

Structural change: our changing landscapes- what the new world of devolution and strategic planning means in practice

POS Conference, 9th July 2026

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Strategic Planning and Devolution: The national context

Devolution and strategic planning – the national context



- Fixing the plan-led system is key to the Government's growth mission – providing more certainty for communities, applicants and investors.
- Re-introducing a two-tier Development Plan system is aimed at reducing risks and building more stable conditions for investors – public, private and others.
- It aims to provide a more robust approach to place-based growth, integrating long term economic, environment and social priorities with development and infrastructure.



DAILY NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

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Steven Swinford Political Editor
Larissa Brown Defence Editor
Charlie Parker

Sir Ker Starmer will unveil an additional £15 billion for defence today amid significant concerns about how long-term projects intended to transform the armed forces will be funded.

The prime minister will announce

plans for a generation of jets, warships and drones as he publishes his long-delayed ten-year defence investment plan (Dip) inoned his last act in No 10.

The Times has been told it includes a one-off £2 billion increase in day-to-day funding this year to help to cover the cost of operations and training, a key concern of defence chiefs. However, no date will be given for increasing

defence spending to 3 per cent of national income, up from 2.4 per cent. It means the defence industry and armed forces will have to wait for the next spending review, which is not expected until next year, for clarity about how much money will be available.

John Healey quit as defence secretary earlier this month after Starmer rebuffed his call to hit 3 per cent by

2030. He raised concerns that the extra funding on offer was "back-ended" into the next parliament and that spending would increase by only 0.08 percentage points in the next four years.

A senior defence source said there was still significant uncertainty around many projects, including a new generation of warships called common combat vessels that are intended to co-ordi-

nate drones and autonomous craft.

The government issued a press release this week announcing the vessels are intended to replace ageing Type 45 destroyers, without giving details of their cost or when they will be built. The source said: "If you want to turn promises of money into defence contracts, you need certainty. You need Continued on page 2

Burnham leads for 'greybeards' UK

PM in waiting to devolve power and set up No 10 North

Oliver Wright Policy Editor
Ben Clatworthy Whitehall Editor
Steven Swinford

Andy Burnham has pledged to "rewire" Britain as he set out plans to start the largest council house-building programme since the Second World War, devolve more power to the regions and impose public control over essential services such as water, energy and transport.

In his first big speech as Britain's prime minister in waiting, Burnham said he would oversee the "biggest change in our lifetimes to the way the country is run" by redistributing power away from London.

He announced a "No 10 North", based in Manchester, that will oversee reindustrialisation, taking public control of utilities such as water and energy and delivering on his pledge to build council homes.

Burnham said it would be a nerve centre to make power "flow" into the regions, and it is expected to provide a bulwark against the conventional dominance of the Treasury.

The Labour MP for Macclesfield also hinted at an early cost of living package, saying that people needed a "bit extra now to help with rising costs" and "can't wait forever for change".

Burnham did not say how he planned to pay for his overhaul of government, huge package of investment and a pledge to cut business rates, raising the prospect of tax rises in the budget this

autumn. Burnham has argued in the past in favour of taxes on wealth, saying he supported the idea of imitating Germany's system of redistributing money from richer areas to create equivalent living conditions in all parts of Britain.

Burnham is expected to become prime minister on July 20 and is set to make a series of policy announcements setting out his priorities for government before his arrival in Downing Street.

In his speech in Manchester yesterday, Burnham sought again to distance himself from Sir Ker Starmer as he promised to give Britain a "new direction". He said: "The country isn't where it should be. It is stuck in a rut and I don't want to go on like this."

He promised:

- A ten-year plan to bring down the cost of water, housing, energy and transport by bringing privatised utilities under greater public control.
- A programme of reindustrialisation as well as new procurement rules requiring the government to "buy British" rather than "chasing cut-price deals around the world".
- To stick to the "discipline" of the government's existing fiscal rules and "sound public finances".
- Changes to education to bring parity between university and technical studies, as well as greater powers for local leaders to support employment.

Burnham said that after ten years of Continued on page 7

Smashing Naomi Osaka's highly anticipated walk-on outfit for the first day of Wimbledon, a "reinterpreted kimono", stuck to the all-white dress code Page 3

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Dame Penelope Keith
1940-2026
News, page 5; Obituary, 46-47

News, page 5; Obituary, 46-47

One in the AI for tech after Ford rehires 'greybeards'

Mark Selman
Technology Correspondent

While it is a widely held belief that AI is going to take many people's jobs, Ford has provided hope for workers.

