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Need not Greed Oxfordshire response to the Draft revised National Planning Policy Framework, May 2018

Chapter 1 Introduction

Q1 Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 1?

Yes

Need not Greed Oxfordshire (NNGO) is a coalition of over 30 local community organisations that is campaigning for sustainable, democratically-accountable planning across Oxfordshire. The coalition is deeply concerned about exploitation by speculative developers, which is damaging local communities and the countryside, and the seeming inability of the current system to produce the right housing in the right place and at the right price. We therefore welcome the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on the NPPF and reforming Developer Contributions. We have commented already at length on both the Housing White Paper and 'Planning for the right homes in the right places' and our concerns remain.

There is nothing contentious in the Introduction, but the NPPF ignores four issues seriously affecting Oxfordshire that NNGO is very concerned about:

- That an excessively high and over-optimistic rate of growth has been built into existing plans (a target of 100,000 more houses by 2031, which is about 40% more than the current housing supply). This provides for almost three times the growth in population that will actually be likely to take place according to the Office of National Statistics¹. We are concerned that this will set impossibly high targets for both the:

¹ Based on ONS 2031 Oxon population projection, 748,000 compared to population implied by housing figures of 900,000

- Backward looking new three-year Housing Delivery Test (HDT) and the
- Forward looking five-year supply of land calculation

NNGO considers that both measures will be unreasonable in areas where excessive growth is forecast. There is a considerable risk that this growth will not materialise. So, NNGO suggests that the HDT should use the national figures for growth to measure success in Oxfordshire, not the excessively high locally agreed figures.

- That existing local plans have taken too much land out of the Green Belt in Oxfordshire and there is no sign of this approach changing. The government says development in the green belt is only allowed in exceptional circumstances when the opposite is true. But there are currently plans for over 13,000 houses in the Oxford Green Belt.
- That the housing market focuses on 'market demand' and not 'need'. So, although many new houses may be built, they will not solve the affordability issues in Oxfordshire. Our view is confirmed by the early findings of the Letwin review, this suggests that:
 - There is a '*web of commercial and industrial constraints*' that hold back development. Seven constraints are listed, including limited availability of skilled labour, limited supplies of building materials and so forth. Of these, six are constraints that local authorities can do little about, but they will get the blame if building rates are low as a result. This is obviously completely unfair, as we have pointed out in other submissions.
 - Builders with large sites limit construction to an '*absorption rate*' which is set to avoid '*materially disturbing the market price*'. In other words, Letwin exposes the market failure to supply needs that has driven up house prices to the point of unaffordability. Again, local authorities are held responsible for this, but they have very limited, if any, means of preventing this. Just zoning more and more land will not sort this problem out!

These findings by the Letwin review support arguments that NNGO have advanced in comments on other issues. The seven constraints on builders and builders' focus on maintaining current market prices identified by Sir Oliver Letwin's review, acting together, will prevent the resolution of the affordable housing crisis. The effects are compounded by viability reviews, which are commonly used to avoid building the agreed and necessary number of affordable houses on particular sites. Local authority planning should therefore not be held responsible for the resulting failure of the market to respond to affordability problems in their areas.

- That the strategic plan to build an Expressway from Oxfordshire to Cambridge, incidentally aiming to ameliorate the overcrowding issues on the A34 will add further development pressures, damage existing countryside and/or settlements and be environmentally unsustainable.

Finally, NNGO looks forward to hearing the final outcomes of Sir Oliver Letwin's review. This may include a new permitted development right for upwards extensions² and more effective ways of bringing agricultural land forward for housing. The latter possibility is a particular concern for NNGO. So, we expect that we will be able to comment on any proposals that are put forward as a result of the Letwin review. NNGO sincerely hopes that more of the windfall profits made when land is zoned for development will, as a result, be captured. This could reduce new house prices and aid affordability.

Chapter 2 Achieving sustainable development

Q2 Do you agree with the changes to the sustainable development objectives and the presumption in favour of sustainable development?

NNGO broadly agrees with the concept of sustainable development. NNGO accepts that it should be applied when plan making and decision taking. But NNGO disagrees with the way in which the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' has been applied to authorities that don't have a local plan or a five-year land supply in place. It has been used by ministers to punish local people by allowing developments in inappropriate locations that undermine the concept of local responsibility for finding appropriate places to develop. Ministers should stop doing this.

We note that whilst development fails to meet zero carbon standards, it is hard to argue that any of it is sustainable. The definition of sustainability needs to be real.

