

Local Plan Task Group – The New National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF): an overview

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Introduction

1. What is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)?
2. Why is the NPPF being updated?
3. Features of the emerging new NPPF
4. New NPPF – most significant/ key changes
5. National Development Management Policies
6. Planning & Infrastructure Act
7. Conclusion/ questions

What is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)?

- The NPPF is the Government’s statement of national planning policy and is (alongside the Council’s own planning policies set out in the Local Plan) an important consideration in determining planning applications
- The first NPPF was published in March 2012 – subsequent updates have represented the evolution of national (England-wide) policies
- The NPPF provides the national definition for “sustainable development”, which underpins the planning system

Why is the NPPF being updated?

- Draft NPPF consultation already underway (closing date 10th March 2026)
- To support new planning system as envisaged by the LURA 2023 and P&I 2025
- Presenting policies in a clearer way
- More rules-based, for consistency/ predictability
- Comprehensive national decision-making policies
- ...but continued focus on delivering growth (e.g. 1.5m homes by 2029)


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Features of the new NPPF (1)

- Maintain essence of current (2024) NPPF; e.g. presumption in favour of sustainable development (but simplified)
- Separation between plan-making policies (directions for preparing Local Plans) and decision-making (development management) policies
- standardised decision-making policies, to replace similar policies currently set out in Local Plans
- focus for Local Plans upon land allocations – delivery of housing/ jobs numbers and accommodating economic growth sectors


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Features of the new NPPF (2)

- Clear introduction for each chapter including a brief **objective**,
- Introduction followed by suite of procedural **plan-making** and decision-making policies
- Separate policies, **individually numbered**, for clarity and resilience
- **Footnotes** retained (as per previous NPPFs), but better linked to policies/chapters

4. Achieving sustainable development

The objective of the policies in this chapter is to meet development needs through sustainable patterns of development, including by maximising the potential for growth on suitable land within settlements, enabling development which will support the rural economy, rural communities and the provision of infrastructure, and limiting development away from settlements to help safeguard the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Plan-making policies

S1: Positive plan-making

1. The development plan should plan positively for future growth and change by:
 - a. Seeking to meet the development needs of their area as a minimum. For spatial development strategies, and for local plans where a spatial development strategy is not in place²², this means providing for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses (including supporting infrastructure), as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas, unless:
 - i. the application of the policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance²³ provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area; or
 - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would substantially outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.
 - b. Providing for new development, and improvement of the environment, in a way which promotes a sustainable pattern of growth and seeks to mitigate climate change and adapt to its effects.

S2: Producing a spatial strategy

1. The development plan should set out a spatial strategy setting clear expectations for the location of development and where land should be protected or enhanced for specific purposes, by identifying at an appropriate scale:
 - a. Settlements within the development plan area, whether existing or proposed, and their boundaries (or clear criteria for identifying settlement extents). Settlements should include any allocations that would ultimately form part of the settlement;
 - b. The location and boundary of town centres within settlements, or other specific areas where particular approaches to development apply;

²² Where a spatial development strategy is in place, the local plan should plan for the level of development provided for in the spatial development strategy covering the area of the local plan.

²³ The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, a National Landscape, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; inalienable habitats; designated heritage assets; and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.



New NPPF – most significant/ key changes

- Some new & re-ordering of some chapters – stronger focus on climate change, energy, water (resources), public protection
- Presumption in favour of sustainable development reiterated, but some changes; e.g. brownfield approach, integrated with location (spatial) policies
- Clarity re principles of development inside/ outside settlements
- Additional annexes; e.g. standard method (housing targets), flood risk tables


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National Development Management Policies (NDMPs)

Impact on Decision making

- Promote sustainable, balanced development.
- Provide clarity and reduce ambiguity in planning.
- Speed up decision-making.
- Development plan policies (including those contained within the Local Plan or a neighbourhood plan) which are in any way inconsistent with the national decision-making policies in the new NPPF, once in place, should be given very limited weight.
- Create fairness and consistency across the country.



Planning & Infrastructure Act

Royal Assent 18 December 2025

- Comes into effect 18th February 2026.
- Planning Committee Reforms – Consultation on Draft Regulations – 2026.
- Planning fees – consultation on the proposed national default fee and guidance on local fee setting – early 2026.

Conclusions

1. NPPF has been the definition of national planning policies since 2012; key role in determining planning applications
2. Proposed changes to NPPF represent most significant changes since 2012
3. Comprehensive update, to improve clarity, consistency and predictability
4. Presumption in favour of sustainable development reiterated, but some changes
5. Separation between plan-making and decision-making (development management) policies
6. More prescriptive, in terms of issues/ themes to be covered by Local Plans
7. Significant procedural changes (P&I Act); e.g. delegation powers
8. **QUESTIONS?**

