

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
PLANNING COMMITTEE – 17 FEBRUARY 2026**

PC 507/26

**PROPOSED REFORMS TO THE NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK –
NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

Report by: David Illsley, Interim Head of Planning & Place

1 Introduction

1.1 In December 2025 the Government launched a 12-week consultation seeking views on proposed revisions to national planning policy to help support the Government's wider planning objectives. Full details are available at [National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system - GOV.UK](#) and the consultation runs to 10 March 2026.

1.2 As part of the consultation the Government has published:

- A revised draft of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF); and
- A consultation document on 'Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system'.

Linked to the current consultation, the Government is also seeking views on: (i) data centres and onsite energy generation; (ii) standardised inputs in viability assessments; and (iii) reforming site thresholds.

1.3 This report focuses specifically on the proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework that would be most relevant to National Parks. We are also liaising closely with the other 9 English national park authorities in the preparation of a joint response from National Parks England to this important consultation.

2 Proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

2.1 The first NPPF was published in 2012 and since then there have been six iterations of the Framework. The NPPF sets out the Government's national planning policies for plan-making and for making decisions on development proposals in England. It is a material consideration of critical importance in both contexts and sets out the overarching national framework for the delivery New Forest National Park Authority's statutory planning functions.

2.2 Previous revisions to the NPPF have been an evolution of the preceding version, with focused changes made to specific sections of the Framework. The proposed revisions published by the Government in December 2025 are much more significant and far-reaching. In launching the consultation, the Minister of State for Housing & Planning stated¹ that the revised NPPF is,

¹ [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

“...the culmination of a sustained effort over the first 17 months of this Parliament to revamp our planning system so that it meets housing need in full and unleashes economic growth, and represents the most significant reform to national planning policy since the original NPPF was introduced more than a decade ago.

This wholly restructured Framework maintains and builds on the initial revisions we made in December last year; includes a range of new measures to support key economic sectors; and incorporates new clear and rules-based national policies for both plan and decision-making. These proposals will make the NPPF easier to navigate for communities, local authorities, and developers alike.”

2.3 It is clear that the Government’s main priority for the revamped planning system is the delivery of essential infrastructure and housing to enable the target of 1.5 million new houses in England to be delivered by 2029. The Minister of State for Housing & Planning’s Statement identified the following key changes to the NPPF:

1. **A permanent presumption in favour of suitably located development.** The Government wants to make clear what forms of development are acceptable in different locations as part of a more rules-based approach to development.
2. **Building homes around stations.** The proposals intend to establish ‘in principle’ support – a “default yes” – for suitable proposals that develop land around rail stations within existing settlements, and around ‘well-connected’ train stations outside settlements. The consultation proposes a minimum density of 40 dwellings per hectare around all stations and 50 dwellings per hectare around ‘well-connected’ stations.
3. **Driving urban and suburban densification.** The Government wants to get the most use out of land in urban and suburban areas. The Government is also setting clear expectations that authorities should set minimum densities in well-connected locations, including around train stations and town centres, and support an overall increase in density within settlements.
4. **Securing a diverse mix of homes.** The Government wants to better support the needs of different groups through the planning system. This includes support for rural social and affordable housing and setting clearer expectations for accessible housing to meet the needs of older and disabled people.
5. **Supporting small and medium sites.** The consultation wants to make it easier to bring forward small sites, through clear support for the principle of development in different locations, the policies on building more densely in settlements and strengthened support for mixed tenure development.
6. **Streamlining local standards.** To promote certainty for applicants and speed up local plan production, it is proposed to limit quantitative standards in development plans to only those specific issues where local variation is justified. The Government also want to limit duplication of matters which are covered by the Building Regulations.

7. **Boosting local and regional economies.** To encourage economic growth, the proposals give substantial weight to the benefits of supporting business growth, and to particular areas and sectors - including those named in the Industrial Strategy, AI Growth Zones, logistics, town centres and agricultural and rural development.
8. **Supporting critical and growth minerals.** To ensure adequate provision is made for extraction, recognising the economic importance.
9. **Embedding a vision-led approach to transport.** The proposed revisions to the Framework seek to further embed the changes made in December 2024, which signalled a move away from a 'predict and provide' approach to transport planning that can create unattractive environments dominated by cars.
10. **Better addressing climate change.** The Government wants to set out how decisions can take a proactive approach to both mitigation and adaptation in relation to climate change.
11. **Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.** A number of changes are proposed to recognise landscape character and conserve and enhance existing natural features, to incorporate swift bricks and to provide guidance on sites of local importance for nature.
12. **Taking a more positive approach to the use of heritage assets.** The proposals set out a clearer and more positive approach which seeks to better support suitable heritage-related development.

