

Response to the DCLG's consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework from Cambridge Past, Present & Future

Introduction

Cambridge Past Present & Future is a charity that celebrates the unique value of Cambridge as a cultural, academic and economic centre of international stature. It seeks to have a constructive influence on the continued social and economic growth and prosperity of Cambridge and its surrounding villages and countryside, based on sustainable forms of development that give priority to protecting its unique character as a place that is attractive in which to live and work.

Cambridge is a city of international significance. CambridgePPF cannot emphasise too highly that the quality of Cambridge as a place has to be sustained, and even enhanced, through sound and robust planning processes if the area is to continue to perform strongly in economic terms. Hasty and poor-quality development, not balanced with infrastructure investment and with environmental considerations, will kill the goose that has hitherto laid the golden eggs.

CambridgePPF supports the Government's attempts to make the planning system more transparent and accessible for local communities, Councils, investors and developers alike. However, CambridgePPF is not persuaded that the Government's review of planning policy guidance gives confidence that the quality of the Cambridge area as a place in which to live, learn, work and play will be sustained and enhanced through the proposed streamlined planning system.

To aid analysis, CambridgePPF has prepared this response to the draft NPPF largely in accordance with the structure and content of the Department of Communities and Local Government's on-line questionnaire.

Response to the consultation questions:

Delivering Sustainable Development

The Framework has the right approach to establishing and defining the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

1(a) – Do you agree? Strongly Disagree

Comment

The general principle of streamlining national planning policy is supported. However, there is a genuine concern about the balance struck by the draft framework between streamlining planning procedures and making the process more flexible on the one hand, and providing sufficient certainty for decision making on the other. Moreover, there are inconsistencies between the draft framework and the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Such concerns lead one to believe that this will result in a greater number of planning applications being determined at Appeal. Such an outcome undermines local democracy and is not in keeping with what are understood to be the ideals of the localism agenda.

Throughout the draft Framework, the planning system is seen as an impediment to growth and not as an enabler and promoter. Also, there is a

failure to recognise the value attached by communities to their local environment, and by businesses to an attractive environment for their employees.

Cambridge is a key driver of the national economy and this role must be supported. But one of the main reasons why companies want to locate in Cambridge is its special ambiance. A high quality environment is essential both for the wellbeing of local communities and to support economic growth. The draft Framework fails to appreciate this relationship between social, environmental, and economic factors in promoting growth.

Greater clarity is required in certain sections of the draft framework so as to reassure local communities that high quality sustainable development (as described in **para. 10** of the draft) will be delivered through the planning system. More emphasis should be placed on the developer taking responsibility for demonstrating whether a development proposal meets the criteria for such sustainable development.

Paragraph 13: This paragraph weakens the presumption in favour of sustainable development as described in the preceding paragraphs by suggesting that “sustainable economic growth” is the overriding concern. This could result in detrimental social and environmental impacts on local communities. The draft Framework gives no guidance as to what precisely constitutes “sustainable” economic growth. If the “sustainable” element applies only to commercial and/or economic viability and does not give equal weighting to the social and environmental impacts of the development, then the guidance is unacceptable.

Paragraph 14: In this paragraph it is stated that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and that permission should be granted where the plan is absent, silent or where relevant policies are out of date. This is a matter of the utmost concern.

It is not entirely clear what the criteria are for determining whether a local plan is out of date. The only example given in the draft Framework is in **Paragraph 110** and this takes out of date to mean where a Local Planning Authority cannot demonstrate an up to date five year supply of housing.

A solution would be to amend the framework to allow for a transitional period for new plans to be brought forward and adopted in conformity with the framework. See comments on **paragraph 26** below (in response to ‘soundness’ question). The absence of clear guidance during a transitional period is a major flaw in the Framework.

Paragraph 19: the draft Framework states that the default answer to development proposals is “yes” except where this would compromise the key sustainable development proposals set out in **Paragraph 10**. This implies that the economic role of sustainable development is generically more important than the social and environmental roles. Good planning should seek to achieve a balance between these three elements depending on the circumstances of the development for the

long-term betterment of the communities it serves. Promoting such a biased guidance does little to help achieve the desirable balance.

