

## **PROPOSED REFORMS TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK AND OTHER CHANGES TO THE PLANNING SYSTEM**

<b>Head of Service:</b>	Justin Turvey, Head of Place Development
<b>Report Author</b>	Harry Burchill, Ian Mawer
<b>Wards affected:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Urgent Decision? (yes/no)</b>	Yes
<b>If yes, reason urgent decision required:</b>	This a response to a Central Government consultation and the deadline to submit is 11.45pm on the 24 September.
<b>Appendices (attached):</b>	Appendix 1 – Draft Response to government consultation Appendix 2 – Proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (track change version) Appendix 3 – Comparison of current and proposed standard methods for calculating housing needs

### **Summary**

The Government launched a consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2024. Four key proposals to note are:

- 1) a change to the Standard Method for Calculating Housing Need;
- 2) alterations to national Green Belt policy;
- 3) proposals to increase planning application fees; and
- 4) proposed transitional arrangements for Local Plans.

The response has been drafted in the knowledge that the proposed changes are only being consulted on and its publication does not mean that the planning system or the NPPF has changed yet.

### **Recommendation (s)**

**The Committee is asked to:**

- (1) **Note the contents of the consultation.**
- (2) **Approve the draft response (Appendix 1) or;**

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**(3) Agree amendments and authorise the Head of Place Development in consultation with the Chair of this Committee, to finalise and submit the response.**

### **1 Reason for Recommendation**

- 1.1 The consultation is only open until 11:45pm Tuesday 24 September 2024.
- 1.2 If reforms are implemented as per the consultation, the proposed changes to the NPPF will have implications for planning decisions and the Local Plan, both in process and content, particularly with regards to the level of development proposed. It is therefore important that the Council make its views known to the Government on these matters, by submitting a formal response to the consultation.

### **2 Background**

- 2.1 The Government launched a consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 2 August 2024. It is open for responses, from anyone (individuals and groups) until 11:45pm on Tuesday 24 September 2024. The consultation follows the election of the new Government, who made a number of commitments around removing barriers to development, including a pledge to build 1.5 million homes during this Parliament. It should be noted that a collective response on behalf of Councils in Surrey has also been prepared, coordinated by the Surrey Planning Officers Group.
- 2.2 There are 15 chapters to the consultation, posing 106 questions, some of which are more open ended than others. Whilst the consultation covers a range of reforms, four key proposals affecting Epsom and Ewell to note are:
  - 1) a change to the Standard Method for Calculating Housing Need (the “standard method”), which for Epsom and Ewell will mean an increase from the current standard method derived target of 576 per annum to 817 per annum,
  - 2) alterations to national Green Belt policy;
  - 3) proposals to increase planning application fees; and
  - 4) Transitional arrangements for Local Plans which set out instances where local plans will be examined against the current (December 2023) version of the NPPF once the new version is published.

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- 2.3 The consultation focuses more on the housing, economy and infrastructure elements of the planning system than other areas, although it does ask for some high-level suggestions about what the planning system can do to improve Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation.
- 2.4 A response to this consultation has been prepared and is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. The response objects to the revised standard method and proposed changes to Green Belt policy (including the introduction of Grey Belt). The proposed response is positive in other areas, for example to increasing planning fees and changes to affordable housing mix, with greater focus on social housing which is in greatest demand in the borough.
- 2.5 Alongside the consultation document a track changes version of the NPPF has been published to show the exact wording of the proposed changes (attached as Appendix 2 to this report).
- 2.6 The following section summarises the proposed changes detailed in each chapter of the consultation document:

### **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

- 2.7 Contains background to consultation and reasoning behind proposed changes, to accelerate growth.

### **Chapter 2 – Policy objectives**

- 2.8 Contains further details as to the aims of the reforms.

### **Chapter 3 – Planning for the homes we need**

- 2.9 Contains proposals to reverse the December 2023 changes to the NPPF advising that housing targets are advisory, uplifts in housing numbers should be accommodated in urban areas only and that character could be a reason not to meet targets.
- 2.10 Clarifies that the presumption in favour of sustainable development should apply in cases where policies relating to the *supply of land* are out of date (to remove ambiguity over what policies are relevant to housing).
- 2.11 Reinstates the 5-year housing land supply test and mandatory inclusion of 5 per cent buffer where housing delivery is low.
- 2.12 Includes proposals to strengthen the Duty to Cooperate requirements and to “strategic planning” across local authority boundaries.

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### **Chapter 4 - A new Standard Method for Assessing Housing Need.**

- 2.13 Introduces a new formula for calculating housing need that is not based on household growth projections but housing stock, factoring in an earnings to house price ratio and providing an uplift for affordability. This results in an uplift from 576 per annum to 817 per annum for Epsom and Ewell.
- 2.14 States that Councils will only be able to plan for a lower number where “hard constraints” can be evidenced to the Planning Inspectorate.
- 2.15 Appendix 3 shows the outputs of the existing and proposed standard method.