NNGO is also very concerned that in respect of 'Strategic plans' the new draft NPPF clearly weakens the protection for Green Belt, AONB and many other sites and areas.

NNGO also has concerns that 'objectively assessed need' (OAN) is used as a disguise for imposing unreasonably high targets on local areas generally. NNGO considers that OAN should be based on the calculated target figures, not any higher figure. Some areas speculate wildly about the level of growth that can be achieved, often without considering the resultant damage to the environment and infrastructure problems.

Also, NNGO does not think that the sustainable development presumption as it stands should be used to replace the local planning system if the government decides that an area has failed either or both of the:

² AKA the 'Tottering towers' rules?

- Backward looking new three-year Housing Delivery Test (HDT); and
- Forward looking five-year supply of land calculation

The assumption appears to be that if suitable unconstrained sites cannot be found, then development must happen on unsuitable constrained sites, rather than redirecting growth to other areas with more opportunities and fewer constraints. NNGO disagrees. Housing requirements should be reduced based on constraints to the supply of housing land.

No discouragement is given to councils with growth aspirations that exceed the opportunities for growth in their areas. Growth, even where this is aspirational and goes beyond meeting local people's actual development needs, is encouraged, regardless of whether this will contradict NPPF policies that indicate growth should be restrained. This is perverse to say the least. Development accommodated in areas constrained by footnote 7 (Green Belt, AONB etc) policies should be restricted to that which can be accommodated on unconstrained sites, or without harm to those policies. The approach in protected places should be based on actual opportunities rather than abstract indicators of theoretical demand.

We therefore suggest the following wording changes to the presumption in paragraphs 9 and 11 of the draft NPPF:

- **Paragraph 9** – Add at the end – ‘It is also crucial that planning decisions respect the views of local people as expressed through locally elected councillors and councils.’
- **Paragraph 11** – Add after the first sentence that ends ‘sustainable development’ – ‘Any decisions made using this presumption should carefully consider and respect the economic, social and environmental objectives. And additionally, consider local circumstances, opinions and local democratic decisions.’
- The text of the footnotes, particularly footnote 7, should be explicitly written into the boxed text. Footnote 7 lists key areas and assets that are to be protected, including Green Belt and AONB.
- Section b) i) – Broadly, this says that Strategic plans should meet OAN and SCOG³ targets unless the NPPF policies provide ‘a strong reason’ for protecting the areas or assets listed in footnote 7. This means that unless there is ‘a strong reason’, Strategic plans can ignore the Green Belt, AONB, etc, etc, etc. Thus, NNGO requests that the words ‘a strong reason’ should be replaced by ‘any reason’ in b) i). The key areas and assets listed in footnote 7 should have strong protection. So, we should not have to find

³ SCOG = Statement of Common Ground

'strong' reasons to protect them. The Prime Minister, in her speech on 5 March 2018 said:

'Indeed, our new planning rules also include stronger protections for ancient woodland and historic coastlines everywhere.'

What has been proposed is that there will be weaker protection under strategic plans, in a very sharp contrast to what the PM said.

- Section b) ii) – Similarly, NNGO suggests that the words 'significantly and demonstrably' should be deleted. Otherwise unless the impacts 'significantly and demonstrably' outweigh the supposed benefits, Strategic plans will be able to ignore Birds and Habitat sites, SSSIs, Green Belt, local green space, AONB, National Parks, Broads Authority, Heritage coasts, irreplaceable habitats including Ancient Woodland, Aged or Veteran trees, designated heritage assets, other assets of archaeological interest, areas at risk of flooding or coastal change (as listed in footnote 7).
- Section c) – approving development proposals 'without delay' should be replaced with 'without unreasonable delay'. Delay is sometimes appropriate!
- Section d) – replace 'out of date' with 'out of date and clearly no longer appropriate'. Appropriate policies should not be consigned to the waste bin!
- Section d) i) – amend 'clear reason' by deleting 'clear'. Following the suggestion for b) i).
- Section d) ii) – delete 'significantly and demonstrably'. Following the suggestion for b) ii).

Q3 Do you agree that the core principles section should be deleted, given its content has been retained and moved to other appropriate parts of the Framework?

No they provide an overall summary, but they are rather detailed and should be shorter.

Q4 Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 2, including the approach to providing additional certainty for neighbourhood plans in some circumstances?

No.

Chapter 3 Plan-making

Q5 Do you agree with the further changes proposed to the tests of soundness, and to the other changes of policy in this chapter that have not already been consulted on?

