



NUJ response to the consultation on the Planning for the Future White Paper

September 2020

1. The local newspaper industry is in crisis. It was in crisis before Covid-19 and is now in even greater dire straits. The union is dealing with huge redundancies across the UK in all sectors of the media, with local newspapers being hit hard. Thirty-three local newspapers have closed in the UK since the start of 2019, according to an analysis by the Press Gazette. A further 13 print titles were launched, making a net loss of 20 between 1 January 2019 and 19 August 2020.
2. Research firm Enders Analysis forecast that advertising revenue could fall by almost a third and estimated that 5,000 journalists and dozens of publishers were at risk. Lockdown led to a huge dip in circulation and advertising virtually dried up, leading to welcome intervention by the government's £35m public information advertising campaign and the bringing forward of the abolition of VAT on digital publications. But with proposals under the White Paper, the government appears to be giving with one hand and taking away with the other.
3. The NUJ is supporting the evidence supplied to this inquiry by the News Media Association (NMA), which estimated the obligation on local authorities to place statutory planning notices in local newspapers puts about £10m each year into the industry. This would be lost under the proposals. This blow could not come at a worse time for newspapers.
4. Newspapers play a vital role in democracy and local communities look to their local titles for news on changes to planning. As it stands, these proposals look to be a way of bypassing local people and their right to be consulted on changes to their environment. As NMA has said, the local news media sector is prepared to work with councils and explore innovative ways to take public notices to their audiences, through both print and digital platforms.
5. The NUJ urges the government to think again about these proposals which will rob the newspaper industry of vital revenue and will undermine local communities of their right to know about proposed new developments.
6. The NUJ's News Recovery Plan [<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/from-health-crisis-to-good-news/>] puts forward proposals to sustain the press and media through the Covid-19 crisis and reboot the industry, putting public interest journalism at its heart. It calls for a levy on the tech giants, as payback for the content they take for free and the damage caused by their dominance in attracting digital advertising. It also calls for urgent and innovative intervention to support the provision of quality

relevant news at a time of unprecedented need – including a package of tax credits to support Jobs for Journalists; local businesses taking out advertising; and for subscriptions to print and digital news outlets.