Paragraph 19: The draft Core Planning Principles fail to make any reference to several fundamental requirements of the planning system:

- the role of planning for the built environment in adapting to or mitigating the effect of **climate change**. In fact the only reference to climate change relates to the encouragement of renewable energy. This does not reflect the significant role that planning processes have to play in responding to the challenges of climate change and helping to meet national targets for carbon reduction. It is suggested that the draft framework be amended to include the requirement that planning policies and decision-making processes should take account of the need for new development to be planned to be adaptable to or mitigate the impact of changes in the climate.
- the Principles say nothing about planning **timescales**. The consequences of planning decisions, both good and bad, will be experienced by local communities for generations to come. A Core Planning Principle must be that decision-making in planning must incorporate a long-term time horizon rather than short-term opportunism.
- the reference to the reuse of resources is welcome, but this should be extended to the reuse of sites. A presumption to give priority in planning new development to **brownfield sites** should be included as a Core Planning Principle.
- a serious omission is the lack of reference in the Principles to the availability of the necessary **infrastructure** to support new developments. There is an implicit assumption that new building can simply piggy-back on the existing infrastructure. For a city like Cambridge where the infrastructure is already overloaded, this is simply not acceptable. Infrastructure development is a key requirement of good planning but is largely overlooked by the draft Guidelines – who is to provide and when? What is the role of the local authority and the developer? Encouraging the use of public transport is meaningless unless the planning system recognises the need to include the infrastructure in its Core Principles.
- a further serious omission is the failure to recognise the fundamental need to make available adequate areas of **green open space, playing fields, and recreational areas** in new developments. The provision of such basic community facilities must be incorporated as a Core Planning Principle.

Plan-making

The Framework has clarified the tests of soundness, and introduces a useful additional test to ensure local plans are positively prepared to meet objectively assessed need and infrastructure requirements.

2(a) Do you agree? Disagree

Comment

The Government's continued support of the plan-making system is to be welcomed.

However, because of the loss of detailed guidance at the national level, it will be necessary for the Local Plan to provide all the relevant standards and codes of practice that councils must rely on when considering applications. Such detailed guidance is essential so that developers and decision-makers have a firm basis for decision-making, and if it isn't provided at the national level then it must be at the local level. However in view of the Government's stated position on Supplementary Planning Documents (**Paragraph 21**), it is not clear how this detailed guidance is to be presented

It is also not clear how these proposals can be reconciled with the Government's wish to encourage **localism**. It appears that Neighbourhood Plan will be accepted only if they conform to the Guidelines – ie only if they support economic development. Localism seems therefore to mean that communities may support development but are powerless to oppose. This erosion of localism is manifest, for example, in the dropping of the proposal that buildings of significance to local communities should be listed. In addition, the manifest bias in **Clause 130 in the draft Localism Bill** with its pro-development guidance for Neighbourhood Plans, must be repealed.

Paragraph 26: There is concern that this would mean that only a new Local Plan could be found to be in conformity. This could leave a policy vacuum for a number of years, which would only serve to create further uncertainty and delay in the planning process. In terms of local plans seeking a certificate of conformity with the Framework, it is not clear how this will be carried out. Further, the paragraph on the certificate of conformity provides no information on who will undertake the checking of conformity and whether a Local Plan or Local Development Framework document can be found to be only wholly or partially in conformity. A solution could be to amend the Framework to allow for a transitional period for new plans to be brought forward and adopted in conformity with the Framework. To avoid a policy vacuum existing development plans should maintain their status for the transitional period. A transitional period of 4 years from the introduction of the framework is suggested.

Paragraph 39: This makes reference to the need for a willing landowner and willing developer to be able to make 'acceptable returns.' At the plan making stage, a certain amount of detail remains unknown until more detailed work has been done, particularly for larger sites e.g. master-planning. Moreover, if the full cost of providing affordable housing and necessary infrastructure, etc. is not to be borne by the land owner and/or the developer in order to provide them with "acceptable returns", from whom will any shortfall in meeting that cost be found?

