

The return of strategic planning

POS Annual Conference

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Catriona Riddell BA (Hons) Planning FRTPI



The national context



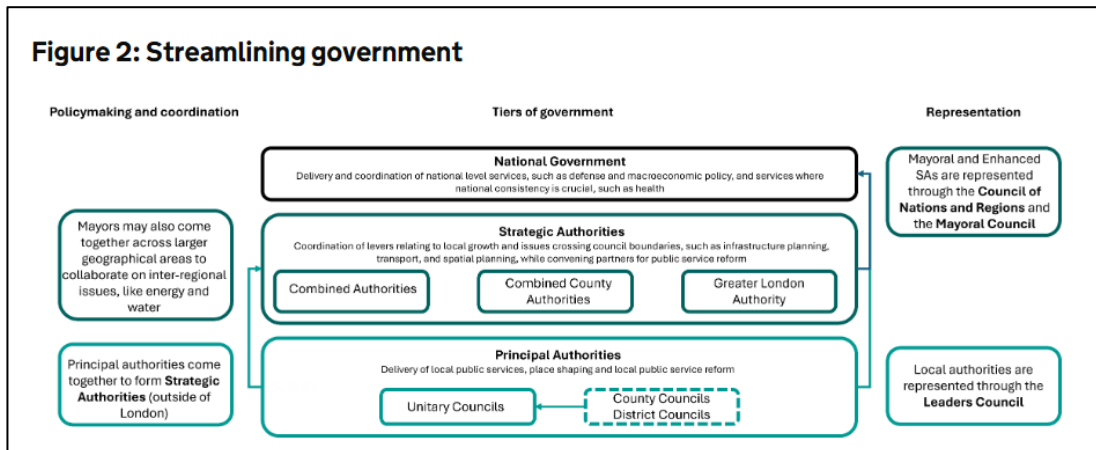
Autumn Budget 2024 - GOV.UK

“The number one mission of this government is to **relight the fire of our economy and ignite growth in every region. ...**

If we are going to build an economy that works for everyone, we need nothing less than a completely new way of governing – a generational project of determined devolution. ... **To truly get growth in every corner of the country and put more money into people’s pockets, we must rewire England** and end the hoarding in Whitehall by devolving power and money from central government to those with skin in the game.

We will give Mayors strong new powers over housing, planning, transport, energy, skills, employment support and more, backed up with integrated and consolidated funding.”

Figure 2: Streamlining government



- **English Devolution Bill** (to be published soon)
- Ambition is for **universal coverage in England of Strategic Authorities**
- **Abolition of two-tier local government system**
- **Funding to support growth to be routed through for MCA/MCCAs**
- A new **Devolution Framework** setting out clear offer of enhanced powers

The national context

- Key to the Government's Plan for Change and Mission to kickstart economic growth and Devolution is the **target of Building 1.5 million homes** in England this Parliament.
- **Planning reforms aimed at providing more confidence in the system** with reduced political, financial and technical risks – key will be getting the 'plan-led' system working again.
- Reforms to be introduced throughout 2025, starting with the **Planning & Infrastructure Bill, updated national policy** (and guidance) and introduction of **National Development Management Policies**.



