

MHCLG consultation, March 2018: 'National Planning Policy Framework'

Transport Planning Society response to consultation

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Transport Planning Society (TPS) aims to facilitate, develop and promote best practice in transport planning and provide a focus for dialogue between all those engaged in it, whatever their background or other professional affiliation. TPS was established, and continues to be supported by four professional societies with an interest in the subject: the Institute of Civil Engineers, the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation, and the Royal Town Planning Institute.
- 1.2 The TPS has over 1400 individual members and corporate membership which includes many of the major consultancies that undertake transport work. The TPS has developed the widely-recognised qualification of Transport Planning Professional, the only such qualification in the UK and internationally regarded as an exemplar.
- 1.3 Our vision is that transport planning should contribute to making places that are not only well-connected, but also attractive, productive and sustainable. We see this as supportive of, and complementary to, the stated aims of NPPF.

2 TPS responses to previous related consultations

- 2.1 The TPS responded to the DCLG consultation on the Housing White Paper (HWP) in April 2017, and also to their November 2017 consultation on Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) on a simplified method for estimating housing needs ('The right homes in the right places').
- 2.2 We are disappointed that there has been no official response from MHCLG to either submission or to the serious transport planning and policy concerns they raised. The current proposals for revision of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) take forward many of the features we criticised, and in some cases further embed them.
- 2.3 We have recently responded to consultations by DfT on Airports, Strategic investment priorities and proposals for a Major Road Network (MRN) in England. Where relevant we have incorporated implications for future patterns of activity, settlement and development into this response and append the TPS papers.

3 Our responses to the on-line survey

- 3.1 The format for responses is either online by Survey Monkey, or by completing the same questionnaire on a pro forma and submitting it by e-mail (with attachments if necessary). This may be administratively convenient for MHCLG, but is not helpful for a cross-cutting consideration like transport or for sharing the reasoning behind our response with others. This paper therefore places our survey answers (boxed paragraphs below) into a report style document with explanatory/linking material.
- 3.2 We regard this as an opportunity to make NPPF fit for the purpose of sustainable development. We have therefore considered the revision as whole, rather than focusing on only the changes helpfully highlighted in MHCLG's accompanying consultation paper.
- 3.3 Our responses concentrate upon Chapters 2, 3, 5, 9, 11 and 14 (Achieving Sustainable Development, Plan-making, Housing, Transport, Effective use of land, and Climate change). These are covered in sections 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 respectively of this response.

4 Achieving sustainable development (Chapter 2, Questions 2-4)

- 4.1 The changes to the wording of this chapter are relatively minor and unobjectionable. However, the problem in practice since 2012 has been the absence of a vision to bridge the gap between the broad aspirations it expresses and the content of the more detailed subject chapters that follow.

TPS response to Question 2: Do you agree with the changes to the sustainable development objectives and the presumption in favour of sustainable development?

Our vision is that transport planning should contribute to making places that are not only well-connected, but also attractive, productive and sustainable. We see this as supportive of, and complementary to, the aims of NPPF as previously stated, and we do not consider that the changes in this chapter alter that position.

We therefore agree with the changes to the sustainable development objectives and the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

- 4.2 The content of 12 'core principles' of the current NPPF have been retained, but are divided between Chapters to align with relevant topics.

TPS Response to Questions 3 and 4:

3. Do you agree that the core principles section should be deleted, given its content has been retained and moved to other appropriate parts of the Framework?

In the current NPPF there is a tension between the aspiration for sustainable development expressed in the opening section and the contents of several subject chapters. This is particularly the case for Housing, where the position has been exacerbated by the proposals now incorporated from the Housing White Paper and related PPG. We have given reasons and evidence for this view in our responses to the related DCLG consultations, and these are summarised in our responses to later questions.

In revised NPPF this tension has become a serious conflict, and this is made somewhat worse by the proposed structural change.

However the larger problem is the absence of a clear vision about what a sustainable national pattern of development would look like. Instead, individual subject chapters imply following trends (explicitly so in the case of housing). If NPPF is to foster positive, pro-active planning it must express a clear sense of direction for future spatial relationships of economic activity, settlement, infrastructure and development. England is a highly urbanised country, so this must above all express a vision of the relationship of urban and rural areas, and of the role of 'place-making' across the whole country.

4. Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 2, including the approach to providing additional certainty for neighbourhood plans in some circumstances?

