

# National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system - Link response

10 March 2026

This response is on behalf of nature and animal welfare coalition Wildlife and Countryside Link ([Link](#)).

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Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) welcomes several positive elements and additions within the draft Framework. This includes the updated and more explicit references to Local Wildlife Sites, hedgerows, Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs), ancient and veteran trees. These inclusions are incremental, but important progress for recognising the role of locally designated habitats within the planning system. However, these improvements are overshadowed by significant concerns about the overall direction and balance of the proposed reforms.

Firstly, we have serious concerns about proposals which would limit Local Planning Authorities Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) ambitions to the statutory 10% minimum and constrain the ability to set higher, evidence-based local policies beyond specific sites. The 10% requirement was always intended as a national floor, not a ceiling, and the minimum to potentially achieve net gain. Preventing or discouraging LPAs from going further will curtail innovation, undermine market development among private nature providers, and inhibit the evolution of best practice. Flexibility to exceed a national baseline is essential if the planning system is to support innovation, respond to local ecological need, and support future upgrades to national ambition in line with statutory targets under the Environment Act 2021. Restricting local ambition at this early-stage risks locking in mediocrity and slowing both future and current progress towards genuinely nature-positive development.

Second, we are deeply concerned that the revised presumption in favour of sustainable development, and the related effective presumptions for both inside and outside settlements, are framed and weighted in such a way as to consistently favour development approval at the net expense of environmental considerations. The repeated use of broadly defined “benefits” tests, combined with vague thresholds of “unacceptable impact”, creates substantial scope for environmental degradation through incremental decision-making.

This concern is compounded by the increasing centralisation of policy and authority within the Framework, particularly through the proposed use of National Development Management Policies (NDMPs), and the primacy afforded to national policy where conflict arises. The combined effect of NDMPs, the strengthened and effective presumptions in favour, and constraints on local standards

risks overriding locally evidenced and democratically endorsed nature-positive ambitions. This approach sits uneasily with the Government's stated commitment to devolution advanced through the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. Local Planning Authorities should be empowered to respond to locally specific ecological conditions and community priorities, especially where robustly gathered evidence underpins higher environmental standards. Instead, the current drafting risks creating a centrally determined, political ceiling on ambition, rather than enabling local evidence-based leadership.

Finally, we are concerned that the overall wording and tone of the nature and environmental sections is not commensurate with the scale of the climate and ecological crises. The UK faces well-documented biodiversity decline and escalating climate risks, which together represent a clear threat to national security. Nature recovery is not, and should not be treated as, a discretionary policy aspiration. It is underpinned by legally binding domestic targets, including those established under the Environment Act 2021, as well as international commitments. The statutory status of these obligations should translate into significantly greater weight within the planning balance.

As drafted, environmental considerations are frequently framed as weaker than development delivery objectives, and in some cases weaker than in previous iterations of the NPPF. This creates clear scope for regression, both in policy and in practice. Without stronger safeguards, there is a real risk that development will continue to be approved on the basis that environmental harms are routinely judged to be outweighed, rather than genuinely avoided or minimised in line with the mitigation hierarchy and the goal of nature recovery.

We therefore urge a substantial strengthening of the NPPF to reflect the urgency and legal force of our nature and climate commitments. Planning must actively support positive environmental action at the local level, enable higher standards where justified, and ensure that development is genuinely sustainable, operating within ecological limits and contributing to nature recovery.

**1) Do you have any views on how statutory National Development Management Policies could be introduced in the most effective manner, should a future decision be made to progress these?**

Partly disagree

Link does not support the introduction of statutory National Development Management Policies (NDMPs), and considers that they present significant risks to the environmental integrity of the planning system. We would wish to see non-statutory NDMPs developed initially, providing national consistency without statutory primacy over local plans. Any such policies should act as a clear floor, not a ceiling, for environmental ambition, align explicitly with the Environment Act 2021 and the Climate Change Act 2008, and embed strong, enforceable requirements for nature-positive development, including robust application of the mitigation hierarchy, protection for priority and

irreplaceable habitats, recognition of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and support for biodiversity net gain while allowing local authorities to go further where justified.

While NDMPs are presented as a mechanism to improve consistency and efficiency, we are concerned that they would weaken the role of robust, evidence-based local planning. Local plans are subject to independent examination, democratic scrutiny and extensive consultation, and are underpinned by detailed, place-specific evidence, including environmental assessments and community data. By contrast, centrally produced NDMPs risk being based on a more limited or generic evidence base, and politicised decision making, which would be insufficient to reflect local ecological conditions, cumulative impacts and climate risks. This risks poorer outcomes for nature, climate resilience and local communities.

We are particularly concerned that statutory NDMPs would override locally determined planning policies and undermine the principle of local primacy. As proposed, NDMPs would take precedence where conflicts arise, potentially preventing local authorities from setting higher environmental standards even where there is strong local evidence and public support. This centralisation of decision-making risks constraining local ambition and reducing the ability of communities to shape development in ways that respond to local environmental priorities.

We also have serious concerns about the democratic accountability and transparency behind NDMPs. Unlike local plans, NDMPs would not be subject to independent examination, and would be created, amended or revoked by the Secretary of State with limited parliamentary scrutiny. This creates a risk that NDMPs could become a vehicle for deregulation or the dilution of environmental safeguards, particularly if they are influenced by short-term political priorities. Environmental considerations, which require long-term and precautionary approaches, could lose out if NDMPs were made statutory.

Link therefore considers that statutory NDMPs would represent too great a risk to environmental progress and public confidence in the planning system. Rather than introducing statutory NDMPs, the Government should focus on strengthening the non-statutory nature policies, ensuring that national policy acts as a supportive framework for greater ambition – a floor not a ceiling - while preserving evidence-based, democratically accountable local planning and enabling local authorities to go further where needed for nature recovery and climate action.

- 2) Do you agree with the new format and structure of the draft Framework which comprises separate plan-making policies and national decision-making policies? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**
- a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

Link recognises the theoretical value of a clearer and more streamlined structure, and in principle welcomes efforts to make national planning policy more accessible and easier to navigate. Separating plan-making and national decision-making policies could, if carefully implemented, help improve usability and reduce duplication. We also welcome the statement of the purpose of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the long-term public interest, including reference to the UN Global Goals and the three overarching objectives (economic, social and environmental) indicating the need for balance between environmental and economic imperatives. However, while we welcome this clearer articulation of purpose, we regret that it is not framed as a statutory purpose of the planning system. In addition, access to high-quality green and blue spaces should be explicitly included within the definition of the ‘social objective’ of planning. Access to nature is fundamental to health, wellbeing, equality and community resilience, and should not be treated as an implicit or secondary consideration within wider social outcomes. The Framework should make clear that enabling equitable access to green and blue infrastructure is a core component of sustainable development and of the planning system’s social role from the outset.

Furthermore, we have significant concerns that, in practice, these structural changes could weaken environmental protections. Reforms of this scale create a real risk of regression in the level of protection afforded to nature and climate, particularly if environmental policy becomes secondary, in effect, to the objective of facilitating development. Although the draft Framework refers to environmental protection, it does not adequately reflect the primacy of statutory environmental targets in defining the “long-term public interest”. Environmental objectives must not be routinely outweighed by housing supply or economic delivery considerations. As currently drafted, there is a risk of perpetuating an imbalance in which housing targets are treated as overriding imperatives, while environmental protections are framed merely as constraints to be managed or mitigated.

The environmental dimension of sustainable development must be strengthened and afforded genuinely equal weight, especially in light of the UK’s statutory environmental commitments. Any new structure must demonstrably maintain and enhance existing safeguards, in line with the Environment Act 2021, the Climate Change Act 2008 and the Environmental Principles Policy Statement. These are not aspirational policy ambitions, they are statutory obligations. Planning policy must operate clearly and consistently within these legal limits. In practical terms, this requires embedding Environment Act targets, climate targets and nature recovery objectives throughout the Framework, rather than confining them to a single environmental chapter. It also requires that plan-making clearly demonstrates consistency with these targets, including through the assessment of cumulative impacts at both local and strategic scales. Finally, decision-making policies must not dilute or sideline existing environmental safeguards or policies, such as biodiversity net gain.

In particular, we are concerned there is a risk that the new national decision-making policies could prioritise “speed” and “certainty” for development at the expense of environmental considerations. Link is concerned that the emphasis on more “rules-based” and directive decision-making could reduce the weighting given to environmental priorities, which are grounded in statutory targets in

primary legislation and site-based assessments. These targets and site-specific nuances must be treated as reasonable constraints within the planning system, not as secondary considerations.

The Framework must not become a tool primarily for enabling development approval. A credible definition of sustainable development must properly integrate animal welfare, environmental limits, nature recovery, climate resilience, and international commitments, including biodiversity and climate obligations. Sustainable development should be understood as development within ecological boundaries, rather than simply development that is mitigated after the fact.

While Link supports improved clarity and accessibility, it does not agree with the proposed structure insofar as it risks reorienting the planning system towards delivery at the expense of environmental protection. Any new format must include firmer and more explicit requirements to uphold and strengthen environmental standards, ensuring that nature and climate objectives are fully embedded and carry greater weight in both plan-making and decision-making – as would be commensurate with their explicit links to statutory targets.

**3) Do you agree with the proposed set of annexes to be incorporated into the draft Framework?  
Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a)  
Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We have significant concerns about several proposed annexes and the risk that, in practice, they may weaken environmental protections.

Firstly, Link supports the need for much stronger and more explicit information requirements on carbon emissions in Annex C. The annex does not currently provide sufficient detail on how operational and embodied carbon should be assessed or reported. Given the statutory targets under the Climate Change Act, the Framework must require comprehensive carbon accounting for development, including whole-life carbon, to ensure planning decisions genuinely support climate mitigation and adaptation.

Secondly, Link is concerned that Annex E on Green Belt assessments risks undermining the long-established purpose of the Green Belt. The proposed approach appears overly focused on facilitating development rather than safeguarding the Green Belt as a strategic environmental asset. We consider that the Green Belt should be “wilded” and better used to support nature recovery, climate resilience, and public access to nature, rather than progressively weakened through reclassification and release.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [https://wcl.org.uk/docs/Link\\_briefing\\_Improving\\_Green\\_Belt\\_for\\_nature\\_Dec2024.pdf](https://wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_briefing_Improving_Green_Belt_for_nature_Dec2024.pdf)

We urge the Government to adopt the recommendations set out in our Green Belt for Nature briefing. Including:

- Explicitly prioritising nature recovery and ecosystem services in Green Belt policy and assessments, so that ecological quality and connectivity are core tests within any review process, not secondary to development delivery.
- Implement the new duty for local planning authorities to take account of LNRSs in their local development plans, including any release of Green Belt land.
- Ensure that any strategic releases of Green Belt land are matched with identifying more Green Belt land for the purpose of habitat enhancement and restoration. Once areas within the Green Belt have been identified, enhanced and/or created for nature, they should be protected from future development. This could be achieved through a new Wildbelt designation – a robust and permanent spatial designation that will protect land in the process of being managed to bring nature back.
- Capture the land value uplift from appropriate development on released Green Belt land and prioritise channelling towards restoring nature in the Green Belt, including by requiring higher mandatory biodiversity net gain for development on land released from the Green Belt.
- Integrating a hierarchy of Green Belt land quality, where genuinely high-value natural Green Belt is protected and enhanced, and development, if genuinely necessary, is directed first to genuinely low-value urban fringe land that delivers minimal ecological and public benefit. While the revised Framework introduces the concept of “grey belt”, which in theory is intended to support such an approach, in practice we are concerned this will be used to justify development on high-quality agricultural land and on Local Wildlife Sites. The definition of grey belt must therefore include clear exclusions for high-quality agricultural land and designated or recognised sites of ecological importance, to prevent misuse and ensure that genuinely valuable land is not inappropriately reclassified for development.
- Ensuring baseline ecological data and transparent criteria are required for all Green Belt assessments, including identification of ancient and veteran trees, so that decisions are informed by sound evidence on biodiversity, soil carbon, flood mitigation, and landscape character.
- The purposes of the Green Belt should include environmental protection and climate resilience, not merely preventing urban sprawl. The Framework should require net benefits for nature and climate where changes to Green Belt boundaries are proposed.

Without these reforms, the risk is that Annex E could be used to justify widespread Green Belt release under a narrow set of criteria, without sufficient regard for ecological integrity. Instead of incremental weakening, Green Belt policy should be re-oriented to better support nature recovery and climate priorities, consistent with statutory targets and national commitments.

We welcome the correction of the definition of ancient and veteran trees, to that in the NPPF2024 which ensures alignment between the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) regulations. Consistent terminology across policy and

guidance is essential to avoid ambiguity in decision-making and to ensure that these irreplaceable features receive the level of protection intended in national policy. Consistency and clarity in definitions can also help to remove blockers in the planning process and speed up decision making.

However, we are concerned the definition of irreplaceable habitats in Annex B (Glossary) is too narrow and risks excluding some of England's most threatened habitats, particularly priority grasslands. We recommend broadening the definition to explicitly recognise ecological distinctiveness, long establishment times, and uniqueness, and to include habitats such as upland hay meadows and chalk streams. These habitats are extremely rare, cover a tiny proportion of England's land area, and are legally recognised as priorities for conservation under the NERC Act and international biodiversity commitments.

We recommend it be changed to:

*Irreplaceable habitat: Irreplaceable habitats are habitats with characteristic ecological features and processes which cannot successfully be created or restored within a reasonable timeframe (i.e. take a very long time to establish and function normally). Irreplaceable habitats are complex to recreate due to their environmental context, ecological distinctiveness and uniqueness. They have a long establishment period (time thresholds may vary), and generally support assemblages or populations of important, rare or notable species. They include, but are not limited to, ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees, upland hay meadow, floodplain meadows, blanket bog, limestone pavement, chalk streams, sand dunes, salt marsh and lowland fen.*

Furthermore, the Government should publish for consultation the long-awaited and promised full list of irreplaceable habitats.

Additionally, we believe there is insufficient clarity over what constitutes recreation or recreational space, nor references to parks. While there is a section of policy on public rights of way a definition has been omitted from the glossary. In one policy, Village Greens are mentioned and while these are protected by statute, again no reference is given in the glossary. Furthermore, we are concerned that recreation and parks are unhelpfully tied up with other definitions. It is vital these are clear and correct to enable proper undertaking of the policies within the Framework. We believe the definition for open space needs to be refined as follows:

*Open space: All open space of public value, including not just land, but also or areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for access to nature, sport and outdoor recreation and can act as a visual amenity.*

There are several policies which reference the need for distance to be no more than a 'short walk'. In the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2025, the government reiterated its commitment to "make sure that everyone has access to green or blue spaces within a 15-minute walk from home". We wholeheartedly support this principle but believe it should be defined within the glossary:

*Short walk: should provide access within 15-minute walking distance. For the purposes of access to green and blue space the improved methodology being developed by the Office of National Statistics should be used – see: Access to green and blue space in England - GOV.UK<sup>2</sup>*

Finally, we oppose the proposals in Annex C of the consultation on reforming site thresholds, as these risk creating further exemptions from key environmental safeguards, including Biodiversity Net Gain. This could significantly undermine nature recovery objectives by excluding a large proportion of development from meaningful ecological requirements.

**4) Do you agree with incorporating Planning Policy for Traveller Sites within the draft Framework? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**5) Do you agree with the proposed approach to simplifying the terminology in the Framework where weight is intended to be applied? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

Partly disagree

We recognise the intention behind simplifying terminology and improving consistency in how weight is expressed within the Framework. However, we are concerned that the proposed simplification risks having unintended consequences in practice, particularly for environmental, Protected Landscapes and animal welfare considerations. Replacing a range of terms with a single term (“substantial”) may reduce the ability to clearly signal the relative importance of different policy objectives and could result in less weight being afforded to environmental protection, nature recovery and climate objectives when balanced against development-enabling policies and housing targets.

Environmental priorities are grounded in statutory duties and targets, including under the Environment Act and Climate Change Act, and in international obligations. These considerations require strong and explicit policy signals within the Framework. We are concerned that a uniform terminology could in practice weaken the policy emphasis on environmental safeguards, making it easier for such considerations to be outweighed by development pressures in decision-making.

**6) Do you agree with the role, purpose and content of spatial development strategies set out in policy PM1? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/access-to-green-and-blue-space-in-england/access-to-green-and-blue-space-in-england>

We support the principle of a genuinely plan-led system and recognise the potential value of spatial development strategies (SDSs) in coordinating growth and infrastructure at a strategic scale. We welcome the inclusion of requirements to identify broad locations for nature conservation and habitat enhancement, restoration and creation.

However, we are concerned that the overall framing of SDSs remains overly weighted towards enabling growth and housing delivery, with insufficient emphasis on environmental limits and statutory nature and climate obligations. While SDSs are required to identify locations for nature recovery, this is presented alongside a much greater emphasis on housing need, identifying major development locations, and supporting economic growth. This risks treating environmental priorities as an add-on rather than as a core strategic driver of spatial planning.

In addition, paragraph PM1(f) should specify that SDSs are required to identify and safeguard access rights as part of strategic infrastructure planning. This should explicitly include public rights of way, open access land, and National Trails, including the King Charles III England Coast Path and associated coastal margin. National Trails and other long-distance walking routes operate strategically across local authority boundaries and are integral to green infrastructure, health and wellbeing, sustainable tourism and climate resilience. They should therefore be treated as essential strategic infrastructure within SDSs, rather than as purely local or discretionary considerations. Failing to safeguard and enhance these networks at the strategic scale risks fragmentation, loss of connectivity and missed opportunities for nature recovery and public access.

Spatial development strategies must be explicitly required to align with statutory targets under the Environment Act and Climate Change Act, including Local Nature Recovery Strategies and legally binding biodiversity and climate commitments. SDSs should be grounded in robust environmental evidence, and use nature recovery, climate resilience, flood risk, carbon storage and ecosystem services as fundamental constraints shaping where and how development occurs. The list of issues an SDS should address needs to include furthering the purposes of any Protected Landscape within them, as required under s245 of the Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023.

Without stronger safeguards, there is a risk that SDSs become effectively only vehicles for distributing housing numbers and facilitating strategic development, rather than genuinely integrating environmental protection and nature recovery into long-term spatial decision-making. A truly plan-led system must place environmental limits and public interest outcomes at its core, not treat them as secondary considerations to growth.

**7) Do you agree that alterations should be made to spatial development strategies at least every 5 years to reflect any changes to housing requirements for the local planning authorities in the strategy area? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**a) If not, do you think there should be a different approach, for example, that alterations should only be made to spatial development strategies every five years where there are significant changes to housing need in the strategy area?**

Partly disagree

We agree that Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs) should be reviewed at least every five years to ensure they remain effective and responsive to changing circumstances. However, we do not agree that such alterations should be framed primarily around changes in housing requirements.

Spatial Development Strategies play a critical role in shaping sustainable development across regions and must respond to a wider range of strategic priorities beyond housing delivery. In particular, SDSs should be reviewed and updated to reflect evolving priorities for nature recovery, including the objectives and spatial priorities identified in line with updates to Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Ensuring that SDSs remain aligned with these strategies is essential to support habitat restoration, ecological connectivity, and the delivery of national biodiversity targets.

**8) If spatial development strategies are not altered every five years, should related policy on the requirements used in five year housing land supply and housing delivery test policies, set out in Annex D of the draft Framework, be updated to allow housing requirement figures from spatial development strategies to continue to be applied after 5 years, so long as there has not been a significant change in that area's local housing need? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**9) Do you agree with the role, purpose and content of local plans set out in policy PM2? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree.

