

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE POLICY SUMMARY

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)

- 1.1 In December 2024 (and corrected in February 2025), the government published the updated National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF'), which maintains the focus on sustainable development that was established as the core of the 2012 NPPF. Those parts relevant to this assessment are summarised below.
- 1.2 Paragraphs 10 and 11 of the NPPF state that at the heart of the framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development, which should be applied in relation to both plan-making and decision-taking.
- 1.3 Paragraph 20 of the NPPF states that strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision for, among other elements, the **conservation and enhancement of the natural built and historic environment including landscapes and green infrastructure and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.**
- 1.4 Section 12 of the NPPF sets out that planning policies and decisions should support the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places. Paragraph 132 states that **design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each areas defining characteristics.** Paragraph 133 requires Local Authorities to prepare design guides and codes which act as a framework to reflect local character and design preferences to create high quality designed places which are beautiful and distinctive.
- 1.5 Paragraph 135 states that planning policies and decisions, should ensure that developments, amongst others:
 - will function well and add to the overall quality of the area not just or the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
 - are visually attractive as a result of good architecture layout and effective landscaping
 - are sympathetic to local character and history including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.

- 1.6 Paragraph 136 highlights the importance of new and retained trees to the character and quality of urban environments, with appropriate species chosen for the location and the needs of all users.
- 1.7 Paragraph 137 states that design quality should be integral to the evolution and assessment of proposals, and paragraph 139 goes on to state that poorly designed development should be refused, particularly where it does not follow local or government design guidance.
- 1.8 Section 15 of the NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 187 of the document states that the planning system should contribute to the protection and enhancement of the natural and local environment through, among other things, protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, **in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan.** The paragraph also outlines that the planning system should recognise **the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land and of trees and woodland.**
- 1.9 Paragraph 188 highlights that plans should distinguish between the hierarchy of international national and locally designated Sites allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value here consistent with other policies in this framework take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure and plan or the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries.
- 1.10 Paragraph 193 notes that in the process of determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply several principles. Among these, the paragraph notes that **development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.**
- 1.11 Section 13 of the NPPF concerns Protecting Green Belt land. Paragraph 142 notes that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open.
- 1.12 Paragraph 143 continues, setting out the five purposes of the Green Belt:
- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
 - To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;

- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
 - To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
 - To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.
- 1.13 Paragraph 145 goes on to state that once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans. It notes that strategic policies should have regard for the intended permanence in the long term of Green Belt boundaries.
- 1.14 Paragraph 146 goes on to state that exceptional circumstances in this context include, but are not limited to instances where an authority cannot meet its identified need for homes, commercial or other development through other means. If that is the case, authorities should review Green Belt boundaries in accordance with the policies in this Framework and propose alterations to meet these needs in full, unless the review provides clear evidence that doing so would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt, when considered across the area of the plan.
- 1.15 Paragraph 148 highlights that strategic policymaking authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary. Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously developed, then consider grey belt land which is not previously developed, and then other Green Belt locations. The importance of considering Green Belt release in the context of sustainable patterns is also reinforced.
- 1.16 Paragraph 150 continues, stating that once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land. Where Green Belt land is released for development through plan preparation or review, the 'Golden Rules' in paragraph 156 apply.
- 1.17 Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
- 1.18 Paragraph 154 highlights that there are certain forms of development that are not inappropriate in the Green Belt. These include:

- buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- limited infilling in villages;
- limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and
- limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
- Other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:
 - i. mineral extraction;
 - ii. engineering operations;
 - iii. local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
 - iv. the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
 - v. material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and
 - vi. development, including buildings, brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.

1.19 Paragraph 155 notes that development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where all the following apply:

- The development would utilise grey belt ¹land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;

¹ 'For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.'

- There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;
- The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework; and
- Where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157 below.

1.20 Paragraph 156 goes on to state that where major development involving the provision of housing is proposed on land released from the Green Belt through plan preparation or review, or on sites in the Green Belt subject to a planning application, the following contributions ('Golden Rules') should be made:

- affordable housing which reflects either: (i) development plan policies produced in accordance with paragraphs 67-68 of this Framework; or (ii) until such policies are in place, the policy set out in paragraph 157;
- necessary improvements to local or national infrastructure; and
- the provision of new, or improvements to existing, green spaces that are accessible to the public. New residents should be able to access good quality green spaces within a short walk of their home, whether through onsite provision or through access to offsite spaces.

1.21 Paragraph 158 states that development which complies with the Golden Rules should be given significant weight in favour of the grant of permission.

1.22 Paragraph 159 notes that the improvements to green spaces required as part of the Golden Rules should contribute positively to the landscape setting of the development, support nature recovery and meet local standards for green space provision where these exist in the development plan. Where no locally specific standards exist, development proposals should meet national standards relevant to the development (these include Natural England standards on accessible green space and urban greening factor and Green Flag criteria). Where land has been identified as having particular potential for habitat creation or nature recovery within Local Nature Recovery Strategies, proposals should contribute towards these outcomes.

1.23 Regarding renewable energy projects in the Green Belt, Paragraph 160 states that elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed.

Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.

