



Easier to read summary – draft National Planning Policy Framework



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DCLG Publications
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Email: product@communities.gsi.gov.uk
Online via the website: www.communities.gov.uk

August 2011

ISBN: 978 1 4098 3111 2

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Purpose

This easier to read summary is for people who have difficulty reading. It is a summary of the main points in the draft Framework, and policy that we think is of most interest to travelling communities. But this summary does not contain all the detail of the draft Framework. The summary should be read alongside the draft National Planning Policy Framework.

Introduction

It is important that we have national planning policy, to help the planning system to work properly and fairly. However, there are now more than 1,000 pages of national planning policy, in 47 documents. It is sometimes hard to understand the policy.

The Government said it would put in place a clearer, more consistent National Planning Policy Framework. This Framework will be easier to understand and put into practice. The Framework will replace all the other national planning policy documents. A list of these documents is in the consultation document, pages 13-15.

<http://communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1951747.pdf>

Localism Bill

The Localism Bill seeks to:

- Give new freedoms and flexibilities for local government.
- Give new rights and powers for communities and individuals.
- Reform the planning system to make it more democratic and more effective.
- Make reforms to ensure that decisions about housing are taken locally.

The Localism Bill contains proposals to make the planning system clearer, more democratic, and more effective. The draft Framework works with the Localism Bill to put into practice the Duty to Cooperate, Neighbourhood Planning and other changes.

You can find out more about the Localism Bill in the updated *A plain English guide to the Localism Bill* at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localismplainenglishguide>

Draft National Planning Policy Framework [The draft Framework]

The draft National Planning Policy Framework is now out for consultation. The consultation closes on 17 October. The draft Framework is only for England.

The draft Framework sets out important issues to think about when local councils and communities make plans for, and decide, what new development should take place. Thinking through these important issues will help communities enjoy a better quality of life, both now and in the future.

The draft Framework sets out nationally important issues and leaves other matters for local councils and communities to decide themselves. So communities can plan to meet their needs, without the Government always getting in the way and telling them what to do.

The draft Framework is based on the policy of sustainable development. We think that sustainable development means:

What we do today to meet our needs, must not stop future generations being able to meet their own needs.

The planning system should help to build a strong economy by ensuring there is enough land for growth, and ensuring that infrastructure is provided.

The planning system should also promote strong, vibrant and healthy communities by providing housing, good design and local services to support health and well-being.

Planning decisions should protect, and try to improve, wildlife and the habitats they live in, as well as landscape, and old buildings.

The Government wants planning decisions to be based on up to date local plans, put together with communities, and based on adequate evidence.

Presumption in favour of sustainable development (the presumption)

The presumption is a new policy designed to ensure that the planning system as a whole focuses on opportunities. The presumption means that where local plans are not up-to-date, or not a clear basis for decisions, development should be allowed. But the development should not be allowed if it would undermine the key principles for sustainability in the Framework (such as protecting the Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty). The presumption also means that where development is in line with the local plan, it should be allowed without delay.

The presumption will encourage plan-making by councils and communities, giving them a greater say in how they meet their development needs. It will also give communities, developers and investors more certainty about the types of applications that are likely to be approved. This will help to speed up the planning process.

Local plans, health and well-being

Local plans are documents prepared by the local council which set out where different kinds of development should be located, to meet the needs of the whole community. Local plans can contain policies to guide new housing, business development and infrastructure, and decisions on important issues such as climate change and the natural and historic environment. Local councils should work closely with the community and business to identify and plan for the needs of the area.

Local plans should be based on adequate, up-to-date and relevant evidence. This evidence should cover economic, social and environmental information about the area, both now and options for the future.

Local councils should work with public health bodies to understand the health of the local community, including how the community might change in the future. Local councils and health bodies should understand anything that stops gains in health and well-being.

Duty to Co-operate

The Localism Bill will place a new Duty to Co-operate on councils. The Duty means that local councils should work together, with other public bodies, on planning issues that impact beyond local boundaries. The draft Framework puts into practice the Duty to Co-operate.

It is important for councils and other public bodies to work together across boundaries, to plan for the housing, transport and infrastructure that local people need. For example, if lots of people living in one council travel to work in a neighbouring city, then the two councils should be working together. The Duty to Co-operate also means that local councils should work together, to plan for the needs of travelling communities.

Neighbourhood planning

The draft Framework supports neighbourhood planning - a new tool that is being set up in the Localism Bill. It will help communities to say what their area should look like: where new shops, offices or homes should go. With a neighbourhood development order, the community can grant planning permission for new buildings they want to see go ahead. Neighbourhood development orders will allow new homes and offices to be built without the developers having to apply for separate planning permission.

If approved by a local referendum (vote), the neighbourhood plan will need to be put into force by the local council.

Promoting sustainable growth and prosperity

Economic growth

The draft Framework makes clear that local councils should aim to meet the needs of business, and help make the economy fit for the future. Local councils should support both town centres and rural business, and raise the quality of life in rural areas. Local councils should have a clear economic strategy for their area, based on understanding business needs to support sustainable growth.

Town centres

The Government wants to support town centres and to protect local high streets. The draft Framework says that town centres are at the heart of communities. The draft Framework maintains the 'town centres first' approach, which means that new shops and leisure developments should look for sites in town centres first. Only if suitable sites are not to be had, shops and leisure developments can look for edge of centre and then out of centre sites.

Sustainable transport

The Government wants to cut down pollution and traffic jams by making it easy for people to use public transport. The draft Framework makes it clear that new development should have good public transport links, with priority given to cyclists and people on foot. Important local facilities, such as schools and shops, should be within walking distance of most new properties where possible. The draft Framework makes clear that it will not always be easy to get good public transport in rural areas, so other transport will have to be used.