We support the intention of PM2 to provide clearer, more streamlined and timely local plans, and recognise the value of a concise vision, measurable outcomes and a defined spatial strategy. However, we are concerned that PM2 places insufficient emphasis on the environment, climate and nature recovery. While the policy refers to "improving the environment", this is not embedded strongly enough across the core purposes and content of local plans. At a time of accelerating climate and biodiversity crises, local plans should play a central role in delivering environmental protection, climate mitigation and adaptation, and large-scale nature restoration.

Local plans should be part of a national framework that raises the bar on environmental performance and actively encourages ambition, leadership and innovation in environmental action. There is a risk that the current framing of PM2 continues to weight the system towards meeting development needs at any cost, rather than ensuring development is genuinely compatible with environmental limits and long-term sustainability.

We therefore consider that PM2 should more explicitly require local plans to set ambitious, measurable outcomes for climate, biodiversity and environmental quality, aligned with national, legal net zero and nature recovery objectives, so that planning acts as a driver of positive environmental change rather than a constraint on it.

Policy PM2 (1) should recognise that a Protected Landscape may fall within more than one SDS. Currently there is no legal requirement for NPAs to be included in preparation of SDSs. If SDSs do not take account of the need to further the statutory purposes within these areas, there would be an inherent conflict between working to achieve statutory purposes in preparing a local plan for a National Park and supporting the spatial development strategy for the area. Where a Protected Landscapes is covered by more than one SDS, there should also be a requirement for their policies to be aligned with those in other relevant SDSs This should be referenced in policy PM2 and cross-referenced with Policy PM10.

**10) Do you think that local plans should cover a period of at least 15 years from the point of adoption of the plan? Yes/No a) If not, do you think they should cover a period of at least 10 years, or a different period of time. Please explain why.**

**11) Do you agree with the principles set out in policy PM6(1c), including its provisions for preventing duplication of national decision-making policies? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree.

We recognise the value of avoiding unnecessary duplication of national policy, particularly where this can improve clarity, accessibility and efficiency in plan-making. Clear and consistent national decision-making policies can provide an important baseline and reduce the administrative burden on local planning authorities.

However, we are concerned that, in its current framing, PM6(1c) risks being used primarily as a mechanism to reduce or curtail local ambition, rather than simply to rationalise policy. Local issues vary across England. For example, industrial animal operations tend to be concentrated in certain areas, disproportionately affecting the environment and residents of those communities. Local plan-makers should be able to implement policies that address specific issues in their locality. Avoiding

duplication must not become a means of constraining local authorities from setting stronger, more progressive policies in response to local environmental challenges and opportunities.

We strongly support robust and ambitious national policies, particularly in relation to:

- Clear and enforceable protections for species, habitats and ecological networks, including Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, priority habitats and irreplaceable habitats.
- A strengthened mitigation hierarchy, ensuring no regression in environmental protections compared with the current NPPF.
- Recognition and effective use of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and support for new designations such as Wildbelt.
- Stronger protections for sensitive ecosystems such as chalk streams, floodplains, estuaries and coastal habitats.
- Nature-friendly design standards, including features such as swift bricks and access to green and blue space as standard.
- Standardised carbon accounting requirements linked to national carbon budgets.

Any approach to rationalisation and avoidance of duplication must raise the bar, not lower the ceiling. National policy should set a strong minimum standard, while local plans must retain the ability to go further, demonstrate leadership, and drive innovation in environmental action and climate resilience.

**12) Do you agree with the approach to initiating plan-making in PM7? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**13) Do you agree with the approach to the preparation of plan evidence set out in policy PM8? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree.

We support the principles that plan evidence should be relevant, proportionate, up-to-date and based on reliable sources, and welcomes the encouragement to use existing evidence, joint working and standardised tools to reduce duplication and improve efficiency.

However, we are concerned that PM8 does not currently place sufficient emphasis on environmental data and ecological evidence, particularly in relation to species and habitats. There is a risk that evidence for plan-making becomes overly reliant on high-level modelling and desk-based assessments, rather than being grounded in robust, locally specific ecological data. It is acknowledged that there are large evidence gaps regarding the locations of ancient and veteran trees, ancient wood pasture and parkland, and all irreplaceable habitats. Local plans should be explicitly required to draw on Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Local Environmental Records Centres and other local biodiversity

datasets, as well as field-based species and habitat data, to ensure that planning decisions reflect the actual condition, distribution and connectivity of nature at a local level while ensuring the application of legal duties relating to species are integrated into decision-making.

In addition, Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) should be required for strategic plans and major development proposals. Plan evidence should explicitly include assessment of access to green and blue space, public rights of way connectivity, pedestrian permeability and walkability. We recommend that PM8 be amended to state that plan evidence should include assessment of access to green and blue space, public rights of way connectivity, pedestrian permeability and walkability, and the spatial relationship between housing growth, employment and sustainable transport infrastructure. Access to nature is a recognised determinant of public health and wellbeing and should be embedded within plan-making as a core evidence requirement, not treated as a peripheral design consideration. This would also support delivery of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2025 commitment that everyone should have access to green or blue space within a 15-minute walk of their home. Embedding HIAs within plan preparation would help ensure that spatial strategies actively promote healthier, more equitable communities and reduce long-term pressures on public services.

We also support the establishment of a National Environmental Observatory, to provide consistent, high-quality environmental monitoring and data across England.<sup>3</sup> Environmental information, including on ancient and veteran trees, collected for all development projects should be added to this national data platform, including information from projects that do not receive planning consent. This would provide information to understand distribution and losses of irreplaceable habitats and trees consequent upon planning decisions. Existing government-held data and resources, including Defra's Magic Map (containing spatial data on habitats, species and landscapes), could provide a solid foundation for this data platform to grow. It would also signpost to other useful data sources, such as the species data platform run by the National Biodiversity Network Trust (NBN Atlas), data from Local Environmental Record Centres and information collected by Local Nature Partnerships, the Land Use Framework and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. A national observatory would significantly strengthen the evidence base for plan-making, improve transparency and accountability, and support better integration of climate, biodiversity and environmental objectives into planning policy and decision-making.

**14) Do you agree with the approach to identifying land for development in PM9? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/planning\\_ahead\\_on\\_land\\_and\\_sea.pdf](https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/planning_ahead_on_land_and_sea.pdf)

While we recognise the importance of a systematic and transparent approach to identifying land for development, and support the principle that plans should be informed by a thorough assessment of availability, suitability and deliverability of sites, we are concerned that PM9 places disproportionate emphasis on identifying land for development, with insufficient attention given to recognizing land that is not suitable for development, including land needed for nature recovery, climate resilience and the protection of environmental limits. The process should not simply be about finding enough land to accommodate growth, but about making strategic choices within ecological and environmental constraints.

Local plans should be required to explicitly identify and safeguard land for nature recovery, ecosystem services, flood management, carbon storage and climate adaptation, informed by Local Nature Recovery Strategies and wider environmental evidence. Without a stronger requirement to assess environmental limits and land that should be protected or restored, there is a risk that PM9 reinforces a development-first approach, rather than supporting genuinely sustainable and resilient spatial planning.

**15) Do you agree with the policies on maintaining and demonstrating cross boundary cooperation set out in policy PM10 and policy PM11? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**16) Do you agree that policy PM12 increases certainty at plan-making stage regarding the contributions expected from development proposals? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**17) Do you agree that plans should set out the circumstances in which review mechanisms will be used, or should national policy set clearer expectations? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**18) Do you agree with policy PM13 on setting local standards, including the proposal to commence s.43 of the Deregulation Act 2015? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Strongly disagree

We strongly oppose any approach that reduces local powers or constrains local ambition in setting standards. In the context of declared climate and nature emergencies, and wide variation in local environmental conditions, risks and policy ambitions, local authorities must retain the ability to set higher and more ambitious standards where justified by local evidence.

PM13, and the proposed commencement of section 43 of the Deregulation Act 2015, risks inhibiting local leadership on climate action, sustainability and environmental performance. It would constrain councils that are seeking to respond to locally agreed climate targets, carbon budgets, water stress, biodiversity priorities and community expectations – crucially even when backed by robust evidence. This runs counter to the urgent need for planning to act as a driver of climate mitigation and adaptation and nature recovery, rather than a brake on progress.

Local standards are evidence-based and play a critical role in driving innovation, supporting market leaders and early adopters, and creating demand for higher-quality, lower-carbon and nature-positive development. Restricting local authorities to national minimum standards risks undermining those developers, investors and clients who want to go beyond compliance, and could slow down the transition to genuinely sustainable construction and placemaking.

Likewise, this centralising approach does not match with the Government’s stated commitment to devolution. The proposals in PM13 run counter to the spirit of the English Devolution Bill, which emphasises local leadership, place-based solutions and greater local accountability. Devolution must mean empowering local authorities to lead on environmental and climate ambition, not removing their ability to do so through planning standards.

Overall, PM13 risks lowering the ceiling rather than raising the bar, at precisely the moment when the planning system should be enabling greater ambition, innovation and leadership in response to the climate and ecological crises.

**19) Do you agree that the tests of soundness set out in policies PM14 and PM15 will allow for a proportionate assessment of spatial development strategies, local plans and minerals and waste plans at examination? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If not, please explain how this could be improved to ensure a proportionate assessment, making it clear which type of plan you are commenting on?**

Partly agree

We agree that the proposed tests of soundness in PM14 and PM15 provide a broadly workable framework for assessing spatial development strategies and local plans in a proportionate way, particularly in seeking to ensure plans are positive, appropriate, effective and consistent with national policy.

We welcome the continued emphasis on evidence-based plan-making and the requirement to consider reasonable alternatives, which are essential components of good environmental planning and critical for ensuring that spatial strategies properly assess environmental impacts, climate risks and sustainability trade-offs.

However, we are concerned that the definition of “positive” is framed primarily around meeting objectively assessed development needs, with insufficient weight given to environmental limits, climate objectives and nature recovery. We feel it also does not give due weight to improving farmed animal welfare. A spatial strategy that is genuinely positive should not only deliver growth, but also demonstrably contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity recovery and long-term environmental resilience.

To improve the proportionality and effectiveness of the tests of soundness, we recommend that they more explicitly require spatial development strategies and local plans to demonstrate how they are aligned with animal welfare and environmental evidence, including climate targets, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and ecosystem constraints, and how reasonable alternatives have been assessed in environmental as well as economic terms. Plans should be required to show how they take account not only of the 10 Year Infrastructure Plan, but also of the overarching Land Use Framework. The Land Use Framework should provide the strategic context for balancing development, food production, climate mitigation and nature recovery, and therefore should sit clearly within the hierarchy of plans and strategies that inform spatial development. Requiring explicit alignment with the Land Use Framework would help ensure that local and strategic plans are consistent with national land use priorities, rather than considering infrastructure and growth in isolation. This would ensure that soundness supports sustainable outcomes, not simply deliverability of development.

Footnote 19 (PM14) allows for the Secretary of State to override the need for an independent examination of spatial development strategies, a loophole that has not been included in previous iterations of the NPPF. We are concerned why the inclusion of this loophole is necessary, particularly as the shift away from a focus on sustainable development suggests this loophole could be used to avoid proper scrutiny of plans. We fear this opens the door for environment safeguards to be overridden in the name of pursuing short-term economic growth.

**20) Do you have any specific comments on the content of the plan-making chapter which are not already captured by the other questions in this section?**

N/A

**21) Do you agree with the principles set out in policy DM1? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We support the principle of early and meaningful pre-application engagement set out in DM1, and agree that proportionate engagement with communities, local authorities and statutory consultees can improve the quality of development proposals, reduce conflict, and lead to better outcomes on

the ground. We also welcome the requirement for a concise planning statement that explains how proposals align with development plan and national policy, and how engagement has shaped the scheme.

However, we are concerned that DM1 places insufficient emphasis on the environment and does not explicitly require development proposals to demonstrate how they contribute to, or at least align with, statutory environmental goals, including climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity recovery, environmental improvement. Early engagement should not only focus on resolving procedural planning matters, but also on identifying environmental constraints, opportunities for nature recovery, and alignment with Local Nature Recovery Strategies and other environmental evidence.

In its current form, DM1 risks reinforcing a process-led approach rather than an outcomes-led one. To strengthen the policy, we recommend that planning statements for major development should be required to clearly set out how proposals respond to environmental limits and statutory environmental targets, ensuring that environmental considerations are embedded from the earliest stages of scheme design, not treated as secondary or optional.

**22) Do you agree with the policy DM2 on information requirements for planning applications? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree

We support the aim of DM2 to provide greater clarity and consistency on information requirements for planning applications, and agree that validation requirements should be proportionate, targeted and clearly linked to development plan policies. A structured national framework can help reduce unnecessary burden and improve efficiency for both applicants and local planning authorities.

We are also concerned about the wording in DM2 which states: *“Any such additional information requirements should not be applied equally to all applications but should be proportionate to the scale of development and its potential impact.”* While proportionality is important, it is unclear how decision-makers are expected to determine the likely scale of potential impact without first having sufficient environmental information. Some small sites can be of disproportionate importance for individual species of conservation concern. In practice, this risks creating a circular problem whereby authorities are discouraged from requesting the very information needed to assess whether impacts may be significant.

In addition, as trees are a material consideration in planning, DM2 should make explicit provision for tree surveys where trees are present on or adjoining a site. In such circumstances, a tree survey should be required in accordance with BS 5837:2012 *“Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations.”* Tree surveys are essential to identify irreplaceable habitats, including ancient

and veteran trees (AVTs) and ancient woodland or wood pasture, which may not be recorded on existing datasets such as the Ancient Tree Inventory or Defra's MAGIC. Such trees and habitats are not comprehensively recorded, and site-based survey is therefore the principal mechanism through which they can be identified and appropriately protected in development situations.

To ensure accuracy and consistency, tree surveys should be undertaken by appropriately qualified practitioners, for example those holding a recognised veteran tree certification standard (such as VetCert). This would help ensure that ancient, veteran and other high-value trees are correctly identified, assessed and safeguarded at the earliest stage of the planning process, in line with national policy protections for irreplaceable habitats.

More broadly, we are concerned about the omission of core environmental information requirements in Annex C. This includes the absence of carbon measurement and reporting requirements from both Annex C and the wider national information set. In the context of statutory climate targets and declared climate emergencies, it is increasingly essential that planning decisions are informed by robust and transparent information on the whole-life carbon impacts of development proposals. Likewise given the Environment Act targets, the absence of clear requirements relating to biodiversity, soil, water and wider ecosystem impacts is a significant omission. A more comprehensive baseline of environmental information should be included in the national list to ensure that planning decisions are properly informed and legally robust.

Without explicit national requirements for carbon assessment, there is a risk that local authorities will be discouraged or prevented from requiring this information through local validation lists, even where it is clearly relevant to local climate objectives and environmental policies. This would significantly weaken the ability of the planning system to support climate mitigation and to make informed, evidence-based decisions.

DM2 should be strengthened to include standardised carbon measurement and reporting as a core national information requirement, particularly for major developments, ensuring that climate impacts are treated as a fundamental consideration in planning decision-making rather than an optional or discretionary one.

**23) Do you have any views on whether such a policy could be better implemented through regulations?**

We support the introduction of a new chapter of the Building Regulations (Part N) to embed core nature-friendly design measures as standard requirements for all new development. This would include measures that support biodiversity, such as integrated habitat features, green infrastructure and nature-positive design principles. This should also include requirements relating to foundation design that take account of future climate conditions, particularly increased drought risk, to ensure that existing and new trees can be retained in the long term without negatively affecting building

stability, thereby maintaining their full environmental benefits. Embedding such requirements in regulations would ensure that these considerations are not optional or inconsistently applied, but form a baseline expectation across the development system. Nature requirements in Building Regulations would help ensure greater consistency, legal clarity and enforceability across all local planning authorities, particularly for core information requirements that relate to national priorities and legal targets such as climate, biodiversity and environmental performance.

Regulations should not replace the role of planning in enabling local ambition. Any regulatory approach must still allow local authorities to require additional or higher standards through planning policies, where justified by local environmental conditions, climate targets or nature recovery priorities. Used in this way, regulations can provide a strong national floor, while planning continues to drive innovation and leadership at the local level.

**24) Do you agree with the principles set out in DM3? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

While we support the principle of a positive and proactive approach to engaging with applicants, we are concerned that DM3 as currently drafted appears weighted strongly towards approval. The guidance does not clearly recognise legitimate limitations on development or the valid reasons why applications may need to be refused. In particular, there is insufficient emphasis on compliance with environmental protections, statutory duties under the Environment Act 2021, and targets for nature recovery, carbon budgets, and other environmental safeguards.

We consider it essential that planning authorities retain the ability to refuse proposals that, despite being well-presented or supported by applicants, would cause unacceptable environmental or social impacts. DM3 should therefore more explicitly balance the encouragement of positive engagement with recognition of these critical limitations and statutory requirements.

The guidance also suggests that decisions should not be delayed when securing advice from a statutory consultee beyond statutory deadlines unless there is either insufficient information or that the awaited advice may enable approve rather than refusal. Given the limited capacity of environmental statutory bodies, it is important that extensions are permitted where it might relate to a refusal on the grounds of unacceptable environmental impacts.

**25) Do you agree that policy DM5 would prevent unnecessary negotiation of developer contributions, whilst also providing sufficient flexibility for development to proceed? Strongly**

agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

**26) Do you have any further comments on the likely impact of policy DM5: Development viability?**

**27) Do you have any views on how the process of modifying planning obligations under S106A, where needed once a section 106 agreement has been entered into, could be improved? a) If so, please provide views on specific changes that may improve the efficacy of S106A and the main obstacles that result in delay when seeking modification of planning obligations.**

**28) Do you have any views on how the process of modifying planning obligations could be improved in advance of any legislative change, noting the government's commitment to boosting the supply of affordable housing. a) If so, please provide views on the current use of s73 and, if any, the impact on affordable housing obligations.**

**29) Do you agree with the approach for planning conditions and obligations set out in policy DM6, especially the use of model conditions and obligations? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

Partly disagree

We partly disagree with the approach in Policy DM6. While we support the general principles that planning conditions should be necessary, precise, enforceable and reasonable and recognise the value of national model conditions and however obligations the presumption that conditions are required to be discharged before development commences should be avoided unless there is a clear justification.

In practice, pre-commencement conditions are frequently essential to secure effective species mitigation and biodiversity protection. Measures such as habitat surveys, updated ecological assessments, method statements for protected species, and site-specific mitigation or compensation strategies must often be agreed and discharged before works begin in order to prevent irreversible harm. Requiring a heightened "clear justification" test risks creating uncertainty or pressure to defer these safeguards, potentially undermining compliance with environmental legislation and the protections embedded within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Pre-commencement conditions relating to biodiversity are not procedural obstacles, they are often the only effective means of ensuring that mitigation is properly designed and implemented at the correct stage. Policy should therefore explicitly recognise that such conditions will routinely be justified where necessary to safeguard habitats, protected species and wider environmental interests.

**30) Do you agree that policy DM7 clarifies the relationship between planning decisions and other regulatory regimes? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**31) Do you agree with the new intentional unauthorised development policy in policy DM8? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Strongly agree

**32) Are there any specific types of harm arising from intentional unauthorised development, and any specific impacts from the proposed policy, which we should consider? a) If so, are there any particular additions or mitigations which we should consider?**

We strongly agree with the new policy in DM8 that intentional unauthorised development should be given substantial weight when considering whether to grant retrospective planning permission. Deliberate attempts to evade the planning system undermine public confidence and risk causing irreversible harm before impacts can properly be assessed or mitigated.

