



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Our ref: RFI 7241

Date: 16 February 2015

Dear [REDACTED]

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: Government Definitions of Sustainability

Thank you for your request for information, which we received on Monday 26 January, about definitions of sustainability. We have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

You asked whether we have recorded information about:

1. The UK government's definition of "sustainable development"

The UK Government's definition of sustainable development was included in the February 2011 policy paper [Mainstreaming sustainable development: the government's vision and what this means in practice](#) as:

The coalition Government is committed to sustainable development (SD). This means making the necessary decisions now to realise our vision of stimulating economic growth and tackling the deficit, maximising wellbeing and protecting our environment, without negatively impacting on the ability of future generations to do the same. (Page 2)

2. The UK government's definition of "sustainability" - (linked to the concept of sustainable development)

Within *Mainstreaming sustainable development: the government's vision and what this means in practice* and elsewhere, 'sustainability' is taken to denote the state towards which the UK Government's vision for sustainable development aspires— for example:

'Just as leading businesses recognise that sustainability is a core strategic issue and not just a 'nice to have', this Government wants to mainstream SD so that it is central to the way we make policy, run our buildings and purchase goods and services.'

(Mainstreaming sustainable development: the government's vision and what this means in practice, p.2)

3. The UK government's definition of "mainstreaming sustainable development"?

The definition of mainstreaming sustainable development is outlined in the February 2011 policy paper [Mainstreaming sustainable development: the government's vision and what this means in practice](#):

'...the time has come to move SD beyond being considered as a separate, 'green' issue which is a priority for only a few Government departments. Just as leading businesses recognise that sustainability is a core strategic issue and not just a 'nice



to have', this Government wants to mainstream SD so that it is central to the way we make policy, run our buildings and purchase goods and services.

Ministers have agreed an approach for mainstreaming SD which in broad terms consists of providing Ministerial leadership and oversight, leading by example, embedding SD into policy and transparent and independent scrutiny.' (Page 2)

4. The UK government's definition of "a presumption towards sustainable development"?

This phrase relates to the [National Policy Planning Framework](#), produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). The definition is set in the section entitled Achieving Sustainable Development (pages 2-5):

*At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a **presumption in favour of sustainable development**, which should be seen as a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking.*

*For **plan-making** this means that:*

- *local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area;*
- *Local Plans should meet objectively assessed needs, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to rapid change, unless:*
 - o *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or*
 - o *specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted*

*For **decision-taking** this means:*

- *approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and*
- *where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant policies are out-of-date, granting permission, unless:*
 - o *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole; or*
 - o *specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted (page 4)*

5. The UK government's definition of "sustainable finance"?

- This information is not held by Defra.

I attach an annex giving contact details should you be unhappy with the service that you have received.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact the address below.

Yours sincerely,


Defra FOIA and EIRs Team
InformationRequests@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Annex

Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision under section 17(7) of the FOIA or under regulation 18 of the EIRs, as applicable, within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to [REDACTED] Head of Information Standards, Area 4D, Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR (email: requestforinfo@defra.gsi.gov.uk) and he will arrange for an internal review of your case. Details of Defra's complaints procedure are on our [website](#).

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, section 50 of the FOIA and regulation 18 of the EIRs gives you the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF