

Draft National Planning Policy Framework: CLG Select Committee Inquiry

Written evidence submitted by the Landscape Institute

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1. Introduction

The Landscape Institute is the professional body for landscape architects. It is an educational charity and chartered body responsible for protecting, conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. It champions well-designed and well-managed urban and rural landscape. The Institute's accreditation and professional procedures ensure that the designers, managers and scientists who make up the landscape architecture profession work to the highest standards. Its advocacy and education programmes promote the landscape architecture profession as one which focuses on design, environment and community in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. The Institute provides services to assist members including support and promotion of the work of landscape architects; information and guidance to the public and industry about the specific expertise offered by those in the profession; and training and educational advice to students and professionals looking to build upon their experience.

2. The LI and the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

2.1 The planning system, and therefore the draft NPPF, have a profound impact on the way our land is planned, designed, managed and used. Reforms to the planning system present us with an ideal opportunity to improve the way in which we manage and use this finite resource which is one of the nation's greatest assets.

2.2. The profession of landscape architecture comprises landscape planning, landscape science, landscape design, landscape management and urban design. It is a holistic discipline which addresses the social, environmental and economic characteristics that make particular places unique. Landscape architects develop solutions which deliver the optimum, and most sustainable, outcomes for that particular place. Revisions to planning guidance are therefore of significant interest to the LI and its 6000 members.

3. Summary of LI response to CLG Select Committee Inquiry

3.1 The following lines of inquiry set out by the CLG Select Committee will be responded to by the LI:

- Is the definition of sustainable development appropriate and is the presumption in favour of sustainable development a balanced and workable approach?
- Is the relationship between the draft NPPF and other national statements of planning-related policy sufficiently clear? Does the draft NPPF serve to integrate national planning policy across Government departments?
- Does the draft NPPF, together with the duty to cooperate, provide a sufficient basis for larger than local strategic planning?

3.2 The response of the LI can be summarised as follows:

- The definition of 'sustainable development' in the draft NPPF is inappropriate, confused and incompatible with the Brundtland Report definition, despite reference to this definition early in the draft.
- The draft NPPF would prevent much of the progressive thinking demonstrated in the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) from being implemented and points to a lack of coordination between DEFRA and CLG.
- The draft NPPF fails to build on the excellent evidence base in the recently-published UK National Ecosystems Assessment which highlights the significant economic and social costs of depleting natural capital while also demonstrating the economic benefits of looking after it.
- The 'duty to cooperate' is an inadequate way of addressing the 'larger than local' demands to be made of the planning system especially with regard to implementation of green infrastructure plans.

4 Is the definition of sustainable development appropriate and is the presumption in favour of sustainable development a balanced and workable approach?

4.1 The definition of sustainable development is not appropriate and the way in which it is articulated throughout the draft NPPF is incompatible with the established definition. The presumption in favour of sustainable development is neither balanced nor workable. At the heart of our response to this line of inquiry, is the extract from Our Common Future, more commonly known as the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) which states that:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

This definition is the basis for much of the work done by this organisation and others over the past twenty years. It was cited at the beginning of the draft NPPF, it is reasonable to use this as point of reference in analysing further references throughout the document.

4.2 The draft NPPF explains that sustainable development is the “core principle underpinning planning” and the Ministerial Foreword states that *“The purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development”*. The draft NPPF establishes a commitment to sustainable development, in accordance with the definition outlined in the Brundtland Report. However the draft NPPF undermines this intention through a number of statements. These are as follows:

4.2.1 *“Simply stated, the principle [of sustainable development] recognises the importance of ensuring that all people should be able to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, both now and in the future” – paragraph 9, NPPF.*

This reinterpretation of the original definition is incorrect, and the addition of the phrase ‘...and enjoy a better quality of life’ confuses matters significantly.

4.2.2 *Development means growth. We must accommodate the new ways by which we will earn our living in a competitive world. We must house a rising population, which is living longer and wants to make new choices. We must respond to the changes that new technologies offer us. Our lives, and the places in which we live them, can be better, but they will certainly be worse if things stagnate” – Ministerial Foreword, page V, NPPF.*

The statement that development means growth is not justified or explained. We do not disagree with the urgent pressure to create jobs, to build new homes and to respond to changing population requirements but the planning system needs to address the requirements of sustainable development, not unplanned growth.

- 4.2.3 *“So sustainable development is about positive growth – making economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations” – Ministerial Foreword, page V, NPPF.*

Sustainable development is about satisfying current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Brundtland definition requires that we should avoid acting in the present in ways which risk seriously compromising the future. This demands that we think about and balance present and future needs. This long term approach is not reflected in the draft NPPF. This approach lacks integrity as it redefines the notion of sustainable development so that it becomes synonymous with economic growth.

- 4.2.4 *“This framework sets out clearly what could make a proposed plan or development unsustainable” – Ministerial Foreword, page V, NPPF.*

Quite simply, the draft NPPF does not set out clearly what could make a proposed plan unsustainable.

- 4.2.5 *“Planning for prosperity (an economic role) – use the planning system to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type, and in the right places, is available to allow growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure” – paragraph 10, page 3, NPPF.*

This section of the draft NPPF fails to acknowledge the important role played by the natural environment in delivering economic prosperity. This is addressed in the recently published Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP). The Executive Summary states *“A healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing”*.

- 4.3 The LI believes that the presumption in favour of sustainable development is neither balanced nor workable based on the Brundtland definition. The imbalance is clearly demonstrated by the following extracts of the draft NPPF:

- *“The Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth...Planning must operate to encourage growth and not act as an impediment. Therefore, significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system” – paragraph 13, page 4, NPPF.*
- *“Planning policies and decisions should seek to protect and enhance environmental and heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, and reduce pollution.”*

The ‘significant weight’ attached to economic growth in the first extract, together with the weaker reference to environmental enhancement and protection in the second extract, is incompatible with Brundtland principles. It is not the purpose of planning to encourage growth; its role, in accordance

with the Department for Communities and Local Government own website, is “...to ensure that development takes place in the public interest, in economically, socially and environmentally sustainable ways¹.”

- 4.4 The LI welcomes the significance given to sustainable development but is disappointed that the initial enthusiasm for this is not carried through the whole document. The approach outlined below is one that we support.

“Planning policies and decisions should make effective use of land, promote mixed use developments that create more vibrant places, and encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land can perform many functions” – paragraph 19, page 5, NPPF.

The work of our members has demonstrated that multifunctional green infrastructure approaches to land use represent one of the most positive ways of ensuring a future which is sustainable. We also welcome the recognition of the value of design in its contribution to sustainable development.

5 Is the relationship between the NPPF and other national statements of planning-related policy sufficiently clear? Does the NPPF serve to integrate national planning policy across Government departments?

- 5.1 The draft NPPF does not sit comfortably with some of the promising thinking contained within the recently published Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP). The planning system is one of the key mechanisms for delivering many of the ambitions set out in NEWP, yet the draft NPPF has failed to address Government environmental policy. The aspirations in NEWP are welcomed by the LI.

“The Government wants this to be the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than it inherited. To achieve so much means taking action across sectors rather than treating environmental concerns in isolation. It requires us all to put the value of nature at the heart of our decision-making – in Government, local communities and businesses.” – paragraph 2, page 3, NEWP.

“Through reforms of the planning system, we will take a strategic approach to planning for nature within and across local areas. This approach will guide development to the best locations, encourage greener design and enable development to enhance natural networks. We will retain the protection and improvement of the natural environment as core objectives of the planning system.” – paragraph 6, page 3, NEWP.

- 5.2 Through NEWP, DEFRA outlines a vision for the natural environment which puts it at the centre of decision making, for example:

- *“The National Ecosystem Assessment has given us the evidence to inform our decisions. It makes clear that government and society need to account better for the value of nature, particularly the services and resources it provides” – Ministerial Foreword, page 2, NEWP.*

¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningsystem/>

- *“This White Paper...places the value of nature at the centre of the choices our nation must make: to enhance our environment, economic growth and personal wellbeing” – Ministerial Foreword, page 2, NEWP.*
- *“A healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal wellbeing” – paragraph 1, page 3, NEWP.*
- *“Sustainable economic growth relies on services provided by the natural environment, often referred to as ecosystem services” – paragraph 8, page 4, NEWP.*
- *“We will put natural capital at the centre of economic thinking and at the heart of the way we measure economic progress nationally” – paragraph 11, page 4, NEWP.*
- *“The benefits we get from nature are often described as ecosystem services...Taking account of all the economic and non-economic benefits we get from these services enables decision-makers to exercise judgments about how we use our environment. Such an approach is often called an ‘ecosystems’ approach” – paragraph 1.5, page 7, NEWP.*

None of these approaches is reflected in the draft NPPF. The draft NPPF does not explain how the environmental, social and economic objectives for the planning system relate to each other. It is difficult to understand how the approaches outlined above can be translated into action with an approach to planning which favours economic growth over the natural environment the draft NPPF does not take account of the objectives set out in NEWP, particularly in relation to placing nature at the heart of economic decision-making. Instead, it treats economic growth and environmental protection as separate goals (see paragraph 4.3).