Yes, most of the proposed changes seem reasonable and will hopefully improve the planning system.

NNGO considers that the 'most appropriate strategy' should be adopted by plans, rather than 'an appropriate strategy'.

Realistic expectations of delivery must be rigorously enforced when testing the soundness of plans.

Q6 Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 3?

Paragraph 16 - We consider that the requirements placed on 'Strategic plans' in paragraphs 17 and 24 are rather vague and not adequate. Are they covered by all the requirements in paragraphs 15 and 16? NNGO suggests that paragraph 16 should start by saying 'Plans and Strategic plans should:'. Paragraphs 35 and 36 both use this form of words.

Chapter 4 Decision making

Q7 The revised draft Framework expects all viability assessments to be made publicly available. Are there any circumstances where this would be problematic?

No.

Q8 Would it be helpful for national planning guidance to go further and set out the circumstances in which viability assessment to accompany planning applications would be acceptable?

Yes, this could be helpful. NNGO considers that any large planning applications should include a viability assessment (see our response to Question 10).

Q9 What would be the benefits of going further and mandating the use of review mechanisms to capture increases in the value of a large or multi-phased development?

NNGO supports this proposal. There might be decreases in value over a longer development period though. This might make sites completely unviable whatever planning conditions, payments or affordability requirements were removed.

Q10 Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 4?

Paragraph 58 - NNGO has some concerns that large planning applications for strategic sites will not require viability assessments. NNGO considers that requiring them would ensure that developers consider the viability at an early stage. This would then be a benchmark for comparing subsequent claims about viability from the developers. NNGO continues to be very concerned about the way in which viability assessments can be used to avoid building affordable housing. The affordability crisis will continue unless this (and other) nationwide issues are addressed.

Chapter 5 Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes

Q11 What are your views on the most appropriate combination of policy requirements to ensure that a suitable proportion of land for homes comes forward as small or medium sized sites?

Paragraph 69 & 70 – NNGO thinks that you mean 20% of the number of sites, but this is not clear. It may be difficult or impossible to *‘ensure that at least 20% of the number of sites identified ... are of half a hectare or less’*. Or it may be that a few appropriate and preferable large sites meet local needs whilst small sites are lacking. So NNGO suggests that *‘ensure that’* is changed to *‘ensure if at all possible that’*.

Q12 Do you agree with the application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development where delivery is below 75% of the housing required from 2020? (Paragraph 75)

As things stand, No. The housing delivery test holds councils to account against the headline demand-led housing figure, which prioritises the construction of any houses, anywhere, over a focus on building the right kind of homes in places where they are actually needed. The delivery test also incentivises developers to slow down building rates in order to obtain planning permission on a potentially more profitable site elsewhere. The delivery test must be re-thought.

Nor do we think that New Homes Bonus funding should be withheld from authorities that don't meet the proposed targets. New Homes Bonus funding was all (apart from maybe £250m) top sliced from the local authority funding Settlement. So, if any is withheld, it should be recycled to other local authorities in some way and NOT retained by HM Treasury.

NNGO has considerable issues with the ‘presumption’ itself, as noted in our introductory comments and in answer to Question 2.

NNGO considers that the standard method of calculating local housing need should be used in the calculation of the Housing Delivery Test percentage, not a more ambitious figure from a plan – see our response to Question 14 below.

Q13 Do you agree with the new policy on exception sites for entry-level homes?

The entry level exception sites would provide for first time buyers.

Paragraph 72 - NNGO suggests that in this paragraph, the two mentions of the words 'adjacent to existing settlements' should be changed to 'adjacent to or in existing settlements'.

Q14 Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 5?

Paragraph 61 mentions the 'standard method' of calculating local housing need. NNGO broadly supports that approach. But NNGO is concerned that in Oxfordshire (and no doubt other areas) growth rates far above that rate have been built into the plans. NNGO considers that this is a serious risk and that the government should accept that. So, when the government assesses the performance of authorities in Oxfordshire against the three-year housing delivery test, *the 'Total number of homes required over three-year period'* should be based on the 'standard method' figures. NOT the over optimistic figures in the plans. This would acknowledge that the plans were risky and might not succeed through no fault of the local councils.

Paragraph 62 - The national household projections show that much of the projected growth in the number of houses is in households represented (or headed) by people aged over 65. So NNGO considers that more attention should be given to the likely needs arising – for example the need for downsizing or more appropriate types of housing and design.

Paragraph 64 – NNGO does not agree with the suggestion that provision of affordable housing should not be required for minor sites in urban areas. Urban areas do need affordable housing.