We are particularly concerned about intentional unauthorised development that has sought to bypass the consenting process where there are known and detrimental impacts on habitats, biodiversity and the environment more generally. This applies especially, though not exclusively, to land subject to nature conservation designation or protection, or identified as strategically important for nature within a Local Nature Recovery Strategy. In such contexts, harm may be immediate and difficult or impossible to remediate, making deterrence essential.

We recommend that substantial weight should be explicitly given not only to the intentional nature of the breach, but also to any harm to nature or the environment when determining retrospective applications. The policy should make clear that any irreparable damage to the environment, especially in relation to irreplaceable habitats, should weigh decisively against, and in practice preclude, the granting of retrospective permission. Making this explicit would strengthen environmental safeguards, reinforce compliance with the rule-based planning system, and help ensure that those who knowingly cause environmental damage do not benefit from doing so.

**33) Do you agree with the new Article 4 direction policy in policy DM10? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**34) Do you agree with the proposed approach to setting a spatial strategy in development plans? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree.

We welcome the emphasis in S1 and S2 on improvement of the environment, in a way which promotes a sustainable pattern of growth and seeks to mitigate climate change and adapt to its effects. We also welcome the requirement for including land that is protected or proposed to be enhanced for specific purposes (such as habitat improvement) and which places limits on whether development proposals may be acceptable or where specific policies apply. Lastly, we also support the inclusion of policies that aim to mitigate climate change.

We are concerned that the proposed approach does not make a sufficiently explicit link to legal environmental targets and international obligations. Spatial strategies should clearly demonstrate how they contribute to achieving statutory climate and biodiversity goals, including those under the Environment Act 2021, international treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, and national commitments like the “30 by 30” target for protected areas.

The wording of S2(c): *“land that is protected or proposed to be enhanced for specific purposes (such as habitat improvement) and which places limits on whether development proposals may be acceptable or where specific policies apply”*, should be strengthened. At present, the phrasing implies only a degree of limitation, rather than clearly allowing for refusal of development in areas of high ecological value. To fully reflect the importance of natural limits and our legal nature recovery targets, spatial strategies should explicitly recognise situations and locations where development is simply not appropriate, because of the ecological value of the land. This would reinforce the principle that planning must not only manage growth, but also actively safeguard irreplaceable habitats and ecological networks.

This section should also explicitly reference the Nature Recovery Network, Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs), and the emerging national land use framework as essential tools for identifying land for habitat protection, restoration and nature recovery. Integrating these frameworks into spatial strategies would ensure that development planning is not only about meeting housing and built infrastructure needs, but also actively contributes to nature recovery, ecological connectivity, and climate resilience; and duly reflects as nature as critical infrastructure.

In its current form, the approach risks treating environmental protection as secondary to development needs, particularly given the limited parameters of footnote 23. We therefore recommend that S1 and S2 are strengthened to ensure that spatial strategies explicitly embed statutory and internationally recognized environmental obligations and provide a clear mechanism for mapping and protecting land for nature recovery alongside development. In addition, we are particularly concerned regarding the absence of Local Wildlife Sites from policy S1 and the associated footnote 23, and urge Government to include these within the footnote, as assets of particular importance.

**35) Do you agree with the proposed definition of settlements in the glossary? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**36) Do you agree with the revised approach to the presumption in favour of sustainable development? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Strongly disagree

We are deeply concerned that the revised presumption is too heavily weighted in favour of development at all costs and risks undermining the core principles of genuinely sustainable development.

The presumption makes no explicit reference to nature or the natural environment within its overall objectives, in line with the earlier ‘purpose for planning’. This is a significant omission, given the scale of the climate and ecological crises and the Government’s own legally binding environmental targets. It is essential that sites be assessed on their individual merits and that decisions are appropriately informed to ensure development is appropriate, not a result of blanket approval.

Development cannot be considered truly “sustainable” without clear respect and acknowledgement of environmental limits, strong protection for biodiversity, and explicit alignment with climate and nature recovery goals. In addition, the definition of sustainable development should explicitly include walkability and the protection of access networks. Sustainable development should include the creation of walkable neighbourhoods with access to services, public transport and high-quality green space, and the protection and enhancement of public rights of way. Development that results in car-dependent patterns of growth, or severs established walking networks, should not be regarded as sustainable.

Without these safeguards, the presumption risks facilitating unsustainable growth at the expense of environmental integrity, contrary to the long-term public interest.

**37) Do you agree to the proposed approach to development within settlements? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We recognise the value of the intention to provide greater certainty for appropriate development within settlements, particularly in encouraging the efficient use of urban and previously developed

land. However, we are concerned that proposed policy S4 appears weaker than the current NPPF in practice, particularly in relation to nature protection.

The policy establishes a presumption that development proposals within settlements should be approved unless “the benefits are substantially outweighed by adverse effects” when assessed against national decision-making policies. This test is framed around whether development would have an “unacceptable impact”, with the circumstances in which undefined “benefits” are likely to be substantially outweighed by adverse effects said to include (but not be restricted to) situations where the proposal would have such an impact.

This formulation is weak and highly subjective. It is unclear what constitutes an “unacceptable impact”, by what criteria, and how any judgement of relative harm is to be balanced against unquantified or broadly defined “benefits”. The combination of this tilted balance in favour of approval and loose thresholds of “unacceptability, benefits and harm” risks creating an overly permissive framework in which significant harm to nature may be tolerated so long as decision-makers consider the benefits to outweigh it. In practice, there is a substantial risk that so-called “benefit” based arguments, particularly those focused narrowly on housing delivery or short-term economic factors, will routinely be judged to outweigh ecological harm, even where environmental impacts are significant and potentially irreversible. This approach is open to inconsistent application and abuse, and risks undermining the effective protection and recovery of nature.

We are particularly concerned about the inadequate acknowledgment of the ecological value of some brownfield land. Wildlife-rich brownfield sites can support priority species, especially those supporting priority habitats such as open mosaic habitat on previously developed land, and are particularly important for invertebrates and other vulnerable species. These ecological functions are often overlooked, and S4 does not sufficiently ensure that such value will be properly assessed and protected.

There is also a wider risk that an overly permissive approach to development within settlements will undermine urban nature recovery. Evidence from Link shows that many young homebuyers are already being forced into “urban nature deserts”, with limited access to green space.<sup>4</sup> Likewise nearly 1 in 5 people live more than a 15-minute walk from a natural green space and over 2.5 million people live in areas with both high deprivation and poor access to nature, with access inequalities are most acute in urban areas.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, S4 risks accelerating the loss of remaining urban green spaces or their future potential, particularly when combined with proposals elsewhere to exempt residential brownfield and small sites under 0.2ha from Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). This could significantly hamper urban nature

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wcl.org.uk/young-homebuyers-being-forced-into-urban-nature-deserts.asp>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.wcl.org.uk/assets/uploads/img/files/Mapping\\_access\\_to\\_nature\\_in\\_England\\_01.05.23.pdf](https://www.wcl.org.uk/assets/uploads/img/files/Mapping_access_to_nature_in_England_01.05.23.pdf)

recovery, and the delivery of urban Nature Recovery Strategies, worsening existing inequalities in access to nature.

In summary, we are concerned that S4 does not strike the right balance between development and nature, and risks weakening protections for urban biodiversity at a time when policy should be more ambitious in supporting nature recovery and tackling environmental deprivation within settlements.

**38) Do you agree to the proposed approach to development outside settlements? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We partly agree with the principle of directing most development to settlements and limiting development in the countryside. However, we are concerned that proposed policy S5 is now too permissive and risks significantly weakening protections for the natural environment outside settlements. We are particularly concerned that Protected Landscapes would be significantly affected by some of the proposed categories of development to be allowed outside settlements.

In particular, S5(1)(a) is overly broad in supporting development for minerals and energy infrastructure. We strongly oppose the inclusion of energy minerals (notably oil and gas), which are almost always greenfield developments and are frequently located near or within proximity to sensitive and protected sites (for example at sites such as Pickering, Burniston and within the wider North Yorkshire area). This approach conflicts with climate objectives and risks locking in further greenhouse gas emissions, as well as causing direct ecological harm.

As with policy S4, policy S5 establishes a strong presumption in favour of approval for a wide range of development outside settlements “should be approved” unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by adverse effects when assessed against national decision-making policies. This framing places the emphasis squarely on approval wherever “benefits” can be identified.

Although the policy notes that benefits are likely to be substantially outweighed where a proposal fails to comply with national policies that require refusal in specific circumstances, this still leaves considerable discretion in the balancing exercise. The concept of benefits being “substantially outweighed by adverse effects” is loosely defined, and there is no clear framework for how environmental harm, including cumulative and long-term ecological impacts, is to be assessed or weighted.

In practice, this is a significant risk for nature. Loosely defined “benefit-based” arguments, particularly those relating to housing supply, infrastructure provision or economic growth (including where a five-year housing land supply cannot be demonstrated), are likely to carry substantial weight. Without

clearer safeguards or defined environmental thresholds, there is a real danger that ecological harm will routinely be judged acceptable in the overall balance, even where impacts are significant or irreversible, despite our statutory environmental targets. The broad and subjective nature of the “benefits outweigh harms” test risks inconsistent application, weakens environmental protection outside settlements, and could undermine efforts to secure nature recovery and long-term resilience.

We are especially concerned about S5(1)(j), which allows development to meet “evidenced unmet need”, including where authorities fail the five-year housing land supply or Housing Delivery Test. This is a dangerous policy lever. The Housing Standard Method is widely recognised as flawed and routinely generates unrealistically high housing targets, setting authorities up to fail and creating a policy presumption in favour of releasing countryside sites. This risks driving speculative and poorly located development, undermining sustainable spatial planning and increasing pressure on rural landscapes and biodiversity.

It is also important to note that, as currently drafted, developments for the purpose of nature conservation have not been included within the list of development types considered suitable for approval outside settlements. This omission risks placing applications intended to enhance or restore nature at risk of refusal, unless they can be clearly categorised under agriculture or forestry. Planning policy should actively support nature recovery in the countryside, and developments whose primary purpose is habitat restoration, ecosystem recovery or conservation should be explicitly recognised as appropriate forms of development outside settlements. In addition, paragraph 193(d) of the current NPPF, which supports development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity, has not been carried forward into the revised NPPF and should be reinstated to ensure that nature recovery projects are not inadvertently disadvantaged.

It is noted that S5(2) establishes where development in the categories can be resisted, placing special significance on those policies in the NPPF that use the word “refused”. For the most part, these are the same as in the current NPPF, but one significant exception is what is known as the major development test for Protected Landscapes in paragraph 190 of the current NPPF, and covered in revised form in N4(2). The current wording is that “permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances”, the proposed wording is “major development within protected landscapes should only be supported in exceptional circumstances”. This change of wording is particularly concerning when considered in the light of S5(2), which suggests that the adverse effects of development proposals under S5(1j) on protected landscapes are less likely to outweigh any benefits than at present.

Similar to the concerns in S4, S5 inadequately acknowledges the ecological value of some brownfield land in the redevelopment of previously developed land. Wildlife-rich brownfield sites can support priority species, especially those supporting priority habitats such as open mosaic habitat on previously developed land, and are particularly important for invertebrates and other vulnerable

species. These ecological functions are often overlooked, and S5 does not sufficiently ensure that such value will be properly assessed and protected.

Overall Link considers that S5 does not provide sufficient safeguards for the countryside and natural environment, and that its permissive framing, particularly in relation to minerals, energy and unmet housing need, risks significant and irreversible environmental harm. The policy should be strengthened to exclude fossil fuel extraction and to ensure that environmental limits, not housing shortfalls alone, determine what development is acceptable outside settlements.

**39) Do you have any views on the specific categories of development which the policy would allow to take place outside settlements, and the associated criteria? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons.**

**40) Do you agree with the proposed approach to development around stations, including that it applies only to housing and mixed-use development capable of meeting the density requirements in chapter 12? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, including any evidence that this policy would lead to adverse impacts on Gypsies and Travellers and other groups with protected characteristics.**

**41) Do you agree that neighbourhood plans should contain allocations to meet their identified housing requirement in order to qualify for this policy? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree or disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If not, please provide your reasons**

**42) Do you agree with the approach to planning for climate change in policy CC1? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree

Link welcomes the overall intent of policy CC1 and, in particular, the explicit recognition of nature-based solutions, biodiversity, and green infrastructure as central to both climate change mitigation and adaptation. We strongly support the requirement to take account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and the emphasis on safeguarding and enhancing carbon storage, nature recovery and ecosystem resilience.

Likewise, we also welcome the provisions in CC1 and PM13 that allow local authorities to set tighter local standards for water efficiency. However, this approach remains too reactive, as it largely depends on areas already being formally designated as being in “serious water stress”. Given increasing drought risk and widespread over-abstraction of rivers, this flexibility should be extended to include areas of *potential* water stress or where catchments are already under growing pressure.

However, we are concerned that the overall framing of CC1 is weakened by imprecise and non-committal language, such as “taking into account”, “consider(ed)”, and “identifying opportunities”. This lacks the robustness needed to drive meaningful change and risks climate considerations being treated as secondary to development pressures. Stronger, more prescriptive wording is required if climate mitigation and adaptation are to be genuinely and consistently embedded in plan-making. For example, CC1 1d could be changed to: “Providing green infrastructure and nature-based solutions which can safeguard and improve carbon storage, support nature recovery and resilience, and which take account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies in accordance with policy N1 and enhance the Nature Recovery Network.”

We are especially concerned regarding the impact of the more restrictive approach in policy PM13 on setting standards, particularly in relation to building performance and energy efficiency, undermines local ambition. This limits the ability of progressive local authorities to adopt well-evidenced, higher environmental standards, at a time when accelerating the transition to net zero should be a core planning objective.

We recommend that the wording be changed to encourage Development plans to take a comprehensive and proactive approach to mitigating climate change to ensure plan policy fully supports the transition to net zero, this would strengthen the requirements, in line with legislative requirements set out in Schedule 7 (15C) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. Likewise, CC1 (a) should refer to development patterns *and design requirements, which should* be informed by an assessment of baseline carbon emissions. This is necessary to ensure clear linkage between mitigation and design policy decisions framed by design guidance in the NPPG, rather than simply referring to the location of development, and to indicate that the expectation that assessment will be carried out for all plans in line with our legal targets.

Finally, we note that limitations on Biodiversity Net Gain ambition in policy N1 risk constraining the delivery of genuinely effective nature-based solutions. This risks inhibiting the delivery of more ambitious approaches to climate resilience and mitigation, particularly in urban areas where green infrastructure and ecosystem restoration are most urgently needed.

While CC1 represents a positive step in principle, its impact is weakened by weak language and constraints on local ambition. Stronger, more directive policy is needed to ensure planning plays a transformative role in addressing the climate and nature crises.

**43) Do you agree with the approach to mitigating climate change through planning decisions in policy CC2? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**a) If not, what additional measures could be taken to ensure climate change mitigation is given appropriate consideration?**

Partly disagree

Link welcomes the overall direction of policy CC2, in particular, we strongly welcome the explicit reference to measures for the creation or restoration of habitats which can act as carbon stores, such as woodland creation and peatland restoration, and to avoid harm to key carbon-rich habitats including peatland and saltmarsh. This is an important recognition of the role of nature-based solutions in climate mitigation. However, this element of the policy should be significantly strengthened and expanded. The policy should more clearly apply the mitigation hierarchy, with a clear priority on avoiding harm to habitats that act as important carbon stores. Only after avoidance has been demonstrated should development be expected to contribute to the creation and restoration of habitats which can act as carbon stores, ensuring that nature-based climate mitigation is embedded in development planning.

In addition, the nature-based solutions element of the policy should include clearer expectations and safeguards, rather than simply encouraging authorities to explore “opportunities”. The policy should emphasise the importance of long-term stewardship, requiring that habitats created or restored for carbon storage are sustainably managed to ensure the permanence of carbon sequestration and their resilience to climate change risks. Strengthening this policy would help ensure that nature-based solutions deliver genuine and lasting climate mitigation benefits, while also supporting wider nature recovery objectives.

Alongside trees and peatland, CC2 should explicitly recognise wildflower meadows, ancient and long established) wood pasture and species-rich grasslands as important carbon stores, both for habitat restoration and for the avoidance of harm. Evidence shows that species-rich grasslands, including upland hay meadows, floodplain meadows and waxcap grasslands, and ancient and long established wood pasture, can store more soil carbon per hectare than intensively managed grassland or arable land, and soil disturbance can re-release a significant proportion of this carbon.<sup>6</sup> Woodland expansion must follow “right tree, right place, right management” principles to prevent damage to existing high-value grasslands.

We are concerned that much of CC2 relies on weak and permissive language. This does not provide the level of certainty or ambition required to align planning decisions with the scale of the climate emergency. CC2 1 should add include additional clauses to specify development proposals “*Contribute to radical reductions in carbon emissions in line with the relevant national carbon budget*” to ensure

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<sup>6</sup> Emmett, B. A., Reynolds, B., Rowe, E., Spurgeon, D., Brittain, S. A., Frogbrook, Z., ... Woods, C. (n.d.). Countryside Survey: Soils Report from 2007. ; Guo, L. B., & Gifford, R. M. (2002). Soil carbon stocks and land use change: A meta analysis. *Global Change Biology*, 8(4), 345–360. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1354-1013.2002.00486.x> ; <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Grasslands-as-a-Carbon-Store.pdf>

carbon is assessed at the point of decision making, which is vital in given so many local plans are out of date.

In particular, the caveats around fossil fuel extraction are inadequate. While CC2(g) states that development should not increase fossil fuel extraction unless in accordance with policy M5, policy M5 itself remains highly permissive. Combined with the broadly pro-development framing of policy S5 (development outside settlements), this is likely to result in continued weighting in favour of oil and gas extraction, despite the removal of “great weight” in their favour in previous versions of the Framework. This is incompatible with net zero objectives and risks locking in long-term carbon emissions.

Likewise, we are concerned that CC2 does not require any meaningful or enforceable carbon accounting. Despite recommendations from the Climate Change Committee that the planning system be comprehensively aligned with carbon budgets, the policy relies on vague notions of “contribution” rather than requiring quantified carbon assessments for major developments or for key sectors such as housing, transport and industry. While CC1 refers to baseline carbon assessments at plan-making stage, this remains weak and is not carried through into decision-making in CC2, or the information requirements in the annexes.

Finally, as noted in our response to CC1, the limitations on local authorities’ ability to set higher energy efficiency standards significantly undermine the effectiveness of CC2. Restricting local ambition on building performance and energy use is inconsistent with the need for rapid decarbonisation and reduces the potential impact of planning as a tool for climate mitigation.

**44) Do you agree with the approach to climate change adaptation through planning decisions in policy CC3? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) What additional measures could be taken to ensure climate change adaptation is given appropriate consideration?**

Partly agree

Link welcomes the strong and relatively detailed focus on climate change adaptation in policy CC3. We particularly support the explicit recognition of emerging risks such as wildfires, alongside more established risks including flooding, overheating and coastal change. This reflects a more realistic understanding of the range of climate impacts that developments will face over their lifetime.