The second bullet point of **Paragraph 48** only refers to proportionate evidence in relation to an evidence base for 'the most appropriate strategy ' and alternatives in a Local Plan. Objectively assessed needs will require a robust, credible and proportionate evidence base. It is contended therefore that reference should be made to a robust and credible evidence base and not simply 'proportionate.'

Any guidance needed to support the new Framework should be light-touch and could be provided by organisations outside Government.

4(a) Do you agree ? Disagree

Comment

While the general principle of streamlining the national planning policy framework is supported, there is a concern that the draft framework does not strike the correct balance between streamlining procedures and providing sufficient certainty for decision making. The draft framework would benefit from greater clarity in certain sections in order to ensure high quality sustainable development is consistently achieved through the planning system. Further guidance could also provide greater clarity. It is unclear why all guidance should be light-touch. Instead, the level of detail must be appropriate and proportionate to the technical complexity involved.

Paragraph 58: this suggests that in order to speed up the process, “consents relating to how a development is built or operated can be dealt with at a later date”. This seems to reflect a lack of understanding of how the current system operates. Conditions do need to be applied as part of the approval process, even at the pre-application stage, when the finer details of the construction are not known in advance.

Transport

The policy on planning for transport takes the right approach.

7(a) Do you agree? Generally in agreement

Comment

There needs to be a much stronger emphasis in the draft Framework on the provision of improved infrastructure to support growth, and particularly on sustainable transport in general. Instead, it appears that objections of the Highways Authority and other transport agencies can be over-ridden even where transport links are manifestly deficient for the size of new development proposed. This concern is particularly relevant in Cambridge where the unacceptable current transport situation is a disincentive to inward investment.

Paragraph 83: Terms such as “where possible” and “where reasonable to do so” are not a strong enough phrases to encourage and ensure reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from transport.

Paragraph 91 should be re-drafted to read “planning policies must aim for a balance of land uses within their areas...” so as to secure sustainable forms of development. Cambridge PPF supports the principle in Paragraph 92 that primary schools should be within walking distance of most homes.

Paragraph 93: the statement that “local car ownership should be a key consideration for setting local car parking standards” would seem to be at odds with the drive for sustainable forms of transport to reduce congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.

Housing

The policies on housing will enable communities to deliver a wide choice of high quality homes, in the right location, to meet local demand.

10(a) Do you agree? Disagree

Comment

The provision for local authorities to determine their own levels of housing development is supported. However, It is considered that this increased freedom does not fit with the requirement in **Paragraph 109** placed on local planning authorities to identify sufficient sites for at least five years’ worth of housing (as identified from local evidence) including an allowance of at least 20% to ensure choice and competition. Furthermore, broad locations for growth should be identified for a further 5 to 10 years housing supply. Local authorities should have the freedom to set their own additional allowances according to local market circumstances, the findings of Strategic Housing Market Assessments, and considerations such as land availability and environmental impacts. The requirement for the additional 20% should therefore be dropped

Design

The policy on planning and design is appropriate and useful.

12(a) Do you agree? Generally in agreement

Comment

In general, the Design Section is supportive of good design. We do urge the need for the draft Framework to be amended to include reference to aspects on which it is currently silent - for example, in **Paragraph 114** the importance of adaptable places (included in PPS1) is omitted from the draft. Reference should be made as the adaptability of buildings is an important characteristic of a sustainable development. In **Paragraph 116:** ‘Context’ is not explicitly referred to. Planning policies and decisions should emphasise the importance of context to underpin and justify development.

Green Belt

The policy on planning and the Green Belt gives a strong clear message on Green Belt protection.