### **Chapter 5 – Brownfield, grey belt and The Green Belt**

- 2.16 Emphasises a “brownfield first” approach and making clear that development on previously developed land (PDL) in the Green Belt is not “inappropriate development”.
- 2.17 Introduces the concept of “grey belt”, which can be summarised as Previously Developed Land and any other parcels and/or areas of Green Belt land that make a limited contribution to the five purposes of the Green Belt.
- 2.18 Suggests councils will be required to do a sequential review of Green Belts where housing need cannot be met (not just in “exceptional circumstances”), focusing on lower quality Green Belt for release.
- 2.19 Introduces a change where development of sustainable grey belt land will not be considered “inappropriate” in cases where 5-year housing land supply cannot be demonstrated.
- 2.20 Introduces “Golden Rules” for Green Belt development to including a 50% affordable housing requirement (subject to viability), improvements to infrastructure and open spaces.
- 2.21 Proposes to set Benchmark Land Values for which Green Belt Land can be purchased (various models).

### **Chapter 6 – Delivering affordable, well-designed homes and places**

- 2.22 Proposed not to implement a revised “Infrastructure Levy” to replace the established Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) as proposed in previous consultations.
- 2.23 Proposes to allow more discretion for local authorities to set housing product requirements (i.e., type of affordable homes), rather than prescribing certain requirements (e.g., set proportion of First Homes).

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- 2.24 Suggests measures to better promote mixed tenure developments and to better supporting community led development.
- 2.25 Proposes to remove references to the word “beautiful” from the NPPF.

### **Chapter 7 – Building Infrastructure to grow the economy**

- 2.26 Proposes measures to better enable the needs of laboratories, gigafactories, data centres and digital infrastructure to be met either by introducing them into the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) Regime or requiring that they are planned specifically for in local plans.

### **Chapter 8 – Delivering Community needs**

- 2.27 Proposed reform to NPPF wording to make clear that significant weight should be placed on the importance of public service infrastructure, specifying early years and post 16 education as a priority.
- 2.28 Proposes a “vision led” rather than “predict and provide” approach to transport planning.
- 2.29 Seeks views on how to promote healthy communities through the planning system.

### **Chapter 9 – Supporting Green energy and the environment**

- 2.30 Proposes to bring onshore wind back into the NSIP regime and increase thresholds for which solar generation, onshore wind and water threshold developments should be considered nationally significant infrastructure projects.
- 2.31 Proposes to give significant weight to benefits associated with renewable energy.
- 2.32 Requests suggestions about how the planning system can better approach climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- 2.33 Proposes to increase protection of agricultural land used for food production.

### **Chapter 10 - Changes to Local plan intervention criteria**

- 2.34 Proposes to amend technicalities of local plan intervention criteria with options presented for comment.

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### **Chapter 11 – Changes to planning application fees and cost recovery for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects**

- 2.35 Proposes to allow councils to set own planning fees (up to £528 for householder development); either full localisation or local variation based on default national fee as baseline.

### **Chapter 12 - The Future of planning policy and plan making**

- 2.36 Sets out transitional arrangements for local plans under new NPPF. Essentially this sets out the circumstances in which Local Plans will be examined against the previous version of the NPPF once the new NPPF is published.
- 2.37 The proposed transition arrangements, if implemented, will require our Local Plan to be examined against the new NPPF.

### **Chapter 13 - Public Sector Equality Duty**

### **Chapter 14 – Table of Questions**

### **Chapter 15 – About this Consultation**

## **3 Risk Assessment**

### **Legal or other duties**

#### **3.1 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 3.1.1 Whilst the reforms to the NPPF will have wide ranging impact, there are no EIA issues in relation to this response exercise.

#### **3.2 Crime & Disorder**

- 3.2.1 None.

#### **3.3 Safeguarding**

- 3.3.1 None.

#### **3.4 Dependencies**

- 3.4.1 None.

#### **3.5 Other**

- 3.5.1 None.

## **4 Financial Implications**

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- 4.1 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** Once the consultation outcome and final National Planning Policy Framework is known, any material financial implications will need to be quantified and reported back to this committee.

### 5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 **Legal Officer's comments:** This report raises no direct legal implications.

### 6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

- 6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

- 5) EC4 - Improve openness, transparency and customer service
- 6) GV4 – Encourage high quality design which balances the built environment with new open green spaces.
- 7) OP1 - Promote Epsom & Ewell as a great place to live, work and study, and encourage inward investment.

- 6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

- 6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** None

- 6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** None

- 6.5 **Partnerships:** None

### 7 Background papers

- 7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

**Previous reports:**

None.

**Other papers:**

- Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the Planning System:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system#:~:text=We%20are%20reforming%20local%20plan,a%20sustained%20increase%20in%20development.>
- National Planning Policy Framework (draft text for consultation):  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66acffdce1fd0da7b593274/NPPF\\_with\\_footnotes.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66acffdce1fd0da7b593274/NPPF_with_footnotes.pdf)

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- Outcome of the proposed revised standard method (all Planning Authorities in England), can be accessed from the following webpage:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>