The American car manufacturer has phoned back to experienced human staff after an experiment in using artificial intelligence failed.

It has rehired 550 veteran technicians – nicknamed "greybeards" – to train younger workers and the AI tools. The carmaker originally deployed 900 AI-powered cameras across its plants to detect quality issues.

The company discovered that the AI was prone to fail because it was only as effective as its training data and lacked the institutional knowledge, troubleshooting intuition and deep experience of human engineers.

Many experienced staff left before their knowledge could be passed on. The firm has 500,000 fewer workers than it had in 2008 and its chief executive, Jim Farley, said last year that AI is "going to replace literally half of all white-collar workers in the US".

Charles Ponp, a Ford vice-president, said: "Mistakenly, we thought that by just introducing artificial intelligence and adjusting the design requirements we would have had that would produce a high-quality product."

Ford has the highest recall rates in the US but since the "greybeard" return, it secured top spot in an industry quality index – its best since 2010.

Concerns around the impact of AI on the jobs market have centred on the reduction of entry-level jobs. A report by PwC has suggested that senior workers will have a higher premium on their skills, such as leadership, decision-making and team building.

Britain's housing crisis is having a ruinous impact on its public finances. So, working with local areas, No 10 North will oversee **the biggest council house building programme since the post-war period**. We will use public land, vacant public land to reduce costs."

**“Long-term,
not short-
term”**

Introducing spatial development strategies

A new era of strategic planning

- **SDS will provide integrated, high level spatial investment** –They will have to provide the spatial articulation for other ‘place-based’ plans and strategies, especially Local Growth Plans. They will not allocate sites.
- The **Legal framework is now in place** through the Planning & Infrastructure Act but waiting for revised NPPF, secondary legislation/regs (including statutory underpinning for new Strategic Planning Boards) & PPG.
- SDS will be **part of the statutory development plan** and local plans will therefore have to be ‘in general conformity’ with the SDS.
- SDS will be **‘vision-led’ and outcome focused** and will therefore have to reflect the shared ‘place-based’ vision and ambition of LA partners (or Strategic Authorities).
- SDS **will be long term**, with the strategy setting the distribution of growth for 25+ year period, including LP housing targets, setting ‘general extent’ of Green Belt (where relevant), identifying ‘investable pipeline’ of strategic infrastructure and strategically important growth areas.
- New **Strategic Planning Authorities (SPAs) will be legally designated** – Different in different places but new Prime Minister may drive devolution forward quicker.
- **Funding agreed for 2026-29** - first tranche of funding has been allocated to most emerging SPAs.
- **SDS to be ‘digitally enabled’** with opportunities to use data and digital tech throughout all stages of the process.

*“Spatial development strategies should set a **positive vision for future growth and change** at a sub-regional scale and provide a **clear spatial framework for investment and growth**, including for new housing. **Their content should be genuinely strategic in nature** and allow for more detailed issues to be considered and addressed through other parts of the development plan.”*

