

Planning & Infrastructure Forum, 21st January 2025, -
Key summary of meeting

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) changes.

During the January forum we received an update on some of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) changes which were announced in December 2024.

The standard method is now the mandatory starting point for planning for homes, implementing a revised standard method so that councils will plan to achieve the delivery of the required number of homes needed.

Many councils will no longer be able to demonstrate a Five-year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS). A lack of a 5YHLS can constitute very special circumstances for development on green belt land.

If local plans are in excess of five years post-adoption, housing policies contained therein are considered to be out of date, even when there is no obvious housing shortfall. The consequence is that the **tilted balance will therefore apply**, if an authority can demonstrate a 5YHLS but the local plan exceeds five years post adoption.

NPPF changes could now lead to a return to 'Planning by Appeal' for sites located outside settlement boundaries. This also applies to non-residential development where there is unmet need. The likelihood is that Local Planning Authorities (LPA) will be rushing to adopt local plans.

NPPF changes regarding the 'grey belt', defined as: *'For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the green belt comprising previously developed land (PDL) and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than green belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development'*.

'Golden rules' will apply for major developments.

A number of other NPPF changes, described as being 'under the radar'. These included a presumption in favour of PDL in settlements and a greater emphasis to small and medium housebuilders, many of whom went out of business during the pandemic.

There is more support for modern economic uses, such as a giga factory and there are new restrictions on the location of hot food takeaways, particularly when sited near schools.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) “is here to stay”, with BNG continuing to incentivise nature positive choices on development sites. BNG will be a theme of the next meeting of this forum on 29.4.25., with guest speakers lined up.

NPPF changes to planning committees, with the aim of speeding up the process of planning decisions and stimulating economic growth. These changes will include a drop in the number of applications to be decided by Members and “putting more faith” in qualified planning officers.

NPPF changes will also include approval to raise the cost of planning fees, w.e.f. 01.04.2025. Householder and Prior Approval fees will double in cost and there will be an Increase in S73 application fees (£2000 for major applications). It is hoped that the higher fees will help to streamline blockages in the planning system. These fees will not be ring-fenced to planning departments, despite the British Chambers’ of Commerce (BCC) calling for this to happen. BCC believes that the ringfencing of fees would help to improve resources within LPA planning teams.

Local Plan updates from local authorities:

Stoke on Trent City Council (SOTCC) – SOTCC is working towards a Reg 18. consultation in September 2025. TL and his colleagues have kept a close eye on NPPF changes. SOTCC is “keen to grasp” Reg. 18 consultation, “as it gives clarity and direction.” Further evidence based updates and viewing of both policies and sites, is under way.

SOTCC is working with consultants to do a piece of work on the green belt, as well as further work to look at the grey belt.

SOTCC is also looking at housing mix and housing types, to ensure it is heading in the right direction with all sites and is also developing a Housing Action Plan.

Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council (NULBC) – NULBC local plan 2020–2040 was submitted to the Secretary of State for public examination on 20.12.24. NULBC also keeping a very close eye on NPPF changes. In response to a question about estimated time of local plan examination, it was suggested that this could happen in May 2025 but would be based on what the Inspector is looking for.

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC) – Update not provided.

Stafford Borough Council (SBC) – Update not provided

**Next Planning & Infrastructure forum meeting – Tuesday 29th April at 9AM –
Theme topic of Biodiversity Net Gain, with keynote speakers lined up.**