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BCC: Planning system must work better for business

The planning system in England is more complex, costly and difficult for business than it was 5 years ago, according to a major report published today (Monday) by the British Chambers of Commerce.

The BCC report says that five years after the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which was designed to make the system less complex and more accessible, businesses are experiencing too many delays and barriers to investment.

The report finds that the government's focus on new homes is leading to increased pressure on the availability of employment land and premises. A BCC survey of over 900 businesses across the country revealed that one in five firms are struggling to find the land and premises they need.

The report says the government's pre-occupation with housing at the expense of other land uses is also leading to localised tensions. New homes are being built adjacent to long-established businesses in towns and cities and causing serious problems, both for new residents and businesses.

The report urges the government to review the NPPF to ensure that the needs of business are on an equal footing with other stakeholders.

Key recommendations include:

- Employment land and uses should be given equal priority to housing, so that people can access jobs and businesses have the space they need to grow and compete.
- Where shops and offices have been converted to homes, councils should ensure there is an alternative supply of quality commercial office space available elsewhere.
- Where there is high demand for new housing and jobs, there should be intelligent use of the green belt to ensure local communities benefit from the delivery of new homes and infrastructure.

Jane Gratton, Head of Business Environment at the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC), said:

“Access to affordable employment land and premises is essential for business innovation, expansion, and long-term competitiveness. Too many firms are now unable to find the land and premises they need. We risk creating big problems for the future if we don’t get the right balance of jobs and homes.

“Firms still face too many barriers, costs and delays as they negotiate the planning system. We need to find a way to make it work better, to provide the strategic certainty for businesses to make their own investment decisions and the freedom and flexibility they need to innovate, grow and compete globally.

“Planning for jobs and homes, together with up-front government investment in modern infrastructure, will give people better access to employment opportunities. It will help businesses access a skilled workforce and provide the platform to compete globally. The planning system must be looked into as part of plans to make the UK Brexit-ready.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) sits at the heart of a powerful network of 52 Accredited Chambers of Commerce across the UK, representing thousands of businesses of all sizes and within all sectors. Our Global Business Network connects exporters with nearly 40 markets around the world. For more information, visit: www.britishchambers.org.uk

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