Paragraph 77 – NNGO does not agree with the underlying assumption that if the Housing Delivery Test is failed, then it is inevitably due to some error or omission by the local council that can be rectified by them. There are many reasons why building rates might fall which are outside of the control of local government as noted by the initial comments from the Letwin review. NNGO's examples are land hoarding, lack of skilled builders, lack of materials for construction, unexpected infrastructure problems, recessions, competition from other sites, flooding of the local housing market and unavailability of funding for developers or for house purchase.

Paragraph 78 – Following on from comments on Paragraph 77, NNGO supports the suggestion that planning conditions could require construction to start within a short timescale. Reasons for failure that are beyond the control of the councils should not lead to failing any performance test.

Paragraphs 79 to 81 – NNGO notes the proposals and supports them.

Chapter 6 Building a strong, competitive economy

Q15 Do you agree with the policy changes on supporting business growth and productivity, including the approach to accommodating local business and community needs in rural areas?

Yes - NNGO supports the objectives of healthy business growth and increasing innovation and productivity.

Paragraph 83 - NNGO would also like to add:

e) encourage and support the creation of well paid, permanent and stable employment: and

f) be based on a clear regional strategy for the whole country, which encouraged growth in under-developed areas and avoided excessive growth in areas where there are severe constraints on existing infrastructure and/or many protected landscapes or features.

So, delete the 'and' at the end of point c).

Q16 Do you have any other comments on the text of chapter 6?

Paragraph 84 and 85 – NNGO agrees with the broad objectives of meeting local business and community needs in rural areas.

Paragraph 84 d) – local services such as community facilities - is in part a more social goal, so perhaps the heading for this section should be 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy and society'.

Paragraph 85 states that local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be outside existing settlements. It is very important that these developments meet the specified range of tests (for example being sensitive to the surroundings). Also, that appropriate policies for supporting or controlling this development can be developed by local planning authorities if they wish.

Chapter 7 Ensuring the vitality of town centres

Q17 Do you agree with the policy changes on planning for identified retail needs and considering planning applications for town centre uses?

Yes.

Q18 Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 7?

No.

Chapter 8 Promoting healthy and safe communities

Q19 Do you have any comments on the new policies in Chapter 8 that have not already been consulted on?

No.

Q20 Do you have any other comments the text of Chapter 8?

Para 92 – NNGO considers that you should add the following:

d) minimise air pollution issues by appropriate design. Busy streets constrained by buildings or other structures lead to a canyon like design that makes it more difficult for air pollution to disperse. So, this sort of design should be avoided and existing examples mitigated if possible.

Chapter 9 Promoting sustainable transport

Q21 Do you agree with the changes to the transport chapter that point to the way that all aspects of transport should be considered, both in planning for transport and assessing transport impacts?

No - NNGO considers that a 'greener' approach could have been adopted. Opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport (Para 103 c)) should have been the first priority. NNGO has commented on the need to reduce air pollution in response to question 20.

Q22 Do you agree with the policy change that recognises the importance of general aviation facilities?

No comments.

Q23 Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 9?

Paragraph 103b – The Consultation document says that this paragraph *'reflects the housing White Paper proposal that authorities should be expected to identify additional development opportunities arising from strategic infrastructure investment.'* But this is less clear in the draft NPPF which only mentions proposed transport infrastructure.

NNGO is concerned that strategic infrastructure investment can be imposed by central government with little apparent consultation or concern about local views. As has happened with the proposed electrification of railways in Oxfordshire – key parts of which will not be carried out - and the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway.

NNGO is also concerned about the funding of strategic infrastructure which lacks clarity and is uncertain. It is very difficult for local authorities to plan in this context. These massive developments can make huge changes to areas, but there is no guarantee whether or when they will actually happen.

Chapter 10 Supporting high quality communications

Q24 Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 10?

No comments, though communications are increasingly a key issue in rural areas.

Chapter 11 Making effective use of land

Q25 Do you agree with the proposed approaches to under-utilised land, reallocating land for other uses and making it easier to convert land which is in existing use?

NNGO is not entirely convinced. Making it easier to convert land that is in existing use might give rise to all sorts of issues for local people. They might find that the character of their area is completely changed, to their considerable detriment.

Q26 Do you agree with the proposed approach to employing minimum density standards where there is a shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs?

