

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

Third Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT BUSINESS AND PLANNING ACT 2020 (LONDON SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY) (CORONAVIRUS) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2020

Tuesday 24 November 2020

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Saturday 28 November 2020

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: †MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE

† Amesbury, Mike (*Weaver Vale*) (Lab)
 † Clark, Feryal (*Enfield North*) (Lab)
 † Fletcher, Nick (*Don Valley*) (Con)
 † Hollinrake, Kevin (*Thirsk and Malton*) (Con)
 † Holmes, Paul (*Eastleigh*) (Con)
 † Hughes, Eddie (*Walsall North*) (Con)
 † Hunt, Jane (*Loughborough*) (Con)
 Johnson, Kim (*Liverpool, Riverside*) (Lab)
 Lewis, Clive (*Norwich South*) (Lab)
 Lloyd, Tony (*Rochdale*) (Lab)
 Mahmood, Shabana (*Birmingham, Ladywood*) (Lab)

† Mayhew, Jerome (*Broadland*) (Con)
 † Pincher, Christopher (*Minister for Housing*)
 † Rowley, Lee (*North East Derbyshire*) (Con)
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd (*Brighton, Kemptown*) (Lab/Co-
 op)
 † Smith, Greg (*Buckingham*) (Con)
 † Sturdy, Julian (*York Outer*) (Con)
 Hannah Bryce, *Committee Clerk*
 † **attended the Committee**

Third Delegated Legislation Committee

Tuesday 24 November 2020

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

Draft Business and Planning Act 2020 (London Spatial Development Strategy) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020

9.25 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I would like to remind Members about the social distancing regulations; spaces available are already clearly marked and unmarked spaces must not be occupied. The usual convention of a Government side and an Opposition side is waived on this occasion, so Members may sit anywhere. *Hansard* colleagues would be grateful for any speaking notes to be sent to Hansardnotes@parliament.uk.

The Minister for Housing (Christopher Pincher): I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Business and Planning Act 2020 (London Spatial Development Strategy) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. Although, as you say, Members may sit anywhere, I hope that all colleagues, no matter where they sit, will choose to support the regulations.

The regulations were laid in draft before the House on 2 November. If approved, they will simply roll forward the existing temporary disapplication of the legal requirements for the Mayor of London to keep his current spatial development strategy available for public inspection, and to provide a hard copy on request. Of course the strategy must be made available for inspection free of charge online.

The regulations are part of a wider package of Government measures to ensure that the English town planning system can continue to operate safely and efficiently during the pandemic. I can confirm for certainty that the plain English translation of the Mayor of London's spatial development strategy is 'the London plan'.

Parallel measures to the regulations are currently also in place across the country for other local plans and spatial development strategies, and it is our intention also to roll forward those measures. Regulations to implement them will be laid in Parliament shortly, but unlike the London plan provisions, they will be subjected to the negative procedure.

The present rules that authorities must follow when preparing plans, including consultation and the documents that must be made available at each stage, are set out in law. Earlier this year, in response to the coronavirus pandemic, and with the support of stakeholders, the Government amended those rules. In the interests of public safety and to ensure that plans can advance through the system and support local recovery, we made

some changes. We temporarily removed requirements for authorities to make plans and other related documents available for inspection at council offices and other places, given that those offices are either closed or restricted in terms of right of entry, and the requirement for hard copies of the documents to be provided on request. Documents are still required to be made available on the authorities' websites.

We also published guidance on how authorities should consider how they can continue to promote effective community engagement by means that are reasonably practicable, in particular to reach those sections of the community that do not have internet access. Because of the current level of uncertainty about the future spread of the coronavirus, and the extent of the associated restrictions, we propose to roll forward those measures by 12 months from the point that they expire on 31 December 2020. For the London plan that requires an amendment to the Business and Planning Act 2020, which in turn amends the relevant provisions of the Greater London Authority Act 1999.

My officials have discussed the current measures with the Local Government Association's planning advisory service and the Planning Officers Society, and neither organisation has heard of any issues or concerns. It is important to stress that we hope that all authorities will be able to discharge those duties sooner than 31 December 2021. The changes do not prevent authorities from displaying documents in public buildings or sending out hard copies. We are simply continuing the existing disapplication of the formal requirements while the effects of the pandemic remain prevalent.

I believe that the Committee will understand that the changes are proportionate and pragmatic, and have been widely welcomed by the public and private sectors alike. I commend the regulations to the Committee.

The Chair: I remind the Committee that the debate can continue until five minutes to 11.

9.30 am

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve, once again, under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank the Minister for his introductory remarks on this administrative statutory instrument. I am confident that the debate will not go on as long as a recent one on the Floor of the House.

As the Minister said, the regulations extend the duration of temporary provisions that were laid before the House earlier this year. They allow the Mayor of London to make copies of the spatial development strategy available at principal offices of the Greater London Authority. The provision of hard copies has become digital-centric in response to the ongoing pandemic, and that is entirely necessary.

There has been extensive consultation with stakeholders, and I share their welcome of the current provisions. I also welcome the reassurance that those who struggle with access to digital provision and the internet will have access to any relevant documentation. It is good that that access will be maintained.

The Opposition support the regulations, and I thank the Minister for his informative remarks.

9.31 am

Christopher Pincher: I am grateful to the Committee and to the hon. Member for Weaver Vale in particular for showing unity of purpose, and for the usual amity with which he presented the Opposition's view. In this

case their view dovetails and is in concord with the Government's view. Therefore I commend the regulations to the Committee for approval.

Question put and agreed to.

9.32 am

Committee rose.

