

Department for Communities and Local Government consultation: National Planning Policy Framework

Submission of the Landscape Institute, 28 February 2011

The Landscape Institute

The Landscape Institute 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-design and well-managed urban and rural landscape. The Landscape 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.

Background

The planning system has a profound impact upon the way our landscapes, from the outstanding to the degraded, are planned, designed, managed and used. Landscape architecture itself is a cross-cutting discipline, working within the planning system, which considers the social, environmental and economic characteristics of particular locations in order to develop solutions, be they strategic or delivered on-site, which deliver the best outcomes. Revisions to planning guidance, as are currently being undertaken, are therefore of significant interest to the Landscape Institute and its 6000 members.

Sections 1 and 2 of our response provide our views on overarching priorities for the proposed National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and our recommendations in relation to these. Sections 3 to 7 provide more specific suggestions which we believe would, if incorporated into the final draft NPPF, lead to strengthened, more future-proof, planning guidance.

1. The NPPF's relationship with other policies, treaties and research

Our finite land resource is one of the nation's greatest assets. The planning system has a profound impact on the way in which this land is managed and used and its subsequent ability to meet a wide range of often conflicting requirements.

The Landscape Institute believes that there are a number of sources which should be taken into account in the drafting of the NPPF; Defra's Natural Environment White Paper discussion document, Foresight's Land Use Futures report and the European Landscape Convention. Revisions to the guidance on the planning system present Government with an ideal opportunity to improve the way in which we manage and use our land resource. It is our view that the progressive thinking contained within the aforementioned documents, must be incorporated into consolidated planning guidance to enable the Government and wider society to deal with a range of economic, environmental and social challenges.

1.1. Natural Environment White Paper discussion document

In its July 2010 publication 'An invitation to shape the nature of England: discussion document', Defra advocated the value of the natural environment and the role of landscape-scale solutions to a range of challenges:

'...on issues such as planning, food production, water, flood risk management and biodiversity, where the impacts of our decisions do not stop and start with administrative boundaries, we need to move towards more integrated management approaches that work with the spatial scale that best addresses the challenge. These are often called landscape-scale approaches'.

While the final Natural Environment White Paper will not be published until Spring 2011, it is clear that Defra has identified circumstances where the planning system needs to operate at a spatial scale larger than administrative boundaries.

The Landscape Institute supports this approach, believing that landscape-scale approaches to land use represent the best way of ensuring that decisions are made which do not have a detrimental impact on natural systems and the continued provision of ecosystem services (the services provided by the natural environment on which we depend).

Recommendations for consideration in the drafting of the NPPF:

- (i) The NPPF must outline the importance of landscape-scale approaches to land use and provides guidance as to how this might be achieved, either between local authorities or between neighbourhood areas.**
- (ii) The NPPF must clarify how adjacent neighbourhood might get involved in the preparation of neighbourhood development orders and plans (as provided for in the draft Localism Bill). This is important as it will often be the case that the impacts, be they social, economic or environmental, of a decision made in one area will be felt by neighbouring communities;**

1.2 Land Use Futures

The role of Foresight is to help Government think systematically about the future. Foresight's Land Use Futures (2010) aims to support Government in ensuring that land use patterns and practices are fit for future challenges, such as climate change, flood control, housing demand and food and energy security. It outlines what can be done to use and manage land more sustainably.

The Landscape Institute argues that the following recommendations from Land Use Futures need to inform the new NPPF:

- There is a strong case to develop a much more strategic approach to land use in order to guide incremental land use change, incentivise sustainable behaviours and to unlock value from the land;
- Increasing competition for land means that landscapes at all scales will come under increased pressure to deliver a range of services and goods. It is therefore imperative that a system which governs the allocation, use and management of land is coherent and consistent at a range of spatial scales; and
- A decentralised approach to land use decision making might well be one that works, but such a style would need to have a basis in some kind of national framework.

The Landscape Institute argues that such a framework (item three above) must consider the following points raised by Land Use Futures:

Recommendations for consideration in the drafting of the NPPF:

- (i) Proposals on neighbourhood planning must not undermine the need for a strategic approach to land use and should guide incremental land use change. While development enabled through neighbourhood planning may be small-scale, it is important not to underestimate the cumulative impact of such development.**
- (ii) The development of the proposed NPPF may well provide the basis for a more decentralised approach to land use decision making. However, the consolidation of the various Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and Planning Policy Guidance (PPGs) is not a process to be taken lightly. The gradual development of these PPSs and PPGs has resulted in some extremely positive results and it will be crucial that important detail is retained in any new incarnation of central guidance.**
- (iii) The NPPF must outline the importance of landscape-scale approaches to land use and provides guidance as to how this might be achieved, either between local authorities or between neighbourhood areas (repeated from 1.1 above).**

1.3 European Landscape Convention

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) was signed by the UK Government in 2006 and became binding in March 2007. It is the first international treaty dedicated to the protection, management and planning of all landscapes in Europe.

The Landscape Institute was delighted that recently Richard Benyon MP reaffirmed the Government's commitment to implementing the ELC in a letter to the Landscape Institute (See Appendix A).

The ELC contains eighteen articles which together aim to promote landscape protection, management and planning and to organize European cooperation on landscape issues.

These articles highlight the need to:

- Recognise landscape in law;
- Develop landscape policies dedicated to the protection, management and creation of landscapes;
- Establish procedures for the participation of the general public and other stakeholders in the creation and implementation of landscape policies; and
- Encourage the integration of landscape into all relevant areas of policy, including cultural, economic and social policies.