As we point out later (Question 21) transport has the potential to lead such spatial relationships, and the absence of such a vision is particularly serious because of its potential to lead in unproductive or even damaging directions. As well as compromising national productivity, this has serious implications for climate change, air quality and the performance of the transport system itself. These are picked up in the relevant responses.

5 Plan-making (Chapter 3, Questions 5 and 6):

- 5.1 The Housing White Paper (HWP) made a number of changes to plan-making processes, which are now incorporated in NPPF. We commented on these in our responses to the HWP, and our comments on the further changes now proposed are made in this context.

TPS Response to Questions 5 and 6:

5. Do you agree with the further changes proposed to the tests of soundness, and to the other changes of policy in this chapter that have not already been consulted on?

6. Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 3?

The most significant change from the TPS perspective is to require the definition of strategic principles in Local Plans. This does to a small extent help meet the concern expressed in our response on the HWP (appended, para 10.2) about piecemeal planning of inter-dependent Housing Market Areas (HMAs).

However, this is vitiated by the replacement as the unit for consideration of housing needs of strategic HMAs by individual Local Plan areas ('Right homes in the right places'). Except for Combined Authorities with spatial planning powers, this inhibits efficient and effective planning and provision of transport services and infrastructure, since travel demands are typically a function of geographical areas at the scale of HMAs and above. This is recognised by DfT sponsorship of transport planning and delivery at wider subnational levels, and points to growing gap between MHCLG and DfT. This is considered further in our response to Questions 12 and 14, under Housing

The proposed Statements of Common Ground (SCGs) are an inadequate response to this issue. The draft table accompanying the revised Housing PPG showed the top 10 increases in housing needs that result are within London, where projected needs are already so great that any meaningful response will require involvement of most of the surrounding Counties and Districts. This poses great dangers and difficulties for transport planning and provision, as needs arising within London are displaced to surrounding areas.

6 Housing (Chapter 5, Questions 11-14)

6.1 The revised NPPF incorporates the proposals in the Housing White Paper (HWP) and the PPG on calculation of housing ('The right homes in the right places'). We responded to the consultations on these, and our comments are appended. These comments provide the context for our views on the further changes now proposed in relation to affordable housing (in the 2017 Budget and Ministerial Statement 28 November 2017) and the effect of delivery below targets on the application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

TPS Response to Questions 11-14.

11. What are your views on the most appropriate combination of policy requirements to ensure that a suitable proportion of land for homes comes forward as small or medium sized sites?

12. Do you agree with the application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development where delivery is below 75% of the housing required from 2020?

The policy being expressed by the dominating use of trend household projections is that past trends are either desirable or immutable. This is fundamentally contrary to the idea of 'positive planning' as set out in both NPPF and the TPS vision.

Volatile bi-annual household projections will drive irreversible decisions about housing land provision. This prevents efficient planning and provision of infrastructure and services that require longer lead times, such as transport. This has already been identified as a major cause of under-delivery of housing.

In many places housing land targets based on need are unrealistic, because not supported by effective demand or by funding for non-market housing. In these circumstances, penalising 'under-delivery' of housing by increasing targets for future years further destabilises the transport planning context.

The implication of the presumption in favour of 'sustainable development' in these circumstances is

that it can be determined on a site by site basis. Where transport considerations are involved this is not the case. The withdrawal of the New Homes Bonus against the proposed Housing Delivery Test will reduce resources for positive planning precisely where they are needed most.

13. Do you agree with the new policy on exception sites for entry-level homes?

We have no comments on this

14. Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 5?

The context for our responses to these questions is provided by our comments on the HWP and PPG consultations. In summary these were:

- The high proportion of new households formed by younger age groups, and their diminishing incomes mean a widening gap between housing need and effective demand. In these circumstances, the aim of providing sufficient land to meet the projected need will lead to a surplus of land over what the private sector can viably deliver.
- The HWP relies heavily on the private sector for delivery, and given a surplus of sites above effective demand it will focus on those most profitable to develop. We suggested that this would increase transport demands, both directly because of suburban locational preferences in the market, and indirectly by pre-empting improvements in infrastructure and services to existing urban areas. We expressed our concern that without substantial provision for non-market housing, this risks making the housing choices available to new households worse, not better, as well as inhibiting well-coordinated transport provision.
- The Housing PPG 'Right homes in the right places' proposes use of the workplace ratio of house prices to incomes as the indicator of 'affordability' for the purpose of adding housing provision for 'market signals'. This means that dormitory suburbs (which typically have expensive houses and few (and poorly paid) jobs) would have the highest ratios and be required to add most housing. Unless this is social housing, these homes will remain unaffordable to local workers (as builders price for the existing market), and will increase commuting in a vicious circle. In practice this is what is already happening around London and other conurbations. There are further implications for transport planning in major urban areas, dealt with at Question 21 below.