The national context: planning reforms, Year 1

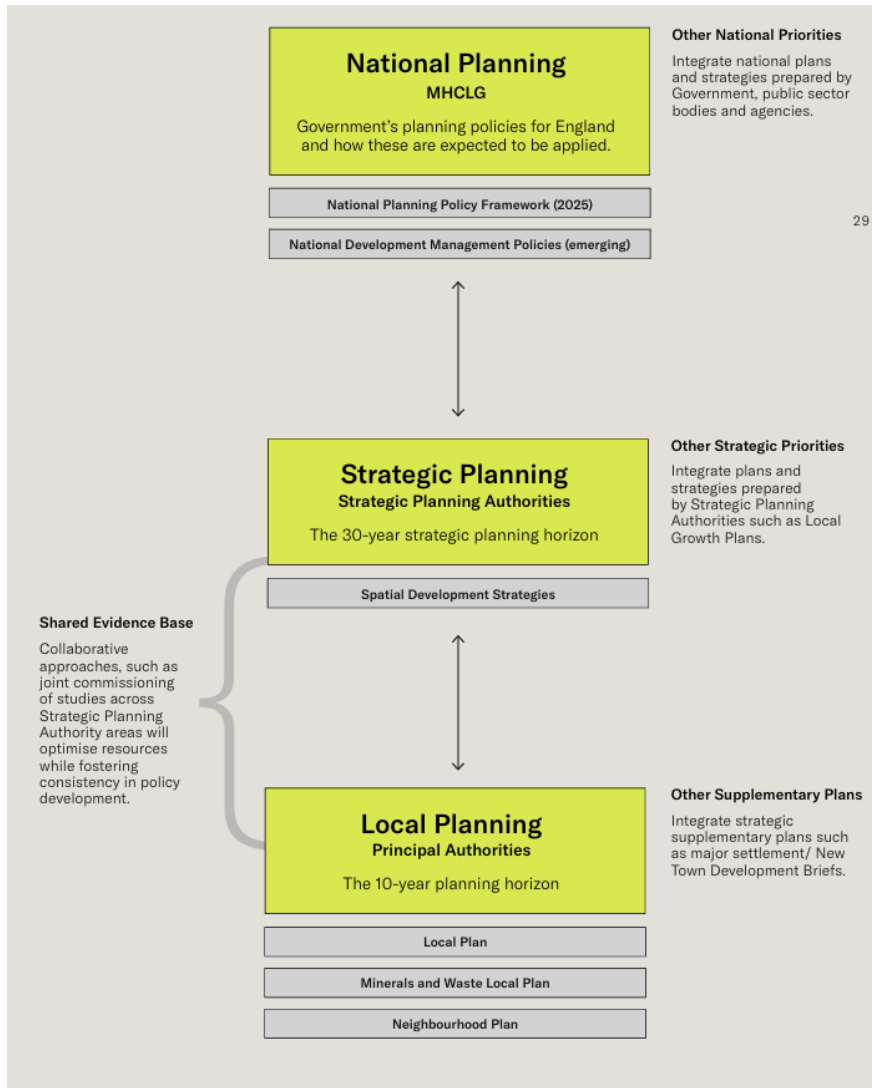
- JULY 24**
 - Changes to NPPF/PPG on **onshore wind**
 - **New Towns Task Force** established
- AUG 24**
 - **New Homes accelerator programme** introduced
- SEPT 24**
 - Working paper on **Brownfield Passports**
- DEC 24**
 - **English Devolution White Paper**
 - Working paper on **nature recovery**
 - **Updated NPPF** focused on updating housing targets and introducing 'grey belt' (with follow up PPG on Green Belt)
- JAN 25**
 - Working paper on **streamlining NSIPs**
 - **10 Year Infrastructure Strategy**
- FEB 25**
 - Consultation on **land-use framework**
 - **Government's response to local plan reforms** (as set out in the LURA)
- MARCH 25**
 - **Planning & Infrastructure Bill**
 - WMS on **Statutory Consultees**
- APRIL 25**
 - WMS on **Reforms to national infrastructure**
- MAY 25**
 - Technical consultation/ working paper on **build out rates**
 - Consultation on **BNG and nationally significant infrastructure, and for small, medium & brownfield sites**
 - Working paper on **site thresholds**
 - Technical consultation on **Planning committees** (update from Feb working paper)



Still to come in 2025

- **English Devolution Bill**
- Consultation on **NDMPs and strategic planning**
- Update to the **National Design Guide and National Model Design Code**
- Recommendations from the **New Towns Task Force**
- **Updated NPPF/PPG** – to incorporate new approach to local plans and spatial development strategies
- **Planning & Infrastructure Bill secondary legislation**

