prepared Cambridgeshire and Peterborough devolution deal - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Greater London Mayor	The London Mayor has powers to prepare a statutory spatial development framework (The London Plan) - The London Plan London City Hall . The LURB proposes changes to the Mayor's Spatial Development Framework to bring it into line with other combined authority SDS.
Greater Manchester MCA	The MCA has powers to prepare a statutory spatial framework but the MCA has prepared a joint local plan instead in order to amend Green Belt boundaries and allocate sites The Plan - Greater Manchester Combined Authority (greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)
Liverpool City Region MCA	The MCA has Powers to prepare a statutory spatial development strategy which is currently being prepared SPATIAL PLANNING Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (liverpoolcityregion-ca.gov.uk)
North East MCA (new – combines existing non-mayoral NECA and North of Tyne MCA)	None. New Devolution Deal agreed in December 2022 for new MCA but does not include any spatial planning powers. There is a commitment to prepare a Strategic Infrastructure Plan which "will include significant innovation in including consideration of rural infrastructure to support food security and the work underway on becoming a Rural Exemplar. As well as considering transport infrastructure this means consideration of major surface water drainage, coastal protection and management and the physical assets that underpin food production in the area."
South Yorkshire MCA	Although the MCA has powers to prepare a non-statutory spatial framework, these have not been implemented.
Tees Valley MCA	None
West of England MCA	The MCA has powers to prepare a statutory spatial development strategy –work initiated but has now been abandoned Spatial Development Strategy - West of England Combined Authority (westofengland-ca.gov.uk)
West Midland MCA	None
West Yorkshire MCA	The MCA did agree to prepare a statutory spatial development strategy in initial Devolution Agreement but Government postponed conferral of powers in March 2021 pending outcome of planning reforms Addendum to the West Yorkshire devolution deal - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) . Nothing has happened since.

- The lack of strategic planning has been identified by several think tanks as an obstacle to growth and a limit on devolution. For example:
 - [Institute for Government's 'How metro mayors can help level up England' report](#) published on 20th June found that that "One of the obstacles to [improving economic performance] has been the absence of effective regional-level planning. This has prevented cities and their surrounding areas from taking full advantage of their agglomeration effects, for example because poorly designed transport links make it difficult for people to commute to work; the proportion of people who travel to work by public transport in other English cities is significantly below the level of London."



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Royal Town Planning Institute

- [Onward's 'Give Back Control' report](#), explains that “Even without the development of Spatial Development Strategies, local spatial plans are highly controversial and challenging to develop, often taking multiple years. This means that whilst mayors are engaged in lots of effective tactical activity - including the deployment of brownfield funds - they are held back from strategically transforming land use in their places over the long term.”
- [Localis' 'Medici Code – Levelling Up White Paper reflections and response' report](#) says “If the government is serious about rewiring the way it operates to deliver an integrated approach to levelling up, this has to be applied vertically from the national to the local level, not just horizontally across government departments. The absence of any reference to strategic or spatial planning explicitly is therefore not only a lost opportunity but is a significant flaw in the government’s overall approach.”
- [The RTPI's Strategic Planning Across Boundaries](#) report has previously highlighted how difficult it is for councils and local planning authorities to engage in strategic plan-making – especially on a voluntary basis – “as a consequence of changes in local politics or key staff leaving.” This has been demonstrated by recent difficulties seen in:
 - [West of England's Joint Spatial Plan – which paused all work in 2022](#) following political challenges (explored in [this RTPI briefing note](#))
 - Greater Manchester's Places for Everyone regional growth programme – that has [reportedly run into difficulties](#) as a result of the recent proposed changes to the housing supply regulations

Draft wording for County Council inclusion

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Schedule 7, Page 279, line 21, after “authorities” insert “or county councils”

Explanatory statement: This amendment and the amendment below would enable county councils to prepare joint spatial development plans.

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Schedule 7, Page 279, line 23, after “authority” insert “or county council”

Explanatory statement: See explanatory statement for the amendment above.

Draft wording for Combined Authority inclusion

Schedule 7, Page 279, leave out lines 26 to 29

Explanatory statement: This amendment would leave out inserted section 15A(2)(b) and make combined authorities eligible for a joint spatial development strategy.