

GRAVELEY PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

Submission to Consultation on new NPPF

General This document should begin with an unequivocal statement that its purpose is that of a *public document*, the wording of which is to be interpreted in accordance with common parlance and understanding. It is not to be subjected to legal sophistry which strays from universally accepted usage. It will therefore concur with the Judgement of Lord Justice Lewison, Dartford B.C. v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, [2017] EWCA Civ 141, pars 8, 9, and 23.

Section 13. Protecting Green Belt Land

132 rightly stresses the essential *Permanence* of the Green Belt. However, subsequent paragraphs, particularly 134 which allows for “major urban extension”, constitute such a mass of exceptions as to render the notion of permanence meaningless. If *permanence* is to be taken literally (and why shouldn't it be, in accordance with common parlance?), these subsequent paragraphs contradict 132 and are therefore invalid.

133 None of these *purposes* relates to wildlife, habitat and biodiversity despite these issues being of very urgent concern locally, nationally and globally. The 2016 *State of Nature* Report concludes that 56% of UK flora and fauna have declined since 1970, some as much as by 80%. Our country has already been denatured to a dangerous level and the Green Belt should (and could if properly protected) provide an essential bastion against habitat loss, disturbance and subsequent eco-collapse. This new NPPF, as was the old, has turned a blind eye to this. The whole issue of Green Belt Protection has become first and foremost one of biodiversity and should head the list *purposes*. Hence subparagraph (c) should become (a) and read: *to safeguard the countryside and the richness of biodiversity upon it*. A separate subsequent paragraph should enlarge upon the specific biodiversity protection required, including that already stated in law, and state that wildlife surveys required of potential development sites are the responsibility of local planning authorities.

133 (a) The word “unrestricted” should be deleted. Its inclusion implies that “restricted” sprawl is acceptable. Sprawl is sprawl whether or not it has a notional boundary as part of a planning process.

134 (see remarks under 132 relating forward to 134)

This sets the bar for identifying *exceptional circumstances* very low if the proposed encroachment is “planned” (meaning presumably part of a “Local Plan” such as currently required by government of all local authorities). It should be the case that the bar is set as high for local authorities planning big developments as it is for private individuals proposing small ones. In other words the rules should be consistently and democratically applied. (This comment applies also to pars 135 to 139 and 144)

Two new subsections are needed, as follows:

(f) Where new Green Belt designation is planned to compensate for loss of Green Belt land elsewhere, the new designation must fulfil the same *purposes* (as defined in 133) as was fulfilled by the old land lost. For example, if the Green Belt lost abutted an urban area preventing sprawl, the new designation must also abut an urban area to perform the same function.

(g) Where new Green Belt designation is planned to compensate for loss of Green belt land elsewhere, it must be demonstrable that the new designation supports the same biodiversity as the old. Account must be taken of the fact that many species (especially rarer ones) are highly site-specific in their habitat and therefore cannot be “moved”. If development is proposed on land containing site-specific habitat, it should be refused on the grounds of environmental harm.

Para 135 It should be made clear within this para that altering GB boundaries, as this para allows, is subject to the restraints of para 132.

Thus a diminution of GB area by altering GB boundaries is not allowed as it would destroy the permanence of the GB as specified in para 132.

The determination of ‘exceptional circumstances’ cannot be left to the local authority or indeed a public examination or an Inspector to decide. All of these bodies are strongly influenced by Government policies of the day as has been seen at the Stevenage and North Herts Local Plan Public Examinations. The NPPF

needs to be specific as to what circumstances in particular may NOT be deemed 'exceptional'.

In that regard we suggest that an objectively assessed need for more houses be deemed NOT exceptional, whether considered acute or not.

Para 137 states:- *where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development and They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt etc.*

There is no mechanism in the draft NPPF (or indeed the current NPPF) which allows for the removal or release of GB land. Thus these two sentences of para 137 must be removed as they are impossible to implement.

No para of the new NPPF should, in anyway, undermine the content of para 132.

140 Some exclusions need to be listed to "outdoor sports". Off-road motor vehicles, including motorcycles, cause soil erosion, habitat destruction and noise pollution and interfere with the enjoyment of the countryside by others. Similarly drone-flying causes habitat disturbance and noise pollution.

Para 142 GBs should NOT be used for outdoor sport and recreation of an urban kind such as football, rugby and sports which require buildings such as grandstands, changing rooms, refreshment facilities etc. The rural nature of a GB is paramount as described in 133c.

Para 143 As with 'exceptional circumstance' 'very special circumstances' need to be determined within the NPPF as to what particularly does not fit that phrase.

144 (see remarks under 134, referring forward)

Subsection (f) suggests new estates of "affordable" housing can be built on Green belt land. Firstly, the mere inclusion of the word "limited" does not constitute a limit to size or numbers. Secondly, if by "affordable" the authors mean costing 80% of market value for the region (as is a popular current definition), then this needs to be stated so that the reader can assess whether "affordable" realistically applies to their situation. Thirdly, as already remarked, this lowers the bar for Green Belt encroachment in favour of any development which can claim to be

“planned” and as such constitutes a major weakening of Green Belt protection, very much at odds with the words and sentiment of paragraph 132.