The new plan-led system



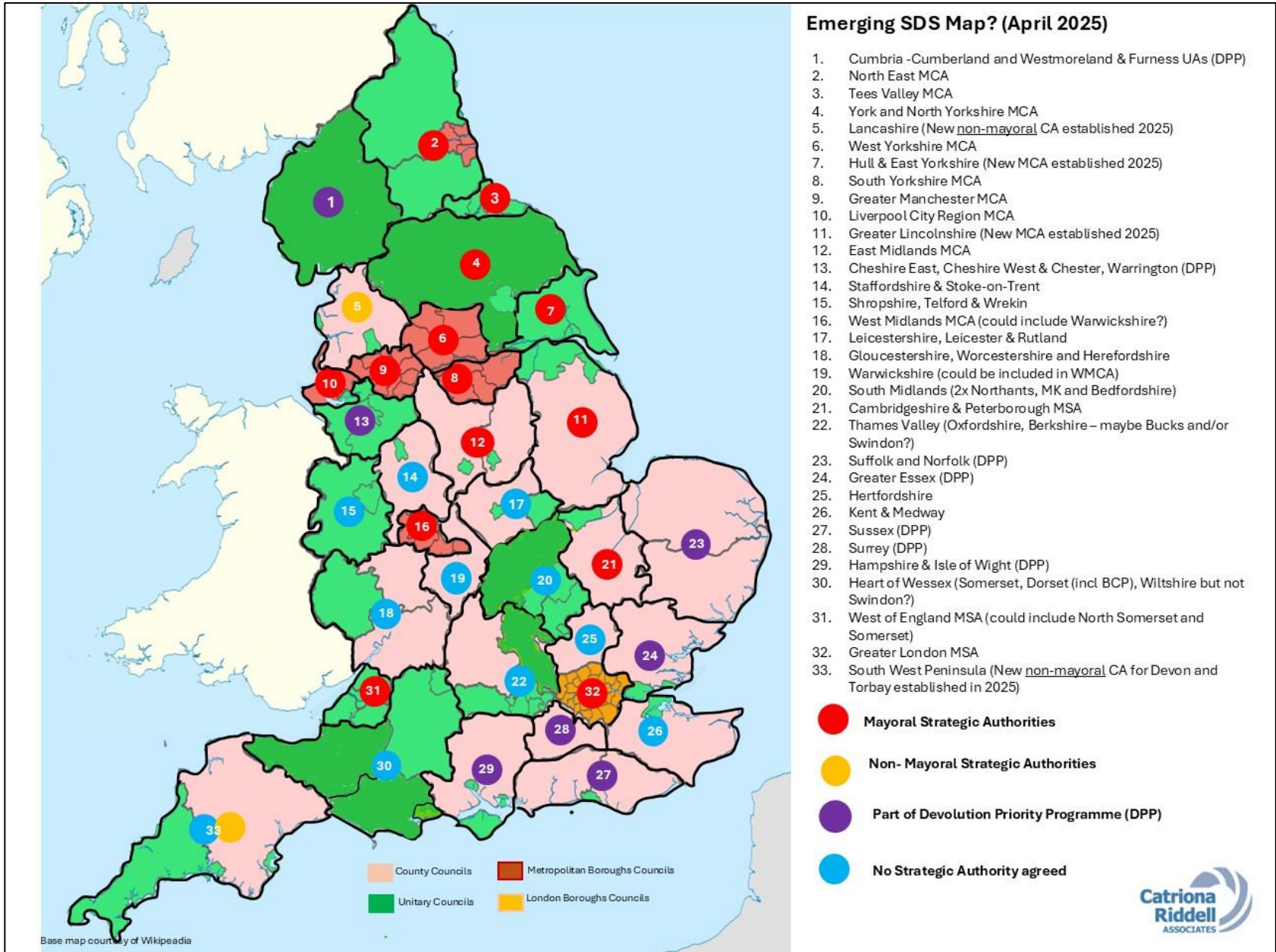
Strategic plans (Spatial Development Strategies) will provide **long term spatial investment frameworks** that help ensure that cross (local planning authority) boundary issues are addressed effectively and in an **integrated way that aligns spatial and infrastructure priorities with wider economic, environment and social objectives.**

