



# National Planning Policy Framework

**From::** Department for Communities and Local Government

**First published::** 27 March 2012

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## Ministerial foreword

Ministerial foreword by the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP

The purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development.

Sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don't mean worse lives for future generations.

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.

Sustainable development is about change for the better, and not only in our built environment.

Our natural environment is essential to our wellbeing, and it can be better looked after than it has been. Habitats that have been degraded can be restored. Species that have been isolated can be reconnected. Green Belt land that has been depleted of diversity can be refilled by nature – and opened to people to experience it, to the benefit of body and soul.

Our historic environment – buildings, landscapes, towns and villages – can better be cherished if their spirit of place thrives, rather than withers.

Our standards of design can be so much higher. We are a nation renowned worldwide for creative excellence, yet, at home, confidence in development itself has been eroded by the too frequent experience of mediocrity.

So sustainable development is about positive growth – making economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations.

The planning system is about helping to make this happen.

Development that is sustainable should go ahead, without delay – a presumption in favour of sustainable development that is the basis for every plan, and every decision. This framework sets out clearly what could make a proposed plan or development unsustainable.

In order to fulfil its purpose of helping achieve sustainable development, planning must not simply be about scrutiny. Planning must be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which we live our lives.

This should be a collective enterprise. Yet, in recent years, planning has tended to exclude, rather than to include, people and communities. In part, this has been a result of targets being imposed, and decisions taken, by bodies remote from them. Dismantling the unaccountable regional apparatus and introducing neighbourhood planning addresses this.

In part, people have been put off from getting involved because planning policy itself has become so elaborate and forbidding – the preserve of specialists, rather than people in communities.

This National Planning Policy Framework changes that. By replacing over a thousand pages of national policy with around fifty, written simply and clearly, we are allowing people and communities back into planning.



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## Introduction

Paragraphs 1 to 5

1. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It sets out the government's requirements for the planning system only to the extent that it is relevant, proportionate and necessary to do so<sup>1</sup>. It provides a framework within which local people and their accountable councils can produce their own distinctive local and neighbourhood plans, which reflect the needs and priorities of their communities.
2. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan<sup>2</sup>, unless material considerations indicate otherwise<sup>3</sup>. The National Planning Policy Framework must be taken into account in the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans, and is a material consideration in planning decisions<sup>4</sup>. Planning policies and decisions must reflect and where appropriate promote relevant EU obligations and statutory requirements.
3. This Framework does not contain specific policies for nationally significant infrastructure projects for which particular considerations apply. These are determined in accordance with the decision-making framework set out in the Planning Act 2008 and relevant national policy statements for major infrastructure, as well as any other matters that are considered both important and relevant (which may include the National Planning Policy Framework). National policy statements form part of the overall framework of national planning policy, and are a material consideration in decisions on planning applications.
4. This Framework should be read in conjunction with the government's planning policy for traveller sites. Local planning authorities preparing plans for and taking decisions on traveller sites should also have regard to the policies in this Framework so far as relevant.
5. This Framework does not contain specific waste policies, since national waste planning policy will be published as part of the National Waste Management Plan for England<sup>5</sup>. However, local authorities preparing waste plans and taking decisions on waste applications should have regard to policies in this Framework so far as relevant.

Related guidance:

- Land remediation (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/land-affected-by-contamination>)
- Water supply, wastewater and water quality (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/water-supply-wastewater->

and-water-quality)

- Hazardous substances (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hazardous-substances>)

## Footnotes

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1. A list of the documents revoked and replaced by this Framework is at Annex 3 (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/annex-3-documents-replaced-by-this-framework>). ↵
2. This includes the Local Plan and neighbourhood plans which have been made in relation to the area (see glossary (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/annex-2-glossary>) for full definition) ↵
3. Section 38(6) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/38>) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/section/70>) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 ↵
4. Sections 19(2)(a) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/19>) and Section 38(6) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/38>) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/section/70>) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In relation to neighbourhood plans, under section 38B and C and paragraph 8(2) of new Schedule 4B to the 2004 Act (inserted by the Localism Act 2011 section 116 and Schedules 9 and 10) the independent examiner will consider whether having regard to national policy it is appropriate to make the plan ↵
5. The Waste Planning Policy Statement will remain in place until the National Waste Management Plan is published ↵



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## Achieving sustainable development

Paragraphs 6 to 17

International and national bodies have set out broad principles of sustainable development. Resolution 42/187 of the United Nations General Assembly defined sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The UK Sustainable Development Strategy Securing the Future set out five 'guiding principles' of sustainable development: living within the planet's environmental limits; ensuring a strong, healthy and just society; achieving a sustainable economy; promoting good governance; and using sound science responsibly.

6. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The policies in paragraphs 18 to 219, taken as a whole, constitute the government's view of what sustainable development in England means in practice for the planning system.

7. There are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles:

- an economic role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure
- a social role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by providing the supply of housing required to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by creating a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being
- an environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; and, as part of this, helping to improve biodiversity, use natural resources prudently, minimise waste and pollution, and mitigate and adapt to climate change including moving to a low carbon economy.

8. These roles should not be undertaken in isolation, because they are mutually dependent. Economic growth can secure higher social and environmental standards, and well-designed buildings and places can improve the lives of people and communities. Therefore, to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system. The planning system should play an active role in guiding development to sustainable solutions.

9. Pursuing sustainable development involves seeking positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment, as well as in people's quality of life, including (but not limited to):

- making it easier for jobs to be created in cities, towns and villages
- moving from a net loss of bio-diversity to achieving net gains for nature<sup>1</sup>
- replacing poor design with better design
- improving the conditions in which people live, work, travel and take leisure
- widening the choice of high quality homes.

10. Plans and decisions need to take local circumstances into account, so that they respond to the different opportunities for achieving sustainable development in different areas.

### **The presumption in favour of sustainable development**

11. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise<sup>2</sup>.

12. This National Planning Policy Framework does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Proposed development that accords with an up-to-date Local Plan should be approved, and proposed development that conflicts should be refused unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. It is highly desirable that local planning authorities should have an up-to-date plan in place.

13. The National Planning Policy Framework constitutes guidance<sup>3</sup> for local planning authorities and decision-takers both in drawing up plans and as a material consideration in determining applications.

14. 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:
  - 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
  - specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted<sup>4</sup>

For decision-taking this means<sup>5</sup>:

- 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:
  - 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

- specific policies in this Framework indicate development should be restricted

15. Policies in Local Plans should follow the approach of the presumption in favour of sustainable development so that it is clear that development which is sustainable can be approved without delay. All plans should be based upon and reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development, with clear policies that will guide how the presumption should be applied locally.

16. The application of the presumption will have implications for how communities engage in neighbourhood planning. Critically, it will mean that neighbourhoods should:

- develop plans that support the strategic development needs set out in Local Plans, including policies for housing and economic development
- plan positively to support local development, shaping and directing development in their area that is outside the strategic elements of the Local Plan
- identify opportunities to use Neighbourhood Development Orders to enable developments that are consistent with their neighbourhood plan to proceed

### **Core planning principles**

17. Within the overarching roles that the planning system ought to play, a set of core land-use planning principles should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. These 12 principles are that planning should:

- be genuinely plan-led, empowering local people to shape their surroundings, with succinct local and neighbourhood plans setting out a positive vision for the future of the area. Plans should be kept up-to-date, and be based on joint working and co-operation to address larger than local issues. They should provide a practical framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made with a high degree of predictability and efficiency
- not simply be about scrutiny, but instead be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which people live their lives
- proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs. Every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. Plans should take account of market signals, such as land prices and housing affordability, and set out a clear strategy for allocating sufficient land which is suitable for development in their area, taking account of the needs of the residential and business communities
- always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings
- take account of the different roles and character of different areas, promoting the vitality of our main urban areas, protecting the Green Belts around them, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it

- support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change, and encourage the reuse of existing resources, including conversion of existing buildings, and encourage the use of renewable resources (for example, by the development of renewable energy);
- contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution. Allocations of land for development should prefer land of lesser environmental value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework
- encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value
- promote mixed use developments, and encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land can perform many functions (such as for wildlife, recreation, flood risk mitigation, carbon storage, or food production)
- conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations
- actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable
- take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs

Related guidance:

- Light pollution (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/light-pollution>)
- Neighbourhood planning (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>)

## Footnotes

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1. Natural Environment White Paper, The Natural Choice: Securing the Value of Nature (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-natural-choice-securing-the-value-of-nature>), 2011. ←
2. Section 38(6) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/38>) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/section/70>) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. ←
3. A list of the documents revoked and replaced by this Framework is at Annex 3 (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/annex-3-documents-replaced-by-this-framework>). Section 19(2)(a) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/19>) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states, in relation to plan-making, that the local planning authority must have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State. ←
4. For example, those policies relating to sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives (see paragraph 119) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Heritage Coast or within a National Park (or the Broads Authority); designated heritage assets; and locations at risk of flooding or coastal erosion. ←
5. Unless material considerations indicate otherwise. ←





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## 7. Requiring good design

Paragraphs 56 to 68

56. The government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.

57. It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes.

58. Local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics. Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development
- establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit
- optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks
- respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation
- create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion
- are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping

59. Local planning authorities should consider using design codes where they could help deliver high quality outcomes. However, design policies should avoid unnecessary prescription or detail and should concentrate on guiding the overall scale, density, massing, height, landscape, layout, materials and access of new development in relation to neighbouring buildings and the local area more generally.