13(a) Do you agree? Strongly Disagree

Comment

The recognition of the purposes of a Green Belt (**Paragraph 134**) is welcome but the Framework lacks a clear and explicit statement that the Green Belt should continue to be protected through a presumption against development. The Green Belt is viewed in the draft Framework merely as an instrument of planning without designated protected status. This approach undermines the strength of the Green Belt in preventing urban sprawl into the open countryside. The Framework requires an explicit statement there should be a presumption of “intended permanence in the long-term” for the Green Belt.

Paragraph 137 states that Green Belt boundaries should be altered only in exceptional circumstances but does not state what these might be. However, this statement is negated by **Paragraph 138** which says that the appropriateness of existing Green Belt boundaries should be considered whenever a Local Plan is being prepared – like every 15 years. If it is the intention that the boundary of a Green Belt should be reviewed every time a Local Plan is reviewed, then it would be constantly under threat of erosion, without, apparently, any provision for extending its outer boundary in compensation.

Paragraph 140 proposes that local authorities should identify in their Local Plans “areas of ‘safeguarded land’ between the urban area and the Green Belt in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period”. The need for identifying such sites is dubious if the local authority continues to meet its five-year housing supply. By inserting these areas on the edge of the urban area, they could be seen as a wedge that is used to push back the boundary of the Green Belt under the guise of the Green Belt review when the Local Plan is being prepared. These “safeguarded areas” should be dropped, and the statement that the boundaries of the Green Belt should be altered only under exceptional circumstances should be strengthened.

Paragraph 145: this paragraph relates to paragraph 3.12 of PPG2, much of which has been lost. Paragraph 3.12 of PPG2 makes the assumption that engineering operations constitute inappropriate development unless they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt. Paragraph 145 of the draft framework turns its predecessor on its head, by assuming that development “is also not inappropriate.” This weakening in the treatment of engineering operations is not acceptable.

Also the draft framework does not contain the useful information on the re-use of buildings set out in paragraph 3.7 of PPG2. The criteria in PPG2’s paragraph 3.7 and Annex D were useful for decision-making on planning applications. The loss of these criteria and the annex will lead to greater uncertainty for both developers and local planning authorities.

Paragraph 146: this states that renewable energy projects should be sited in the Green Belt only in very special circumstances. These circumstances might include “the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources”. Such widely-defined “special circumstances” would seem an open door for all wind-farm projects, as all applications would presumably be able

to meet this criterion. Renewable energy projects should be sited in the Green Belt only in circumstances where the necessity for locally produced, or on site, renewable energy can be clearly demonstrated, and where this need outweighs the social and environmental impact of the development.

Natural and Local Environment

Policy relating to the natural and local environment provides the appropriate framework to protect and enhance the environment.

15(a) Do you agree? Disagree

Comment

The whole section on Natural Environment is presented in such a broad generic way that the Guidelines will be extremely difficult to implement as effective guidance for decision-making. As this section lacks clarity, the detailed standards and codes will need to be spelt out in the Local Plans. This section needs significant rewriting to ensure that consideration of the natural environment is not relegated to a secondary function.

The onus appears to be with the Local Planning Authority to prove that a development is not sustainable, whilst limiting the amount of information the Council requests in support of a proposed development. This is not acceptable.

Further, there is a concern that insufficient account has been taken of the **precautionary principle**. Too great a weight is attached to development and insufficient consideration is given to the cumulative harm to the biodiversity of a site that is caused by a series of non-significant planning applications.

Paragraph 16: development likely to have a significant effect on protected sites should be extended to include sites of habitat restoration and/or creation.

Paragraph 124: we strongly support the requirement that developments will need to consider community needs and well-being more effectively. The onus must be placed on the developer to demonstrate this.

Paragraph 126: the first bullet-point calls for the provision and integration of 'community facilities' but the second and third bullet-points refer only to 'facilities'. To avoid ambiguity, these too should specify 'community facilities'.

Paragraph 128: this paragraph makes reference to planning policies identifying specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreation facilities. The draft framework should make reference to the need to have a robust evidence base identifying specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreation facilities from which local standards for the provision of open space, sports and recreational facilities are derived.