Draft Policy PM1, NPPF

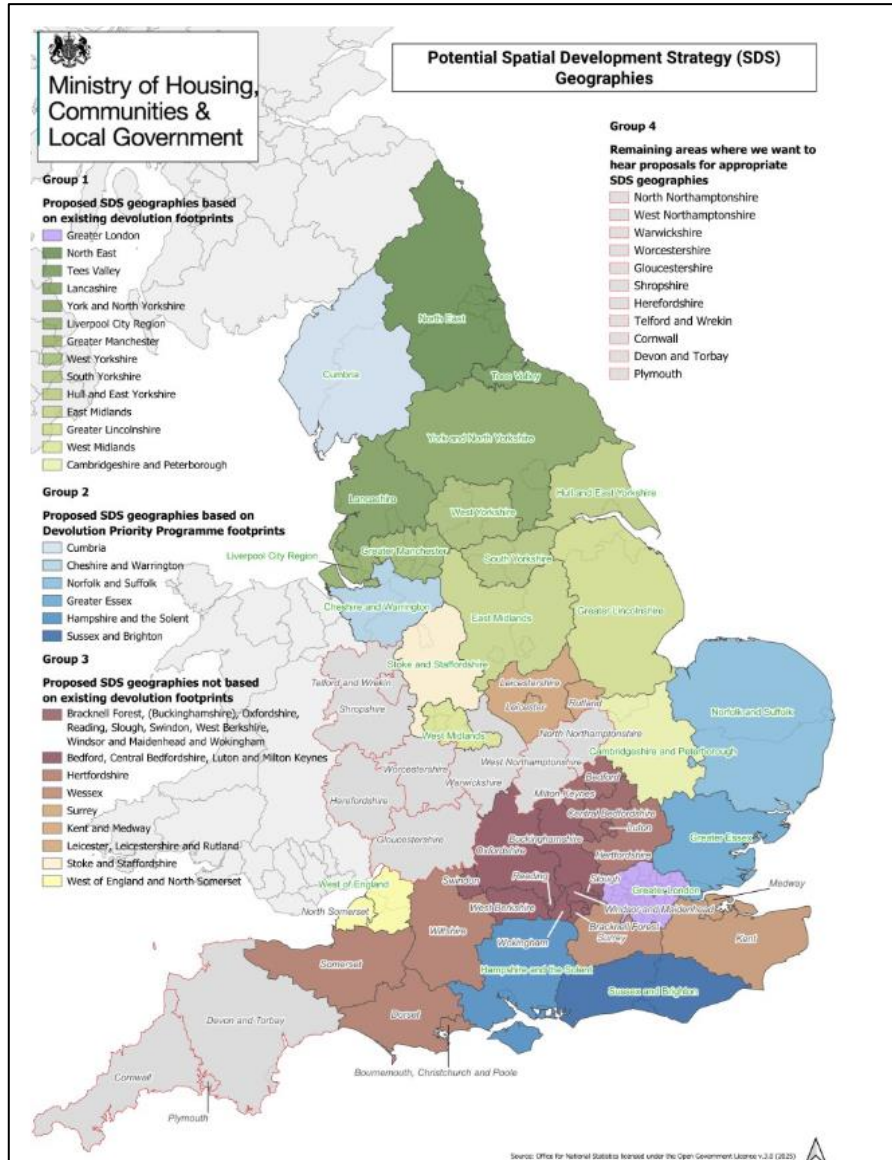
A new era of strategic planning

- **Need to keep SDS strategic** and not become ‘big local plans’, especially if we are to get first generation in place quickly – no red lines on maps!
- **SDS will be evidence supported, not evidence led.** Intelligent commissioning will be essential, as will careful thinking around joining up current visions for growth – for SDS area and neighbouring areas if relevant.
- **A ‘Plan, Monitor, Manage’ approach will be needed** given that these are supposed to be transformational frameworks delivered over time, with different market/funding/policy conditions impacting. Push to have a national ‘Outcomes Monitoring Framework’ to support this. And this means....
- **The testing process will be different to local plans**, especially around ‘deliverability’. It will be important that viability test is not applied as these are long term plans and range of new tools and funding will impact on delivery. Implementation and Monitoring Frameworks will provide key evidence at Examination.
- **Engaging local communities on strategic issues will be important but challenging** -different tools need to be used e.g. digital engagement, community panels.
- **A different resource is needed to local planning** with a very different skillset – planners will be needed but as part of multi-disciplined team. Support from Homes England could help develop skills needed.

*“It is important to stress that **SDSs are not big local plans**. They cannot be site-specific or allocate/designate particular sites. The site-specific role is preserved for **local plans, which will have to be in ‘general conformity’ with the SDS** once it has been adopted. The government does not intend to set a limit or range on the size or length of SDS, but **they are expected to be succinct** and not get into detail or locally specific issues.”*

Areas for producing spatial development strategies - GOV.UK

A new era of strategic planning



- **Sequencing will be challenging initially** in areas where local plans are being prepared and where there are newly adopted local plans. Any strategic sites currently being planned for/ delivered will have to be taken into account in emerging SDS spatial strategy.
- **Engaging infrastructure providers and agencies at the start will be vital** - especially in relation to infrastructure for the long term (e.g. water and energy) – need to get decisions made at plan-making stage instead of application stage.
- **Partnerships will play an important role in both SDS preparation and delivery.** Key partnerships will be government agencies, developers, utilities and local authorities. But – these will change over time in areas impacted by Devolution and/or LGR.
- **A key issue will be ensuring SDS join up** - the sum of the parts has to add up to a national picture, especially in more complex geographies, areas that are a national growth priority or where strategic developments (including New Towns) impact on more than one SDS. A new ‘duty to cooperate’ won’t be sufficient and Mayoral ‘Duty to Collaborate’ will only impact on Mayoral areas.