We also strongly welcome the consistent emphasis on Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) and the recognition of their multi-functional benefits, not only for managing flood risk but also for supporting nature, water quality and wider climate resilience. Similarly, we welcome the requirement for passive design approaches that minimise overheating and the inclusion of green infrastructure and suitable tree planting, in line with policies DP3 and N3.

However, these positive principles should be underpinned by stronger and more mandatory mechanisms. In particular, the requirements for green infrastructure and urban greening should be linked to a mandatory national Urban Green Factor or equivalent National Development Management Policy, to ensure consistent and measurable delivery of climate-resilient green infrastructure across all developments. We also recommend that CC3 is expanded to explicitly require consideration of high winds and storm impacts, which are likely to increase in frequency and severity as a result of climate change and pose significant risks to both buildings and infrastructure, as well as a greater emphasis on mandatory water retention and harvesting measures. CC3 should not be a substitute for integrating necessary measures into Building Regulations, such as mandatory flood resilience measures.

Finally, we are concerned about the broader weakening of flood risk policy particularly in relation to the sequential test. While CC3 itself is relatively robust, any dilution of flood risk safeguards in other policies risks undermining the effectiveness of this adaptation framework and increasing long-term vulnerability to climate impacts.

**45) Does the policy on wildfire adaptation clearly explain when such risks should be considered and how these risks should be mitigated? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons**

Partly agree

We welcome the inclusion of wildfire risk within policy CC3 and agree that this is an important and timely recognition of an emerging climate risk, particularly for development located adjacent to heathland, conifer woodland and agricultural land. The policy provides a helpful starting point in identifying when wildfire risks should be considered and gives some practical examples of mitigation measures, such as creating defensible spaces and avoiding fire pathways. However, it remains relatively high-level risks a lack of sufficient clarity and consistency. Key terms such as “heightened risk” and “where possible” are open to interpretation, and there is limited direction on how wildfire risk should be assessed, who should undertake this assessment, and how it should be balanced against other planning considerations. As a result, there is a risk that wildfire adaptation will be applied inconsistently or treated as optional rather than essential in high-risk locations.

**46) How should wildfire adaptation measures be integrated with wider principles for good design, and what additional guidance would be helpful?**

Wildfire adaptation measures should be fully integrated with wider principles for good design via landscape-led, nature-based and place-making approaches, rather than treated as a separate or purely technical issue. Good design should incorporate defensible space, fire-resilient layouts,

appropriate drought tolerant planting schemes, and access for emergency services in ways that also deliver biodiversity, nature recovery, amenity and climate resilience benefits.

We would also emphasize the importance of addressing wildfire risk at a landscape scale, not just at the site level. This should include stronger policy support for rewetting degraded landscapes, particularly peatlands and other dry habitats, and for wider rewilding approaches that restore natural hydrology and ecosystem function, reducing long-term fire risk.

We also recommend that CC3 and associated guidance require the incorporation of on-site water harvesting, species choice for woodland and other tree planting, and water storage technologies, such as rainwater capture, ponds and other blue-green infrastructure, to support both wildfire resilience and wider climate adaptation objectives.

Additional national guidance would be helpful in setting out clearer and more consistent approaches to assessing wildfire risk, including the use of climate projections and land cover data. It should also clarify relevant standards for fire-resilient landscape design and the use of appropriate materials and provide direction on how wildfire adaptation can be effectively integrated with biodiversity policies, Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), and wider green infrastructure strategies.

**47) Do you have any other comments on actions that could be taken through national planning policy to address climate change?**

National planning policy should play a much more central and decisive role in addressing climate change, commensurate with the scale and urgency of the challenge. There is a critical need for a clear, consistent national methodology for carbon accounting, explicitly linked to the UK's legally binding carbon budgets. This should apply at both plan-making and decision-taking stages and include a robust "net zero test" for major development proposals, to ensure that individual schemes and cumulative development patterns are genuinely aligned with national climate targets.

Without a mandatory and standardised carbon accounting framework, current policy relies too heavily on vague "contributions" to net zero, which provides little certainty and allows carbon impacts to be routinely outweighed by short-term economic or housing arguments. A national methodology would support transparency, consistency and accountability, and enable local authorities to make evidence-based decisions that reflect real climate limits.

More broadly, national planning policy should embed a clear presumption in favour of nature-based solutions, stronger restrictions on new fossil fuel extraction, and greater freedom for local authorities to set ambitious energy efficiency and environmental standards.

48) Do you agree the requirements for spatial development strategies and local plans in policy HO1 and policy HO2 are appropriate? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

49) Is further guidance required on assessing the needs of different groups, including older people, disabled people, and those who require social and affordable housing? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If so, what elements should this guidance cover?

50) Do you agree with the approach to incorporating relevant policies of Planning Policy for Traveller Sites within this chapter? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

51) Is further guidance needed on how authorities should assess the need for traveller sites and set requirement figures? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If so, what are the key principles this guidance should establish?

52) Do you agree the new Annex D to the draft Framework is sufficiently clear on how local planning authorities should set the appropriate buffer for their 41 local plan 5-year housing land supply? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

53) Do you agree the new Annex D to the draft Framework is sufficiently clear on the wider procedural elements of 5-year housing land supply, the Housing Delivery Test and how they relate to decision-making? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

54) Do you agree the requirements to establish a 5 year supply of deliverable traveller sites and monitor delivery are sufficiently clear? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

55) Do you agree the plan-making requirements, for both local plans and spatial development strategies, in relation to large scale residential and mixed-use development are sufficiently clear? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

56) Do you agree our proposed changes to the definition of designated rural areas will better support rural social and affordable housing? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.

57) Do you agree with our proposals to ask authorities to set out the proportion of new housing that should be delivered to M4(2) and M4(3) standards? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.

58) Do you agree 40% of new housing delivered to M4(2) standards over the plan period is the right minimum proportion? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, and would you support an alternative minimum percentage requirement?

59) Do you agree the proposals to support the needs of different groups, through requiring authorities to identify sites or set requirements for parts of allocated sites are proportionate? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

60) Do you agree with our proposals to ask authorities to set out requirements for a broader mix of tenures to be provided on sites of 150 homes or more? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons and indicate if an alternative site size threshold would be preferable?

61) Do you agree with proposals for authorities to allocate land to accommodate 10% of the housing requirement on sites of between 1 and 2.5 hectares? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons

62) Are any changes to policy HO7 needed in order to ensure that substantial weight is given to meeting relevant needs?

63) Do you agree that proposals to add military affordable housing to the definition of affordable housing, and allow military housing to be delivered 45 as part of affordable housing requirements, will successfully enable the provision of military homes? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

64) Do you agree flexibility relating to the size of market homes provided will better enable developments providing affordable housing? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

65) Would requiring a minimum proportion of social rent, unless otherwise specified in development plans, support the delivery of greater number of social rent homes? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If so, what would be

an appropriate minimum proportion and development size threshold taking into account development viability?

66) Are changes to planning policy needed to ensure that affordable temporary accommodation, such as stepping stone housing, is appropriately supported, including flexibilities around space standards? a) If so, what changes would be beneficial?

67) Do you agree that applicants should have discretion to deliver social and affordable housing requirements via cash payments in lieu of on-site delivery on medium sites? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If so, would it be desirable to limit the circumstances in which cash contributions in lieu of on-site delivery can be provided – for example, should it not be permitted on land released from the Green Belt where the Golden Rules apply? Please explain your answer. b) If you do not believe applicants should have blanket discretion to discharge social and affordable housing requirements through commuted sums, do you think cash contributions in lieu of on-site delivery should be permitted in certain circumstances – for example where it could be evidenced that onsite delivery would prevent a scheme from being delivered? Please explain your answer

68) What risks and benefits would you expect this policy to have? Please explain your answer. The government is particularly interested in views on the potential impact on SME housing delivery, overall housing delivery, land values, build out rates, overall social and affordable housing delivery, and Registered Providers (including SME providers).

69) What guidance or wider changes would be needed to enable Local Planning Authorities to spend commuted sums more effectively and more quickly? Please explain your answer.

70) Would further guidance be helpful in supporting authorities to calculate the appropriate value of cash contributions in lieu? a) If so, what elements and principles should this guidance set out? Please explain your answer. For example, guidance could make clear that contributions in lieu should be an amount which is the equivalent value of providing affordable housing on site, based on a comparison of the Gross Development Value of the proposed scheme with the Gross Development Value of the scheme assuming affordable housing was provided onsite.

71) Do you support proposals to enable off site delivery where affordable housing delivery can be optimised to produce better outcomes in terms of quality or quantity? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

72) Do you agree with the criteria set out regarding the locations of specialist housing for older people? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

73) Do you agree with the criteria set out regarding the locations of community based specialist accommodation, including changes to the glossary? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

74) Do you agree with the criteria set out regarding the locations of purpose-built student accommodation and large-scale shared living accommodation, including changes to the glossary? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

75) Do you agree the proposals provide adequate additional support for rural exception sites? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, including what other changes may be needed to increase their uptake? 76) Do you agree with proposals to remove First Homes exception sites as a discrete form of exception site? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

77) Do you agree proposals for a benchmark land value for rural exception sites will help to bring forward more rural affordable homes? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If so, which approach and value as set out in the narrative for policy HO10 of the consultation document is the most beneficial for government to set out?

78) Do you agree the proposals to set out requirements for traveller sites at policy HO12 adequately capture relevant aspects from Planning Policy for Traveller Sites, whilst ensuring fair treatment for traveller sites in the planning system? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. 79) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

80) Do you agree the proposals in policy HO13 will help to ensure development proposals are built out in a reasonable period? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

81) Do you agree the requirements to take a flexible approach to the consenting framework for large scale residential and mixed-use development is sufficient to ensure the opportunities of large scale development are supported? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

82) Are any more specific approaches or definitions needed to support the delivery of very large (super strategic) sites, including new towns? Yes, no a) Please provide your reasons.

**83) Do you agree with the proposed changes to the Housing Delivery Test rule book? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**84) Do you agree that more emphasis should be placed on relevant national strategies and the need for flexibility in planning for economic growth, as drafted in policy E1? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

Link recognises the importance of aligning plan-making with relevant national strategies, including the UK Government's Industrial Strategy. This must crucially include the Land Use Framework, and a national spatial plan for land use for a holistic approach to tackling multiple land use pressures and addressing multiple statutory objectives together. We are concerned that, as drafted, Policy E1 places disproportionate emphasis on growth and investment facilitation without equivalent weight given to environmental limits, climate obligations and nature recovery.

Economic objectives must be framed within legally binding commitments on biodiversity recovery, climate mitigation and adaptation, and water and air quality. An overriding focus on accelerating approval and reducing perceived "barriers" to investment risks marginalising proper consideration of environmental and nature impacts. Plan-making must ensure that economic growth is genuinely sustainable, not simply faster or less constrained.

We are particularly concerned that references to Industrial Strategy Zones and similar growth-focused designations could lead, in practice, to deregulated or "light-touch" approaches to environmental standards. Any such zones must not weaken existing environmental protections or result in cumulative environmental degradation, contrary to our statutory targets. Planning policies should make explicit that environmental safeguards, nature recovery objectives and environmental assessment requirements apply fully and consistently, including within growth or investment zones.

We also consider it essential that Policy E1 is explicitly aligned with the emerging Land Use Framework. The Land Use Framework should provide a strategic spatial steer to ensure that damaging or land-intensive development is directed away from areas of highest value or potential for nature recovery, climate mitigation and ecosystem services. It should also play a proactive role in guiding private investment towards high-opportunity nature recovery areas, helping to integrate economic development with nature-based solutions and long-term land stewardship. Without such alignment, there is a risk of conflicting signals between economic growth policies and environmental land use priorities.

We support flexibility in commercial allocations where this enables adaptation and reuse of land and premises. However, flexibility should not equate to reduced scrutiny of environmental impacts, especially in relation to high-energy uses such as data centres and associated generating capacity. We would welcome stronger recognition of nature-based economic opportunities within Policy E1. In this regard, we support the concept of Natural Investment Zones or “nature-based enterprise zones”, as set out by Rewilding Britain, which align economic development with locally determined land and marine use plans and prioritise nature restoration, climate resilience and community benefit. Embedding such approaches would better reflect the environmental dimension of sustainable development and ensure that economic growth contributes positively to national environmental targets.

**85) Do you agree with the approach to meeting the need for business land and premises in policy E2? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

Link recognises the importance of ensuring an adequate supply of land and premises to support business growth and economic resilience. However, we are concerned that Policy E2 places disproportionate weight on short-term economic growth with insufficient emphasis on environmental limits and long-term sustainability.

The requirement to give “substantial weight” to economic benefits risks in practice systematically outweighing environmental considerations in decision-making. While environmental benefits are referenced in paragraph 1(b), they are framed primarily in the context of domestic food production and agricultural modernisation, rather than recognised as independent and equal objectives. This creates a risk that environmental gains are treated as tertiary to productivity and growth, rather than essential components of sustainable development.

As we have highlighted in our previous responses, planning policy must ensure that economic development is delivered within environmental limits and in line with statutory targets for biodiversity recovery, climate mitigation and adaptation, water quality and air quality. A strong presumption in favour of commercial development, without parallel clarity on environmental safeguards, risks undermining these commitments. “Substantial weight” should only apply to business developments that can demonstrate they are aligned with statutory environmental targets. This should not extend to the expansion of environmentally harmful operations, including those requiring environmental permits.

Paragraph 2(b), should explicitly require consideration of environmental limitations and constraints alongside infrastructure availability. Just as grid connections or water capacity may make certain

locations particularly suitable, ecological sensitivity, carbon storage value, flood risk, or importance for nature recovery should be recognised as valid and decisive spatial considerations. Without this, there is a risk that infrastructure-led arguments could override environmental capacity and cumulative impact concerns.

We also believe the policy should give greater recognition to nature-friendly and nature-based businesses as part of meeting business land needs. There is significant potential for economic development models that actively contribute to ecosystem restoration, climate resilience and rural livelihoods. In this context, we support the concept of Natural Investment Zones or “nature-based enterprise zones”, as proposed by Rewilding Britain, which would align enterprise support with locally determined land and marine use plans and prioritise high-opportunity areas for nature recovery. Embedding such approaches would better integrate economic policy with environmental and land use objectives, in line with the underlying aims of the Land Use Framework.

**86) Do you agree with the proposed new decision-making policy supporting freight and logistics development in policy E3? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**87) Do you agree with the approach to rural business development in policy E4? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We support the principle of sustaining rural economies and recognises the need for appropriate diversification and business development in rural areas. We welcome the emphasis on making use of previously developed land and sites well-related to existing development. However, this should recognise that brownfield land can have significant ecological value and may support priority habitats and species. Its reuse should therefore be informed by robust ecological assessment and avoidance of harm.

E4 requires a much stronger and more explicit emphasis on nature and environmental considerations within rural businesses and commercial activity. While character and design are referenced, there is insufficient recognition of the potential impacts of rural business development on biodiversity, soils, water and climate. Rural areas often contain some of the most sensitive and strategically important land for nature recovery and ecosystem services, and this policy should reflect this.

Regarding the conversion of existing buildings, we welcome the intention to reuse structures. However, the policy should explicitly reference the need for suitable assessment and consideration of the ecological impacts associated with building reuse. Agricultural buildings and other rural structures frequently function as valuable habitats for wildlife such as barn owls and bats. Without clear

safeguards, overly broad permitted diversification and conversion could result in significant biodiversity loss.

Rural economic development must be aligned with statutory environmental objectives and nature recovery strategies. Policy E4 should give greater recognition to nature-friendly rural business activities, including habitat restoration, low-impact land management, nature-based tourism and ecosystem service enterprises, as legitimate and valuable forms of diversification. In this context, we support the concept of Natural Investment Zones or “nature-based enterprise zones”, as proposed by Rewilding Britain, which would align business support with locally determined land and marine use plans and channel investment into high-opportunity areas for nature recovery. Recognising such models within rural business policy would help ensure that diversification contributes positively to biodiversity recovery, climate resilience and long-term land stewardship.

This policy interacts with S5 particularly in relation to agricultural diversification schemes (1a), re-use of buildings (1c) and 1b “Development for rural businesses and services including tourism, where a location outside settlements is necessary”. However, unlike other policies linked to S5, no further guidance is provided in E4 about what would make such proposals acceptable outside settlements. This is a particular issue for National Parks which are significant tourist attractions, and indeed this is reflected in their second statutory purpose, which is to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public. However, there is often a tension between providing those opportunities through visitor accommodation and tourist attractions and damaging the very special qualities that people come to enjoy.

**88) Do you agree with the proposed changes to policy for planning for town centres? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree

We agree with the revised objectives and the emphasis they place on vitality and viability of town centres but references to nature should be restricted to talking about the natural environment. We believe the issue of access to recreational space and the natural environment have been insufficiently considered as part of making these places liveable. We seek an amendment to:

TC1(b) below:

TC1: Planning for town centres

1. To promote the long-term vitality and viability of town centres, development plans should, at the most appropriate level:

...

b. Set out the hierarchy of centres, and any areas within them where specific policies on the nature type and scale of development apply, including:

- i. the extent of town centres;
- ii. areas particularly suitable for a greater diversity and/or intensification of use, including through residential development; and
- iii. areas within which infrastructure and public realm improvements are proposed including publicly accessible biodiverse open spaces for recreation

**89) Do you agree with the approach to development in town centres in policy TC2? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If not, please explain how you would achieve this aim differently?**

**90) What impacts, if any, have you observed on the operation of planning policy for town centres since the introduction of Use class E?**

**91) Do you believe the sequential test in policy TC3 should be retained? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**92) Do you agree with the approach to town centre impact assessments in policy TC4? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**93) Do you agree that the updated policies provide clearer and stronger support for the rollout of 5G and gigabit broadband? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**94) Do you agree the requirements for minimising visual impact and reusing existing structures are practical for applicants and local planning authorities? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**95) Do you agree the supporting information requirements are proportionate and sufficient without creating unnecessary burdens? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**96) Do you agree with the approach to planning for energy and water infrastructure in policy W1? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree, what alternative approach would you suggest?**

Partly disagree

We welcome the recognition in Policy W1 of the need for early engagement between plan-making authorities, utility providers, regulators and network operators. Early, structured engagement is

essential to ensure a clear and shared understanding of energy supply and network capacity, water supply, drainage and wastewater infrastructure. This is particularly important in the context of planned growth, changing consumption patterns and climate change, and will help to identify risks, constraints and opportunities at an early stage.

We also support the intention to improve join-up across the planning system and utilities planning. It is vital that development plans are aligned with investment in water supply and wastewater infrastructure so that new housing and business development can be accommodated without causing deterioration of the water environment. Proper coordination is essential to ensure sufficient water resources, resilient wastewater capacity, and the protection and enhancement of rivers, wetlands and groundwater.

However, the policy omits explicit references to the need to protect and restore the natural environment in line with our legally binding targets. While W1 refers to infrastructure plans and climate change, it does not require alignment with statutory Environment Act objectives, or the plans designed to deliver them. This is a significant omission. Development planning for energy and water infrastructure must be framed not only around enabling growth, but also around achieving environmental recovery and compliance with environmental law.

In particular, the objectives of the chapter do not include alignment with the target under the Environment Act 2021 to reduce the use of public water supply per head of population by 20% by 2038. Planning policy should actively support delivery of this target through demand management, water efficiency standards, and nature-based solutions, alongside traditional infrastructure provision.