Yes, as land is in short supply generally. Higher density can ensure that more affordable housing is constructed, help reduce the carbon footprint and be more suitable for an aging population. Good design and proper provision of facilities (for play, for parking etc) can ensure that higher density does not lead to overcrowding or other difficulties. The government might wish to suggest target density figures, Poundbury in Dorset has 50 per hectare, with up to four floors in a few cases. Some parts of historic London reach 200 per hectare⁴

Q27 Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 11?

The consultation document (Page 18, bullet point d)) mentions that minimum density standards should apply around 'transport hubs' though the NPPF does not clearly mention this in Chapter 11⁵. Hubs are mentioned on page 27 (in Chapter 8) of the draft NPPF, but only in footnote 32, which relates to security and defence requirements.

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2002/jul/31/urbandesign.architecture>

⁵ Paragraph 123 a) mentions 'other locations that are well served by public transport'. This could mean almost anywhere on a frequent bus or rail route though...

NNGO is concerned that some park and ride sites are in comparatively rural locations and in some cases at major road junctions. These might be considered to be 'transport hubs'. NNGO does not consider that minimum density standards, presumably designed for more urban areas should be applied in these cases.

Chapter 12 Achieving well-designed places

Q28 Do you have any comments on the changes of policy in Chapter 12 that have not already been consulted on?

No.

Q29 Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 12?

Paragraph 130 – The consultation document says that Paragraph 130 says that:

“outstanding or innovative designs” should not be given great weight where they are in conflict with local design policies, or would not be sensitive to their surroundings.’

But the draft NPPF contradicts this, saying ‘great weight should be given...’. Assuming that the NPPF version is correct, perhaps the word ‘great’ should be deleted. There are some excellent examples of outstanding or innovative designs, but also some that are outstanding but quite frankly poor.

Chapter 13 Protecting the Green Belt

Q30 Do you agree with the proposed changes to enable greater use of brownfield land for housing in the Green Belt, and to provide for the other forms of development that are ‘not inappropriate’ in the Green Belt?

No

Q31 Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 13?

NNGO has concerns about the government’s understanding of the word ‘exceptional’.

The government says that Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in ‘exceptional circumstances’ (Paragraph 135). But the experience in Oxfordshire is that ‘exceptional circumstances’ means ‘more or less anywhere’. Paragraph 135 contains the get out clauses, which state that Green Belt boundaries can be changed when updating plans. The process is that:

- Strategic plans can ‘establish a need’ for changes to Green Belts;

- Local plans can make ‘detailed amendments’ to the boundaries; and
- Neighbourhood plans can also make ‘detailed amendments’

So, it will no longer be clear who was responsible for a particular detailed change. Is it the neighbourhood, the local plan or the strategic plan?

NNGO in Oxfordshire has experienced a sequence of Green Belt reviews and the distinct impression was that reviews were carried out again and again, until they came up with the answer that was required.

Then, coupled with this process for continuing the significant erosion of the Green Belt, the government goes on to set out an approach that seems guaranteed to run down the area covered by Green Belt protection. This says that new Green Belt should only be established in ‘exceptional’ circumstances (Para 134). But in this case, ‘exceptional’ is defined by five onerous conditions, including checking that every other objective in the whole NPPF is met before New Green Belt is possible.

NNGO considers that this whole structure needs to change if the landscape and form of development in this country is to be maintained and improved. It needs to be much more difficult to remove land from Green Belt protection. Pretending that local housing needs are far more than they are ever likely to be – as in Oxfordshire - should not be a justification for this step.

Also, NNGO considers that any ‘Green Belt review’ should explicitly consider whether any more areas meet the criteria and need to be added to the Green Belt

There should not be review after review during the planning process to identify, by changing the criteria, more and more land that can be removed from the Green Belt.

NNGO suggests that the following text should be added at the end of Paragraph 136:

Authorities should not identify Green Belt for development where this is only necessary because they are proposing an ambitious level of housing need that is in excess of that calculated by the standard methodology. Also, the fact that there is unmet need should not be used by plans, inspectors or the government to justify the use of land in the Green Belt.

NNGO does support the proposals in Para 137 to offset the impact of removing land from the Green Belt by compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land.

Similarly, NNGO supports Para 140 which enhances the Green Belt or where appropriate provide better access. NNGO considers that this will have to involve the way subsidies for farming are distributed post Brexit, as Green Belt land is typically agricultural.

Chapter 14 Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change

Q32 Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 14?

NNGO supports the objectives, policies and tests set out in Chapter 14. Climate change and its related increases in flood risk is an increasingly pressing problem.

Q33 Does paragraph 149b need any further amendment to reflect the ambitions in the Clean Growth Strategy to reduce emissions from buildings?