[strategic plans are **not 'big local plans'** and are not the London Plan or the Greater Manchester Joint Plan]

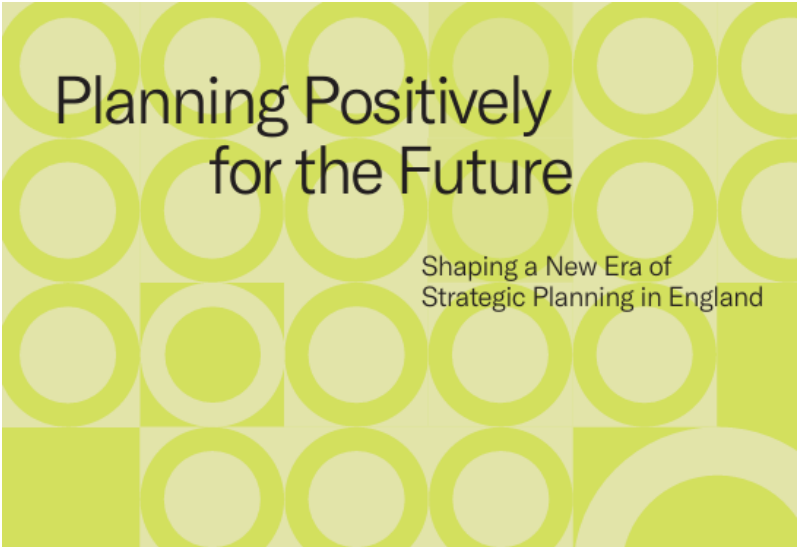
What are the Government's proposals for strategic planning?

- **Spatial Development Strategies (SDS) will be required across all of England.** These will be part of the statutory development plan alongside local and neighbourhood plans. Can be used for decision-making where LP is out of date. BUT – LP preparation is expected to continue at pace!
- **Strategic Planning Authorities** will be CA/CCAs and upper tier authorities although the expectation is that all areas will eventually be represented by a (Mayoral) Strategic Authority. Mayors will have a casting vote. Strategic Planning Boards will be formed where there is more than one UTA.
- **Strategic planning will play a critical role in implementing a wide-range of devolved powers** e.g. housing (including affordable housing), environment, local growth priorities, health, regeneration, transport. They will be vision-led/outcome focused with clear links to the integrated funding settlements with Mayors.
- **SDS will be long term (30 year), high level frameworks** with key roles around spatial distribution of growth and identifying strategic infrastructure priorities. Addressing climate change and health inequalities will be embedded across all policies. They will have to be specific around the location of strategic development areas, strategic infrastructure but will not allocate sites.
- **Housing targets set by government will be amalgamated at the SDS scale** – Strategic Planning Authority will determine targets for individual LPs.
- **Strategic Planning Authorities will have to work closely together to address cross boundary issues**, e.g. housing market areas, national infrastructure or new town proposals.
- **Mayoral Strategic Authorities likely to have significant delivery tools** to ensure SDS are implemented e.g. Strategic Infrastructure Tariff, Development Corporations, call-in powers for strategic applications. These will be set out in the English Devolution Bill.
- **Strategic planning geography will (largely) mirror devolution landscape** – existing and emerging, with universal coverage of SDS across England expected by 2029. Confirmation of spatial planning geography expected soon.

Is this the new strategic planning geography?