Policy W1 should be strengthened to:

- Explicitly require alignment with legally binding environmental targets, including water quality, biodiversity and resource efficiency targets under the Environment Act 2021.
- Reference the need to protect and restore the water environment, ensuring that infrastructure provision supports environmental recovery rather than simply mitigating harm.
- Embed water efficiency and demand reduction, including contributing to the 20% per capita consumption reduction target, as core objectives of energy and water planning.
- Promote nature-based solutions and green infrastructure as integral components of water management and resilience.

**97) Do you agree with the amendments to current Framework policy on planning for renewable and low-carbon energy development and electricity network infrastructure in policy W2? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**98) Do you agree with the proposed approach to supporting development for renewable and low carbon development and electricity network infrastructure in policy W3? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree, and any changes you would make to improve the policy.**

Partly agree

Link supports the objective of accelerating renewable and low carbon energy to address the climate emergency and enhance energy security. However, policy W3 should be strengthened to ensure that genuine co-benefits for climate and biodiversity are embedded in decision-making, and that renewable energy deployment does not come at the expense of high nature value habitats or species.

A more strategic approach is required, particularly for solar energy, prioritising rooftops and existing hard infrastructure such as car parks before greenfield land. Priority should be given to large industrial and commercial buildings, especially high energy users, where on-site generation can significantly reduce demand from the grid. Solar canopies over car parks should be particularly encouraged in association with health facilities, educational establishments, public service buildings and large food retail outlets, where shading can also reduce vehicle overheating and improve public health and user experience. Development should be steered away from sensitive habitats including species-rich grasslands, heathlands wood pasture and mature open grown trees. Renewable and low carbon development and electricity network infrastructure should avoid any loss or damage to irreplaceable habitats including ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees.

The establishment of solar arrays on existing species-rich grassland, or grassland with clear potential for restoration, can result in habitat degradation through soil disturbance, shading effects, altered microclimates and inappropriate grazing regimes, with consequent declines in plant and pollinator diversity.

Where solar is located on arable land or temporary grass leys, there can be biodiversity gains if sites are restored to diverse permanent grassland and managed appropriately over the long term. This requires enforceable, long-term Biodiversity Management Plans to secure measurable improvements in floral, fungal and structural diversity. Policy W3 should make clear that renewable energy development must follow a mitigation hierarchy, avoid harm to irreplaceable and high-value habitats, and secure demonstrable nature recovery alongside decarbonisation.

In addition, policy W3 should provide significantly stronger and more explicit protection for deep peat. Deep peat soils are irreplaceable carbon stores of national importance, and their disturbance for can release substantial greenhouse gas emissions and cause long-term ecological damage. The policy should include a clear presumption against energy development on deep peat, supported by a sequential test requiring developers to demonstrate that no reasonable alternative site of lower

environmental value is available and that development on deep peat is the only viable option. Without such safeguards, renewable deployment risks undermining both climate mitigation and nature recovery objectives.

**99) Do you agree with the proposed approach to supporting development for water infrastructure in policy W4? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

Partly agree

We welcome the policy's recognition that increased capacity for water supply, drainage and wastewater infrastructure should be given substantial weight in planning decisions. Strengthening water infrastructure is essential to support sustainable development. We also welcome the inclusion of improving water quality and reducing water-borne pollution as outcomes that should receive substantial weight. Upgrading and expanding wastewater and drainage infrastructure is critical to addressing pollution pressures affecting rivers, lakes and coastal waters, and to supporting wider environmental and public health objectives.

However, the policy would benefit from a broader framing of the environmental outcomes that water infrastructure should support. In addition to water quality improvements, planning for water infrastructure should also recognise the importance of securing sustainable water quantity, supporting biodiversity, and maintaining healthy freshwater and wetland habitats. Adequate and well-planned infrastructure provision can play an important role in achieving these outcomes, particularly where it helps reduce abstraction pressures, prevent pollution incidents, and support the ecological functioning of water-dependent habitats.

Policy W4 should therefore more clearly reflect the role that water infrastructure investment can play in delivering wider environmental objectives and statutory targets, including nature recovery and the long-term resilience of freshwater ecosystems.

**100) Do you agree with the proposed prohibition on identifying new coal sites in policy M1, and to the removal of coal from the list of minerals of national and local importance? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**101) Do you agree with how policy M1 sets out how the development plan should consider oil and gas? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**102) Do you agree with the proposed addition of critical and growth minerals to the glossary definition of 'minerals of national and local importance'? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree**

nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

**103) Do you agree criteria b of policy M2 strikes the right balance between preventing minerals sterilisation and facilitating non minerals development? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

**104) Do you agree policy M3 appropriately reflects the importance of critical and growth minerals? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

Link recognises the strategic importance of certain minerals, including those that support the green energy transition, net zero delivery and key industrial sectors. We also welcome the explicit support for processing secondary aggregates, which can help reduce the need for new primary extraction and lower associated environmental impacts.

However, we are concerned that Policy M3 places too much weight on the economic and supply-side benefits of mineral extraction, with insufficient consideration of the environmental limits and statutory nature and climate targets. The risks prioritising short-term growth over long-term ecological resilience and nature recovery.

Mineral extraction can have significant and often irreversible impacts on biodiversity, soils, water resources, landscape character and carbon-rich habitats. Policy M3 should more clearly recognise the ecological footprint of mineral development, including cumulative effects and embedded environmental costs across whole supply chains. This is particularly important where demand for “critical” minerals is linked to low-carbon technologies. Environmental harm should not be displaced or underestimated in pursuit of climate objectives.

Greater emphasis should be placed on demand reduction, resource efficiency, reuse and recycling as first principles. Expanding the use of secondary aggregates and recycled materials can reduce pressure on sensitive environments domestically and help limit reliance on imports from countries where extraction practices may be more environmentally damaging. A whole-supply-chain perspective is needed to ensure that mineral policy contributes positively to domestic biodiversity recovery and nature restoration targets.

As we have set out in our previous responses, planning policy should ensure that economic and industrial priorities are pursued within environmental limits and in a manner consistent with legally binding climate and biodiversity commitments.

**105) Do you agree with the exclusion of development involving onshore oil and gas extraction from policy M3? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**106) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**107) Do you agree policy M4 sufficiently addresses the impacts of mineral development, noting that other national decision-making policies will also apply? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

Partly disagree

**108) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Link welcomes the recognition in Policy M4 that mineral development should not have unacceptable adverse impacts on the natural and historic environment, human health or aviation safety, including cumulative effects, and that high standards of restoration and aftercare are required. However, we do not consider that the policy is sufficiently strong to reflect the scale of nature and climate crises, or the need to align decision-making with statutory environmental targets.

In particular, the policy needs to refer to Protected Landscapes and landscape character and should place greater and more explicit emphasis on impacts on biodiversity, for example protected sites, irreplaceable and priority habitats, ecological networks and carbon-rich soils, and it should clearly link decision-making to the achievement of legally binding biodiversity and climate targets. The test of “unacceptable adverse impact” risks being open to interpretation without this specificity and would risk inconsistent application unless tied more directly to statutory objectives for nature recovery.

We also believe that the policy should be more explicit that there should be no mineral development on ancient woodland and peat soils, given their importance for carbon storage, water regulation and biodiversity. This would align with the emerging position of the England Peat Partnership and help avoid damaging cases affecting vulnerable peatland sites, such as Dane’s Moss. Peatland protection should not be addressed solely through policy on peat extraction; the wider impacts of mineral development on peat soils must also be clearly prohibited.

While restoration and aftercare are essential, greater assurance is needed that restoration proposals will deliver measurable biodiversity gains and long-term ecological resilience, not simply landscape reinstatement. Given the financial and environmental risks associated with mineral sites, stronger

expectations around financial guarantees may also be warranted in order to secure delivery of high-quality restoration. As we have set out in our previous responses to reforms of the National Planning Policy Framework, minerals policy must operate within environmental limits and actively contribute to nature recovery rather than merely mitigating harm.

**109) Do you agree with approach to coal, oil and gas in policy M5? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree

Link welcomes the clear position that proposals for the extraction of peat at new or extended sites should be refused. This is an important and necessary step in recognising the critical role that peatlands play in carbon storage, biodiversity conservation, water regulation and flood mitigation.

However, we consider that the policy should go further by making explicit that development on peat soils, not only peat extraction, should be avoided. Damaging or degrading peat through other forms of development can result in significant carbon emissions and long-term ecological harm. Strengthening the policy in line with the emerging position of the England Peat Partnership would provide greater clarity and consistency and help avoid repeat situations such as proposals affecting sites like Dane's Moss, where development pressures have highlighted the vulnerability of peatland habitats.

In relation to coal, oil and gas, while the restrictive criteria are noted, we remain concerned that permitting new exploration or production within licensed areas risks undermining climate commitments and the transition to net zero. As we have set out in our previous responses, planning policy should be fully aligned with statutory carbon budgets and climate targets. Any exceptions should be demonstrably compatible with those obligations.

We note the support for underground gas and carbon storage where geologically feasible. Any such proposals must be subject to rigorous environmental assessment, long-term monitoring, and clear safeguards to prevent leakage, pollution or harm to groundwater and ecosystems.

**110) Are there any other exceptional circumstances in which coal extraction should be permitted?  
Yes/No**

No

**111) If yes, please outline the exceptional circumstances in which you think coal extraction should be permitted.**

**112) Do you agree policy M6 strikes the right balance between preventing the sterilisation of minerals reserves and minerals-related activities, and facilitating non-minerals development? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**113) Does policy M6 provide sufficient clarity on the role of Minerals Consultation Areas? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

**114) Do you agree policy L1 provides clear guidance on how Local Plans should be prepared to promote the efficient use of land? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

Partly agree

Link partly agrees that Policy L1 provides clearer guidance on promoting the efficient use of land, particularly through its strong preference for re-using previously developed land and optimising site densities. The prioritisation of brownfield land where it is demonstrably of low biodiversity value, estate regeneration, and the re-use of service yards and car parks is welcome and aligns with the objective of making best use of land while limiting unnecessary greenfield release.

However, while previously developed land is often located in urban areas with good sustainable transport connectivity, this is not always the case. Development on brownfield sites should not be supported where locations fail to offer a genuine choice of sustainable transport options, or where such options cannot realistically be provided. Effective land use must go hand in hand with sustainable accessibility, consistent with the principles set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and the goals of the Local Transport Framework. Without this, intensification risks reinforcing car dependency rather than reducing it.

In addition, Policy L1 must more clearly recognise the ecological value of brownfield land. Previously developed sites were often assumed to be of low environmental quality, yet many support important priority habitats and species, particularly in urban areas where such spaces can be scarce. In the context of urban nature recovery and implementation of urban Local Nature Recovery Strategies, brownfield sites can, and should, make a significant contribution to biodiversity, climate resilience and public wellbeing. Plans should therefore require proportionate ecological assessment and ensure that redevelopment avoids harm to high-value habitats, secures measurable biodiversity net gain, and, where appropriate, retains or enhances existing ecological features as part of well-designed, nature-rich development.

Finally, we support the re-use of surplus car parks, particularly where demand can be managed and alternatives to private car use are available. However, a different approach is required in relation to linear transport infrastructure such as disused railway lines. These corridors often present valuable opportunities to create high-quality active travel routes for everyday journeys and healthy recreation. Such infrastructure should be safeguarded and repurposed for walking, wheeling and cycling, rather than reallocated for built development.

**115) If not, what further guidance is needed?**

Further guidance is needed to ensure that maximising the use of previously developed land under Policy L1 does not inadvertently undermine biodiversity and urban nature recovery objectives. Brownfield land is not always of low ecological value; many sites support priority habitats and species and can contribute significantly to Local Nature Recovery Strategies and wider environmental goals. The Framework should therefore make clear that plan-makers must undertake proportionate ecological assessment of brownfield allocations, identify sites of high biodiversity value, and ensure redevelopment avoids harm, retains important ecological features where feasible, and secures measurable biodiversity net gain aligned with strategic nature recovery priorities. This would help ensure that effective land use is defined not only by density, but also with reference to other statutory objectives

**116) Do you agree policy L2 provides clear guidance on how development proposals should be assessed to ensure efficient use of land? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree

Link partly agrees that Policy L2 provides clearer guidance on assessing proposals to ensure the efficient use of land, particularly in giving substantial weight to the remediation of degraded land and the reuse of vacant and under-utilised sites and buildings. These principles can help reduce pressure on greenfield land and support regeneration within existing settlements.

However, the policy should more clearly align with statutory nature recovery targets and environmental commitments. In addition, brownfield land is not necessarily of low ecological value; with many previously developed sites support priority habitats and species, particularly in urban areas where such habitats are scarce. In seeking to optimise land use through intensification, upward extensions or redevelopment of service yards and car parks, decision-makers should be required to give proper consideration to the existing ecological value of sites and their contribution to Local Nature Recovery Strategies, urban cooling, sustainable drainage and access to nature.

We also consider that substantial weight should be given not only to development that remediates or intensifies land use, but to proposals whose primary purpose is nature recovery or significant biodiversity enhancement, especially on despoiled or vacant brownfield land. Recognising nature restoration as a beneficial and effective use of land in its own right would help ensure that efficiency is understood in environmental as well as quantitative terms and would better support the creation of nature-rich, climate-resilient places.

**117) Do you agree policy L2 identifies appropriate typologies of development to support intensification? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If not, what typologies should be added or removed and why?**

**118) Do you agree the high-level design principles provided in policy L2(d) appropriate for national policy? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**119) Do you agree policy L2 (d)(i) achieves its intent to enable appropriate development that may differ from the existing street scene, particularly in cases such as corner plot redevelopment and upwards extensions. Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**120) Do you agree with the proposed safeguards in policy L2 that allow development in residential curtilages? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**121) Do you agree policy L3 provides clear guidance on achieving appropriate densities for residential and mixed-use schemes? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If not, please explain how guidance could be clearer?**

**122) Do you agree with the minimum density requirements set out within policy L3? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree. b) Could these minimum density requirements lead to adverse impacts on Gypsies and Travellers and other groups with protected characteristics? Please provide your reasons, including any evidence**

**123) Do you agree that using dwellings per hectare is an appropriate metric for setting minimum density requirements? Additionally, is our definition of 'net developable area' within the NPPF suitable for this policy? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**124) Do you agree with the proposed definition of a ‘well-connected’ station used to help set higher minimum density standards in targeted growth locations? In particular, are the parameters we’re using for the number of Travel to Work Areas and service frequency appropriate for defining a ‘well-connected’ station? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons and preferred alternatives.**

**125) Are there other types of location (such as urban core, or other types of public transport node) where minimum density standards should be set nationally? Yes/No a) If so, how should these locations be defined in a clear and unambiguous way and what should these density standards be?**

**126) Should we define a specific range of residential densities for land around stations classified as ‘well-connected’?**

**127) If so, what should that range be, and which locations should it apply to?**

**128) Do you agree policy L4 provides clear high-level guidance on good design for residential extensions? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**129) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

**130) Do you agree that policy GB1 provides appropriate criteria for establishing new Green Belts? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

Strongly disagree

**131) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

We do not consider that policy GB1 provides appropriate or sufficiently balanced criteria for establishing new Green Belts. We are concerned that the policy’s framing implies that Green Belts are inherently in tension with long-term growth ambitions. By requiring demonstration that new Green Belts would be “compatible with long term growth ambitions”, the policy risks positioning Green Belt designation simply as an obstacle to development rather than recognising its positive functions. Green Belts can deliver substantial public benefits, including climate mitigation, flood management, public access, landscape protection nature recovery and health and wellbeing. The emphasis should therefore be on articulating and securing these benefits, not simply on demonstrating that growth will not be constrained.

The criteria for establishing new Green Belts should explicitly reference alignment with the Land Use Framework, statutory climate and biodiversity targets, and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs). New designations should be informed by strategic spatial planning that directs development to the

most appropriate locations and safeguards land of high environmental value or nature recovery potential.

Following the recommendations in Link's *Improving Green Belt for Nature* (December 2024), the policy should move beyond a narrow containment function and embed a clear nature recovery objective within Green Belt policy (including in GB2).<sup>7</sup> New Green Belts should be required to contribute positively to biodiversity recovery, ecological connectivity, carbon storage and access to nature, with management frameworks in place to deliver these outcomes. Instead of the current approach that takes an implicit default of hostility towards new Green Belt designation, the policy should allow for proactive and strategic use of Green Belt where it would deliver long-term environmental and social value, alongside sustainable patterns of development.

Finally, the Government should consider the potential for complementary or sub-designations such as "Wild Belts", as proposed by The Wildlife Trusts, which would focus specifically on nature recovery and rewilding in areas close to towns and cities. Such approaches could help "green the Green Belt" and ensure that land around urban areas plays a meaningful role in meeting statutory nature recovery targets.

In summary, GB1 should be reframed to recognise the positive strategic role of Green Belts in delivering environmental and social objectives, ensure alignment with the Land Use Framework and statutory targets, and support designations that actively contribute to nature recovery rather than treating Green Belt as primarily a constraint on growth.

**132) Do you agree policy GB2 gives sufficient detail on the expected roles spatial development strategies and local plans play in assessing Green belt land? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

We do not consider that policy GB2 provides sufficient detail or the right strategic framework for assessing existing Green Belt land.

While the policy refers to the five established Green Belt purposes, it does not reflect the urgent need for Green Belt policy to contribute actively to nature recovery and climate resilience as core. Spatial development strategies and local plans should be required to assess Green Belt land not only against containment purposes, but also fundamentally against statutory environmental objectives, including biodiversity targets under the Environment Act 2021 and climate mitigation and adaptation goals.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://wcl.org.uk/docs/Link\\_briefing\\_Improving\\_Green\\_Belt\\_for\\_nature\\_Dec2024.pdf](https://wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_briefing_Improving_Green_Belt_for_nature_Dec2024.pdf)

As set out in our *Improving Green Belt for Nature* (December 2024) report, the Government should review and update Green Belt's core purposes to include an explicit role in delivering nature recovery, ecological connectivity and climate resilience, while ensuring that any new purpose is carefully framed to avoid creating opportunities for speculative development that would undermine the existing purposes of Green Belt. Green Belt land around urban areas can play a critical role in habitat restoration, carbon sequestration, natural flood management and cooling, helping build resilience to climate change in surrounding communities.

Policy GB2 should also require clear alignment with the Land Use Framework, ensuring that Green Belt assessments contribute to the most effective and strategic use of land.

Where strategic releases of Green Belt land are proposed, these should be matched by the identification and long-term protection of other Green Belt land for habitat enhancement and restoration. Once areas have been enhanced or created for nature, they should be safeguarded from future development. This could be achieved through the introduction of a robust and permanent "Wildbelt" designation, as advocated by The Wildlife Trusts, supporting commitments such as 30 by 30 and helping to "green the Green Belt".

**133) Do you agree with proposals to better enable development opportunities around suitable stations to be brought forward? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

**134) Do you agree the expectations set out in policy GB5 are appropriate and deliverable in Local Plans? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**135) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**136) Do you agree policies GB6 and GB7 set out appropriate tests for considering development on Green Belt land? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We support the continued recognition in policy GB6 that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should only be approved in very special circumstances, with substantial weight given to harm to openness. Retaining a strong protective framework is essential to maintaining the integrity and long-term function of the Green Belt.