3. **Proposals most relevant to the New Forest National Park**

- 3.1 As summarised in section 2 of this report, the reforms to the NPPF are wide-ranging and the most significant since it was introduced in 2012. While previous updates have amended specific paragraphs or policy areas, the proposals published in December 2025 seek to fundamentally update the Framework.
 - (i) Structure of the revised NPPF
- 3.2 Changes to the structure of the Framework are proposed to improve its clarity, usability and consistency. The draft retains individual chapters on different topics, with some re-ordering. Introductory text on the purpose of the planning system and related high-level objectives has been included. This introduction is followed by procedural policies relating to plan-making (Chapter 2) and decision-making (Chapter 3). Chapters on particular planning topics are then set out, as per the current version of the Framework (December 2024).
 - (ii) National Decision-Making Policies
- 3.3 The Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023 provides powers for the Secretary of State to introduce 'National Development Management Policies' on a statutory basis. For the first time, the new Framework will now include what are termed National Decision-Making Policies, although these will not be mandatory as

originally mooted. The consultation confirms that these decision-making policies should not be repeated in development plans; and states that any inconsistent local planning policies will immediately be given very limited weight.

(iii) References to National Parks within the revised NPPF

- 3.4 The table below summarises the references to National Parks in the proposed new NPPF compared to the current version (2024), which will continued to apply and be a material consideration until it is formally replaced later in 2026. It should also be emphasised that the Framework should be read as a whole.

Existing NPPF (December 2024)	Proposed NPPF (December 2025)
<p>Footnote 7 to paragraph 11 (Sustainable Development) – the footnote confirms that National Park designation protects areas of particular importance and provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type and distribution of development.</p>	<p>Footnote 23 to Plan-Making Policy S1 continues to confirm that National Park designation protects areas of particular importance and provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type and distribution of development.</p>
<p>Paragraph 189 – confirms that ‘great weight’ should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks; that National Parks have the ‘highest status’ of protection in relation to these matters; the scale and extent of development within National Parks should be limited; and development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to minimise adverse impacts.</p>	<p>National Decision Making Policy N4(1) (Protected Landscapes) states proposals should be limited in scale and extent and sensitively located and designed to avoid harm to their statutory purposes and special qualities. ‘Substantial weight’ should be placed on the importance of conserving and enhancing natural beauty, and to conserving and enhancing wildlife and cultural heritage.</p>
<p>Paragraph 190 – confirms that applications for major development within National Parks should be refused other than in exceptional circumstances <u>and</u> where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of the need for the development; the scope for developing outside the designated area; and the extent to which detrimental effects on the environment, landscape and recreation can be moderated.</p>	<p>National Decision Making Policy N4(2 & 3) (Protected Landscapes) states that proposals for major development within National Parks should only be supported in exceptional circumstances where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. The three major development ‘tests’ are retained largely unaltered. Additional wording is proposed on mitigating the adverse impacts of major development on nationally protected landscapes.</p>
<p>Footnote 66 to paragraph 189 – the footnote references the ‘English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010’ which provides further guidance and information about the statutory purposes, management and other matters relating to National Parks.</p>	<p>The footnote reference to the extant English National Parks and the Broads: UK Government Vision and Circular 2010 has been removed from the draft revised NPPF published in December 2025 (although it continues to be referenced within the accompanying National Planning Practice Guidance resource).</p>

<p>Paragraph 224 – minerals planning authorities should, as far as is practical, provide for the maintenance of landbanks of non-energy minerals from outside National Parks (and other protected areas).</p>	<p>Plan-making Policy M1 states that where further extraction is necessary, landbanks of non-energy minerals should so far as practical be maintained through sites which lie outside National Parks (and other protected areas).</p>
<p>Glossary definition of ‘Designated Rural Areas’ includes National Parks, National Landscapes and areas designated as ‘rural’ under Section 157 of the Housing Act 1985.</p>	<p>The definition of ‘Designated Rural Areas’ includes National Parks, National Landscapes, areas designated as rural under Section 157 of the Housing Act 1985.</p>

(iv) Other national planning policy areas relevant to the Authority’s work

3.5 The revised draft NPPF (December 2025) includes several other policy areas that will also be relevant to the delivery of the New Forest National Park Authority’s statutory planning functions. The key areas are summarised below, although it should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list and the whole Framework is material to both plan-making and development management decision-taking.