NNGO considers that the government's technical standards should be set at the highest reasonable level as efficient new property and generation systems will save energy, reduce costs and reduce the impact on the climate for many years to come. In particular, NNGO would expect all new buildings to be appropriately provided with solar panels (for heating or electricity generation), particularly larger industrial buildings.

Paragraph 150 - NNGO considers that a further point should be added at the end of point a):

Solar panels to generate electricity or heat should be located on the roofs or walls of new industrial buildings to generate energy wherever possible. This would reduce the need to use agricultural land for energy generation purposes.

Paragraph 163 - The reference to Sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) is particularly supported. Flooding is an issue in Oxfordshire.

Paragraphs 164 to 167 - NNGO in Oxfordshire is not especially concerned by coastal issues but would be content if the coast remains, more or less, in its existing location.

Chapter 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

Q34 Do you agree with the approach to clarifying and strengthening protection for areas of particular environmental importance in the context of the 25 Year Environment Plan and national infrastructure requirements, including the level of protection for ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees?

Paragraph 173c) and defined in the Glossary - NNGO strongly supports the improvement in protection for ancient woodland and aged or veteran trees.

Q35 Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 15?

Paragraph 179 - NNGO is concerned about air pollution and the government's failure to come up with plans for reducing this at source, notably from older diesel vehicles. It is not acceptable for the government to dump this responsibility onto local authorities without considering the need to fund this work and have the powers to implement effective policies. In response to Question 20 we have suggested that planners should avoid building busy streets that form narrow trenches constrained by buildings or other structures that makes it more difficult for air pollution to disperse.

NNGO's local experience in Oxfordshire is that the presence of AQMA's with pollution problems has not led to restrictions on the amount of development imposed on towns and villages, even though it is very clear that the new development will add to the burden of pollution.

We suggest that DNPPF 168e should be amended to include light pollution.

We are concerned to note the dropping of important text in relation to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and would like to see this re-instated (shown in capitals below):

Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, WHICH HAVE THE HIGHEST STATUS OF PROTECTION IN RELATION TO LANDSCAPE AND SCENIC BEAUTY.

Chapter 16 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment

Q36 Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 16?

Paragraph 182 - NNGO supports the recognition that World Heritage sites are of the highest significance.

Paragraph 189 – NNGO supports the conservation of all heritage assets. However the wording of this paragraph is difficult to follow. It is not clear what 'the significance' of an asset is. Are any other features of the asset ignored when considering 'significance'? Then what does 'irrespective of the degree of potential harm to its significance' mean – does that mean irrespective of great harm or irrespective of little harm? What does the second sentence imply - greater weight than the great weight implied in the first sentence?

This might (?) be clearer if it said:

When considering the impact of a proposed development on a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, even if the proposed harm is only small. Even greater weight should be given to the conservation of more important key assets - that have unique features, play a key role in the landscape, townscape or history, or are of national significance.

But we are not quite sure what the original means, so it is hard to rewrite!

Chapter 17 Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals

Q37 Do you have any comments on the changes of policy in Chapter 17, or on any other aspects of the text of this chapter?

No.

Q38 Do you think that planning policy on minerals would be better contained in a separate document?

No, although there should be clear links to the government's planning policy for waste to the NPPF and vice versa.

Q39 Do you have any views on the utility of national and sub-national guidelines on future aggregates provision?

No.

Transition arrangements

Q40 Do you agree with the proposed transitional arrangements?

Para 211 – This suggests that the level at which 'Substantial underdelivery' of the housing delivery test occurs is to be raised over time. This could push more and more local authorities into the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'.

As noted above, NNGO disagrees and in response to various questions says:

- Q1 – It is unreasonable to use an excessively optimistic growth rate forecast to push a local authority into the 'presumption'
- Q2 – The government should not replace the local planning system with the 'presumption' if at all possible to avoid damage due to random applications contradicting or undermining a local plan that is substantially accepted. Or at least, the wording of the 'presumption' should be toned down.
- Q12 – NNGO disagrees with the 75% limit in 2020.
- Q14 – Calculation of the Housing Delivery Test should use figures from the 'standard method' for the total number of homes required over the three-year period and not any higher figures in a local (or strategic) plan.

Q41 Do you think that any changes should be made to the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites as a result of the proposed changes to the Framework set out in this document? If so, what changes should be made?

No comment.

Q42 Do you think that any changes should be made to the Planning Policy for Waste as a result of the proposed changes to the Framework set out in this document? If so, what changes should be made?

No comment.

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