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I worked formerly as Design and Heritage Team leader at Teignbridge District Council and now conservation officer at Somerset West and Taunton Council.

Planning for the Future Planning White Paper Briefing Note

1. In the new land categories, Conservation Areas are classed as 'protect', yet these include economically active areas that are sometimes undergoing dramatic physical and economic transformations, including urban centres, high streets, industrial and commercial areas. The Renewal categorisation would not be appropriate for conservation areas, as it would lessen protection. There may be a need for an additional category to those suggested in the PWP for complex areas, where there needs to be a careful balance of protection and change. This could include conservation areas, but also perhaps commercial areas, residential areas, high streets and designated neighbourhood areas.
2. It is proposed to create a central design body. This could be a positive step. Many have argued that such a body would focus on design fundamentals and addressing climate change, and not promote a particular aesthetic agenda.

Comments

As far as I know I am the last Architect working in planning in the south west region. I have wide experience and have worked heavily with listed buildings, conservation areas and flood defence work.

I have seen historic areas become shabby from bad planning decisions (Newquay) and have seen conservation areas such as Teignmouth regenerate from former neglect due to good planning decisions, a desire to regenerate and some investment. I have also seen large flood defence schemes implemented and built into historic areas such as Shaldon, Teignmouth and Cockwood that have added to the area due to careful design and attention.

Lack of design and conservation skills in planning dept has contributed to poor quality decisions. Unfortunately there is a lack of qualified staff such as conservation officers and urban designers and with pressure to make cuts these jobs do go.

Unfortunately a standard design panel won't help as most architects aren't trained in heritage works. Modern architects even now don't have that much heritage training. Having viewed some design panels the quality and entry to the design panel varies. If you are considering having a new design panel it should be conservation biased and of a higher quality than some in existence.

I have reviewed and re-designated many conservation areas and helped with regeneration. The majority of central areas in my part of the country are historic conservation areas often having developed from medieval cores. They are the 'face' or image of the town and most valued and in my area bring in the tourists and jobs. The 'preserve and enhance' tool which is within the conservation area is invaluable. If you create areas of 'deemed consent' it takes away the careful consideration of development that can occur. There needs to be an additional category for conservation areas. How can you carry out your statutory duty to consider the setting of a listed building if there is a deemed consent?

You should look at areas that have regenerated and see how it has been done or where big schemes such as the flood defence work has been incorporated well. Look at the successes and failures and understand why.

I would suggest you look at investment in qualified and experienced staff to regenerate cores and maintain protection don't take it away. You could also look at the quality of existing design panels and architectural education. Historic England produce a large amount of guidance often verbose. Have you considered re-generation guidance produced by someone experienced but who also protects the historic environment? Guidance either seems to be historic or modern and a new combined approach with good examples would be refreshing.