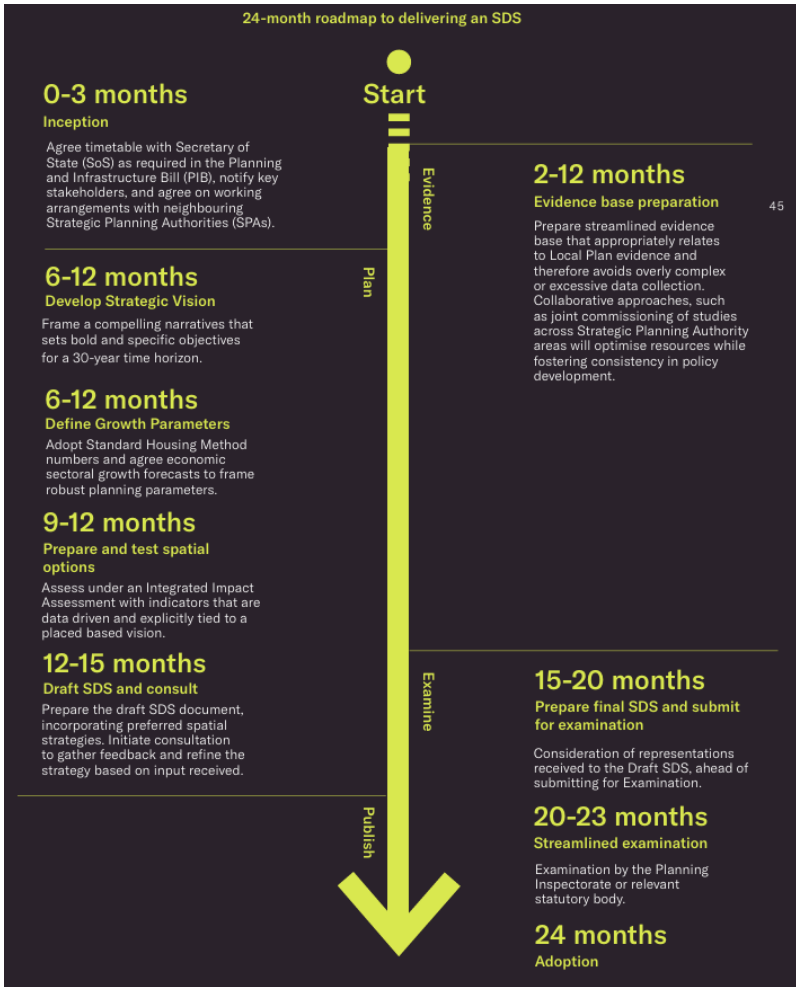


The new era of strategic plans: what will they look like, how will they be prepared, and how will they be tested?



Key questions:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Why is universal coverage of strategic plans necessary and what are the long-term and tangible benefits?</p> | <p>How will these plans act as the sustainable growth 'ringmaster' ensuring that national priorities are aligned (including in relation to national infrastructure and the New Towns Programme) locally and horizontally across different sectors, policies and investment priorities?</p> |
| <p>How will neighbouring strategic planning authorities effectively collaborate to address common issues, cross boundary opportunities for development and infrastructure and functional relationships and ensure that the sum of the SDS parts add up to a national spatial picture?</p> | <p>How can the scope and content of first generation SDSs remain focused and therefore ensure that preparation moves forward at pace to meet the Government's objectives of having full coverage across England by the end of the first Parliament.</p> |



Planning positively for the future (Prior + Partners, May 2025) - [Landmark report launched to shape a new era of strategic planning in England | Prior + Partners](#)

Recommendations from the Strategic Planning Group

Purpose and Objectives

- 1 Strategic plans should be the core of the reformed planning system.
- 2 Strategic plans must be joined up to provide a clear framework for national spatial and infrastructure priorities.
- 3 Strategic plans must provide clarity and certainty for the investment needed to deliver the vision and ambition of an area.
- 4 Strategic plans must ensure a resilient natural environment to underpin sustainable and equitable growth.
- 5 Strategic plans must fully embed healthy placemaking principles, and address local need and inequalities.

Focus, Approach and Scope

- 6 Strategic plans must set out visual and compelling spatial strategies with clear intent to support sustainable growth.
- 7 Strategic plans must be digitally enabled for the 21st century and be effective, efficient, accessible and transparent.
- 8 Strategic plans should be delivered at pace, with a clear delivery framework and measurable outcome-focused targets monitored annually.

