

Advanced Oxford Responding to consultation on NPPF (2025) draft

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Advanced Oxford

Agenda

Introduction to the session – Sarah Haywood

The planning system, why the NPPF matters & the 2025 reforms – Adrian Colwell

Key Questions

Discussion to agree key points for AO to make



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

**Proposed reforms to the National Planning
Policy Framework and other changes to
the planning system**

December 2025

*The planning
system, why the
NPPF matters & the
reforms*

Why the NPPF matters

- NPPF guides Local Plan making, planning applications & appeals.
- Tends to be updated annually. First published 2012
- Current draft is out for consultation. Due to come into force & apply from June/July 2026.
- A legal guide to what a Local Plan/planning application must cover, '*has force*' but language is open to interpretation and for use in appeals.

NPPF – policy guidance

Contents

Contents	3
Scope of consultation	4
Consultation introduction	9
Chapter 1: Introduction	18
Chapter 2: Plan-making policies	19
Chapter 3: Decision-making policies	27
Chapter 4: Achieving sustainable development	32
Chapter 5: Meeting the challenge of climate change	37
Chapter 6: Delivering a sufficient supply of homes	40
Chapter 7: Building a strong, effective economy	53
Chapter 8: Ensuring the vitality of town centres	55
Chapter 9: Supporting high quality communications	58
Chapter 10: Securing Clean Energy and Water	60
Chapter 11: Facilitating the sustainable use of minerals	63
Chapter 12: Making effective use of land	68
Chapter 13: Protecting Green Belt land	74
Chapter 14: Achieving well-designed places	80
Chapter 15: Promoting sustainable transport	83
Chapter 16: Promoting healthy communities	87
Chapter 17: Pollution, Public Protection and Security	91
Chapter 18: Managing Flood Risk and Coastal Change	94
Chapter 19: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment	99
Chapter 20: Conserving and enhancing the historic environment	102
Further questions	106
Annex A - Data Centres and onsite energy generation	108
Annex B - Viability: Standardised inputs in viability assessment	111
Annex C - Reforming Site Thresholds	117
Public Sector Equality Duty	123

The NPPF covers a range of policy requirements for developments - housing & economic schemes, transport & environment.

- Includes policy requirements (circa 81 policies)

- *NOTE: This presentation focuses on economic development aspects*

NPPF covers National Infrastructure

- NPPF also covers new National Infrastructure – electricity generation (including renewables & nuclear) & networks, water networks & new reservoirs, data centres and rail freight terminals, seaports and airports such as Luton, Gatwick and current preparation of Heathrow 3rd runway.
- Each theme is governed by a National Policy Statement, reviewed every 5 years.

The NPPF and Local Plans

- Current Government is seeking housing growth (1.5m new houses by end of current Parliament) and economic growth.
- Changing the planning system. Local Plan guidelines also coming in June/July 2026
- More prescription for Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to follow content of NPPF in decisions and Plan making.
- Seeking 'shorter Local Plans', must not duplicate national policy in NPPF
- Local Plans to place more emphasis on sites, be delivery focused and less on local policies
- New timetable for producing Local Plans quicker than currently

The NPPF and the economy

- Government placing increased emphasis on economic growth and economy
- Emphasises taking compliance with UK Industrial Strategy (2025) and 8 ‘Growth Drivers’ (key sectors – defence, logistics, data centres, science and technology etc)
- The NPPF encourages use of Local Development Orders (LDOs) to speed up planning decisions on large sites, especially business parks, see Milton Park in Vale of White Horse – a site allocated in the Local Plan. The LDO commits the Council to agreeing planning applications within 10 working days.

NPPF and town centres

Town Centres

- New sequential test for town centres more flexible, does not direct all retail to town centres

NPPF policy strengthening

The NPPF requires

- ‘Vision-led’ approach to transport policy
- Housing growth at ‘well-connected’ stations with a housing higher density of a minimum of 40 – 50 dph
- Opened up ‘Green Belt’ to development on ‘*Grey Belt*’ with Affordable Housing required to be 50% of the total
- More on taking account of flood risks