7 Transport (Chapter 9, Questions 21-23)

7.1 Our comments derive from our responses to DfT on transport matters (including recent consultations on the future programme of investments (RIS2) in England's Strategic Road Network (SRN) and the proposed Major Road Network for England) as well as responses to the DCLG's Housing consultations.

TPS Response to Question 21: Do you agree with the changes to the transport chapter that point to the way that all aspects of transport should be considered, both in planning for transport and assessing transport impacts?

Our comments are at two levels – Strategic and Local

Strategic

The scope of the Transport Chapter is essentially limited to transport as an input to the development process. This is unambitious: accessibility plays a major role in the locational choices made by households and businesses throughout the building stock. The overwhelming majority of such choices (for homes about 90% each year) are from the existing stock. The pattern of demand and prices thus created sets the tone of the market both for new development, and is a major element in the market incentives for regeneration of existing areas.

The provision of transport services and infrastructure is thus a major driver of patterns of settlement, social interaction and economic activity. It may well be more important in these respects than the allocation of land. We consider that NPPF should recognise the much wider potential of transport in the 'positive planning' that it calls for.

We have pointed to the potential positives above; in our recent response to DfT on its proposals for a Major Road Network (MRN) in England (appended) is an example of the dangers of neglecting the wider land-use implications of transport:

- Defining the MRN (as proposed) primarily in terms of traffic flows, and creating a separate funding stream for its improvement, risks changing the balance between inter- and intra-urban transport to the detriment of the latter. This would shift the balance of locational choices (for new and existing stock) in favour of fringe and exurban locations, driving dispersion of new development, with concomitant effects on travel demands.
- In the absence of demand management measures (not proposed), the policy is effectively a return to 'predict and provide', abandoned in the reforms of the early 1990s. The wider effects would be likely to include increasing congestion, reducing the productivity advantages of agglomeration of major urban areas and undermining the strategic functions proposed for the MRN itself.
- Assisting housing delivery is a key aim of MRN as proposed. While apparently admirable, this risks exacerbating both problems, for the reasons given in our earlier comments on HWP and PPG.

We have commented on the effect of setting housing targets at the level of individual local plan areas ('Right homes in the right places') in our response to Question 14 above. The top 10 increases in housing needs resulting from the new method are within London (see appended report, Appendix 1). This poses great dangers and difficulties for transport planning as major increases in housing provision are already being proposed across the whole of the Greater South East.

'Good' transport policies risk adding fuel to this fire. Better rail links will attract more commuters to the centre and builders will respond with additional housing in the commuter belt to meet increasing demand from this source rather than providing for lower income local housing needs. Meanwhile lower paid city centre workers are being displaced from central locations to cheaper but more distant suburbs, as low cost housing near the centre is displaced by high density but high rent investor housing. Most of these moves will be accommodated by churn of existing homes rather than new building. All of these processes generate additional transport demands, and these are likely to strain the capacity of the best that TfL can do.

Similar, though less extreme, issues affect other conurbations. The SCG proposals (see response to Questions 5 and 6) appear completely inadequate to respond to these concerns. This is an example of the need for the broader spatial policy called for in our comments on Chapter 2.

These examples show that there is a two-way relationship between transport and land-use which can be either positive or negative. Much better coordination between MHCLG and DfT is required on the strategic spatial issues that link their areas of direct responsibility – both to capitalise on the positives and mitigate the negatives.

Local

The draft Chapter embodies laudable aspirations but also offers too many opportunities for developers to avoid significant support for sustainable transport. As a framework NPPF cannot perhaps be too prescriptive, but it will be important that local planning policies have real teeth. For example:

- To encourage active travel, developers should be required to include quality pedestrian and cycle accessibility to development sites (this would not, for example, include footways alongside heavily trafficked roads).
- The scale of provision should be related to the scale of the development, but the largest

developments should include firm proposals for quality pedestrian and cycle networks in the surrounding area, funded by the developer and built by the local authority under a S106 Agreement.