Rebuilding the 'ringmaster role' of strategic planners

Core skills should include:

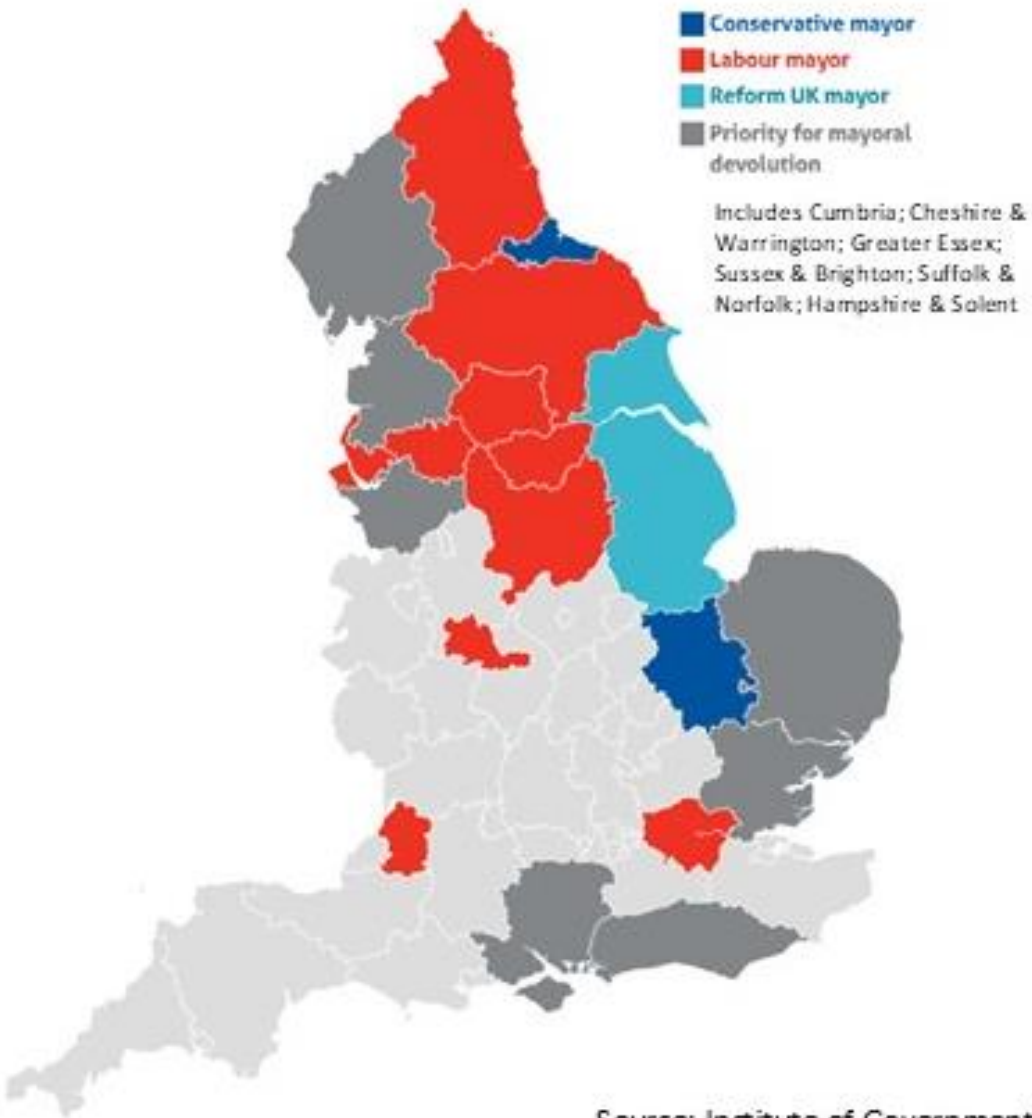
- **Place leadership** with a critical ringmaster role to ensure growth is managed through an integrated 'place-based' approach and priorities are aligned with spatial framework.
- **Spatial planning experience** to ensure the SDS is developed as a statutory development plan.
- **Partnership working/ relationship management skills** and an ability to work with different politicians and stakeholders around a shared vision.
- **Good communications skills** and ability to tell the story of 'place' and communicate with people outside of planning so they understand the value of the SDS to them.
- **Monitoring and data management** – essential to support PMM approach and to interrogate and use data and technology which will be core to a digitally enabled strategic planning system.
- **Project management skills** to support preparation of the SDS within a complex, multi-plan environment and in many areas, the local partners will be going through a period of significant of change as a result of LGR.
- In the longer term, **development management resource** to support Mayoral delivery powers.
- Need to **maximise use of new ways of filling skills and resources gaps** should be considered e.g. partnership arrangements with the private sector, Public Practice and Graduate recruitment programmes (e.g. Pathways to Planning) as well as opportunities through LGR.



