



By Email Only
5 February 2021

Message from Chief Planner

Last weekend marked the launch of an important package of measures to support the delivery of better designed and more sustainable homes, streets and neighbourhoods in England. Alongside the Government's response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's recommendations, updates to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) were issued for consultation and the National Model Design Code (the Code) has been launched alongside a pilot programme.

I had the pleasure of hosting an event this week with over 750 colleagues from across England to present and discuss the Code. We particularly benefited from the powerful insight from Nottingham City Council and what they have learnt during the preparation and application of their Design Quality Framework and the importance of supporting quality assurance processes. Thank you to everyone who took part in the event. We will be following up with further opportunities to learn more about how to use the Code, supported by the interim Office for Place within MHCLG and the transition board chaired by Nicholas Boys Smith.

As part of this programme, interested local authorities are invited to submit expressions of interest to take part in the first of two pilot programmes to apply design coding in their areas. We will be awarding £500,000 across 10 local authorities in this first wave and plan to launch a further wave of pilots in the coming months. [The full package of announcements can be found here.](#)

We invite planners and colleagues across the industry to engage with our consultation on the NPPF, start using the Code and consider their role in piloting local design codes. Please also consider completing the Biodiversity Net Gain survey introduced below. If there is one thing we have learnt through the pandemic it is that people's quality of life, health, wellbeing and opportunities are often shaped by the quality of their homes, streets, public and green spaces and neighbourhoods. The measures announced can make a difference to how local authorities can embed the design quality and sustainability of their built fabric into their local plans, policies and decisions and help on the journey towards net zero by 2050.

Joanna Averley
Chief Planner



Planning for the Future Consultation – Update to Privacy Notice

We have received over 40,000 responses to our [Planning for the Future consultation](#). This is a huge number and these responses will inform further policy thinking. To ensure we effectively analyse all these responses we will be using a third-party supplier to carry out this work. All data shared with the supplier will be managed and protected by them in accordance with strict data protection laws.

[Updated privacy terms and conditions can be found here.](#)

Building Better, Building Beautiful

One year ago, the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (BBBBC) published their report, [Living with Beauty](#), which set out 45 policy propositions for the Government of what needs to be addressed if we are to build more beautiful places. The Government set up the BBBBC to find ways to promote and increase the use of high-quality design for new build homes and neighbourhoods, to help ensure new development meets the needs and expectations of communities, making them more likely to be welcomed, rather than resisted.

Over the past twelve months, we have worked to address the recommendations and on 30 January 2021 the Government published its [response to the report](#), setting out how to address the recommendations to create better and more beautiful homes and places.

Steps being taken include proposed revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework and producing a National Model Design Code. The recommendations of the BBBBC informed our proposed planning reforms, set out in the [Planning for the Future](#) White Paper published for consultation in August 2020. To empower and enable local authorities and communities to use these tools to secure beauty and design quality in their local areas, we intend to establish an Office for Place to support and inspire communities and local authorities.

Revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework

In response to the recommendations of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, we are proposing a number of revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Our proposed policy changes will ensure the system helps to create more attractive buildings and places, while maintaining the NPPF's existing strong focus on delivering the homes and other development which communities need. The changes will make beauty and placemaking a strategic theme in the NPPF, set out the expectation that local authorities produce their own design codes



and place an emphasis on granting approval to schemes that are well-designed. Proposed changes also include an expectation that all new streets should be tree-lined and that there are improvements in biodiversity and access to nature through design.

We have also made a small number of environment-related changes, including on flood risk and climate change and have made changes to reflect a recent [written ministerial statement](#) which emphasised the importance of retaining and explaining the historic and social context of statues rather than removing them.

[The consultation](#) will run from 30 January to 27 March 2021 and we welcome your views. However, it should be noted that this consultation is not a wholesale review of the NPPF. We will announce a way forward on the wider planning reforms and the role of the NPPF we consulted on in [Planning for the Future](#) in due course.

Testing the National Model Design Code

Your opportunity to apply for testing and to produce a local design code.

In response to the recommendations of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's report, we are proposing to strengthen the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) so that design quality is a strategic objective of the planning system. Our proposed changes also strengthen the requirement for local authorities to produce design policies including design codes and guides. The proposed changes to the NPPF set an expectation that local authorities will produce design codes or guides. Alongside this the [National Model Design Code \(the Code\)](#) and the supporting [Guidance Notes for Design Codes](#), have been published setting out detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies that promote successful design and demonstrate how the principles set out in the [National Design Guide](#) can be delivered in practice.

The Government understands that quality design does not look the same across different areas of the country, for instance, that by definition local vernacular differs, and design priorities differ for scale and types of development. The guide is a toolkit to guide local planning authorities on the design parameters and issues that need to be considered and tailored to their own context when producing local design codes and guides, as well as methods to capture and reflect the views of the local community from the outset, and at each stage in the process. Design codes are important because they provide a framework for creating healthy, environmentally responsive, sustainable and distinctive places with a consistent and high-quality standard to enhance local character.