- Obstacles to active travel, especially cycling, need to be removed by such actions as providing easily accessible storage facilities for bicycles both in homes and elsewhere, and facilities for changing and showering at major attractors.
- Quality public transport access should be mandatory in terms of the provision of quality infrastructure and financial arrangements for supporting services where necessary.
- Demand management should be integral, with limits on parking, provision of access by sustainable modes, and support for a Travel Plan.
- Although Travel Plans have historically been easiest to implement at workplaces, there seems little reason why they cannot be implemented in housing areas through, for example, app-based car sharing schemes or app-based provision of public transport information.
- Reduced trip generation rates for private motorised transport should be specified and developers be required to demonstrate how these will be achieved and maintained. Such trip rates could, of course, be beneficial to developers when agreeing the scale of local highway improvements that need to be funded, which is the other side of their coin.
- Location of development is, of course, fundamental to achieving these aims.

Developers have become used to making S106 payments and funding highway access improvements. NPPF should engender a new mindset that promotes sustainable travel as a matter of normal principle and practice, and needs to put more pressure on developers to deliver.

TPS Response to Question 22: Do you agree with the policy change that recognises the importance of general aviation facilities?

In October 2017 TPS responded to a Department for Transport (DfT) consultation on developing a new aviation strategy for the UK. We recommended that the 'overarching principles' of the proposed strategy should be revised to include: 1) regional development – ensuring that one region does not dominate investment in aviation infrastructure, 2) Protecting the environment – meeting our climate change obligations and reducing local pollution, and 3) Managing demand – for example to address environmental and regional issues but also the real economic impacts of aviation including the aviation tourist trade imbalance.

We consider that the NPPF should embody national principles at least at this level of specificity.

TPS Response to Question 23: Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 9?

8 Making effective use of land (Chapter 11, Questions 25-27)

TPS Response to Questions 25-27: Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 9?

25. Do you agree with the proposed approaches to under-utilised land, reallocating land for other uses and making it easier to convert land which is in existing use?

26. Do you agree with the proposed approach to employing minimum density standards where there is a shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs?

27. Do you have any other comments on the text of Chapter 11?

It will be apparent from our responses to all the previous questions that we consider that attractive, high density urban areas, well-served by public transport represent the best way of meeting current transport needs and moderating the growth of transport demand, particularly car-dependency. We

therefore support measures to promote better use of under-utilised and urban brownfield land. Minimum density standards are potentially helpful, but without particular attention to the quality of local services and the public realm can backfire by making urban areas less attractive. A strategic commitment to urban regeneration as a component of national spatial policy (as advocated in response to Questions 2-4) is crucial. This has wider benefits across the whole spectrum of public policy aims, but requires a similarly broad response by Government.

9 Climate change (Chapter 14, Question 32)

9.1 NPPF deals with climate change primarily as a vulnerability to be mitigated rather than a process which planning can do anything much about.

TPS Response to Question 32: Do you have any comments on the text of Chapter 14?

Transport is the largest and fastest growing component of greenhouse gases, and also has a major impact on local health of poor air quality. The proposals in NPPF seem unambitious in the face of such important challenges.

The relationship of transport emissions to land-use has received relatively little attention since planning policy guidance on transport (PPG13) was published in 1994. This focused land-use policy on reducing need to travel by co-location of new development for related uses and planning for low carbon transport modes. As outlined in previous responses only a small proportion of travel growth relates to new development: 90% relates to locational choices realised through churn of the existing stock. While travel need may be reduced by co-location, the direct influence of new development on travel demand is very limited.

However, around 70% of growth in motorised land-based transport emissions is the result of patterns of activity driven by locational choice¹. To the extent that land-use policies affect locational choices they have potential for much greater impact on transport emissions than offered by PPG13. A broader and more coherent strategic approach than NPPF offers is necessary to capitalise on this opportunity. The spatial policy changes we have advocated in our responses to the present NPPF consultation indicate the importance of place-making in the context of a national approach to urban policy. What is good for transport emissions is good for most other aspects of spatial policy as well.

¹ A Wenban-Smith (2017), 'Land-use drivers of transport emissions – revisited' Transport 170(2)