

Historic Towns Forum 20/6/12

The NPPF, growth, and protection of the historic environment



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What the NPPF means for planning historic towns

- i. Background - planning and the historic environment
- ii. Recent tensions during the drafting of the NPPF and the Localism Act
- iii. The balance achieved in the final NPPF
- iv. In practice...
- v. Summary

Background

- i. Legislation:
 - Civic Amenities Act 1967
 - National Heritage Act 1983
 - Town and Country Planning Act 1990
 - Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
(to be amended through the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill)
- ii Guidance: PPG5; PPS5
- iii Role of Historic Buildings Council → English Heritage
- iv Role of conservation officers / county archaeologist

Balance achieved – presumption in favour of sustainable development

Ministerial foreword

“The purpose of planning is to achieve sustainable development... ‘Sustainable’ means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don’t mean worse lives for future generations. ‘Development’ means growth... Sustainable development is about change for the better, and not only in our built environment...”

“Our historic environment – buildings, landscapes, townscapes towns and villages – can better be cherished if their spirit of place thrives, rather than withers”.

Recent tensions

3 March 2011 - Business Secretary Vince Cable MP stated that the planning system has been a *“particular impediment to growth”* and he has heard *“countless stories of perfectly reasonable developments being thwarted by bizarre planning rules.”*

4 March 2011 - reported that George Osborne *“wants to make it much easier for companies to obtain planning consent for new projects – even if they go against the wishes of local residents – allowing them to expand their businesses while also providing a timely boost for the construction sector”*.

10 March 2011 – Minister for Decentralisation Greg Clark said: *“Neighbourhood planning will give people the chance to exercise meaningful choice over the look and feel of the places where they live - from the location of new homes, shops and offices, to the choice of materials used”*.

...Growth versus localism

Balance achieved – presumption in favour of sustainable development

There are three dimensions to sustainable development, and planning system has three roles: economic, social and an environmental role, including “*contributing to the protection and enhancing of our natural, built and historic environment*” (Para 7).

“*To achieve sustainable development economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system*” (Para 8).

Therefore, sustainable development does not mean growth at any cost.

In practice - plan making

Positively prepared,
evidence-based,
and growth-oriented

Para 14 *“For plan-making local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area...”*

Para 47 Need to identify deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years work of housing against their housing requirements, plus 5% from later in plan period or 20% (where persistent under delivery)

In practice - plan making

Para 151 *“Local Plans must be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. To this end, they should be consistent with the principles and policies set out in this framework, including the presumption in favour of sustainable development”.*

Para 157 Crucially Local Plans should plan positively for the development and infrastructure required in the area to meet the objectives, principles and policies of this framework

Para 182 A “sound” plan is one that is *“positively prepared - the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements...”*

In practice - plan making

But also:

Para 14 *“Local plans should meet objectively assessed needs, unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits...”*

Para 58 Local Plans should respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials.

Para 126 *“LPAs should set out in their Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment...In developing this strategy LPAs should take account of...”*

Opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place.”

In practice - plan making

Para 152 *“LPAs should seek opportunities to achieve each of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and net gains across all three. Significant adverse impacts on any of these dimensions should be avoided and, where ever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued...”*

Para 156 Strategic priorities should be set out and strategic policies not only to deliver homes and jobs but for the conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment including landscape.

Para 157 *“Local plans should:*

- Identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance, because of its environmental or historic significance.*
- Contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment...”*

In practice - plan making

Para 169 *“LPAs should have up to date evidence about the historic environment in their area and use it to assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make to the environment...”*

Para 170 *“Where appropriate, landscape character assessments should also be prepared, integrated with assessment of historic landscape character, and for areas where there are major expansion options assessments of landscape sensitivity.”*

In practice - summary

LPA's have to accommodate locally assessed need for growth.

But free to do so in a manner appropriate for that specific locality, and so that economic, social and environmental gains are delivered, including enhancing significant heritage assets.

Robust evidence base required for both.

In practice - examples and tools

Listed buildings and conservation areas

Cathedrals and churches: Bath, Wells, Salisbury, Winchester, Chichester, Ely, Lincoln

Protected view cones: the spires and rooflines of Oxford, St Paul's Cathedral, London

Historic canals, docks and wharfs: Chatham, Gloucester, London

Meadows: Port Meadow, Granchester Meadows, Salisbury, Winchester

Historic commons: Parkers Piece, Christ's Piece Midsummer Common

In the face of the growth agenda, is this ad hoc range of tools sufficient to protect the integrity of our most valued historic towns?

In practice - is a more comprehensive approach required?

Should a historic town be protected as an entity of itself?

- > identifying their most significant historic assets
- > protecting the assets themselves and
- > protecting their surroundings and context, eg: key views of spires and cathedrals; protecting the quality of the approach to a historic core.

May mean that historic towns have a 'physical capacity' beyond which there would be too much pressure for redevelopment of the core to accommodate more retail and services, a need for lower order district centres or out of centre provision. These may be considered to threaten the integrity of the historic town and incompatible with protecting and enhancing the town's significant historic assets.

Para 52 of the NPPF recognises that *"Supply can sometimes be best met through planning for larger scale development such as new settlements - such as garden cities"*.

We suggest that if historic towns are to be protected and enhanced this may be necessary

In practice - application

Evidence base - include assessment of the significance of heritage assets and carry out historic landscape character assessment if appropriate. What is the physical capacity of the town without detriment to heritage assets?



Set out in local plans a **positive strategy** for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment, taking account of opportunities to draw on the contribution made by the historic environment to the character of a place. May mean investigating alternative development strategies, including new garden towns, to protect historic towns.



Develop **strategic priorities and policies**, not only to deliver homes and jobs, but for the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment.

Summary

i) 'Sustainable development' is not about growth at any cost, but growth that delivers economic, social and environmental gains, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment

- > Heritage assets are irreplaceable and important in retaining a sense of place
- > Heritage assets are part of the solution for long-term sustainable development
- > Heritage assets are to be conserved and enhanced in a manner appropriate with their significance.

ii) Localism and the NPPF mean that local needs are to be met in a form and manner appropriate to that particular locality, conserving and enhancing heritage assets commensurate with their significance to the area

iii) Back to bold, purposeful and visionary planning to get it right, and protect and enhance our towns of irreplaceable historic significance