

Association for Rental Living and Shared Voice

October 2025

Bringing a Cultural Change to Planning: Discussion Paper

Autumn 2025

This paper draws on insights from a cross-sector roundtable held in autumn 2025 exploring how to embed cultural and practical reform in the UK planning system. It reflects the voices of practitioners, leaders, and communities committed to building a more human, hopeful, and collaborative approach to planning and housing delivery.

Introduction

Planning shapes the way we live. It decides not just what gets built, but how people connect, belong, and thrive. Yet in recent years, planning has become known more for its obstacles than its opportunities. Public perception has hardened, and too often, the process feels defensive, procedural, and disconnected from the people it serves.

At a cross-sector roundtable held in autumn 2025, participants from across housing, planning, development, and local government came together to ask a fundamental question: how can we make planning more human, more positive, and more effective?

The answer was not more regulation, but cultural renewal. It was a call to rediscover pride and purpose - to move from a system that manages risk to one that creates value. Out of that conversation came a shared framework known as the Many P's of Planning.

“Planning should feel like hope - not bureaucracy.”

What We Heard – Insights from the Roundtable

The roundtable reflected a rare alignment across sectors: the recognition that cultural change, not just procedural reform, is the missing ingredient in the future of housing delivery. Participants described a shared frustration with the tone of the system - technical, transactional, and too often adversarial.

They spoke about the need to tell different stories - to bring people into the narrative of planning, not shut them out. They emphasised that the way we talk about development shapes public trust, professional confidence, and political will.

“If we keep talking in policy language, people will never feel invited into the conversation.”

Out of these discussions emerged a shared belief that genuine renewal depends not on new regulation, but on new mindsets. To capture this, participants co-created a framework - the Many

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P's of Planning - expressing the values and behaviours that could transform how planning is led, communicated, and experienced.



The Many P's Explained

The Many P's of Planning present a holistic framework for cultural renewal - a way to view planning as a living, human system shaped by creativity, empathy, and collaboration. Each 'P' reflects a quality or behaviour that, together, define a more hopeful and effective planning culture.

The framework recognises ten dimensions: Purpose, Partnership, Possibility, People, Process, Performance, Placemaking, Politics, Proformas, and Participation.

1. **Positivity:** Bringing a more positive outlook to planning, by actively promoting positive voices in the planning process.
2. **Purpose:** Reconnecting planning with its deeper public mission - shaping lives, not just land use.
3. **Partnership:** Bridging sectors and disciplines to deliver shared outcomes.
4. **Possibility:** Seeing planning as a creative act that expands opportunity, not restricts it.
5. **People:** Putting empathy, lived experience, and human stories at the centre of decision-making.
6. **Process:** Simplifying rules and workflows so collaboration becomes natural, not exceptional.
7. **Performance:** Measuring success by impact, inclusion, and long-term value - not just speed or volume.
8. **Placemaking:** Designing places where people belong - the emotional and social outcome of good planning.
9. **Politics:** Encouraging stability, cross-party leadership, and a shared vision that outlives election cycles.
10. **Participation:** Opening the system to co-design and more representative engagement, ensuring every voice has a stake in shaping place.

“We’ve built a system that manages failure better than it enables success.”

Changing the Culture – From Process to Purpose

Planning has become too technical. Too often, language and process drown out empathy and creativity. Rebuilding trust begins with rediscovering the human side of planning - the stories, emotions, and shared hopes behind every application and policy.

Participants called for a cultural reset that celebrates the act of creation rather than control. They spoke about planners as storytellers, leaders as enablers, and developers as partners in public purpose. This vision reimagines planning as a creative profession, not an administrative one.

Storytelling is not a soft skill; it's a leadership tool. By using human language and lived examples, planning can reconnect with the public and reshape its reputation.

“Let’s start writing reports that describe what we’re building, not just what we’re allowing.”

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The Path Forward – Collaboration, Leadership, and Action

- Empower planners to lead with creativity and confidence, not just compliance.
- Encourage cross-sector mentorship and secondments to build empathy and understanding.
- Reframe consultation as collaboration - inviting communities into design and dialogue.
- Reward positivity and partnership through recognition and storytelling.
- Celebrate success publicly to rebuild pride and morale across the profession.
- Establish a voluntary Planning Culture Charter to embed shared values across organisations.

“If people only ever hear about planning when it’s a problem, we shouldn’t be surprised they think it’s broken.”

Conclusion – A Call to Collective Renewal

The Many P’s of Planning is more than a framework - it is a reminder that planning is, at its core, a human enterprise. It shapes how people live, meet, and belong. Rediscovering that purpose is the most powerful reform of all.

A more purposeful, participatory, and people-centred planning culture can transform not just the pace of delivery, but the pride and trust that underpin it. Efficiency will follow empathy; partnership will follow purpose.

“If we can change the culture, we can change the system — and if we change the system, we can change lives.”

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