

PRINCIPLES OF PLANNING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – PPS1

Introduction

Wildlife and Countryside Link brings together 32 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation, protection and enhancement of wildlife and the countryside. Our members practise and advocate environmentally sensitive land management and food production and encourage respect for and enjoyment of natural landscapes and features, the historic environment and biodiversity. Taken together, our members have the support of almost 7 million people in the UK, have a turnover of over £700 million and manage over 398,000 hectares of land.

Principles of planning for sustainable development – PPS1

Wildlife and Countryside Link believes that sustainable development should be the principal objective of a modern planning system. It is essential that Government delivers the commitment by Barbara Roche MP, Minister for Social Exclusion and Equality, who said in the debate on the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill “*we want a planning system that supports and promotes sustainable development*” (House of Commons Second Reading 17 Dec 2002: Column 735). Therefore, the planning system should promote sustainable development. Sustainable development should be the overarching and integrating concept in PPS1, the forthcoming revision to Planning Policy Guidance note (PPG) 1 *General Policy and Principles*.

Link believes that planning for sustainable development has the following general features. It should:-

- deliver **necessary and acceptable development and land use change**
- take a **long term view** – setting a vision for future generations
- provide **integrated, joined-up** development decisions and land use solutions
- be **well-informed** by expert advice
- promote **social progress** in the **public interest**, including through effective public involvement, participation and mediation
- achieve effective environmental **protection** and environmental **enhancement**, and
- promote **resource efficiency** and helps **reduce demand** for consumption.

The new PPS1 should provide a ‘step change’ in the treatment of sustainable development from the existing PPG1. It has a crucial role to play in interpreting and realising the new Sustainable Development duty, in clause 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, (see separate Link submission, attached).

We consider that PPS1 should provide a clear definition of planning for sustainable development based on the six working principles that have been drawn up by the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC). This should include a clear definition of the purpose of planning, including securing ‘development and land use in the long-term public interest’ and a commitment to the plan-led system - the bedrock of effective strategic and sustainable planning. This should be modelled on similar guidance recently issued in Scotland:-

“The planning system guides the future development and use of land in cities, towns and rural areas in the long term public interest. The aim is to ensure that development and changes in land use occur in suitable locations and are sustainable. The planning system must also provide for protection from inappropriate development.” (Scottish Planning Policy SPP1 *The Planning System*, Scottish Executive, November 2002, para 4).

Link considers that PPS1 should embody and implement the SDC's six sustainable development principles in the following way - **planning for sustainable development should...:**

1) Quality of life - sustainable development at the centre

- help to produce a pattern of development and natural resource use that focuses on improving quality of life, and that meets environmental, social and economic needs for present and future generations. This includes development that - is 'fit for place' and 'fit for purpose'; protects and enhances the environment (e.g. through an integrated approach to biodiversity, landscape and cultural heritage); works within environmental limits and respects environmental capacities; reduces the need to travel; and adapts to future requirements (e.g. the effects of climate change);
- recognise that the planning system is an important means of integrating policies and decision-making;
- urge local planning authorities to establish a clear vision for their area (including through their Community Strategies);
- produce objectives-led land use plans that express their vision spatially – that are geographically specific, including through comprehensive map coverage; and
- recognise that development and change do not necessarily always mean physical expansion;

2) Valuing nature and cultural heritage

- recognise that there are environmental and cultural limits and capacities that must be respected and not breached – the importance of the temporal sequence, spatial distribution, cumulative effects and interactions between factors and developments must be considered in planning decision-making;
- continue to develop and improve techniques to assess and quantify such limits, capacities and effects;
- recognise that some assets are irreplaceable and therefore avoid 'trade off' or 'balance' in respect of such important environmental and social assets – and also avoid inappropriate development;
- stress the need to protect and *wherever and whenever possible enhance* the natural and built environment - promoting opportunities to achieve positive planning and net gain/improvement through development and land use;
- recognise the substantial loss of environmental assets that have resulted from past development over many decades and seek to redress this loss through mechanisms implemented through the planning system; and
- recognise the value (economic and social) that a high quality environment provides;

3) Fair shares

- recognise the stake that future generations have in the decisions that we take today;
- promote urban and rural vitality and sustainable regeneration – while recognising the interconnection of town and country;
- promote the examination of alternatives and needs assessment - demand management rather than 'predict and provide';
- promote resource efficient development and the prudent use of non-renewable resources;
- require more efficient use of land and buildings - through the reduce, re-use, re-cycle hierarchy and through higher density, use of previously developed land (whilst recognising that some such sites have a significant biodiversity interest that must be protected), mixed use developments, a sequential approach to development/sequential testing, etc; and
- use planning policies to help minimise demand for consumption and, whenever and wherever possible, to reduce it (especially in respect of energy, water and minerals);

4) Polluter pays

- assess and incorporate the full range of costs and benefits when making plans and decisions, including those which cannot be easily valued in money terms;

- avoid pollution wherever and whenever possible, including through strategic planning, whilst ensuring that the polluter pays for any *unavoidable* damage resulting from pollution; and
- use scientific knowledge to aid decision-making, and try to work out in advance what knowledge will be needed so that appropriate research can be undertaken to fill gaps;

5) Good Governance

- recognise the unique place that a democratically accountable planning system plays in the governance of our nation;
- require robust and meaningful public participation in all aspects of the planning process and at strategic and local levels. Such participation should be based on clear and simple rights which allow access to information, participation, facilitation/mediation and justice in the plan and decision making processes;
- require co-ordination and integration of different tiers of decision and plan-making and resolution of conflicting priorities at the strategic level;
- improve consultation and communication between neighbouring planning authorities, on applications, plans and good practice;
- embody consistent application, implementation, monitoring, review and, if necessary, enforcement and adjustment of sustainable planning policies;
- promote these proposed principles in all sections of our communities with particular emphasis on reaching the socially excluded;
- ensure that decisions are based on full information and expert advice about their environmental and social consequences; and
- emphasise and encourage the need for Local Planning Authorities to provide training on all aspects of land use planning, including sustainable development, for planners and local authority members/councillors;

6) Adopting a precautionary principle

- apply the precautionary principle: developments that could result in possibly serious environmental damage should not be allowed (where there is credible scientific case that damage could occur) just because of scientific uncertainty about the seriousness of the risk. Planning has a role in preventing adverse and inappropriate development as well as facilitating acceptable development;
- ensure that plans and programmes are subject to rigorous, robust, iterative and effective Strategic Environmental Assessment, including examination of alternative solutions. Guidance should provide advice on the use of Strategic Environmental Assessment in plans and programmes;
- ensure that, as appropriate, development projects are subject to rigorous Environmental Impact Assessment, including examination of alternative solutions. Guidance should provide advice on the use of EIA on projects; and
- promote the role of planning in tackling the causes and consequences of climate change.

This statement is supported by the following organisations:

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| Bat Conservation Trust | British Ecological Society |
| British Mountaineering Council | Butterfly Conservation |
| Campaign to Protect Rural England | Council for British Archaeology |
| The Council for National Parks | Friends of the Earth |
| Herpetological Conservation Trust | Marine Conservation Society |
| Open Spaces Society | Plantlife |
| Ramblers' Association | The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds |
| Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust | The Wildlife Trusts |
| Woodland Trust | World Wide Fund for Nature |