However, policies GB6 and GB7 should be strengthened to better reflect contemporary environmental priorities. In particular, the list of development that is not inappropriate in GB7 should explicitly include development whose primary purpose is nature restoration, habitat creation, ecological

connectivity or climate resilience. While certain land use changes (e.g. for outdoor recreation) are referenced, there is no clear recognition that land management and associated works aimed at restoring nature are appropriate and desirable in the Green Belt. Given the UK's statutory biodiversity and climate targets, and the increasing importance of land around urban areas for habitat restoration, natural flood management and carbon sequestration, policy should positively support development and land use change that delivers these outcomes. Explicit recognition would provide clarity to decision-makers and land managers and help avoid uncertainty where nature recovery requires modest built infrastructure or engineering works.

As we have highlighted in our previous responses, Green Belt policy should evolve to play a more proactive role in delivering nature recovery alongside its traditional containment purposes. Clarifying that nature restoration is appropriate development would align Green Belt policy with environmental legislation and emerging spatial priorities, without weakening protection against inappropriate built development.

**137) Do you agree policy GB7(1h) successfully targets appropriate development types and locations in the Green Belt, including that it applies only to housing and mixed-use development capable of meeting the density requirements in chapter 12? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**138) Please provide your reasons, including any evidence that this policy would lead to adverse impacts on Gypsies and Travellers.**

**139) Do you agree that site-specific viability assessment should be permitted on development proposals subject to the Golden Rules in these three circumstances? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

It is essential that any site-specific viability assessment does not undermine the delivery of the full Golden Rules, particularly with respect to contributions to nature recovery and green infrastructure. To avoid this, the Golden Rules should be much more explicit about the acceptable contributions to nature recovery. Strategic releases of Green Belt land should be accompanied by the identification of additional Green Belt areas for habitat enhancement and restoration. Once land within the Green Belt has been enhanced or created for nature, it should be permanently protected from future development, potentially through a new "Wildbelt" designation. Additionally, any land value uplift arising from development on released Green Belt sites should be captured and prioritised for nature restoration, including through higher mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements.

**140) With regards to previously developed land, are there further changes to policy or guidance that could be made to help ensure site-specific viability assessments are used only for genuinely previously developed land, and not predominantly greenfield sites?**

**143) Do you agree with local planning authorities testing viability at the planmaking stage using a standardised Benchmark Land Values scenario of 10 times Existing Use Value for greenfield, Green Belt land? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please explain your answer.**

**144) Do you have any other comments on the use of nationally standardised Benchmark Land Values for local planning authorities to test viability at the plan-making stage?**

**145) Do you agree that proposed changes to the grey belt definition will improve the operability of the grey belt definition, without undermining the general protections given to other footnote 7 areas? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Strongly disagree

We are concerned that the revised definition of grey belt remains overly flexible and risks undermining the fundamental purposes of the Green Belt.

In particular, we reiterate that nature restoration and biodiversity preservation should be recognised as a core function of the Green Belt. The current framing of grey belt focuses narrowly on contribution to purposes (a), (b) and (d), without adequately recognising the environmental and ecological functions that Green Belt land increasingly performs in the context of the climate and nature crises. Assessments under Annex E should explicitly require consideration of nature recovery potential and existing ecological value, not solely spatial or visual contribution to Green Belt purposes.

We are also concerned that the inclusion of previously developed land within the grey belt definition may inadvertently weaken protections for brownfield sites that have significant ecological value. Many such sites support open mosaic habitats and rare or priority species. Without clear safeguards, these areas could be released for development on the assumption that “previously developed” equates to low environmental value, which is frequently not the case.

Annex E should place stronger emphasis on identifying and safeguarding areas suitable for nature recovery, in alignment with wider environmental objectives. Green Belt assessments should not only identify land that makes a weaker contribution to certain spatial purposes, but also proactively identify land that is strategically important for biodiversity enhancement, habitat connectivity and climate resilience.

Finally, the proposed definition of grey belt relies on judgements about whether land “strongly contributes” to selected Green Belt purposes. This risks a high degree of subjectivity and potential inconsistency in application. Without clearer thresholds and stronger environmental safeguards, there is a real risk that cumulative releases of so-called grey belt could fundamentally undermine the overall integrity and permanence of the Green Belt, contrary to long-standing national policy objectives.

**146) Do you agree that policy DP1 provides sufficient clarity on how development plans should deliver high quality design and placemaking outcomes? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

Partly agree

We partly agree that policy DP1 provides helpful clarification on how development plans should deliver high quality design and placemaking outcomes. We welcome the clear expectation that plans should articulate a design-led vision, identify where design codes and masterplans are required, set locally specific policies, and clarify when design review will apply. This provides a useful framework for embedding design considerations at the plan-making stage.

We strongly support the use of design codes where they follow the best practice models developed by the Royal Town Planning Institute and the RSPB in *Cracking the Code*, which demonstrate how codes can integrate meaningful, measurable provisions for nature recovery.<sup>8</sup> Evidence from this work, alongside the *Housing Design Audit for England*, shows that codes are most effective when they move beyond aesthetic considerations and include clear, enforceable standards for biodiversity, green infrastructure and long-term stewardship.

The *Housing Design Audit for England* found significant inconsistency in design quality across large housing schemes and concluded that clearer, site-specific design guidance is essential to securing better outcomes.<sup>9</sup> In particular, it highlighted the value of site-specific design codes and masterplans in establishing a strong vision, securing contextual responsiveness, and ensuring that quality ambitions are carried through from outline permission to detailed delivery. The report recommends wider and more consistent use of such codes, especially for larger allocations, to provide certainty, improve coordination between stakeholders, and reduce the risk of quality dilution at reserved matters stage. These findings reinforce the importance of DP1(b) and suggest that site-specific design codes should not merely be optional tools, but more actively encouraged, particularly for major developments and areas of change. Where they are prepared early, with meaningful community engagement and multidisciplinary input, they can embed expectations for green infrastructure, landscape structure,

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.lda-design.co.uk/kindling/news/cracking-the-code/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://placealliance.org.uk/research/national-housing-audit/>

walkability and biodiversity into the fundamental layout of development, rather than relying on later mitigation.

DP1 would benefit from greater clarity that design codes must incorporate robust, locally specific requirements for nature and climate, including strategies for protecting and enhancing biodiversity as an integral part of placemaking from the outset. We recommend that the reference to achieving a “suitable degree of variety” in prescription explicitly includes meeting, and where possible exceeding, locally and nationally set minimum standards. For example, design codes should be encouraged to set expectations that go beyond the 10% biodiversity net gain minimum, including through higher locally set targets where appropriate.

Local design codes should also set specific minimum standards for access to high quality green and blue spaces, ensuring equitable provision, multifunctionality and long-term stewardship. Clear metrics and spatial standards are essential if codes are to deliver health, climate adaptation and nature recovery outcomes in practice.<sup>10</sup>

While design coding has an important role, it is not a full substitute for national regulation. In some areas, more consistent delivery would be achieved through amendments to Building Regulations, particularly for building fabric measures such as the mandatory installation of swift bricks and other integral features for wildlife. Our briefings on nature-friendly design requirements highlight the need for such nationally applied measures to avoid patchy uptake and ensure certainty for developers and local authorities alike.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, while DP1 sets a positive framework but requires stronger and more explicit direction to ensure that site-specific design codes are widely encouraged for major schemes, systematically embed biodiversity protection and enhancement, and set ambitious and measurable standards to guarantee consistent delivery.

**147) Do you agree with the approach to design tools set out in policy DP2? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

Partly agree

Link partly agrees with the approach to design tools set out in policy DP2. We welcome the recognition that local design guides, codes and masterplans should be grounded in a clear understanding of

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<sup>10</sup> See the specific core requirements in model nature-recovery Design Codes: [https://www.lda-design.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/LDADesign\\_DistrictCode\\_March2022.pdf](https://www.lda-design.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/LDADesign_DistrictCode_March2022.pdf) ; [https://www.lda-design.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/LDADesign\\_SiteCode\\_March2022.pdf](https://www.lda-design.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/LDADesign_SiteCode_March2022.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [https://wcl.org.uk/docs/New\\_nature-friendly\\_design\\_requirements\\_Link\\_briefing\\_Nov2024.pdf](https://wcl.org.uk/docs/New_nature-friendly_design_requirements_Link_briefing_Nov2024.pdf)

character, context and deliverability, informed by community engagement, proportionate in prescription, and supported by monitoring and review processes.

In particular, we strongly welcome the reference to monitoring and review. Too often, aspirations set out in codes and masterplans are diluted at later stages of the planning process. Clear monitoring mechanisms, alongside effective design review, are essential to ensure that promised environmental and placemaking enhancements are actually delivered on the ground. This reflects the findings of the Place Alliance Housing Design Audit, which identified the importance of stronger coding, clearer expectations and design scrutiny to secure consistent quality outcomes.<sup>12</sup>

However, we consider that DP2 could be strengthened through more explicit emphasis on environmental considerations. Evidence from the Royal Town Planning Institute and the RSPB report *Cracking the Code* demonstrates that design codes are most effective when they embed measurable requirements for biodiversity, green infrastructure and long-term stewardship, rather than treating nature as illustrative or optional.<sup>13</sup> Lessons from exemplar district- and site-level codes show that where environmental principles are clearly codified, through parameters for green corridors, tree canopy cover, habitat creation, sustainable drainage etc, positive outcomes can be delivered.<sup>14</sup>

We therefore recommend that DP2 explicitly require that environmental context and opportunities for nature recovery are integral to design tools from the outset. In addition to reflecting local character and community aspirations, all guides and codes should embed strategies for protecting and enhancing biodiversity and climate resilience as foundational structuring elements of development. We suggest adding reference to ensure that all guides and codes take into account relevant national guidance as well as Local Nature Recovery Strategies, local Nature Recovery Network maps, and local tree and woodland strategies. Aligning design tools with these strategies would ensure that site-specific and area-based codes actively contribute to nature recovery, rather than merely avoiding harm.

Finally, while proportionality in prescription is appropriate, this should not result in environmental standards being weakened. As set out in our previous representations, design tools should meet, and where possible exceed, locally and nationally set minimum standards, including biodiversity net gain requirements and access to high quality green and blue space.

In summary, DP2 would benefit from stronger and more explicit direction to ensure that biodiversity protection, nature recovery and climate resilience are embedded as core, measurable components of all local design guides, codes and masterplans.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://placealliance.org.uk/research/national-housing-audit/>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.lda-design.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/CrackingtheCode\\_March2022.pdf](https://www.lda-design.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/CrackingtheCode_March2022.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.lda-design.co.uk/kindling/news/cracking-the-code/>

**148) Do you agree policy DP3 clearly set out principles for development proposals to respond to their context and create well-designed places? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree

We partly agree that policy DP3 sets out a clear and helpful framework of principles for development to respond to context and create well-designed places. The structure, covering context, liveability, climate, nature, movement, built form, public space and identity, provides a strong foundation and appropriately gives substantial weight to design quality.

We particularly welcome the inclusion of a distinct nature principle, and the recognition that development should connect to high-quality, multifunctional green infrastructure and incorporate sustainable drainage systems. This aligns with recommendations from the RTPi and RSPB in *Cracking the Code*, which demonstrate that nature must be treated as a fundamental element of place-making, not an afterthought. As the report highlights, where biodiversity requirements are clearly codified, through measurable expectations for habitat creation, green corridors, canopy cover and stewardship, outcomes are more consistent and resilient. Lessons from both district- and site-level coding work, including model Design District and Site Codes, show that effective environmental coding identifies a clear green infrastructure framework at the outset, secures space for habitat connectivity, integrates sustainable drainage as multifunctional blue-green corridors, and establishes parameters for long-term management. These exemplars demonstrate the value of combining strategic landscape structure (district level) with site-specific prescriptions that secure delivery through layout, typologies and stewardship arrangements. DP3 would benefit from clearer signposting that such structured, layered approaches are expected where relevant.

In addition, we recommend that the nature section include a stronger emphasis on nature *recovery*, biodiversity enhancement and species outcomes. The current wording focuses on green infrastructure and tree cover but does not explicitly reference biodiversity recovery or species abundance. We recommend explicit reference to contributing to nature recovery, strengthening ecological networks and delivering measurable gains for priority habitats and species, in line with Local Nature Recovery Strategies and national targets.

We also recommend that the policy explicitly recognise the need for both landscaping and fabric-based biodiversity enhancements. While green infrastructure is critical, measures such as appropriately positioned swift bricks, bat boxes and integral nesting features embedded within the building fabric are necessary to support key species and ensure consistent delivery across sites. Evidence from design coding research indicates that without clear requirements, these measures are often omitted at detailed design stage.

The emphasis on refusing poorly designed schemes and giving substantial weight to design compliance is welcome. However, as highlighted in the Place Alliance Housing Design Audit, consistent monitoring, effective design review and clear coding are essential to avoid erosion of quality through the development process.<sup>15</sup>

**149) Do you agree with the proposed approach to using design review and other design processes in policy DP4? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) If not, what else would help secure better design and placemaking outcomes?**

Strongly agree

We strongly agree with the proposed approach to encourage design review and other design processes in policy DP4. Embedding design quality throughout the evolution, assessment and delivery of development proposals is essential to securing genuinely well-designed places, and we particularly welcome the clear expectation that local planning authorities should use design review for significant schemes and prevent post-permission erosion of quality.

Evidence from the Place Alliance *Housing Design Audit* highlighted the importance of robust design review, clear coding and consistent scrutiny in achieving better outcomes, particularly for major housing developments.<sup>16</sup> Too often, environmental and placemaking ambitions are diluted between outline approval and completion. The explicit requirement not to allow material diminishment of quality is therefore strongly supported. Analysis, including the “Lost Nature” report demonstrates how environmental features secured at application stage can be reduced or altered during delivery. Of nearly 6,000 homes across 42 developments found only half of promised nature mitigation measures were delivered, with, for example, 83% of hedgehog highways and 100% of bug boxes missing.<sup>17</sup> DP4’s emphasis on accurate plans, materials and preventing post-consent downgrading is therefore critical, but must be applied robustly to ecological as well as visual design elements.

In addition, to secure better placemaking outcomes, design review processes must place stronger and more explicit emphasis on meeting nature recovery, biodiversity and species objectives and delivering outcomes, not just ‘quality’. Design tools and review panels should assess whether schemes are embedding measurable nature recovery objectives from the outset, including habitat connectivity, canopy cover, multifunctional sustainable drainage, and long-term stewardship.

**150) Do you agree that policy TR1 will provide an effective basis for taking a vision-led approach and supporting sustainable transport through planmaking? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither**

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<sup>15</sup> <https://placealliance.org.uk/research/national-housing-audit/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://placealliance.org.uk/research/national-housing-audit/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://wildjustice.org.uk/general/lost-nature-report/>

**agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree.

We welcome the introduction of a clear ‘vision-led’ approach within policy TR1. Truly sustainable transport must be embedded from the earliest stages of plan-making and form a core component of spatial strategy, rather than being treated as a secondary or mitigation-focused consideration. Integrating transport with land use planning from the outset is essential to creating well-designed, inclusive and genuinely sustainable places.

We recommend the policy should place even greater emphasis on prioritising active travel, walking, wheeling and cycling, as the foundation of sustainable movement, rather than a subset. While these modes are referenced, strengthening their prominence would better reflect the transport hierarchy and ensure that plan-making consistently gives first consideration to the most sustainable and space-efficient forms of travel.

We also suggest that policy TR1 should more explicitly reference complementary green infrastructure, such as wildflower-rich road verges, and climate objectives within the factors to be considered. Transport decisions have significant environmental and carbon implications; therefore, the vision-led approach should not be siloed from wider environmental, biodiversity and net zero goals. Integrating transport planning with green infrastructure networks and climate resilience strategies would support more holistic and future-proofed development outcomes.

**151) Do you agree that policy TR2 strikes an appropriate balance between supporting maximum parking standards where they can deliver planning benefits, and requiring a degree of flexibility and consideration of business requirements in setting those standards? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**152) Do you agree with the changes proposed in policy TR3(1a), including the reference to proposals which could generate a significant amount of movement, and the proposed use of the Connectivity Tool? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree.

We welcome the strengthened focus within TR3(1a) on locating development where it can support sustainable patterns of movement, particularly the emphasis on making the most of existing and proposed transport infrastructure and optimising the amount or density of development in

appropriate locations. This approach can help reduce the need for additional infrastructure, limit land take, and minimise associated environmental impacts.

We also support the principle of using the Connectivity Tool alongside other relevant evidence to inform decision-making, provided it is applied robustly and does not displace the need for qualitative assessment and local context.

However, we consider that 1c should be significantly strengthened. The current wording requiring environmental impacts to be “identified, assessed and taken into account” and for “opportunities” to be taken to avoid or mitigate adverse effects, is not commensurate with the scale of the nature and climate emergencies or the UK’s associated legal targets. Stronger, more directive language is needed to require the avoidance and mitigation of harm and the fragmentation of habitats and ecological networks as a matter of course, alongside the delivery of measurable net gains not only in air quality but also in biodiversity and green infrastructure.

We also recommend more explicit reference to nature recovery and climate goal considerations within the factors determining sustainable locations. Decisions about the location of development, particularly in relation to transport, have significant environmental implications. The policy should ensure that transport and land-use considerations are not siloed from biodiversity enhancement, green infrastructure and carbon reduction objectives, but are fully integrated into a coherent and climate-aligned spatial strategy.

**153) Do you agree that proposed policy TR4 provides a sufficient basis for the effective integration of transport considerations in creating well-designed places? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

Partly agree

We support the clear prioritisation in TR4 of pedestrian and cycle movements, followed by access to high-quality public transport. Embedding this hierarchy within street design is essential to creating well-designed, inclusive and genuinely sustainable places. We also welcome the emphasis on safety, accessibility and inclusive design for disabled people, older people and children, as well as the integration of transport considerations into placemaking more broadly.

However, the policy could be strengthened through more explicit reference to green infrastructure within the policy wording itself, rather than relying primarily on cross-reference to national design guidance. In particular, under criterion (1c) which requires streets and routes to create places that are “safe, inclusive and attractive for all users”.

We recommend explicitly recognising the role of green infrastructure and biophilic landscaping in delivering attractive, healthy and climate-resilient streets. Street trees, sustainable drainage features, planting, wildflower-rich grassland green spaces and connected green corridors are not aesthetic additions but integral components of high-quality street design. They contribute to biodiversity, urban cooling, air quality improvement, surface water management and user wellbeing, while encouraging walking and cycling. Embedding green infrastructure requirements directly within TR4 would ensure that transport and street design policy fully aligns with wider environmental and climate objectives, and would strengthen the policy's effectiveness in delivering truly well-designed places.

**154) Do you agree with policy TR5 as a basis for supporting the provision and retention of roadside facilities where there is an identified need? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**155) Do you agree that the amended wording proposed in policy TR6 provides a clearer basis for considering when transport assessments and travel plans will be required, and for considering impacts on the transport network? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

**156) Do you agree the proposed text in policy TR7 provide an effective basis for assessing proposals for marine ports, airports and general aviation facilities? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**157) Do you agree with the additional policy on maintaining and improving rights of way proposed in policy TR8? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree.

We welcome the inclusion of policy TR8 on maintaining and improving public rights of way. A clear national policy basis is essential to support delivery of the Government's commitments on access to nature set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan 2025. Strengthening, extending and connecting rights of way is fundamental to improving public access to green space, supporting active travel, and promoting health and wellbeing.

However, the wording should more explicitly require the protection and enhancement of rights of way, not merely their maintenance. In the context of rights of way, "maintenance" typically refers to the practicalities of keeping paths open and usable, rather than securing their long-term quality, connectivity and amenity value. The policy should also recognise the importance of open access land as a vital means of providing access to green space, and the significant public benefits that flow from that access.