Progressing towards a Devolved England

The emerging devolved structure of England

Existing & Proposed Strategic Authorities



Source: Institute of Government

Mayoral Strategic Authorities/GLA

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough
East Midlands
Greater Lincolnshire
Greater Manchester
Hull & East Yorkshire
Liverpool City Region
North East
South Yorkshire
Tees Valley
West of England
West Midlands
West Yorkshire
York and North Yorkshire

Greater London

Further information:

[Devolution deals | Local Government Association](#)
[Devolution to England | Institute for Government](#)

Non-Mayoral Strategic Authorities

Greater Devon
Lancashire

Devolution Priority Programme for MSAs

Mayoral election May 2027

Cheshire & Warrington
Cumbria

Mayoral election May 2028

Greater Essex
Hampshire & Solent
Norfolk/Suffolk
Sussex and Brighton

Existing Devolution Agreements

Buckinghamshire Council
Cornwall Council
Surrey County Council
Warwickshire County Council

Ongoing negotiations in most other parts of England

2026 English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act: Key planning provisions

STRATEGIC PLANNING RELATED PROVISIONS

Clause 33 (and Schedule 14) – **Mayoral powers to call in an application** from the Local Planning Authority (and Development Corporations) of potential strategic importance (to be defined in regs).

Clause 34 (and Schedules 15 and 16) – **Mayoral powers to establish a Development Order.**

Clause 35 (and Schedule 17) – **Mayoral powers to raise Community Infrastructure Levy** in addition to local CIL.

Clause 36 (and Schedule 18) – **land acquisition and development powers** for all Strategic Authorities.

Clause 39 – **Brownfield land to be prioritised** in SDS – to be set out in regs.

Schedule 2 – sets out **decision-making for SDS** as follows:

Non-mayoral CA/CCA – simple majority vote with each member having one vote.

Mayoral CA/CCA – majority vote but with Mayoral casting vote where there is no clear majority.

[Note SPA voting provisions for non devolved areas is set out in the PIA)

OTHER RELEVANT PROVISIONS

Clause 9 (and Schedule 3) - **Mayoral appointment of Commissioners** for any area of competence (includes strategic planning).

Clause 22 – **Mayoral powers to convene meetings** with local partners (to be defined in regs) to discuss any relevant local matters linked to areas of competence (includes strategic planning).

Clause 23 – **Mayoral duty to collaborate** where a Mayor (or more than one Mayor) can request another Mayor (or other Mayors) to collaborate on any matter related to Mayoral areas of competence (includes strategic planning) where this is likely to lead to improve the economic, social or environmental wellbeing of people that live or work in the area (s).

Clause 41 (and Schedule 22) – **Mayoral duty to prepare a Local Growth Plan** which, amongst other things, has to identify priorities for the economic growth of the area and identify key projects for achieving economic growth in the area through private or public investment.

Clause 45 – **CA/CCAs must have a ‘health in all’ policy approach** to its areas of competence having regard to the need to improve the health of the people in the area and to reduce health disparities.