Paragraph 130: At face value the reference to the proposed designation of **Local Green Space**, is welcomed. However, the paragraph needs to be strengthened to pick up on the following circumstances. Firstly, it is not clear what the very special circumstances are which would allow the loss of land designated as Local Green Space to new development. Without guidance on this issue, it will be difficult for the Local Planning Authority to safeguard land designated as Local Green Space. Secondly, only allowing this level of designation to be given when a plan is reviewed or prepared could mean that new sites which come forward during the plan period might not be safeguarded for an extensive period of time.

Paragraph 131: The criteria for the designation of Local Green Space lack clarity. For example, the statement “will not be appropriate for most green areas or open spaces” could undermine the concept of designating areas of green space to create networks of green infrastructure. Also, how would the criterion stating that the land designated should not be ‘an extensive tract of land’ be applied?

Paragraph 132: This paragraph and the final bullet point of the preceding **Paragraph 131** lack clarity. These paragraphs seem to allow the same forms of development as potentially appropriate in the Green Belt. For example, would local transport infrastructure be appropriate on Local Green Space provided it maintained the openness of the Local Green Space and did not conflict with the purposes of including land in Local Green Space designation? Not only do the criteria for designation of Local Green Space require clarity, but the criteria for any development affecting Local Green Space need to be carefully thought through and spelt out in the draft framework.

Paragraphs 164 and 165: these imply that it is the responsibility of the local authority to demonstrate that the detrimental impact of a development on biodiversity, the landscape, and open countryside outweighs the benefit of economic growth if an application is to be rejected. This is simply not compatible with the meaning of sustainable development given in **Paragraph 10**. There should be no development at all in designated wildlife sites, including local country parks and nature reserves, or in protected landscapes except in very exceptional circumstances (**Paragraph 166**). In addition, greater consideration should be given in the draft Framework to the impact of development on the wider countryside outside designated areas where the level of protection is reduced..

Paragraph 166: The reference made to locally designated sites is welcomed as such sites are important in the quest to conserve biodiversity and are at risk of inappropriate development.

Paragraph 167: the recognition of the role of local authorities in promoting networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure (first bullet-point) is welcome, but greater emphasis should be given of the role of the planning system in supporting such networks.

Paragraphs 171, 172, 173, 174 and 175: These paragraphs are acceptable as guiding principles. However, without more detailed guidance it will be necessary to specify in a Local Plan all the relevant standards and codes of practice the Local

Planning Authority may rely on when considering an application. Therefore, whilst the guidance at a national level is reduced, it will only be increased at a local policy level. It may be better to have an appendix of accepted guidance at a national level.

Historic Environment

This policy provides the right level of protection for heritage assets.

16(a) Do you agree? Disagree

Comment

The strong predisposition towards development within the draft Framework is likely to give rise to environmental issues. There is a lack of advice for development management in relation to proposals, which have some impact on the historic environment.

Paragraph 178: This paragraph does not reflect the strength of purpose of PPS5 (Policy HE3.1) and should be revised accordingly.

Paragraphs 180 and 181: the section on the Conservation of Heritage Assets should include the impacts on the setting of such assets, including both the landscape and townscape, as a material consideration. If the asset is of sufficient importance, development should be precluded if it has a deleterious impact on the setting.

Paragraph 181: This paragraph should apply to plan-making as heritage assets will need to be considered when allocations are made.

Paragraph 182: The reference to “deliberate neglect of or damage to a heritage asset” is welcomed and it is important that this paragraph remains in the draft Framework.

Paragraph 183: Although the draft Framework deals with substantial harm being caused to a heritage asset, it fails to consider small incremental changes, which cumulatively might affect over time, the setting or importance of a heritage asset.

Paragraph 184: Whilst the protection of designated heritage assets is welcome, there is no mention of the protection of local vernacular assets or places deemed important by local communities. The proposal that communities through their local Neighbourhood Plans can list buildings should be reinstated, alongside the designation of Local Green Space.