5.3 In June 2011, UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA) was published by DEFRA. It , revealed that nature is worth billions of pounds to the UK economy. The report effectively makes the case for protecting and enhancing the environment and, we believe, should be used as evidence to inform planning policy. Defra’s website states:

- *The report strengthens the arguments for protecting and enhancing the environment and will be used by the government to direct policy in future².*

This commitment made by Government has not been carried through into the draft NPPF. This represents a missed opportunity for land use planning reform.

6. Does the NPPF, together with the duty to cooperate, provide a sufficient basis for larger than local strategic planning?

6.1 It does not, because:

- It does not provide an adequate basis for addressing the issues set out in the Natural Environment White Paper
- It lacks detail on key environmental issues
- It is not explicit about landscape-scale approaches
- It is not explicit about green infrastructure

² <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2011/06/02/hidden-value-of-nature-revealed/>

- 6.2 We have indicated some of the ways in which the NPPF fails to deliver what was promised in the Natural Environment White Paper. To a large extent, the failure of the NPPF in this respect arises from the fact that most of the issues in the NEWP issues are not 'local' and they require a larger than local approach if they are to be properly addressed.
- 6.3 The NPPF deliberately does not contain as much detailed guidance on specific environmental issues as the various topic-based PPGs and PPSs. This loss of detail at national level, in combination with the absence of regional policy, may well result in substantial variations both in interpretation of the available guidance and the setting of relevant priorities between neighbouring or clusters of local authorities. For example, the local aspirations of one authority in respect of green infrastructure, housing growth or economic development may not mesh with another, despite or possibly because of their geo-physical relationship. It is unclear in such circumstances how the Duty to Cooperate will be delivered in a timely and effective manner. This may delay the adoption of Local Plans.
- 6.4 It will often be the case that the social, economic or environmental impacts of a decision made in one area will be felt by neighbouring communities. This is likely to be especially critical in urban areas, where neighbourhoods are currently undefined, as opposed to parishes, which are predominantly rural. A neighbourhood development order or plan, whilst being in conformity with the Local Plan (assuming this to be in place), may have an adverse effect on adjoining areas where a neighbourhood plan does not exist or has conflicting aspirations. This may apply especially to edge of town (peri-urban) greenfield development proposals, where the separate proposal (S.130 to 132) for promoting and protecting 'Local Green Spaces' may give rise to further challenge and delay in decision-making. In the absence from any indication within the NPPF as to how such matters might be resolved, we are concerned that complex and sensitive matters may either become quickly bogged down in protracted disputes, or may just be ignored by neighbouring authorities because they are too difficult to resolve.
- 6.5 The NPPF only refers to 'landscape-scale' in respect of planning for biodiversity (S.168) across local authority boundaries. The need for landscape-scale approaches extends much more widely than biodiversity, and includes, for example, strategic green infrastructure networks, which are relevant to urban areas and which have a particular importance in peri-urban areas where the NPPF in general is weakest. The NPPF should therefore outline the importance of landscape-scale approaches to land use more generally and indicate how the duty to cooperate can deliver it.
- 6.6 Section B4 of the NPPF Impact Assessment includes helpful guidance on green infrastructure, setting out the case for government intervention to offset market failure and referring to the associated multi-functional benefits of the services that it can provide. Whilst mention is made of green infrastructure in respect of climate change adaptation (s.154) and biodiversity (s167), it is not included specifically under the list of strategic priorities to be addressed through the Duty to Co-operate nor as an important element of infrastructure provision. There is also no reference to green infrastructure in the NPPF glossary. This may result in a failure to make the best use of land and missed opportunities for built development to incorporate elements of green infrastructure or otherwise contribute to its provision.
- 6.7 The National Ecosystem Assessment Report and the Defra Natural Environment White Paper highlight the substantial benefits of green infrastructure provision and the concepts that it embraces. Most of the published or emerging regional plans identified proposals for green infrastructure networks at a sub-regional scale. Successful delivery of these will be highly dependent on

collaborative approaches by local authorities, public agencies, land-managing organisations and a number of other stakeholders and this will need to be informed by cross-cutting strategic and spatial planning policy.

6.8 Finally, the LI questions how the Duty to Cooperate would work in the potential scenario where two or more neighbouring authorities do not yet have in place local plans. Such uncertainty will not be conducive to delivering against challenges which transcend political boundaries.