Communications infrastructure

The draft Framework promotes growth for the telecommunications industry, but this growth should be sensitive to local areas. We agree with the industry policy of sharing masts and using existing buildings, and well designed and camouflaged equipment.

Minerals

Minerals are vital to meeting society's needs. The Government's aim is to ensure we get enough minerals from our country to have the steady supply needed to support sustainable growth. But in doing so we must limit impacts on the natural and local environment.

Planning for strong, vibrant and healthy communities

Housing

The policies in this section do not apply to traveller sites.

Local councils should undertake a study called a 'Strategic Housing Market Assessment' to help them understand how many houses, and what kind of houses, are needed in the area. They also look at what land can be used for housing development in a study called a 'Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment'. The draft Framework makes clear councils should ensure their local plan meets the needs for market and affordable housing in their areas.

The draft Framework says that local plans should identify sites or broad areas to allow 15 years housing growth where possible. Within that 15 years worth of sites, local councils should identify enough sites with good prospects of being built for five years. An extra one year of sites should also be found to create competition and choice in the market for land. If the local council does not find enough sites for the first five years of the plan, the council should grant permission for developments in line with the 'Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development'.

The draft Framework drops the national target on how much housing development should happen on land that has been previously developed land – also called brownfield land.

In rural areas local councils should plan housing to meet local requirements, particularly if local people require affordable housing. Local councils should consider if allowing some market housing would help provide more affordable houses for local people. Housing should not be built in places far away from local services.

Out-of-the-way homes in the countryside should not be allowed unless there are special reasons, such as:

- The need for a rural worker to live near their job in the countryside.
- Where development would help keep a special historic building, or re-use a disused building.
- Or where the design of the building is very good.

Design

Good design is important for sustainable development. The planning system should promote good design for all development, including traveller sites. Local Plans and neighbourhood plans should set out design standards for new developments.

Developers will be expected to work closely with people affected by their proposals. Their designs should take account of the views of the community.

Sustainable communities

The Government wants communities to be strong, vibrant and healthy. These communities should have good quality buildings in their area, and have good local services that serve community needs.

All parts of a community should be involved in preparing local and neighbourhood plans. Local councils should plan to provide community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, public houses and places of worship.

Green space designation

The draft Framework sets out a new tool for local communities to protect green areas that are very special and important to them. They can save local green space land to be protected that is important to local life because:

- It has natural beauty.
- It has important history.
- It is important for sport and entertainments.
- It is tranquil or calming.
- It is rich in wildlife.

These green areas will be planned so they work with, and do not undermine, creating homes, jobs and other essential services.

Green Belt

The Green Belt is a belt of land surrounding a town or city; it is used to stop towns growing into each other. Green Belt areas are set out in local plans. The draft Framework keeps current Green Belt protections. All inappropriate development harmful to Green Belt is not allowed. Local councils are asked to try to make the Green Belt better. Local councils can do this in lots of ways, for example by having walking paths, more wildlife and plants, and by making the land look better.

The draft Framework has a new policy for Green Belt land that has been developed in the past. At the moment, this land can only be used for new development if the local plan allows it. In the draft Framework, Green Belt land developed in the past may be used, in some circumstances, for new development.

Looking after the environment and making it better

Climate change

The draft Framework sets out planning's important role in tackling climate change, and moving to a low carbon economy. Planning can help lower transport fumes and green house gases released into the air, through:

- Choosing good locations [see transport, above] and layouts for new development.
- Support for better energy efficiency in existing buildings, and
- Backing the delivery of renewable and low carbon energy, including community-led schemes.

We also want to ensure new development is ready for future climate change, by getting its location and design right. For example, local councils should make sure that new housing estates are not at risk of flooding.

The draft Framework also meets the Government's commitment to stopping needless building in areas of high flood risk.

Access to the coast

The draft Framework says the Government not only wants to protect our great coastline, but also to ensure people can get to it. New development should not get in the way of a non-stop, signed and managed route around the coast, for all to enjoy.

The natural environment

The draft Framework keeps protection for:

- Areas of countryside of special quality and beauty called "Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty".
- National Parks.
- Areas of countryside that are the very best sites for wild creatures and plants called "Sites of Special Scientific Interest".
- And other special environmental areas which protect the character of our country's landscape, and preserve wildlife.

Biodiversity – different kinds of countryside, wildlife and plants

A healthy and varied natural environment is important to our sense of wellbeing. The draft Framework says that the planning system should try not just to protect, but, where possible, improve biodiversity. We need to make sure we don't just have isolated pockets of wildlife, but rich and joined up green spaces. Planning permission should not be given for development

resulting in loss or damage to irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland.

Noise and light pollution

Noise and light pollution impacts badly on people's quality of life. The draft Framework says that planners must try to avoid too much noise pollution from new developments, and to protect tranquil areas prized for their peace and quiet. By encouraging good design, planning decisions should limit the affect of light pollution.

Historic environment

The draft Framework keeps protections for old buildings and monuments (these are called heritage assets). Development causing substantial harm or loss to an important heritage asset is not allowed, unless in wholly exceptional circumstances. Similar protections should be given to unofficial sites of archaeological interest, if it can be shown they are of substantial significance.

Local councils are encouraged to show how they will protect and improve heritage assets most at risk of being lost, for communities to enjoy. Councils should have up to date evidence about the historic environment in their areas, and use it to weigh up the significance of heritage assets and how they contribute to the local area.

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ISBN: 978 1 4098 3111 2