NPPF introduces a new Plan hierarchy

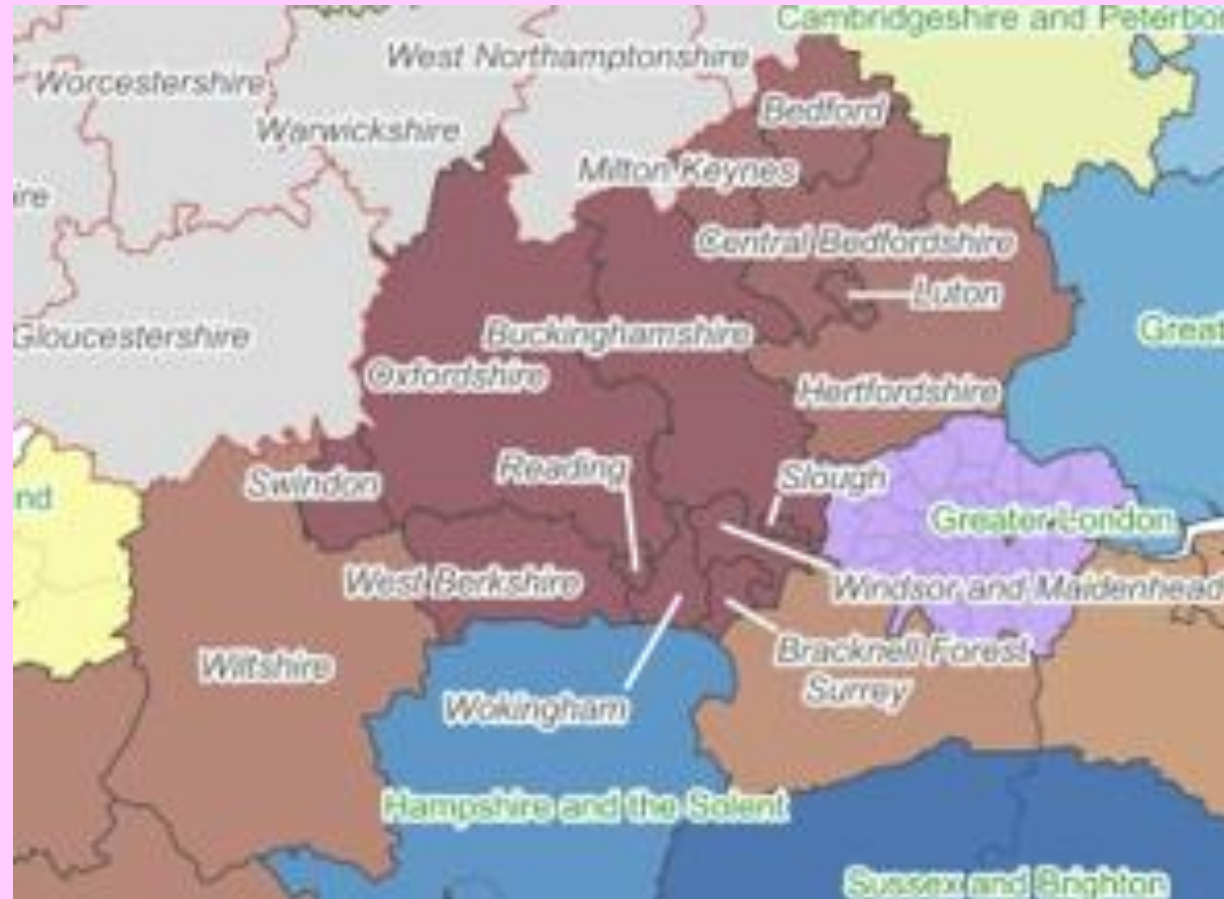
New Plan hierarchy being introduced –

- 3 levels of plan making –
 - Spatial Development Strategies (regional),
 - Local Plans (District / new Unitary Councils) and
 - Neighbourhood Plans (Parish/community)

NPPF Plan making changes links to LGR

- Local Government Reform and Devolution decisions in Autumn 2026, is a separate process to make larger, single tier Councils, with region wide Mayors.
- But, sets groupings for introduction of very large spatial planning areas (see next slide)
- Consultation on areas proposed is underway

New Thames Valley SDS



Interlocking 'growth areas'



New SDS for Thames Valley



- Thames Valley brings together new Unitary Authorities and a new Mayor.
- Thames Valley covers - Oxfordshire, Swindon, Berkshire & Bucks.
- 20-year strategy to promote economic growth, infrastructure needed (utilities networks & generation & transport – road, bus & rail)
- New Settlements – separate Commission to determine, to be included in SDS to capture spatial impacts.
- Initial Oxfordshire priorities includes – Heyford Park New Settlement, Abingdon Reservoir, Ardley Rail Freight Terminal, Harwell expansion.
- Others will be added – Carterton expansion, Carterton railway etc

NPPF changes – key questions

Do the proposed NPPF changes secure:

- Outcome of higher growth, especially economic growth?
- Quicker decision making on Local Plan preparation & content?
- Greater certainty of planning decisions?
- Consistency of planning decisions, less random ‘political’ decision?