

**Planning for a Sustainable Future : White Paper
Summary of key elements and proposed responses**

Improving the processing of nationally significant infrastructure projects

The government propose:-

- (a) the production of national policy statements for key sectors to ensure that there is a clear policy framework for decisions on nationally significant infrastructure.
- (b) improving the way in which infrastructure proposals are submitted on applications, requiring consultation with the public and local communities and requiring earlier consultation with key agencies.
- (c) the creation of an independent infrastructure planning commission to determine nationally significant infrastructure cases.
- (d) streamlining the procedures for infrastructure projects of national significance by rationalising the different development consent regimes.
- (e) improve public participation across the entire process.
- (f) explore developing decisions on smaller infrastructure projects to local authorities.

Key Questions

Do you agree that there is a strong case for reforming the current system on infrastructure projects?

Do you agree in principle, that the overall package of reforms proposed will achieve the wider objectives?

If not, what changes to the proposed reforms or alternative reforms would you propose to better achieve these objectives?

Proposed Responses

Proposals to speed up the delivery of major infrastructure proposals are supported. In many cases local planning authorities do not have the capacity or expertise properly to oversee major infrastructure proposals. The proposed independent commission should be constituted in such a way as to ensure that local authorities and local communities have a stronger voice. The key to the success of the new infrastructure planning commission will be a very clear definition of its responsibility. It should be limited to projects of a clearly national scale (Terminal 5 Heathrow Airport, new transport infrastructure, new ports & harbours etc) leaving local planning authorities with the majority of decision-making.

National Policy Statements (on infrastructure)

The government propose that national policy statements would:-

- (a) set out general objectives

- (b) indicate how these objectives would integrate with other government policies
- (c) show how actual and projected capacity and demand are to be taken into account.
- (d) consider relevant issues on safety or technology.
- (e) Indicate any circumstances where it was particularly important to other adverse impacts of development.
- (f) be as locationally specific as appropriate.

Key Questions

Do you agree that national policy statements should cover the core issues above?

Do you agree in principle that these statements should be primary consideration for the infrastructure planning commission in determining individual applications?

Proposed Response

These core issues are considered to be appropriate. They would set the scene for the infrastructure planning commission.

It would be logical to ensure that these principles would be primary considerations in the determination of applications. Local considerations would also need to be balanced in decision-making.

Preparing applications for nationally significant infrastructure projects

The government propose setting a clear policy background against which individual projects can be developed. In particular promoters would need to:

- (a) identify a project that might deliver the infrastructure required identified in the policy statements.
- (b) identify potential options to deliver the project.
- (c) gather information on the potential impacts of the project (especially where EIA is needed).
- (d) identify as preferred option.
- (e) consult on the preferred option.
- (f) prepare an associated application.

Key Question

Do you agree that promoters should have to prepare applications to be defined standard before the commission agrees to consider them?

Proposed Response

This approach is supported. The standards should, however, be regarded as minimum standards and should not prevent or preclude specific work being carried out on any scheme. The importance on on-going community consultation is particularly supported.

Determining applications for nationally significant infrastructure projects

The government propose:-

- (a) that the commission would deal with development consent applications for nationally significant transport, water, waterside and waste infrastructure in England, and energy infrastructure in England and Wales (and which exceed thresholds).
- (b) that the threshold would provide transparency and certainty.
- (c) all projects necessary to the operation of the electricity transmission and distribution network should be taken by the commission.
- (d) similar arrangements for major gas infrastructure.

Key Questions

Are thresholds appropriate?

Do you agree that electricity transmission proposals should be determined by the commission?

Do you agree that major gas infrastructure should be determined by the commission?

Proposed Response

These proposals are supported

Strengthening the role of local authorities in place-shaping

The government propose:-

- (a) a positive role for the LDF Core Strategy and act as the spatial expressions of the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- (b) a more comprehensive joined-up approach to the involvement of the wider community.
- (c) to introduce changes to ensure a more effective and tailored process of plan preparation with more flexibility about the number and type of plans and how they are produced.
- (d) greater flexibility in revising plans during the process.
- (e) more flexibility for local authorities on the type and number of plans.
- (f) to remove the need for a sustainability appraisal for every Supplementary Planning Document.

Key Questions

Do you agree the importance of a more joined up approach to community engagement locally?

Do you agree that there should not be a requirement for SPDs to be listed in the local development scheme?

Do you agree that there should not be a blanket requirement for supplementary planning documents to have a sustainability appraisal?

Proposed Response

The approach to joined up engagement is supported. The wider role of the LDF is supported, both in principle and in relation to its ability to raise the wider corporate role of the planning function.

The flexibility for local planning authorities to prepare supplementary planning documents is supported. The 2004 system has artificially restrained this inherent flexibility to the wider detriment of the system. The Council's recent decision to prepare SPD on polytunnels has been a good example of flexibly applying the local development scheme (and with support of the Government Office for the West Midlands).

The proposed relaxation on the preparation of sustainability appraisals is welcomed. This requirement has become burdensome and costly. The Council suggests, however, that the wider principles of sustainability should remain as critical to the production of any planning document.

Making the planning system more efficient and effective

The government propose:-

- (a) to reduce the need for applications for minor developments subject to safeguards to level impact on others.
- (b) to streamline the planning application process.
- (c) to improve the planning appeals process.

In particular the government proposed a range of measures which will offer greater freedom and flexibility for householders wishing to make minor extensions or improvement to their home; and other occupiers of buildings and land, including small businesses who wish to extend or improve their premises.

Key Question

Which types of non-residential development offers the greatest potential for change to permitted development rights?

Proposed Response

This matter is addressed in Appendix 4.

In addition the government propose:-

- (d) the development of a voluntary system (probably for smaller developments, whereby if there was agreement between a developer and neighbours affected) a full planning application would not be required.

Key Question

What is your view on the principle of introducing a streamlined process for approval of minor development which does not have permitted development rights and where the neighbours are in agreement?

Proposed Response

The Council has major reservations about this proposal. It fails to recognise that the planning process operates in the public interest rather than as an agreement or pact between a developer and neighbours. In extreme cases this may result in the granting of permission for proposals which conflict with policy, established practice or adopted guidelines. It also has the opportunity to bring the planning process into disrepute.