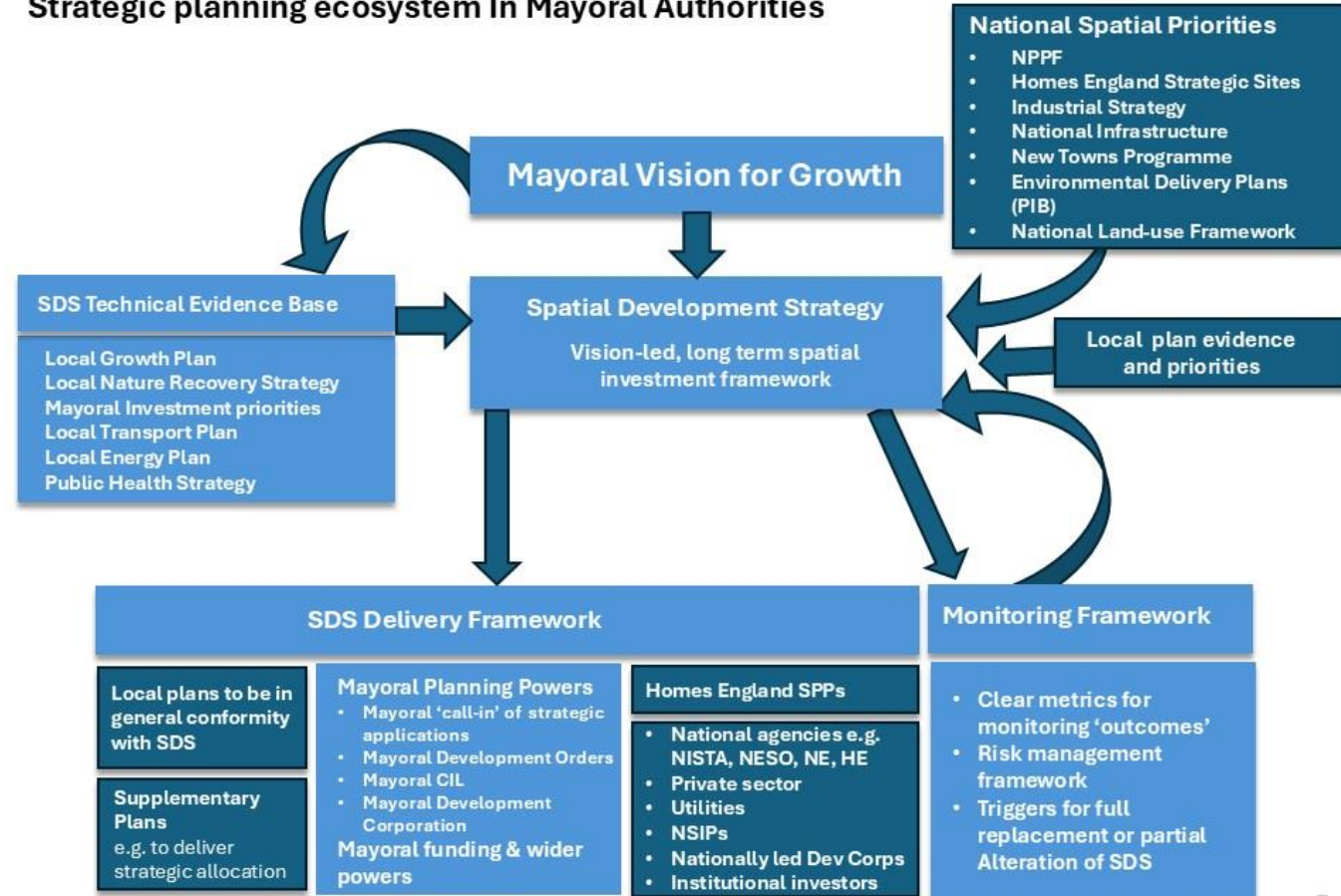
Putting it all together



The emerging strategic planning ecosystem

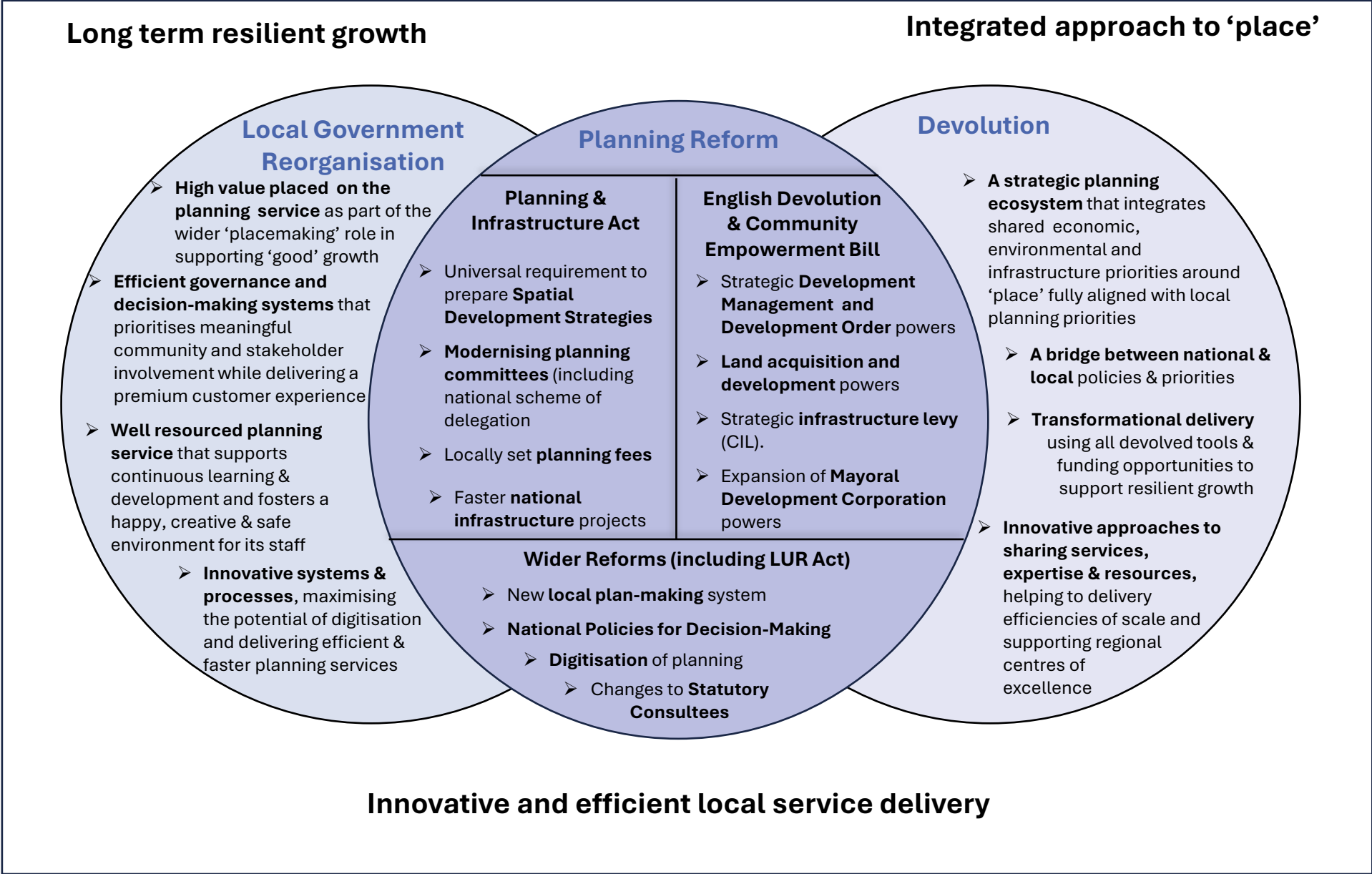
- **SDS will be part of a wider ecosystem** to support long term growth.
- **MSAs will have much more ability to influence delivery directly** due to powers and funding. This will be important at examination when demonstrating credibility of strategy.
- **Strategic partners will be an essential part of delivery** e.g. Homes England SPPs along with LPAs
- **Other sub-regional plans and strategies will have a key role to play** especially LGP but also Local Transport Plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- **National plans and strategies will also have a key role to play** e.g. the National Infrastructure Plan, National Energy Spatial Plan (and RESPs) – SDS will have to implement these and inform future reviews. Successful delivery will depend on joining up of government departments and agencies –

Strategic planning ecosystem In Mayoral Authorities



Planning, LGR & Devolution – How it all fits together

POS LGR
Resource
Hub -[POS](#)



What next?

- First tranche of funding for SDS has been allocated.
- Final SDS geography, NPPF and PPG to be published Summer/early Autumn.
- Planning & Infrastructure Act SDS Regulations published in Autumn.
- First Strategic Planning Boards established late Summer/early Autumn.
- First SDS timetables agreed by SoS in the early 2027.

All timing subject to new PM!!

Thank you!

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