Setting Vision and Ambition

- 9 Strategic plans must be ambitious, with a compelling place-specific vision.
- 10 SDSs should be developed through honest and meaningful engagement with communities and stakeholders.

Evidence, Testing, Examination and Monitoring

- 11 Strategic plans must be supported by a focused and streamlined evidence base and in line with clear guidance to be provided by MHCLG.
- 12 Strategic plans must be assessed under an Integrated Impact Assessment tied to a placed based vision.
- 13 Strategic plans should be evaluated through a streamlined technical examination process and in line with clear guidance to be provided by MHCLG.
- 14 Strategic plans must be capable of demonstrating how they will accelerate delivery of development and infrastructure priorities over time and how the anticipated outcomes of the strategy will be monitored.

Leadership, Skills and Capacity

- 15 Strategic plans must be championed by strong place leaders willing to make the difficult decisions that will inevitably be required through the strategic planning process.
- 16 Strategic plans must be prepared by multi-disciplinary teams and incorporate a diversity of perspectives.
- 17 The successful preparation of SDS will require investment in a new generation of strategic planners to support the essential role of partnerships and embed innovative practices and thinking.



Some key issues

- **Implications of LGR/Devolution:** how do we keep the show on the road for both LPs and SDS when large parts of England are going through major transformation?
- **Skills & resources:** will LGR offer an opportunity to reset planning resources? How will councils going through LGR retain staff? Where will we find a new generation of strategic planners? Is part of the answer more public/private partnership?
- **The negative image of planning:** how do we sell planning as a positive tool for growth, especially if SDS are to play a key ringmaster and investment role? Will Mayors understand its value in delivering good growth and bringing in more investment?
- **The absence of a national spatial plan:** the sum of the SDS parts will need to add up to a national picture, including national infrastructure priorities and new towns. What is needed to make sure the universal coverage happens quickly and that any cross-boundary issues are picked up?
- **Getting SDS prepared:** Government has promised funding and pilots but what else is needed to get going with preparing the new generation of strategic plans?



Recommended next steps for the Government from the Strategic Planning Group



Define Strategic Planning geographies so that early work to develop the evidence base on the right spatial geography can be progressed now.



Carry out a full risk assessment for each SDS area in relation to Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution to support the implementation of the new system during a period of considerable upheaval in large parts of England and maintain momentum in plan preparation.



Facilitate cross-boundary cooperation by establishing new Strategic Planning Monitoring Units with initial work programmes and defined cross SDS area responsibilities.



Standardise evidence base and examination requirements by setting clear guidance for SDS preparation in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated Planning Policy Guidance (PPG), ensuring consistency across Strategic Planning Authorities.



Provide accessible data by developing a centralised government data hub with standardised, downloadable datasets to support evidence-based planning and ensure ongoing support of SDS monitoring frameworks.



Allocate strategic planning funding and budget to support the early establishment of resources for each Strategic Planning Authority through specific funding and support packages.



Provide funding to pilot specific processes and evidence base, especially related to embedding the role of digital technology, for early SDS initiatives to test and refine strategic planning approaches from which others can benefit.



Support the establishment of core Shadow Teams especially in areas that are subject to local government reorganisation and devolution transitions to protect valuable spatial planning resources and experience.



Promote the added-value of strategic planning by advocating for the importance of SDSs, especially in relation to integrating policy agendas and priorities, and in attracting investment through targeted campaigns involving Mayors, advisors, and stakeholders.



Develop a strategic planning support, training and development programme to help rebuild capacity and knowledge in the system, to set out a proactive approach to working with Higher Education facilities and Planning Schools, and support the role of the Planning Inspectorate and government delivery agencies.

Thank you!

Tel: +44 7710405957

Email: catrionariddell@btinternet.com

Linkedin: [Catriona Riddell | LinkedIn](#)

Bluesky: [@catrionariddell.bsky.social](#)



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