60. Planning policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles. It is, however, proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness.

61. Although visual appearance and the architecture of individual buildings are very important factors, securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations. Therefore, planning policies and decisions should address the connections between people and places and the integration of new development into the natural, built and historic environment.

62. Local planning authorities should have local design review arrangements in place to provide assessment and support to ensure high standards of design.

They should also when appropriate refer major projects for a national design review<sup>1</sup>. In general, early engagement on design produces the greatest benefits. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the recommendations from the design review panel.

63. In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which help raise the standard of design more generally in the area.

64. Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.

65. Local planning authorities should not refuse planning permission for buildings or infrastructure which promote high levels of sustainability because of concerns about incompatibility with an existing townscape, if those concerns have been mitigated by good design (unless the concern relates to a designated heritage asset and the impact would cause material harm to the asset or its setting which is not outweighed by the proposal's economic, social and environmental benefits).

66. Applicants will be expected to work closely with those directly affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Proposals that can demonstrate this in developing the design of the new development should be looked on more favourably.

67. Poorly placed advertisements can have a negative impact on the appearance of the built and natural environment. Control over outdoor advertisements should be efficient, effective and simple in concept and operation. Only those advertisements which will clearly have an appreciable impact on a building or on their surroundings should be subject to the local planning authority's detailed assessment. Advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of cumulative impacts.

Related guidance: Advertisements (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/advertisements>)

68. Where an area justifies a degree of special protection on the grounds of amenity, an Area of Special Control Order<sup>2</sup> may be approved. Before formally proposing an Area of Special Control, the local planning authority is expected to consult local trade and amenity organisations about the proposal. Before a direction to remove deemed planning consent is made for specific advertisements<sup>3</sup>, local planning authorities will be expected to demonstrate that the direction would

improve visual amenity and there is no other way of effectively controlling the display of that particular class of advertisement. The comments of organisations, and individuals, whose interests would be affected by the direction should be sought as part of the process.

Related guidance: Advertisements (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/advertisements>)

## Footnotes

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1. Currently provided by Design Council Cabi. ↩
2. Regulation 20 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/783/regulation/20/made>), The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007. ↩
3. Regulation 7 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/783/regulation/7/made>), The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007. ↩





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## 12. Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Paragraphs 126 to 141

126. Local planning authorities should set out in their Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment<sup>1</sup>, including heritage assets most at risk through neglect, decay or other threats. In doing so, they should recognise that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and conserve them in a manner appropriate to their significance. In developing this strategy, local planning authorities should take into account:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation
- the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits that conservation of the historic environment can bring
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness; and
- opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place

127. When considering the designation of conservation areas, local planning authorities should ensure that an area justifies such status because of its special architectural or historic interest, and that the concept of conservation is not devalued through the designation of areas that lack special interest.

128. In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary. Where a site on which development is proposed includes or has the potential to include heritage assets with archaeological interest, local planning authorities should require developers to submit an appropriate desk-based assessment and, where necessary, a field evaluation.

129. Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should

take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.

130. Where there is evidence of deliberate neglect of or damage to a heritage asset the deteriorated state of the heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision.

131. In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:

- the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation
- the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality
- the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness

132. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, notably scheduled monuments, protected wreck sites, battlefields, grade I and II\* listed buildings, grade I and II\* registered parks and gardens, and World Heritage Sites, should be wholly exceptional.

133. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- the nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site
- no viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation
- conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible
- the harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use

134. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

135. The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

136. Local planning authorities should not permit loss of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will proceed after the loss has occurred.

137. Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably.

138. Not all elements of a World Heritage Site or Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 133 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 134, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole.

139. Non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest that are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments, should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets.

140. Local planning authorities should assess whether the benefits of a proposal for enabling development, which would otherwise conflict with planning policies but which would secure the future conservation of a heritage asset, outweigh the disbenefits of departing from those policies.

141. Local planning authorities should make information about the significance of the historic environment gathered as part of plan-making or development management publicly accessible. They should also require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible<sup>2</sup>. However, the ability to record evidence of our past should not be a factor in deciding whether such loss should be permitted.

## Footnotes

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1. The principles and policies set out in this section apply to the heritage-related consent regimes for which local planning authorities are responsible under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/9/section/66>), as well as to plan-making and decision-taking. ↵

2. Copies of evidence should be deposited with the relevant Historic Environment Record, and any archives with a local museum or other public depository. ↵