We will be seeking views on the application of the Code during the consultation on NPPF changes and look forward to hearing your views. I'd like to draw your attention



to an opportunity you have to test the Code and produce design codes for your area. As part of the process for introducing the wider application of design codes we are undertaking a programme for testing the use of the Code. 10 local authorities that have the appropriate skills will be appointed following a light touch procurement process and awarded a grant to apply the Code for codes for local sites or areas. [We are advertising the opportunity](#) for a limited period and awarding the grants as soon as practical during the consultation period.

Historic Statues

A [written ministerial statement](#) on 18 January 2020 set out the need to ensure that all historic statues, plaques, memorials and monuments – both listed and unlisted - are appropriately protected. The statement made clear that, where the meaning of who or what historic statues represent is disputed, the Government's policy is that they should be retained and explained rather than removed. It also set out our intention to amend secondary legislation and Directions issued by the Secretary of State to make the removal or alteration of an unlisted historic statue subject to a requirement to obtain planning permission. The changes will be introduced in the Spring.

Local Heritage List Campaign

Following an overwhelmingly positive response to our call for expressions of interest from local authorities keen to develop new and updated local lists in their area, the Government has decided to double the funding available to allow 22 areas to be supported instead of the 10 originally intended. [The successful areas have now been announced](#). Lessons learned and examples of good practice from these areas will be shared with all local authorities once the projects have been completed.

Housing Design Awards

Entries are now open to the 2021 Housing Design Awards.

Government continues to support the respected Housing Design Awards programme. In recent years we have been represented on the judging panel alongside our Homes England delivery arm and Government officials from other departments including DEFRA. Recent award winners included the Goldsmith Street, Norwich development for a Good Neighbour Award, which went on to win the Stirling Prize in the same year. We continue to seek developments that we can use to promote the Government's ambition to raise design quality of homes and places.

Knowledge about good design will be fundamental to upskilling in local planning authorities. The Housing Design Awards remain the country's principal resource of



new ideas for housing quality and there is an impressive library of high-quality developments gathered over the years. They are unique in that the awarding panel includes judges from across the industry and that shortlisted schemes and all winners have been viewed in person – last year uniquely by video presentations from use of drones - unlike other awards that rely on paper only information. We hope you promote submissions for this year's design awards in your area, encouraging developers and their consultants to apply. These could be schemes that recently received planning permission and show fresh thinking, whether in sustainable design, modern methods of construction, building with nature, innovative tenure, inclusive design such as for older or more vulnerable groups, or supporting biodiversity, and encourage them to put themselves forward for assessment this year.

The deadline for entry is 26 February 2021 and the process is online, using a system which allows judges to view scheme details online and other parties, such as Homes England, to browse for more general information at www.hdawards.org.

Update on Self & Custom Housebuilding

The Government believes self and custom build housing can play a crucial role in securing greater diversity in the housing market as well as helping to deliver the homes people want. Self and custom builders are well placed to build high quality, well designed homes that are energy efficient, accessible, affordable and welcomed by their communities.

The Department has worked with stakeholders to put in place a number of measures to overcome barriers the sector has identified. We are undertaking a review of the effectiveness of the Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 ('Right to Build') in the context of our wider planning reforms. Given the legislation has been in place since 2016, it is now time to consider whether the legislation is having the desired effect in supporting self and custom build nationally.

We are updating Planning Practice Guidance to provide greater clarity and certainty for authorities to bring more land forward. We are also publishing the data returns that local authorities have reported on self and custom build activity in their areas.

In addition, the Department is funding the Right to Build Task Force to provide expert support and guidance to local authorities in England to support the delivery of more self and custom build homes. It will also deliver workshops, which are currently being delivered as webinars, to explore opportunities to enable self and custom build locally. The workshops and guidance will also showcase examples of existing good practice on monitoring self-build permissions and to help inform local delivery strategies and policies. To arrange a workshop with the Task Force [please fill out this form](#).



Survey of Local Planning Authorities on Readiness to Deliver Biodiversity Net Gain

You will be aware that the Government intends to introduce a mandatory requirement for the planning system to deliver biodiversity net gain (BNG) through proposals in the Environment Bill which will become law later this year.

The introduction of these new mandatory requirements is likely to place new burdens on local authorities. This will be both in terms of capacity to deal with the expected increase in workload, and in the professional expertise necessary to address the additional technical, planning and legal issues involved in preparing for and implementing the measures.

This survey is a partnership between the Association of Local Government Ecologists, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport and the DEFRA. It aims to determine current levels of expertise and capacity to establish the current baseline and then seeks to identify the additional skills and capabilities required to deliver BNG through the planning system.

The survey results will provide an important contribution to the evidence base as the Government looks to test its assumptions on new burdens arising from the Environment Bill.

We encourage you to respond and provide a fuller picture of the likely implications for local planning authorities, and ultimately what resources will be required to ensure effective delivery of the Government's ambitions to introduce BNG.

The survey will be going live in week commencing 8 February 2021 and will be accessible [via this link](#).

If you have any questions about the project, please contact [Mike Oxford](#).