- **Policy PM6: General Principles for Plan-making:** Plan-makers should not duplicate, substantively restate or modify the content of national decision-making policies unless directed by other policies in the Framework.
- **Policy PM8: Evidence for Plan-making:** Plans should be shaped and underpinned by information and data that is relevant to the matters being considered; proportionate; and drawn from suitable and reliable sources that are sufficiently up-to-date. Plan-makers should draw upon existing evidence, updated where appropriate, before preparing or commissioning new evidence.
- **PM10: Maintaining cooperation between plan-making authorities:** Plan-making authorities should engage proactively and regularly with infrastructure providers, neighbouring and other relevant plan-making authorities and other relevant bodies to address cross boundary matters. Plan-making authorities should prepare, maintain and publish statements of common ground to demonstrate that relevant cross-boundary matters have been addressed.
- **PM13: Setting standards:** Quantitative standards set through development plan policies should be limited to infrastructure provision, affordable housing requirements, parking and design and placemaking. Such standards should not cover matters which are already addressed in Building Regulations other than in relation to accessibility standards and water efficiency standards.
- **DM5: Development viability:** Where proposals accord with relevant up-to-date plan policies and national decision-making policies, they should be assumed to be viable. There may be limited circumstances in which it would not be possible for development to proceed on a policy compliant basis, and a viability assessment to inform decision-making is justified to ensure that a proposed development makes the maximum possible contribution.

- **DM7: Relationship with other regulatory regimes:** Planning decision-makers should assume, unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, that the regulatory regimes that operate alongside the planning system will work effectively. “Planning decisions should not seek to duplicate or extend controls imposed by separate regulatory regimes.” This is relevant in the context of National Parks, where regulatory functions such as environmental health and licencing are the responsibility of other bodies, rather than the Authority.
- **DM8: Unauthorised development and enforcement:** In cases of unauthorised development where consideration is being given to an application for retrospective planning permission, if it is concluded that the unauthorised development was intentional, that fact should be given substantial weight in considering whether to grant planning permission.
- **S1: Positive Plan-making:** The development plan should plan positively for future growth by seeking to meet the development needs of the area as a minimum. This is caveated by reference to policies within the Framework which protect areas or assets of particular importance, which provide a strong reason for reducing the overall scale of development. Footnote 23 makes it clear that such policies apply to National Parks and this continues the existing approach.
- **S5: Principle of development outside settlements:** This draft policy would enable (i) the re-use, extension, alteration or replacement of an existing building, so long as the existing building is of permanent and substantial construction; (ii) the redevelopment of previously developed land; and (iii) ‘limited’ infilling within groups of houses (the term ‘limited’ is not defined). All these examples could impact on the landscape character of the New Forest National Park without proper local planning policy safeguards.
- **HO7: Meeting the need for homes:** Substantial weight should be given to the benefits of providing accommodation that will contribute towards meeting the evidenced needs of the local community, taking into account any up-to-date local housing need assessment, and other relevant evidence.
- **L3: Achieving appropriate densities:** Proposals should make efficient use of land. Proposals for residential and mixed-use development within settlements should contribute to an increase in the density of the area in which they are situated. The existing character of an area should be taken into account, but should not preclude development which makes the most of an area's potential.
- **Annex A: Implementation:** The policies in the Framework are material considerations which must be taken into account in decision-making from the day of its publication. Development plan policies which are “in any way” inconsistent with the national decision-making policies should be given very limited weight, except where they have been examined and adopted against the new Framework. These transitional arrangements have significant implications for planning authorities working on their local plan reviews².

² It is estimated that around 150 planning authorities are aiming to submit their draft local plans for examination by the Government’s deadline of 31 December 2025, including the NFNPA and NFDC.

4. New Forest National Park Authority’s proposed consultation response

- 4.1 In the Government’s words, the latest proposed reforms to national planning policy represent, “...the most significant reform to national planning policy since the original NPPF was introduced more than a decade ago.” The revisions go further than previous iterations of the Framework and fundamentally alter it through the introduction of national decision-making policies.
- 4.2 It is recommended that the Authority’s consultation response focuses on the areas of the draft NPPF that specially address planning in National Parks. This report recommends that members endorse the following key areas of feedback; and delegate authority to the Interim Head of Planning & Place (in liaison with the Chair & Vice Chair of Planning Committee) to finalise the National Park Authority’s formal consultation response by the deadline of 10 March 2026.

New Forest National Park Authority – recommended areas for response

- The current NPPF (2024) uses several different terms where the Government expects weight to be given to particular matters (great, significant, substantial). It is understood that, in general, these are not intended to imply any sort of ‘weighting’ hierarchy, so the Government is now proposing that ‘substantial’ is used throughout the Framework where positive weighting is intended. This affects the wording on development within National Parks, where the term ‘substantial weight’ replaces ‘great weight’ for consistency across policies. It is queried whether this wording provides greater clarity than the existing wording.
- The proposed rewording of the existing national planning policy for development within National Parks to refer to ‘natural beauty’ rather than ‘scenic beauty’ is supported. The proposed re-wording ensure alignment with the wording of the first statutory National Park purpose in the National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and this consistency is welcomed.
- Paragraph 189 of the current NPPF explicitly states that National Landscapes have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. This wording is clear and is unambiguous. The proposed deletion of this wording is therefore a significant concern and it is not understood what the justification is for the loss of this well-established planning policy principle.
- Paragraph 189 of the current NPPF includes reference to development within the setting of nationally protected landscapes and it is proposed that this wording is retained in the revised NPPF. This is supported and reflects the statutory duty on relevant bodies (including neighbouring planning authorities) to seek to further the National Park purposes in the delivery of their functions.
- There are concerns that the revised NPPF represents a weakening of the well-established ‘major development tests’ currently set out in paragraph 190 of the NPPF (2024). There is a subtle - but presumably conscious - shift in wording that major development should ‘be refused’ except in exceptional circumstances to ‘should only be supported’ in the proposed Framework. This

