

## THE FUTURE OF PLANNING

### DRAFT NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF)

This is a crucial policy document that will affect all our lives. The intention is that these sixty pages will replace about 1,000 pages of existing detailed planning guidance. This includes replacing PPS4, the guidance currently covering new supermarket developments. The NPPF applies only to England. To give a flavour of it, the following are all direct quotations from it.

“The purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development.”

“*Development* means growth.....so sustainable development is about positive growth – making economic, environmental and social progress for this and future generations....The planning system is about helping to make this happen.”

“Development that is sustainable should go ahead, without delay - a presumption in favour of sustainable development that is the basis for every plan and every decision

The NPPF....provides a framework within which local people and their accountable councils can produce their own distinctive local and neighbourhood plans, which reflect the needs and priorities of their communities.

“Local planning authorities should:

- prepare Local Plans on the basis that objectively assessed development needs should be met
- approve development proposals that accord with statutory plans without delay
- grant permission where the plan is absent, silent, indeterminate or where relevant policies are out of date.”

“Neighbourhoods should:

- develop plans that support the strategic development needs set out in Local Plans, including policies for housing and economic development
- Plan positively to support local development, with the power to promote more development than is set out in the Local Plan; and
- identify opportunities to use neighbourhood development orders to grant planning permission for developments that are consistent with an adopted neighbourhood plan.”

“Planning should be genuinely plan-led, with succinct Local Plans setting out a positive long-term vision for an area. These plans should be kept up to date and should provide a practical framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made with a high degree of certainty and efficiency.”

“Planning should proactively drive and support the development that this country needs. Every effort should be made to identify and meet the housing, business, and other development needs of

an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. Decision-takers at every level should assume that the default answer to development proposals is “yes”, except where this would compromise the key sustainable development principles set out in this Framework.”

#### RSA COMMENT

The above extracts show, the NPPF is long on principle but very short on how it might work in practice. The principles of our current planning system were set out in the 1940s, as a backlash to the unconstrained urban sprawl of the 1920s and 30s. Nobody should wish to repeat that era. More recently, an unrestrained building boom has destroyed the Irish economy. It is clear that nobody, least of all the Dept. for Communities and Local Government, can predict the practical outcome of their fine ideals. Lawyers are already predicting a bonanza, with more legal appeals, inquiries and arguments.

There is no evidence that the current planning system is holding back economic growth. This year, supermarket chains are expected to add millions of square feet of new selling space. Under the current system supermarket chains, with their specialist development departments, can wear down and defeat under-resourced council planners. The proposed NPPF pushes local councils further into the firing line with little in the way of artillery support to back them up. The key way councils will control new developments is through a local plan that meets the requirements of the NPPF. Many councils will not be in a position to produce one in time to resist planning applications when the NPPF is adopted, probably next year.

At a more local level are Neighbourhood Plans, which, if properly derived, can trump district plans. The vast majority of current parish councils assumed control without an election – there were insufficient candidates to need one and everybody who stood was appointed. Their level of resource and expertise is inadequate for their new powers. The real world is not as the Conservatives would like it to be.

The RSA has two main suggestions:

- It is imperative that we cut local authorities some slack to get their plans up to date and thus enforceable. To do otherwise is just perverse and counter-productive.
- The absolute key to the argument has to be a proper definition of “Sustainable Development. This should include a strong town centre first development policy, a clear steer towards the development of brown field sites and a presumption against building on good quality farm land. In the specific case of retail, there should be a needs test and also evidence that any new development will not increase the use of private cars for shopping

#### **More information**

Please do look at the whole document to obtain a fuller picture. The government consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework closes on October 17<sup>th</sup> – details below. We would encourage all retailers to put forward their views.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/draftframework>

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/draftframeworkconsultation>

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Minister for Planning

