

National Planning Policy Framework

Key points from the Planning Officers Society's response to the consultation

Spatial and aligned national policies and priorities

A spatial vision for England continues to be a major gap in the Government's approach to planning and development. The Government must set out long-term spatial priorities alongside its planning objectives in the NPPF. These must also be fully aligned with other national priorities, particularly on infrastructure, climate change, energy and economic growth.

Nationally defined, locally interpreted sustainable development

Nationally defined 'sustainable development' which ensures that social, economic and environmental considerations are taken into account is appropriate, but there must be flexibility within the system to take into account local priorities and objectives, particularly those that are agreed with the community as part of a local authority's corporate responsibilities.

A new model for strategic planning and investment

Effective arrangements for the delivery of strategic priorities, particularly around infrastructure, housing, economic development and energy, are an essential part of the planning system. The Society, in partnership with others, will be developing a model which offers a simple, transparent and flexible approach to long-term strategic planning and investment and supports the new 'duty to co-operate'.

Delivering the right housing in the right place.

The basis for planning for housing has not yet been clearly thought through. An approach based purely on a continuation of past trends fails to take account of issues of longer-term deliverability, local sustainability and the need in some cases to establish new directions for growth not reflected in past trends. The consequences are likely to include excessive land releases, resulting in blight or sporadic development. In cases where local need cannot fully be met locally, there needs to be added weight attached to the duty of neighbouring authorities to cooperate.

Protecting essential employment land

We oppose the proposed weakening of the ability of local plans to afford protection to employment land. A local reservoir of such land is essential to facilitate the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises, to provide sustainably-accessed employment and to attract inward investment. Whilst it would clearly be unrealistic to protect such land in the absence of any prospect of it being used for employment, the draft policy goes too far in fuelling pressures for land to go to higher-value uses.

Transition and Implementation

We welcome a succinct national planning policy framework that limits itself to key matters of principle and policy. It is an important step in the transition to localism in planning, which requires a significant change in culture, and in roles and responsibilities for preparing policy and guidance. To avoid uncertainty, it is therefore very important that Government make clear future responsibilities and process for producing the complementary guidance, and appropriate transitional arrangements. The Society is willing to play an active role in producing this guidance and indeed is already working with others to do so.

The full version of the Society's response to the consultation will be published when finalised on: www.planningofficers.org.uk.