To ensure no regression in policy ambition, we recommend replacing TR8 with the following wording:

*Development proposals should protect and enhance public rights of way, open access land, and National Trails. Where development affects an existing right of way, the route should be retained on its existing alignment wherever possible. Where diversion is necessary, the alternative route must be of equal or better quality, safety, accessibility and user experience, and should avoid increased interaction with vehicular traffic. Opportunities to improve the connectivity, accessibility and quality of rights of way networks should be actively pursued through development.*

This approach would better safeguard nationally significant walking routes, which are integral to securing wider NPPF outcomes, including the delivery of healthy, inclusive communities.

Furthermore, improved access routes alone will not meaningfully enhance access to nature if biodiversity continues to decline or if green infrastructure and habitat requirements associated with new development are weak or inconsistently applied. Increased provision of access must go hand in hand with genuine improvements to the quality, extent and ecological value of green infrastructure and habitats.

Evidence such as Lost Nature highlights the failure to deliver promised environmental enhancements in practice.<sup>18</sup> In this context, the interaction between TR8 and wider policies is critical. Proposed changes to policy N1, alongside new exemptions to biodiversity net gain requirements, risk reducing the quantity and quality of green space delivered through development. The Government's access to nature ambitions cannot be achieved if policies addressing biodiversity loss and green infrastructure provision are weakened elsewhere in the framework.

**158) Do you agree with the approach to planning for healthy communities in policy HC1, including the expectation that the development plan set local standards for different types of recreational land, drawing upon relevant national standards? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree.

We welcome the focus on healthy and inclusive places within HC1, including the expectation that development plans set local standards for outdoor recreational land drawing on relevant national standards and best practice. We agree with the intention to make the expected level of provision for community facilities and public service infrastructure, such as green routes and green spaces, explicit in policy, given their vital role in supporting health and wellbeing, improving quality of life, and

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<sup>18</sup> <https://wildjustice.org.uk/general/lost-nature-report/>

ensuring that appropriate contributions from development are secured. Embedding quantitative and qualitative standards in local plans is essential to addressing health inequalities and ensuring that growth is aligned with community wellbeing. This has a potential connection with the proposed health duty within the devolution reforms under the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. The emerging requirement for strategic authorities to have regard to improving health outcomes reinforces the need for robust planning policies that proactively secure access to green space, recreation and community infrastructure as determinants of health.

In this context, the “understanding of any existing deficits in the availability of community facilities and public service infrastructure” should be informed by Rights of Way Improvement Plans prepared under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, as well as by Natural England’s Green Infrastructure mapping and the Green Infrastructure Standards for England. These provide an established, evidence-based framework for assessing access, connectivity and quality, and should be explicitly referenced to ensure consistency and robustness in plan-making. We also strongly support HC1(D). Policies for play and informal recreation should aim to secure a connected network of high-quality, inclusive and accessible opportunities as part of the wider network of green space provision. This should be secured through both on-site provision in conjunction with land allocated for development and through other contributions and investment, ensuring that new and existing communities benefit from an integrated and accessible green infrastructure network.

However, we recommend that HC1 go further by introducing a specific requirement for local plans to set a time-bound target for achieving the “Access to Greenspace Close to Home” standard set out in Natural England’s Green Infrastructure Standards for England. In particular, plans should commit to ensuring that everyone lives within a 15-minute walk of a high-quality green or blue space, and require all new development to meet this standard as a minimum expectation.

This target formed part of the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 and is crucial for ensuring equitable access to nature for health and wellbeing. Without a clear, measurable and time-specific requirement in local plans, delivery risks being inconsistent. Strengthening HC1 in this way would help provide greater certainty, align planning policy with national environmental and health objectives, and help ensure that all communities benefit from access to high-quality green infrastructure.

**159) Do you agree that Local Green Space should be ‘close’ to the community it serves? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Strongly agree.

We support the clarification that Local Green Space should be “reasonably close” to the community it serves. The change from “close” to “reasonably close” provides helpful flexibility while maintaining the core principle that such spaces must be genuinely local in character and function. It ensures that

areas designated as Local Green Space are meaningfully related to, and used by, the communities they serve, rather than being remote or serving a wider strategic function more appropriately addressed through other designations.

This refinement strengthens the policy by reinforcing the intention that Local Green Space designation should protect valued spaces with a clear and direct community relationship, while allowing for sensible interpretations based on local geography and settlement patterns.

**160) Do you agree that the proposed policies at HC3 and HC4 will support the provision of community facilities and public service infrastructure serving new development? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Strongly agree.

We agree that the proposed policies at HC3 and HC4 will support the provision of community facilities and public service infrastructure serving new development. Clear requirements to assess need, secure provision, and ensure timely delivery will strengthen alignment between growth and infrastructure capacity. In particular, embedding an expectation that proposals are informed by an understanding of associated infrastructure requirements and that necessary facilities are secured through on- or off-site provision or appropriate contributions provides a practical and transparent basis for delivering sustainable development.

We also support the approach that, where development plans do not set locally specific standards for green space provision, proposals should rely on relevant national standards and established best practice to identify necessary improvements in both the quantity and quality of provision. Applying recognised standards and guidance ensures consistency, helps address deficiencies in existing provision, and enables infrastructure to be proportionate to the scale and nature of development.

**161) Do you have any views on whether further clarity is required to improve the application of this policy, including the term ‘fast food outlets’, and the types of uses to which it applies?**

**162) Do you agree with the proposed approach to retaining key community facilities and public service infrastructure in policy HC6? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**163) Do you agree with the approach taken to recreational facilities in policy HC7, including the addition of ‘and/or’ with reference to quantity and quality of replacement provision? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree.**

**a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We disagree with the approach taken to recreational facilities in policy HC7, specifically the inclusion of the phrase “quantity and/or quality” in relation to replacement provision. While we support the overarching objective of protecting existing open space, sports and recreational land, the use of “and/or” introduces flexibility that could, over time, result in a gradual erosion of usable and accessible recreational infrastructure.

Replacement provision should not compensate for a reduction in quantity solely through qualitative enhancements, particularly where this may reduce overall capacity or informal access opportunities. Recreational space performs multiple functions including health, wellbeing, biodiversity and active travel connectivity and reductions in quantity can have cumulative impacts, even where quality is improved.

We recommend clarifying the policy to state that replacement recreational provision must be of equal or greater quality, accessibility and connectivity to walking and active travel networks. This would ensure that communities do not experience a net loss in usable, accessible recreational infrastructure and would strengthen the policy’s intent to safeguard long-term public benefit.

**164) Do you agree with the clarification that Local Green Space should not fall into areas regarded as grey belt or where Green Belt policy on previously developed land apply? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Strongly agree

We agree with the clarification that land designated as Local Green Space should not fall within areas regarded as grey belt, nor be subject to Green Belt policy relating to previously developed land. Local Green Space is intended to provide enduring protection for areas of particular importance to local communities, reflecting their recreational, environmental or community value. Clarifying that grey belt policy and previously developed land provisions do not apply avoids ambiguity and reinforces the strength and purpose of the designation.

**165) Do you agree with policy P1 as a basis for identifying and addressing relevant risks when preparing plans? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We support the overall aim of policy P1 to ensure that development plans identify and address risks from pollution and hazards. The emphasis on reducing pollution through strategic nature-based solutions is particularly welcome.

However, we partly disagree as currently P1(1)(c) omits consideration of light pollution. We welcome that it requires plans consider relevant opportunities to reduce air, water, soil and noise pollution, however artificial light is also a significant and growing environmental pressure. Light pollution can have substantial impacts on biodiversity, disrupting the behaviour, movement and survival of many species, particularly nocturnal wildlife. It can also affect human health and undermine the quality of dark skies, including in protected landscapes.

We recommend that policy P1(1)(c) be amended to explicitly include light pollution alongside the other relevant types listed. Explicitly recognising and addressing light pollution would help ensure a more comprehensive approach to environmental quality, and support both nature recovery and healthy, high-quality places.

**166) Are any additional tools or guidance needed to enable better decision making on contaminated land?**

**167) Do you agree with the criteria set out in proposed policy P3 as a basis for securing acceptable living conditions and managing pollution? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We welcome the clearer structure, the explicit reference to daylight and sunlight, the recognition of cumulative effects, and the inclusion of specific provisions relating to air pollution (including PM2.5), noise, artificial light and water quality. In particular, we welcome the explicit reference to chalk streams, which are globally rare and ecologically significant habitats. However, the policy as drafted is not sufficiently precise or robust to secure their effective protection. The wording is currently too general and lacks the precision necessary to secure meaningful protection. Simply requiring assessment and mitigation where development could have an unacceptable adverse effect does not reflect the exceptional sensitivity and scarcity of chalk streams, nor the scale of pressures they face from abstraction, wastewater discharge, urban runoff and catchment-wide development.

The NPPF should be strengthened to:

- Designate chalk streams and their catchments as irreplaceable habitats, and publish the long-promised comprehensive list of irreplaceable habitats;
- Introduce mandatory 50–100 metre “no development” buffer zones alongside chalk streams;
- Require a precautionary approach to development within chalk stream catchments, including clear tests demonstrating no deterioration in water quality or ecological status; and

- Explicitly require consideration of cumulative and catchment-scale impacts, rather than relying solely on site-level mitigation.

Without clearer thresholds and stronger policy safeguards, there is a risk that incremental and individually “acceptable” proposals will continue to erode the ecological integrity of these highly sensitive water bodies.

We also welcome the recognition in paragraph 3 that other pollution control regimes should not be assumed to eliminate emissions completely. This is an important clarification, reinforcing the role of the planning system in preventing harm at source rather than relying solely on separate regulatory frameworks.

**168) Do you agree policy P4 makes sufficiently clear how decision-makers should apply the agent of change principle? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**169) Do you agree policy P5 provides sufficient basis for addressing possible malicious threats and other hazards when considering development proposals? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**170) Do you agree that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of development for defence and public protection purposes? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**171) Do you agree with the proposed changes set out in policy F3 to improve how Coastal Change Management Areas are identified and taken into account in development plans? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**172) Do you agree with the proposed clarifications to the sequential test set out in policy F5? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

Strongly disagree

We are concerned that the changes do not go far enough to address a growing body of recent legal judgments and appeal decisions which have treated the sequential test as simply one factor in the overall planning balance, capable in certain circumstances of being outweighed or effectively disregarded.

The sequential and exception tests are of fundamental importance, not only in relation to immediate public safety and the availability and affordability of insurance, but also in ensuring that places remain viable and resilient over their whole lifetime. Recent research by Aviva indicates that an increasing proportion of new homes are being approved in Flood Zone 3.<sup>19</sup> This trend underlines the urgent need to strengthen the sequential approach so that it operates as a genuine gateway test, directing development to the lowest-risk and most climate-resilient locations.

The status of the sequential test should be elevated as a pre-eminent material consideration in decision-making, with reduced scope for negotiation or disapplication through the planning balance. In parallel, the exception test should be tightened to more clearly limit the circumstances in which wider benefits can be judged to outweigh flood risk. The availability and long-term affordability of flood insurance should be explicitly recognised as a material consideration in applying the exception test.

In the longer term, we believe a policy position more closely aligned with the precautionary approach reflected in Welsh Technical Advice Note 15 would provide greater clarity and resilience.<sup>20</sup> In the interim, however, the sequential test within F5 should be strengthened to ensure it robustly delivers development in the safest and most sustainable locations in the context of accelerating climate risk.

We recommend changing F51 to include “Where the test applies, development proposals ~~should~~ **must** not be located in areas at risk of flooding where alternative sites “ to strengthen its application and reinforce its status as a gateway requirement. We also support narrowing the exemptions so that the test applies to all forms of flood risk, including surface water flooding, except in clearly defined and limited circumstances. In this context, we recommend that F5(2)(ii) is removed. Surface water flood risk is now effectively mapped, and there is no justification for exempting it, particularly given the other caveats within the policy relating to minor development. In addition, change of use exemptions should be removed, as such changes can significantly increase site and resident vulnerability, for example, where employment uses are converted to residential. Finally, F5(3) should explicitly reference the climate change flood risk allowances. Referring to this data is essential, as it is regularly updated and is necessary for understanding long-term flood risk.

**173) Do you agree with the proposed approach to the exception test set out in policy F6? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

Partly disagree

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.aviva.com/newsroom/news-releases/2026/02/proportion-of-new-homes-built-in-flood-areas-rises-to-one-in-nine/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/technical-advice-note-tan-15-development-flooding-and-coastal-erosion>

We recommend amending the text so that it requires development to provide “specific and demonstrable sustainability benefits to the community that substantially outweigh the flood risk,” rather than the current broader formulation. This would help tighten the policy and reduce the risk of the exception test being applied in an overly permissive or inconsistent manner.

We also recommend inserting an additional point requiring applicants to demonstrate that the development is capable of being insured for flood risk. Insurability is a critical indicator of long-term viability and resilience, and its absence can have significant consequences for households and communities.

In addition, the policy framework should better recognise that some forms of development whose primary objective is to conserve and enhance biodiversity must necessarily be located in areas of higher flood risk, such as coastal and floodplain habitat creation and restoration projects. These nature recovery activities are often water-dependent and cannot reasonably be located in areas of lower flood risk. It is therefore not appropriate for such development to be subject to the sequential test requirement. Subject to the completion of a site- or project-level Flood Risk Assessment demonstrating safety and no increase in flood risk elsewhere, such development should be exempt from the sequential test and explicitly recognised within Annex F as a form of “water compatible development”, for example under a category such as *water-dependent biodiversity delivery*. This would help ensure that planning policy supports the delivery of nature-based solutions and habitat restoration in floodplains and coastal zones while maintaining robust safeguards around flood risk.

**174) Do you agree with the proposed requirement in policy F8 for sustainable drainage systems to be designed in accordance with the National Standards? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree

We welcome the consistent emphasis on SuDS throughout the draft Framework, including the clear expectation that systems should deliver multifunctional benefits such as improvements in water quality, biodiversity and amenity. The reference to natural flood management, nature-based solutions, and the need to set aside land for flood risk management measures is also positive.

However, the policy could be clearer and more explicit about prioritising natural processes and making space for water through integrated green infrastructure and catchment-based approaches. We strongly support the requirement for SuDS to be designed in accordance with the National Standards, as this should help improve consistency and quality of delivery. However, this will only be effective if the standards themselves are robust, ambitious and clearly supported by detailed guidance and strong

enforcement. Without effective implementation and long-term maintenance arrangements, SuDS risk being poorly designed, value-engineered, or inadequately maintained.

In line with our previous responses, we consider that SuDS should be mandatory for all appropriate development, as is the case in Wales, rather than subject to discretionary interpretation. This would provide greater certainty, improve climate resilience, and secure more consistent biodiversity and water management benefits. In the interim, we recommend F81 is changed to “*Development proposals which could affect drainage on or around the development site ~~must should~~ incorporate sustainable drainage systems*” due to the increasing risk posed by surface water flooding.

In addition, F7 (1) should be amended to “Development proposals ~~must should~~ not present a risk from flooding to potential occupiers, users, or visitors, and should not increase flood risk *elsewhere for the lifetime of the development*” to strengthen the requirement and emphasise the need for safety over the lifetime of development, in line with established risk precedent. Likewise F7 (2) a. should remove “unless there are overriding reasons which justify a different arrangement”, and F7 c. should add “*Any residual risk can be safely managed, and safe access and escape routes **can be maintained during a flood event** are included ~~where appropriate, as part of an agreed emergency plan~~*”. We believe these changes are necessary to support public safety given rising risks.

Any reliance on emergency escape planning and mitigation, rather than locating and designing development to be safe for its entire lifetime, should be treated as an absolute last resort, not simply as a ‘routine’ element of development planning on an equal footing.

**175) Do you agree with the proposed new policy to avoid the enclosure of watercourses, and encourage the de-culverting and re-naturalisation of river channels? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly agree

We support the intention of this policy and agrees that avoiding the enclosure of existing watercourses and promoting de-culverting and re-naturalisation is an important step towards restoring freshwater ecosystems. A clear presumption against culverting is welcome, as culverting fragments habitats, damages river processes, and reduces the ecological, landscape and amenity value of watercourses.

However, we consider the policy wording to be insufficiently strong. While the draft text discourages enclosure, it does not establish a clear duty on developers to avoid culverting wherever possible. The circumstances in which enclosure may be permitted should be more clearly defined to prevent excessive discretion. Where it is deemed necessary to enclose an existing watercourse, the policy should specify that enclosure must be limited to the minimum length possible. Reasons for enclosure should not include the minimisation of developer costs at the expense of environmental outcomes. A

strong presumption against culverting all watercourses should be established, alongside a positive presumption in favour of de-culverting and the re-naturalisation of existing channels (including streams, rivers and ditches), wherever this can be achieved without increasing flood risk or causing environmental harm.

In practice, re-naturalising watercourses will often help reduce flood risk and deliver wider environmental benefits. Restored river channels improve habitat connectivity, support biodiversity recovery, enhance water quality, and contribute to climate resilience, while also creating opportunities for access to nature and high-quality green and blue infrastructure within developments. Planning policy should therefore encourage developers to integrate open, natural watercourses as a core design feature in both new developments and the regeneration of existing sites.

Where culverting cannot reasonably be avoided, the policy should require clear justification and appropriate mitigation or compensation, including through Biodiversity Net Gain where relevant.

Finally, this policy should be explicitly cross-referenced with provisions elsewhere in the NPPF relating to the conservation, enhancement and recovery of water bodies, including priority habitats such as chalk streams. Strengthening these connections would help ensure planning policy supports the Government's wider commitments to freshwater recovery, recognising that clean and plentiful water underpins a healthy natural environment and contributes to the delivery of biodiversity targets under the Environment Act.

**176) Do you agree with the proposed changes to policy for managing development in areas affected by coastal change? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We are concerned that Policy F9, does not fully reflect the severity and accelerating nature of climate risk arising from coastal change. Given the rate of coastal retreat already evident in many areas, and the significant impacts already being experienced by residents and businesses, a more precautionary and robust policy approach is required.

We support strengthening the wording of the policy by replacing "should" with "must" in relation to development within Coastal Change Management Areas, in order to provide greater clarity and certainty. In addition, the requirement for developments to provide "sustainability benefits" in F9: (1)c should be strengthened to 'substantial', not just 'wider', given the severity of the risks involved.

We also support reinforcing a stronger presumption against permanent new residential development (including changes of use) in Coastal Change Management Areas in F9:2, given the long-term risks to

safety, insurability, infrastructure viability and community stability, a more lenient policy risks exacerbating future social and economic harm, including the costs of relocation or defences.

**177) The National Coastal Erosion Risk Map sets out where areas may be vulnerable to coastal change based on different scenarios. Do you have views on how these scenarios should be applied to ensure a proportionate approach in applying this policy?**

We recommend higher-risk projections are used in decision making to ensure accelerating sea-level rise and long-term coastal change is properly accounted for. Mitigation approaches should prioritise nature-based solutions, making sure development does not block managed realignment or create future pressure for hard defences.

**178) Do you agree with the proposed new additions to Table 2: Flood Risk Vulnerability Classifications? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Should any other forms of development should be added? Please give your reasoning and clearly identify which proposed or additional uses you are referring to.**

Partly agree

We welcome the inclusion of additional forms of green energy infrastructure within the list of essential infrastructure. These installations are necessary to meet climate objectives and to strengthen the resilience of the UK's energy system to global shocks. It is therefore appropriate that they are not subject to more restrictive flood risk planning controls than other forms of energy infrastructure.