is then followed by new wording on what measures could be sought by way of mitigation. In addition, previous legal advice has been clear that to meet the high bar to allow major development within nationally protected landscapes, proposals had to demonstrate they were both exceptional and also in the public interest. The revised NPPF dilutes this by treating 'exceptional circumstances' and 'public interest' as one requirement/test.

- The deletion of the current footnote 66 reference to the extant National Parks Circular is a retrograde step. The Circular provides a wealth of information on National Parks that it would not be appropriate to include in full in the NPPF, but signposting of the Circular through the footnote is appropriate. The wording in the Circular is routinely used by national park authorities and others in planning decisions within National Parks and is cross-referenced within the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) resource on 'landscape.'
- The proposed approach to development outside settlements (draft Policy S5) could lead to significant development in relatively remote and unsustainable areas, conflicting with the 'plan-led' approach. Previous attempts to extend Class Q to protected landscapes have been strongly resisted due to landscape impacts and this policy could have the same detrimental effect. The wording is permissive and allows development unless there are adverse effects, "...when assessed against the national decision-making policies in the Framework." As national policy cannot anticipate every local adverse effect, this policy wording needs to include reference to the adopted development plan in addition to cross-referring to the national decision-making policies in the Framework.
- It is important that the revised NPPF – including the national decision-making policies - is read as a whole. There are several principles set out in the proposed new Framework that will need to be applied judiciously within a National Park context. For example, the draft proposes to establish 'in principle' support for suitable proposals that develop land around rail stations within existing settlements and a minimum density of 50 dwellings per hectare around 'well-connected' stations (defined as a minimum of 4 trains per hour). Several settlements within the New Forest National Park have train stations and it will be important that the proposed tilted balance 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' in such locations is applied with reference to how the proposal performs against all national decision-making policies (including those protecting National Parks and the character of settlements within them).
- A significant number of planning authorities – including the New Forest National Park Authority – are working to submit their revised local plans by December 2026 to meet the Government deadline for examination under the current plan-making system. Given the Government's desire for national local plan coverage and clear steer to continue plan preparation, the transitional arrangements should not render these plans out of date on adoption.

5. Conclusions and the transition period to the new NPPF

- 5.1 The Government's proposed reforms to national planning policy are wide ranging. The proposals will directly influence the delivery of the New Forest National Park

Authority's statutory planning functions around plan-making, development management, planning enforcement and minerals & waste planning. It is acknowledged that the proposed revisions are driven by the Government's commitments to streamline the planning system and support a step change in the delivery of housing and associated infrastructure.

- 5.2 Overall the proposed revisions specific to nationally protected landscapes raise some concerns. Several well-established and widely understood areas of national planning policy for Nationals Parks would be lost and this would result in a (perhaps unintentional) weakening of their protection. It is recommended that the Authority's consultation response – outlined in the box after paragraph 4.2 of this report – centres on these concerns. The direction of travel clashes with the clear recommendations in the Glover Review of nationally protected landscapes and the strengthened 'duty to seek to further' the Park purposes in Section 245 of the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023, which came into effect in late 2024.
- 5.3 In terms of the transitional arrangements, the consultation confirms that any local plans being prepared under the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, as amended by the Levelling-Up & Regeneration Act 2023, should be produced in accordance with the new Framework. Page 98 of the revised draft NPPF confirms, "...any other plans being prepared should be produced in accordance with the version of this Framework published in December 2024." This is the case with the review of the New Forest National Park Local Plan, which is due to be submitted by the deadline of December 2026 and will therefore be independently examined under the current Framework.

Recommendation:

Members of the Planning Committee:

- (i) Endorse the key principles set out in the box after paragraph 4.2 of this report to form the basis of the Authority's consultation response; and**
- (ii) Delegate authority to the Interim Head of Planning & Place – in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of Planning Committee – to submit the final response by the deadline of 10 March 2026.**

Papers:

PC 507/26 – Cover report

Equality and Diversity Implications:

There are not considered to be any specific equality or diversity implications arising out of this report. Ultimately it is a decision for the Government how they revised national planning policy and discharge their statutory responsibilities. The consultation material includes a section on the Public Sector Equality Duty

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