

Charities set red lines for green development

A coalition of charities today set out 'red lines' for the Government's controversial reform of the planning system, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The groups, represented by umbrella body Wildlife and Countryside Link, which counts RSPB, WWF-UK, the CPRE, The Wildlife Trusts and Friends of the Earth as members, warn that if these lines are crossed, planners are likely to become tied up with direct action, court challenges and appeals.

The charities say that without the introduction of these safeguards in the NPPF, more environmentally damaging developments are likely to get the green light. Critically, they say that the NPPF needs a clear definition of genuine sustainable development, which ensures that economic, environmental and social concerns are fully integrated rather than traded off against one another. The group's 'red lines' are that:

- Sustainable development must be defined in line with the current UK Sustainable Development Strategy;
- The presumption in favour of sustainable development must be designed to promote development that is sustainable, rather than development at any cost;
- The natural environment must be properly and consistently protected;
- The NPPF must achieve 'smart growth', meaning growth that makes efficient use of land, utilises existing infrastructure and reduces the need to travel.

Emmalene Gottwald, senior planning advisor, WWF-UK: "It's ludicrous that the Treasury thinks the planning system is a 'block' to growth. There's little evidence that an NPPF biased towards development at any cost will usher in economic growth in the short term - but as it stands, the reforms are a clear threat to the environment and our long term prosperity.

"The Prime Minister said that he's serious about protecting the countryside, but it's starting to look like he was just horsing around. An NPPF that doesn't have sustainable development at its heart will leave this Government galloping down the wrong path."

Commenting **Simon Marsh of RSPB** said: "The public, having shown their opposition to the reforms, won't take environmentally damaging development lying down. We're likely to see local opposition groups springing up across the country wherever an environmentally damaging development has been approved.

"The Government must get these reforms right, otherwise local communities, our landscape and our wildlife will bear the brunt of unsustainable development. It is critically important that misguided attempts to stimulate economic growth do not jeopardise our natural environment.

Paul Wilkinson, head of Living Landscape for The Wildlife Trusts, said: "We believe that the planning system should make a positive contribution to creating wildlife-rich places, where people want to live. The new framework should help this, not hinder it. Will the Government have the imagination and courage to really understand the value the natural environment, and to contribute to its recovery? We wait and hope that the default answer to natural environment restoration is 'yes'."

Paul Minor, senior planning officer for the Campaign to Protect Rural England, says: "The public values the countryside highly and expects good planning to protect it. We need to continue

making the best use of brownfield sites, and not create the urban sprawl seen elsewhere. We urge Ministers to show that they have listened to the clear message the public has sent on these issues.”

Craig Bennett, Friends of the Earth’s director of policy and campaigns, said: “Ministers say new planning guidance has ‘sustainable development’ at its core, but unless they spell out what this means we’ll see ever more new roads clogged with traffic and families struggling to insure homes built on floodplains.

“The planning system must give the green light to building the clean energy systems and warm, affordable homes the country urgently needs – but George Osborne’s countryside-wrecking plans for growth at any cost will not do this and must be stopped.”

The coalition of organisations also warn that if the NPPF does not meet the sustainability criteria laid out in the ‘red lines’, England may revert to having a ‘planning by appeal’ system. They argue that even if local authorities tried to refuse applications more developers would opt to go to appeal if they are turned down by the local authority because of the expectation that the default answer to all new development should be ‘yes’. This would effectively take the decision-making process for local planning decisions out of town halls and put it into the hands of Government-appointed inspectors, seriously undermining the Government’s commitment to localism.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. *Red lines for the National Planning Policy Framework* (March 2012), published by Wildlife and Countryside Link, is available here www.wcl.org.uk. The document is supported by the following Link members:
 - Badger Trust
 - Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
 - Butterfly Conservation
 - Campaign for Better Transport
 - Campaign for National Parks
 - Campaign to Protect Rural England
 - Environmental Law Foundation
 - Friends of the Earth England
 - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
 - Open Spaces Society
 - The Wildlife Trusts
 - Woodland Trust
 - WWF-UK
2. Wildlife and Countryside Link is an umbrella body, whose purpose is to bring together voluntary organisations in the UK to protect and enhance wildlife, landscape and the marine environment. The Link currently has 37 members who collectively employ over 10,000 full-time staff, have the help of 170,000 volunteers and the support of over 8 million people in the UK: www.wcl.org.uk
3. The Government is expected to publish revisions to the proposed the National Planning Policy Framework in March.

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