

Agenda Item IMD23

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: IMD 2018/23

TITLE	Revised National Planning Policy Framework Consultation
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Leader of the Council – Charlotte Haitham Taylor
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	4 June 2018 SF4 at 9:00am.
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR	Interim Director of Environment - Josie Wragg

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure that the Government's planning policy has minimal negative impacts upon Wokingham Borough and that any positive benefits are maximised.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Leader of the Council agrees that Wokingham Borough Council submit the comments contained in Appendix B as this council's response to the governments draft revisions to the National Planning policy Framework.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The government has published its draft revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for consultation. The NPPF consultation runs until 10 May 2018.

The report provides a summary of the draft revised NPPF and outlines a recommended response in Appendix A and B.

Key revisions include:

- The requirement to review local plans at least every five years.
- Changes to the test of soundness, particularly emphasising the importance of joint working.
- The introduction of the standardised methodology for calculating local housing need and the housing delivery test.

Background

The government has published its draft revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for consultation. The consultation incorporates policy proposals previously consulted on in the housing white paper 'Fixing our broken housing market' and the 'Planning for the right homes in the right places' consultation, as well as changes to policy implemented through written ministerial statements since the NPPF was originally published in 2012.

Alongside the NPPF consultation, the government has also published a number of additional reference documents: draft Planning Practice Guidance and the housing delivery test measurement rule book. Also published are the government's response to the 'Planning for the right homes in the right places' consultation.

The NPPF consultation runs until 10 May 2018. The consultation documents are available to view at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/draft-revised-national-planning-policy-framework>

Due to the timing of the consultation and council procedures, a holding response based on this report has been submitted to government within the consultation period. Following formal consideration of this report, a final response will be provided incorporating any necessary updates.

It should be noted that a separate consultation has also been published by the government seeking views on a series of reforms to the existing system of developer contributions, alongside research on Section 106 planning obligations and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). This report does not address this consultation.

Analysis of Issues

A summary of the draft revisions to the NPPF is provided in Appendix A to this report with a recommended response set out in Appendix B.

Key areas to note are set out below.

Requirement to review local plans every five years

The draft revised NPPF proposes that local plans should be reviewed to assess whether they need updating at least once every five years from the date of adoption, and should then be updated as necessary. Currently there is no prescribed review period meaning that plans may not be reviewed until towards the end of the defined plan period (normally around 15 years from the date of adoption).

With the calculation of local housing need potentially varying annually as new data becomes available, the possible need to update plans is considerable and presents a logistical and resource challenge unless the government allows breathing space to allow reviews to progress without the risk of unplanned, speculative developments.

Changes to test of soundness

Local plans are examined against four defined tests:

1. Positively prepared.

2. Justified.
3. Effective.
4. Consistent with national policy.

Where plans meet the tests, the plan is considered 'sound' and can be adopted.

A number of minor changes are proposed to the tests of soundness. Of note is the change to the 'justified' test which is revised to require the strategy to be 'an' appropriate strategy rather than the most appropriate strategy. The other notable change is that the 'positively prepared' and 'effective' tests have been revised to emphasise joint working, requiring councils to reach agreements on key issues, including housing and other development needs. The emphasis is on dealing with issues rather than deferring for consideration at a later date.

Functional geography

The draft revised NPPF makes no reference to housing market areas or functional economic areas which formed key elements of the current NPPF and PPG. Instead the draft revisions simply refer to neighbouring areas. It is not clear how this change will work through. Some commentators believe councils are still expected to identify functional areas to enable joint working, and so little will change, however the changes are silent on this.

Introduction of the standardised housing need calculation

The draft revised NPPF makes reference to the proposed introduction of the standardised methodology for calculating local housing need. No further detail is provided and the consultation does not contain a specific question on this area. Notwithstanding, the government's response to the 'Planning for the right homes in the right places' consultation provides a strong suggestion that the methodology consulted on as part of that consultation will be unchanged.

Introduction of the housing delivery test

The housing delivery test, as consulted on as part of the 'Planning for the right homes in the right places' consultation is confirmed in the draft revisions to the NPPF. The policy consequences of the test, which looks back over a three year period, include that councils will need to plan for an additional 20% buffer on top of their five year supply of deliverable sites where housing delivery is below 85% of the housing requirement. Should delivery fall below 75%, the consultation clarifies that the presumption in favour of sustainable development will apply in decision taking.

Incorporation of legal framework into Green Belt policy

The draft revised NPPF makes a number of changes to Green Belt policy to effectively incorporate the existing legal framework. These changes were previously consulted on under the housing white paper 'Fixing our broken housing market'.

The changes include the requirement that all reasonable development options outside of the Green Belt should have been examined fully before a case for exceptional circumstances to change the boundaries of the Green Belt can be considered.

The revisions also seek to allow brownfield land in the Green Belt to be used for affordable housing (including starter homes) where there is no substantial harm to openness. This is more flexible than the current NPPF which requires proposals to have no greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None anticipated.

Cross-Council Implications

Government planning policy strongly influences the council's statutory planning function and other services which involve changes to the use of land or premises.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Director – Corporate Services	None received.
Monitoring Officer	No specific comments.
Leader of the Council	None received.

List of Background Papers

1. National Planning Policy Framework (MHCLG, March 2012)
2. National Planning Policy Framework: Draft text for consultation (MHCLG, March 2018)
3. National Planning Policy Framework: Consultation proposals (MHCLG, March 2018)
4. Housing Delivery test Draft Measurement Rule Book (MHCLG, March 2018)
5. Draft Planning Practice Guidance (MHCLG, March 2018)

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