- 1.24  Section 14 of the NPPF focuses on climate change, flooding and coastal change. Paragraph 161 states that the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate and should help to support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.
- 1.25 Paragraph 165 of the document asks that plans should:
- provide a positive strategy for energy from these sources, that maximises the potential for suitable development, while ensuring that adverse impacts are addressed satisfactorily (including cumulative landscape and visual impacts);
 - consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources, and supporting infrastructure, where this would help secure their development; and
 - identify opportunities for development to draw its energy supply from decentralised, renewable or low carbon energy supply systems and for collocating potential heat customers and suppliers.
- 1.26  Paragraph 189 notes that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The paragraph goes on to state that planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Applications for development should include an assessment of potential detrimental effects on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and should show the extent to which these could be moderated. The paragraph also notes that development within the setting of a designated area **should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated area.**
- 1.27 Paragraph 190 states that **permission should be refused for major development** within the National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes apart from where exceptional circumstances and public interest can be demonstrated. Such applications will require assessments of the need for the development, other options for the location of the development outside the designated area and any detrimental effects on the environment, landscape and recreational opportunities.
- 1.28  The definition of major development for the purposes of paragraphs 189 and 190, is noted as being a matter for the decision maker, and should be considered in terms of its **nature scale**

and setting and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes or which the area is designated or defined.

Planning Practice Guidance ('PPG'; July 2021)

- 1.29 The Planning Practice Guidance PPG as relevant to this assessment covers landscape and the natural environment, and the design of new developments. The PPG may be out of date in its reference to NPPF paragraph numbers, and where this is the case, the latest paragraph number has been included in the text in square brackets.
- 1.30 Paragraph 001 ID 26-001-20191001 of the Design process and tools section sets out the purpose of the guidance, which aims to explain the process and tools that can be employed to achieve well-designed places. The guidance refers to paragraph 130 – 134 [131 – 135] of the NPPF which relates to ensuring good design, and states that the section should be read in conjunction with the National Design Guide published October 2019, which it notes should be used in both plan-making and decision making. Ten good design characteristics are identified in the National Design Guide, and these are set out as follows in the PPG:
- Context
 - Identity
 - Built form
 - Movement
 - Nature
 - Public spaces
 - Uses
 - Homes and buildings
 - Resources
 - Lifespan.
- 1.31 Paragraph 006 and 007 deal with masterplans, stating that they should be site specific and should **set the vision and implementation strategy for a development**. Paragraph 006 notes that they may need to be accompanied by other technical reports including landscape assessment and proposals for securing biodiversity net gain.
- 1.32 The Natural Environment section of the guidance aims to explain the key issues to consider in relation to the implementation of policies to protect and enhance the natural environment, including local requirements.
- 1.33 Paragraph 004 defines Green Infrastructure, while in paragraph 005 it explains its importance as a natural capital asset that provides multiple benefits, including enhanced biodiversity,

landscapes and urban cooling. In paragraph 006 the guidance sets out the planning goals green infrastructure can assist in achieving, and these are:

- Building a strong competitive economy;
- Achieving well designed places;
- Promoting healthy and safe communities;
- Mitigating climate change flooding and coastal change;
- Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

1.34 The final paragraph 008 in the green infrastructure sub-section notes that green infrastructure opportunities and requirements need to be considered at the earliest stages of development proposals as an integral part of development and infrastructure provision and taking into account existing natural assets and the most suitable locations and types of new provision.

1.35 Within the Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Ecosystems section, the topic of net gain has been included. Paragraph 020 describes net gain as **an approach to development that leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it as beforehand. Net gain is an umbrella term for both biodiversity net gain and wider environmental net gain.**

1.36 In the Landscape section of the guidance, paragraph 036 refers to that part of paragraph 170 - 174 [187 – 191] of the NPPF which deals with the recognition of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside in local plans, and the need for strategic policies to **provide for the conservation and enhancement of landscapes. This can include nationally and locally designated landscapes but also the wider countryside.** Paragraph 036 goes on to note that:

'Where landscapes have a particular local value it is important for policies to identify their special characteristics and be supported by proportionate evidence. Policies may set out criteria against which proposals or development affecting these areas will be assessed. Plans can also include policies to avoid adverse impacts on landscapes and to set out necessary mitigation measures such as appropriate design principles and visual screening here necessary. The cumulative impacts of development on the landscape need to be considered carefully.'

1.37  In the section on Climate Change, paragraph 007 highlights how local planning authorities can identify appropriate mitigation measures in plan-making. It notes that different sectors may have different options for mitigation including the generation of renewable energy.

1.38 The section on the Green Belt highlights issues surrounding what factors can be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt as well as how plans might set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset by compensatory improvements, including landscape and visual enhancements. Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 64-001-20190722 notes that judgement is required to judge the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt. It sets out that the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in making this assessment. These include, but are not limited to:

- openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume;
- the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness; and
- the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.

National Design Guide 2019

1.39 The National Design Guide 2019 provides guidance to illustrate how well designed places that are beautiful enduring and successful can be achieved in practice.

1.40 The guidance identifies ten good design characteristics and the following are of most relevance to landscape and visual assessment.

- Context is described as the location of the development and the attributes of its immediate local and regional surroundings. The Guide goes on to state that: '*An understanding of the context history and cultural characteristics of a site neighbourhood and region influences the location siting and design on new developments. It means they are well grounded in their locality and more likely to be acceptable to existing communities. Creating a positive sense of place helps to foster a sense of belonging and contributes to well-being, inclusion and community cohesion.*'
- The identity or character of a place comes from the way that buildings streets and spaces landscape and infrastructure combine together and how people experience them. It is not just about the buildings and how a place looks but how it engages with all of the senses. Local character makes places distinctive. Well-designed sustainable places with a strong identity give their users occupiers and owners a sense of pride helping to create and sustain communities and neighbourhoods.

- Nature contributes to the quality of a place and to people's quality of life and it is a critical component of well-designed places natural features are integrated into well designed development. They include natural and designed landscapes, high quality public open spaces, street trees, and other trees, grass, planting and water.

1.41 The National Model Design Code, July 2021 expands upon the ten characteristics of good design providing an overarching framework for design.