Recommendations for consideration in the drafting of the NPPF:

- (i) The proposals under the development of the NPPF to give neighbourhoods more control over development in their local areas is clearly in line with the third item above, and the Landscape Institute welcomes this.**
- (ii) The NPPF will need to integrate landscape into all relevant subject areas in order to be compliant with the articles of the ELC.**

2. Learning from Scotland

In 2010, the Scottish Government published its Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) which consolidated various pieces of planning guidance into one overarching statement of national planning policy. One of the Landscape Institute's overarching concerns has surrounded the loss of content; moving from approximately fifty pieces of guidance to one has inevitably resulted in a loss of detail which we felt was important in terms of expectations around particular subject areas.

Recommendations for consideration in the drafting of the NPPF:

- (i) Government should consult with colleagues at the Scottish Government to learn lessons from their experience of planning guidance consolidation which could be useful in the development of the NPPF.**

3. Green infrastructure and open space

Green infrastructure is an environmentally sound, socially just and economically viable means of delivering many sustainability objectives. The Landscape Institute believes it is an approach to the planning, design and management of our land which perhaps offers the best solution to a range of, often conflicting, demands placed upon our finite land resource.

GI must be distinguished from open space within the proposed NPPF. The primary focus for GI should be on its multifunctionality. This is enhanced by each of its elements, or GI assets, being connected as part of a network. The GI assets may be street trees, streams, green roofs, parks, football pitches or private gardens – each with their own primary function but each making a significant contribution to the GI network and the ecosystem services that this provides. A key driver to this being realised is multi-disciplinary and cross-organisational cooperation and coordination, and this is particularly important at early stages in the decision-making process. The role of Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in promoting, encouraging and enabling this should be explicitly referred to within the NPPF as at present we are not convinced the duty to cooperate under the localism bill covers this sufficiently robustly.

LPAs should therefore be required under the NPPF to prepare a formal GI strategy, most usefully in conjunction with relevant neighbouring authorities, based upon surveys of needs, opportunities and potential. It would be desirable for GI strategies to be developed at the sub-regional, or possibly county (where two-tier and depending on size), not at a district level, to reflect the geographical rather than political boundaries required for effective delivery.

The sensitivity of the natural environment and its living component parts should be adequately addressed in the proposed NPPF, particularly if there is to be consistency between Defra's Natural Environment White Paper (see 1.1) and the NPPF. The planning system has a vital role to play in ensuring that environmental quality is delivered and secured in the long term to fulfil policy objectives and community aspirations. There should at least be reference to the vulnerability of the natural environment to a lack of care resulting in a failed or sub-standard scheme. This would apply equally to landscape and biodiversity issues.

The proposed NPPF should emphasise the enhancement and improvement of biodiversity, rather than simply statutory or designated sites of species, on development sites.

The Landscape Institute is concerned at the potential loss of PPG17 audits. Current requirements on a local authority to audit what it has in terms of open space is in our view an important element of baseline evidence on which future decisions about quality and quantity of open space are made. Likewise the added benefit of an Open Space Strategy (currently good practice but not mandatory) enables that 'supply' as quantified in the PPG 17 audit to be brought together with the 'demand' in terms of what the community wants. Whilst we appreciate the NPPF's objective is to simplify and reduce the amount of guidance given, we believe that the guidance on open space strategies as issued by CABI takes on board the needs and views of the local communities and should therefore become binding or the importance should be spelled out in the NPPF so that good quality open space (with all its benefits to quality of life) can be required as an outcome of development through delivery or contributions through the Community Infrastructure Levy.

4. Management and Maintenance

The proposed NPPF should address the fundamental issue of maintenance and management of the urban and rural landscape. All elements of the natural environment will require post-development aftercare, involving regular maintenance and long-term management. The planning system should raise awareness of this and should use its powers to obtain assurances that future management and ongoing monitoring for performance is paid due regard and that appropriate resource, in terms of expertise and funding, are reasonably assured. This is essential if the benefits of multifunctional GI are to be continually delivered and sustained for the future.

5. Public Realm

The Landscape Institute advocates cross reference to the Manual for Streets in the NPPF. This is because highways can form such significant parts of new development and the Manual for Streets ensures the community element is highlighted, that streets are built to strengthen the communities they contain, be pleasant and attractive as well as effective conduits, be cost effective to construct as well as acceptably safe. Public realm should be seen as the community's place (not that of the highways department or the local authority) as well as being the healthy circulatory system for the communities that live and work in an area. The importance of planning the public realm in a collaborative way that clearly prioritises importance for different users should be an integral part of development proposals.

6. Masterplanning

Where masterplanning is required, the NPPF should be advocating a multi-disciplinary approach with professionals involved who can take account of the entire range of impacts and design requirements, fostering a shared understanding of the nature of climate change, and its consequences and the impact of development and need for mitigation against climate change.

7. Other

The NPPF must:

- Provide a national overview of strategic policy objectives;
- Provide guidance on how these will be delivered;
- Explain what is meant by 'a presumption in favour of sustainable development' and how the planning system will achieve this; and
- Reinforce that sustainability is not just about climate change, carbon emissions, energy efficiency and water conservation. Though the NPPF must address these, sustainable development must deliver a fair balance of environmental, social and economic benefits and secure the mitigation of potential impacts. Without strong protection measures, economic 'gains' inevitably outweigh environmental and social considerations in the decision-making process. Therefore we cannot afford to lose the strategic policy objectives in PPS1 (Sustainable

Development), PPS1 (Climate Change), PPS3 (Housing), PPS5 (Historic Environment), PPS7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas), PPS9 (Biodiversity) and PPS25 (Flood Risk). It is regrettable that these are missing from the above list of topics that the NPP framework will maintain.