Para 144b We repeat comments made under para 142.

Para 144f This should be deleted entirely. Building on the GB for any reason other than the remaining exceptions is against the fundamental objects of the GB

PROTECTION ESSENTIAL FOR WILDLIFE

From ancient woodlands and flower meadows to wildlife oases in our cities, there are thousands of quiet, often unnoticed places where wildlife thrives. They are known as Local Wildlife Sites and there are more than 42,000 in England. Together they make up 5% of England’s land area.

Local Wildlife Sites are recognised in national planning policy which protects them from being developed for housing, roads or industry. Even with this protection, some are lost each year.

Now, the Government is proposing to take all reference to Local Wildlife Sites out of the National Planning Policy Framework. This means removing protection for all Local Wildlife Sites.

This means “unprotecting” 42,000 unique places where our soils are healthy and our wildlife can thrive – and with this our society. It means unprotecting 5% of the country’s land area – that’s an area of wildlife-rich land the size of Devon. This should not be allowed to happen. There should not be unprotected sites. This would be a disaster for our wildlife.

If the Government is to achieve its ambition to be “the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than it found it”, it must reverse this proposed change to the planning rules. Because our Local Wildlife Sites lie at the heart of nature’s recovery. A recent survey of over 5,000 Local Wildlife Sites showed that

16% had been lost or damaged in the last five years and loss to development was a significant cause within this. This is happening even with the basic levels of protection - imagine what could happen when there's none.

The Government must not forget Local Wildlife Sites and leave them unprotected.

Local Wildlife Sites are very important and must be reinstated to the National Planning Policy Framework.

Q2 See Q4. No development can be sustainable. There should be no presumption in favour of development of any kind – quite the opposite in fact.

Q4 We disagree fundamentally with a presumption in favour of development. Building more houses on this crowded island for an ever-increasing population is fundamentally unsustainable. The final outcome of development must inevitably be a total loss of Green Belt and rural countryside. These are not acceptable outcomes either for human beings or for the resident flora and fauna of our island or, indeed, for the planet.

The NPPF 'sustainable' policy requires '**living within the planet's environmental limits**'.

However the limits are not specified, hence the policy, as it stands, is meaningless. Consequently the continuous diminution of UK flora and fauna numbers is either ignored or merely paid lip-service to. It is our contention that these limits were breached some 70 years ago in the UK.

The phrase 'sustainable development', together with all its derivatives, and all its concepts and conclusions, should be totally erased from the new NPPF. This phrase is fundamentally a lie inserted merely to keep the gullible public quiescent.

The only possible approach to a sustainable future is to freeze the UK population at its current level. This one act solves many of the problems that the new NPPF is attempting to achieve, but in a more direct and universal way.

The approach of the new NPPF should be strongly weighted against development.

Chapter 13

Q14

Para 60 states the Governments objective is to significantly boost the supply of homes.

This sentence and the attitude that it generates throughout this draft NPPF should be deleted at all points for the following reasons:-

It must be assumed that this draft NPPF will endure, when accepted, for many years. It cannot be assumed that the Governments objective as currently described in para 60 will remain constant over those years simply because that is the objective now. It is quite unreasonable to assume otherwise.

Furthermore, it must be questioned whether the para 60 objective is correct even for the present.

The Government states that it wishes to build 300,000 houses per year over the next few years. At the current average persons per household of 2.4 (ONS figures) it implies an increase in population of 720,000 per year. That is a growth of 1.1%, which is **twice** the rate projected by the Office of National Statistics. Continued for 100 years the UK population would be **3 times** what it is now. This is not acceptable for our tiny island even for just a few years as that rate of growth is not acceptable for our planet **and is not sustainable**.

We must also ask where the 720,000 persons will come from.

The ONS predict a population growth rate over the next ten years of 0.54% per year which accounts for 353,000 persons only. Furthermore 54% of the ONS growth comes from net immigration which the Government is committed to get down to 'tens of thousands'. Thus annual population growth should be down to circa 240,000 if the Government keeps its promise. This would only require 100,000 houses per year; one third of the current target.

Thus there is no need to significantly boost the supply of homes.

As a consequence there is no need to loosen protection of the Green Belt as this draft NPPF intends.

In fact Government policy should be weighted against development (see our answer to Q4).

In addition the house-building industry has stated that they do not have the resources to build more than 150,000 houses per year.

Q30 We do not agree that the additional forms of development proposed in the draft NPPF are acceptable. Reasons are given under Q31.

COALESCENCE

It is very concerning that there is no mention of “coalescence”. The NPPF should ensure that villages and towns or settlements are not allowed to converge into each other.

There is a need to protect the settings of towns and villages from inappropriate development and urban sprawl.

A settlement’s identity can be as much as a result of its setting, within the surrounding countryside, as with the quality of its buildings.

Landscapes around settlements have a special role to play in maintaining the distinction between town and country, in preventing coalescence between adjacent built-up areas and in providing a rural setting to the built-up area. However, proximity to urban populations brings special problems in some locations. The fabric of the landscape can easily become downgraded if unprotected.

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