



**The NPPF has finally been published today after a controversial and very public launch into the planning world.**

Notwithstanding the media storm it is perhaps not as controversial as the newspapers would have us believe. The notion of “sustainable development” has been given a definition of sorts which will be familiar from the Brundtland Paper and recited in a United Nations definition as being “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition, the NPPF states that the government believes that the whole of the NPPF constitutes their view of what sustainable development means in practice. There is no default answer and a commitment to decision making in accordance with policy remains unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

A good starting point with the NPPF is to look at Annex 3 to see what it is intended to replace. There are some surprises in that Circular 05/2005 is being replaced with three of the five familiar tests finding their way into the NPPF instead.

There are 12 core planning principles which are to be considered. None are contentious in themselves but the following are highlights:-

- Promoting the vitality of urban centres, protection of the green belt and recognising the “intrinsic character and beauty” of the countryside
- Encouraging the use of brown-field land
- Sequential test to use land of lesser environmental value

Local planning authorities will have to show that they have an evidence base to meet their housing needs and then identify 5 years worth of land for the same with a 5% buffer built in to provide for choice and competition in the land market. Poorly performing authorities will have to provide a 20% buffer.

Unused Class B buildings should be granted permission for residential conversion in areas of need providing that there is no strong economic reason why it would be inappropriate to do so.

Urban extension on the garden-cities model is actively encouraged which can be ring fenced by new green-belt if appropriate.

Local Plans which post-date 2004 can be given full weight, even if there is limited conflict with the NPPF for a period of 12 months from today. After this weight will be accorded with the degree to which they are consistent with the NPPF.

There is still a lot to digest and how it remains to be used in a practical sense will no doubt provide much commentary for some time.

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