However, we are unconvinced that floating or rising structures should be classified as "more vulnerable" in the same way as standard dwelling houses. In many cases, such designs are specifically intended to operate safely in flood-prone environments and can provide valuable infrastructure or facilities in locations where conventional buildings would not be viable. For example, floating or flood-resilient visitor facilities have been successfully delivered at nature sites. These types of structures may be better classified as less vulnerable, or potentially as water-compatible development, depending on their design and function.

We also note that certain forms of conservation activity, which may be classed as development, must by their nature be located in areas of elevated flood risk. This includes habitat creation or restoration for water-dependent species and ecosystems. We therefore recommend adding "water-dependent biodiversity delivery" to the list of water-compatible development. Similarly, natural flood management schemes may also involve works that constitute development and are often intentionally located in floodplains or river corridors. Recognising these activities as compatible would

help ensure that planning policy supports nature recovery and the delivery of nature-based solutions while maintaining appropriate safeguards for flood risk.

**179) Do you agree that the proposed approach to planning for the natural environment in policy N1, including the proposed approach to biodiversity net gain, strikes the right balance between consistency, viability, deliverability, and supporting nature recovery? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Strongly disagree

We strongly disagree that the proposed approach in policy N1 strikes the right balance between consistency, viability, deliverability and supporting nature recovery.

We welcome the references to Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Green Infrastructure Standards, and the use of strategic environmental evidence to guide development. These are positive steps. However, the proposed approach to biodiversity net gain (BNG) significantly constrains local ambition at a time when nature recovery requires greater, not lesser, flexibility and leadership.

The statutory 10% BNG requirement represents a bare minimum. The Government's original 2018 impact assessment made clear that 10% was the *lowest* level of net gain that could confidently be expected to deliver genuine net gain, or at least no net loss, once real-world factors such as habitat degradation between assessment and construction, operational impacts (including light and noise pollution), and the long-term risk of habitat decline are taken into account. In other words, 10% was never designed to be an optimal outcome for nature recovery.

There is now clear evidence that higher percentages are viable. Research highlighted by Wildlife and Countryside Link shows that a number of local authorities have adopted or are progressing policies above 10%, including 20% and in some cases 30%, with robust viability evidence. The Local Government Association, drawing on work by Kent Nature Partnership, has concluded that increasing BNG from 10% to 15% or 20% would not materially affect viability in most cases.<sup>21</sup> The greatest cost is typically in reaching the mandatory minimum; incremental increases above this are generally modest and unlikely to render schemes unviable. National Park Authorities and other protected landscapes in particular should be empowered to maximise contributions to nature recovery through higher BNG requirements where justified.

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<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/events/pas-past-events/biodiversity-net-gain-local-authorities/journeybiodiversity-net-gain> & <https://kentnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Justification-for-biodiversity-netgain-in-Kent-Sept-2020.pdf>

We are therefore very concerned that policy N1(2) restricts local authorities to setting BNG requirements above the statutory minimum only for specific site allocations and where “fully justified and deliverable”. This risks undermining local democratic leadership and environmental ambition. Even more concerning is the statement that such requirements should not extend to categories of development exempt from statutory BNG. This risks curtailing local powers to address the misuse or unintended consequences of exemption, an extensive issue highlighted in our research with eftc, that is hampering BNG from delivering it’s intended potential.<sup>22</sup>

Given the scale of biodiversity loss and the Government’s legally binding environmental targets, national policy should enable and encourage higher, locally evidenced BNG requirements rather than constrain them. As drafted, policy N1 risks embedding a ceiling where there should be a floor.

In addition, we are concerned that the proposed wording changes in policy N1 weaken existing protections for biodiversity and ecological networks when compared with the language of the current (now previous) NPPF. Under the existing framework, plans are required to identify, map and safeguard wildlife-rich habitats, ecological networks, wildlife corridors and areas identified for habitat management, enhancement or restoration. The revised wording, which refers more generally to safeguarding the “natural environment”, lacks this specificity and risks reducing the clarity, strength and enforceability of local plan policies. To maintain effective protection, national policy should explicitly require the identification, mapping and safeguarding of key habitats, ecological networks and environmentally sensitive features, including chalk streams and other locally important assets.

We are also concerned about the shift in wording from requiring plans to “promote” the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats and species to merely “identify opportunities for” such action. This represents a dilution of policy intent. Experience under the current NPPF demonstrates that the stronger, previous wording has enabled local planning authorities to adopt robust policies protecting priority habitats, species and ecological networks, and to steer development away from sensitive areas unless clear public benefits outweigh environmental harm. Replacing this with weaker, opportunity-based language risks undermining local authorities’ ability to secure meaningful safeguards and could lead to increased pressure on priority habitats and species, particularly where sites lack formal designation.

Finally, in relation to spatial steering through Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs), the proposed drafting is also weaker than established approaches for Conservation Target Areas and similar Biodiversity Opportunity Areas. Existing local policies often restrict development within ecologically important areas unless strict criteria are met and the mitigation hierarchy is applied. The current proposals do not provide equivalent clarity or strength, and may therefore not adequately prevent development in areas identified as important, or potentially important, for nature recovery. Policy N1 should therefore be strengthened to require protection and enhancement of ecological networks, application of the mitigation hierarchy where harm may occur, and a clear presumption against major

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<sup>22</sup> <https://private-url--lifescape.netlify.app/uploads/BNG%20Market%20Report,%20eftc,%20260625.pdf>

development in areas identified through LNRs as having high or potential biodiversity value, except in exceptional circumstances.

**180) In what circumstances would it be reasonable to seek more than 10% biodiversity net gain on sites being allocated in the development plan, especially where this could support meeting biodiversity net gain obligations on other neighbouring sites in a particular area?**

We consider that it is reasonable to seek more than 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) in a wide range of circumstances, and that this should be enabled wherever supported by robust local evidence.

Higher BNG requirements should be applied as widely as possible where local ecological need, spatial strategy and viability evidence justify it. Experience from pioneering planning authorities demonstrates that this is both feasible and effective. Our analysis, including *Biodiversity Net Gain: One Year On*, highlights a number of councils that have adopted or are progressing BNG rates above 10%, including 20% and in some cases 30%.<sup>23</sup> These policies are evidence-based and are helping to drive meaningful local nature recovery.

Evidence from a range of local authorities strongly suggests that increasing BNG to 15% or 20% would be financially viable in the majority of cases. The Local Government Association, drawing on research by Kent Nature Partnership, concluded that the greatest cost is typically in reaching the mandatory 10% baseline; incremental increases beyond this are comparatively modest and unlikely to render schemes unviable.<sup>24</sup> BNG costs are generally low relative to other policy requirements.

It would therefore be reasonable to require more than 10% BNG in particular:

- On large strategic allocations where there is scope to deliver landscape-scale habitat creation and ecological networks;
- In areas identified in Local Nature Recovery Strategies as priorities for habitat restoration or connectivity;
- Within or adjacent to protected landscapes, where National Park Authorities and others are encouraged to maximise contributions to nature recovery;
- Areas of acute nature / green space deprivation;
- Areas of Green Belt allocated for nature recovery or 'wild belt' protection;
- In locations where enhanced onsite provision could help meet BNG needs of neighbouring sites in a coordinated way, reducing reliance on distant offsetting and supporting coherent ecological networks; and
- In areas facing acute biodiversity loss or cumulative development pressures.

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Net\\_Gain\\_One\\_Year\\_On1.pdf](https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Net_Gain_One_Year_On1.pdf) ;

<sup>24</sup> [https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use/net-gain/supporting\\_documents/181121%20Biodiversity%20Net%20Gain%20Consultation%20IA%20FINAL%20for%20publication.pdf](https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use/net-gain/supporting_documents/181121%20Biodiversity%20Net%20Gain%20Consultation%20IA%20FINAL%20for%20publication.pdf) ; <https://kentnature.org.uk/nature-recovery/biodiversity-net-gain/>

There is clear appetite for higher environmental ambition across local government, reflected in the number of authorities declaring climate and nature emergencies and seeking stronger biodiversity outcomes. Developers have also expressed support for BNG in principle, particularly where greater flexibility on offsite delivery can accompany higher targets.

Given the scale of biodiversity decline and legally binding environmental targets, the planning system should actively enable locally justified BNG requirements above 10% as a mechanism to deliver genuine, strategic nature recovery rather than treating 10% as a de facto ceiling.

**181) Do you agree policy N2 sets sufficiently clear expectations for how development proposals should consider and enhance the existing natural characteristics of sites proposed for development? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We welcome a number of positive elements within policy N2. In particular, we strongly welcome the explicit reference to hedgerow protection, the first time hedgerows have been clearly referenced in the NPPF, alongside recognition of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, green infrastructure, nature-based solutions and biodiversity enhancements such as integrated swift bricks. We also welcome the partial reflection of the mitigation hierarchy in paragraph 2, confirming that development should be refused where significant harm cannot be avoided, mitigated or compensated.

However, we believe the policy does not yet set sufficiently clear or robust expectations, particularly in the context of legally binding Environment Act targets and the scale of biodiversity decline. The proposed policies rely heavily on weak formulations such as “consider”, “identify opportunities” and “take suitable opportunities”, which are unlikely to drive meaningful environmental outcomes. Stronger, outcome-focused wording, replacing “identify opportunities” and consider with “should” is needed to ensure development genuinely conserves and enhances biodiversity, strengthens ecological networks and delivers nature recovery.

To address this, firstly, references to the mitigation hierarchy should be strengthened and made far more explicit. Avoidance must be clearly prioritised over mitigation and compensation, with a stronger presumption against harm to irreplaceable, priority and high-value habitats as well as landscapes (which may include some local designations as well as all nationally designated landscapes). As currently drafted, there remains too much scope for reliance on post-hoc mitigation or offsetting.

Second, the policy wording is often too general to drive consistent outcomes. Consideration should be given to introducing clearer, measurable requirements, for example, a mandatory urban greening

factor or equivalent quantitative standard for green space delivery – similar in principle to housing targets, to ensure nature is embedded as a core delivery requirement rather than an aspiration.

The reference to species in this policy (N2.1.f) would benefit from clarification, as several different official legal definitions of “priority” or “threatened” species could be assigned. In Policy N1.1.b refers to “species of principle importance”, which is defined in Annex B. Given the unofficial wording used in N2.1.f, and the reference in this policy to specific groups of animals, this policy is currently less than clear and, to aid planners and developers, should be re-written to be explicitly about which species are included.

In paragraph 1(f), the reference to “priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs” should be strengthened. The policy should refer explicitly to UK Priority Species and species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, rather than implying a limited list. The current wording is imprecise and risks misinterpretation (for example, “bats” comprise 18 distinct species in the UK, many with differing ecological requirements).

Paragraph 1(d) should also explicitly reference river buffers and river corridors as existing natural features requiring protection and enhancement, alongside trees and hedgerows. Blue infrastructure is as critical as green infrastructure for people, biodiversity, water quality and climate resilience.

While planning policy support for wildlife-friendly features in N2 is welcome, planning conditions alone are not sufficient to secure delivery on the ground. The *Lost Nature* report found that only around 53% of the legally-secured ecological features required by planning permissions on nearly 6,000 new homes were actually present in reality, based on a survey of 42 developments across England. Large proportions of specific measures were missing, with 83% of hedgehog highways, 75% of bird and bat boxes, 85% of reptile refuges and 100% of promised bug boxes not installed on site. Among planted features, 39% of trees were dead or missing and 82% of woodland edge seed mixes failed to materialise, with a majority of wildflower grasslands improperly sown or damaged.<sup>25</sup> These findings illustrate a systemic failure in implementation and enforcement of planning-secured biodiversity enhancements, meaning that “net gain” often exists only on spreadsheets rather than in reality. This underlines the need for stronger mechanisms. We therefore support the introduction of a new Part N of the Building Regulations to require nature-friendly design features as standard, which would provide greater certainty and consistency than reliance on discretionary planning conditions. While some elements, such as the inclusion of swift bricks, are welcome, this should be stronger and specify that that “*Development proposals should incorporate integrated nest boxes (commonly known as swift bricks) into their construction unless, in rare and exceptional cases, there are compelling technical reasons which prevent their use, or would make them ineffective; and*” to reduce the potential for exemption misuse.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://wildjustice.org.uk/general/lost-nature-report/>

In addition, we believe this policy would greatly benefit from further clarification, specifically over what constitutes “significant harm” and which aspects of biodiversity are relevant to this judgement. Harm may constitute, among other things, loss of habitat or species, degradation of the condition of a habitat, loss of connectivity, or loss of opportunity to regenerate, expand or connect.

Finally, we remain concerned about the restrictions placed elsewhere in the draft Framework on biodiversity net gain ambition. Limiting local authorities’ ability to require gains above the statutory minimum risks undermining the effectiveness of policy N2 in driving meaningful nature recovery. Overall, while we welcome the steps forward, N2 requires significant strengthening to match the scale of the environmental challenge and statutory commitments.

**182) Do you agree the policy in Policy N4 provides a sufficiently clear basis for considering development proposals affecting protected landscapes and reflecting the statutory duties which apply to them? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, including how policy can be improved to ensure compliance.**

Strongly disagree

We disagree that Policy N4 provides a sufficiently clear and robust basis for considering development proposals affecting Protected Landscapes.

We support the substitution of “natural beauty” for “landscape and scenic beauty” in N4(1) as this reflects the legislation for Protected Landscapes.

However, we are deeply concerned about changes to the strength and clarity of national policy protection. In particular, the shift in wording from “great weight” to “substantial weight”, and the removal of the long-standing reference to National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes having the “highest status of protection”. Protected Landscapes have been recognised as having the highest level of planning protection in the country over many iterations of the NPPF and there has been no change in legislation to justify the removal of this phrase. On the contrary, the amendments to primary legislation introduced under Section 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act are intended to be a strengthening of the requirements to protect and enhance these areas.

Given the statutory purposes of National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, national policy should clearly reflect and reinforce this strengthened duty, including the requirement on relevant authorities to seek to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes. Policy N4 should make explicit reference to this duty and associated guidance, to ensure that plan-making and decision-taking fully align with the updated statutory framework. We would remind MCHLG that this new duty applies to

them as well, and that therefore they must consider the requirement to seek to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes when deciding upon any changes to the NPPF which affect these areas.

We are also concerned about the difference between policy N4(2) and paragraph 190 in the existing NPPF which says that “permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances...” whereas N4(2) says such proposals “should only be supported in exceptional circumstances”. This change turns a presumption for refusal into caveated support and is particularly concerning when considered alongside S5(2), which establishes where development can be resisted, including on sites outside settlements justified on the basis of unmet needs (S5(1j)). S5 places special significance on those policies in the NPPF that use the word “refused” and N4(2) is one of only two instances where the word “refused” has been removed from a policy, (the other is TR6 on highway impacts addressed under Question 155).

Furthermore, the proposed revisions to the NPPF risk diluting the wording of this policy by treating “exceptional circumstances” and “public interest” as one requirement/test. In fact, previous legal advice has been clear that to meet the high bar for allowing major development within Protected Landscapes, proposals must demonstrate that they are both exceptional and in the public interest. These wording changes weaken the protection afforded to Protected Landscapes and may allow development that would currently be considered unacceptable. We therefore strongly object to this change and request that the paragraph 190 wording is retained.

To ensure compliance with statutory duties and the Government’s nature recovery commitments, policy should:

- Change “substantial weight” to “great weight” in N4 (1) and reinstate wording used in current NPPF paragraph 90 in place of proposed N4(2).
- Reinstate clear wording that Protected Landscapes have the highest status of protection ;
- Explicitly reference the strengthened statutory duty to further their purposes under the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act; and
- Emphasise that avoidance of harm must be prioritised, with mitigation and compensation only considered in genuinely exceptional cases.

**183) Do you agree policy N6 provides clarity on the treatment of internationally, nationally and locally recognised site within the planning system? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Partly disagree

We partly disagree that policy N6 provides sufficient clarity and certainty for the protection of internationally, nationally and locally recognised sites.

We welcome the specific recognition of Local Wildlife Sites and Local Nature Reserves in policy. However, the wording limits protection to those “identified... in the development plan”. This could

create gaps where plans are out of date or where not all qualifying sites have yet been formally identified. Protection should apply to all sites (included candidate/potential sites) meeting locally agreed selection criteria, not solely those listed in adopted plans.

To address this, the glossary definition should be amended so that policy reflects all sites in the area, not just those that have been included in the development plan at a particular point in time. We therefore suggest the following revised definition:

Glossary definition – Local Wildlife Sites:

*A term used to describe non-statutory areas recognised and identified in the development plan area for their biodiversity value through an evidence-based selection process by local authorities Local Site partnerships. There are a number of different terms in use locally to describe these sites, including Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINCs), Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNICIs) and County Wildlife Sites (CWS).*

The definition should also recognise that many local authorities operate systems for identifying candidate or potential sites prior to formal confirmation. Therefore, the glossary should clarify that potential or candidate Local Wildlife Sites should be treated as Local Wildlife Sites unless it is demonstrated, through local survey and assessment against agreed criteria, that they do not meet Local Wildlife Site status. This approach would ensure that sites of biodiversity importance are not left vulnerable during the period between identification and formal designation.

The reference to irreplaceable habitats is also welcome, but the long-promised comprehensive national list should be publicly consulted on, and then published urgently. The current non-exhaustive examples risk leaving important habitats without clear recognition. The policy must be explicit that the habitats listed within the definition are a non-exhaustive list, to avoid unintended omission of highly threatened habitat types. In particular, upland hay meadows and floodplain meadows should be clearly included. These grasslands are recognised as priority habitats under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, published in response to obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and are listed as habitats of principal importance under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.

We are also concerned that the language relating to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) is weaker than existing policy. The shift from protecting the site as a whole to focusing only on “features of special scientific interest” narrows the scope of protection and fails to reflect ecological reality: it is the mosaic of habitats and species across a site that underpins its integrity. In addition, the removal of the explicit reference to development “within or outside” an SSSI introduces ambiguity about off-site impacts. The previous wording made clear that proposals affecting SSSIs, regardless of location, were subject to strong protection, and this clarity should be reinstated.

The change in phrasing from “applications should be refused if...” to “should only be supported if...” may appear subtle but weakens the protective tone of national policy and risks increasing discretion in decision-making. Furthermore, the requirement for “no adverse effect... on the features of special scientific interest” raises practical concerns. Many SSSI citations are historic and do not fully reflect current knowledge, particularly in relation to invertebrate assemblages and other under-recognised biodiversity interests. Reliance on outdated or narrowly defined feature lists risks overlooking significant ecological harm. Given that SSSIs form the backbone of England’s national site network, they should be afforded the strongest and clearest level of protection.

We are particularly concerned about the introduction of Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs) and the nature restoration levy as potential routes to enable development affecting internationally and nationally important sites. The ability for impacts on protected features to be addressed through an EDP, combined with payment of a levy, risks creating a perception of a “cash to trash” approach to previously well-protected habitats and species. This is especially problematic where SSSIs form part of wider ecological landscapes and could be incrementally eroded under strategic mitigation arrangements. National policy must make clear that avoidance of harm remains the primary objective, and that strategic compensation mechanisms cannot justify avoidable damage to protected sites.

Additionally, with respect to sites of international importance or habitat sites, 1 a) i) should reflect all stages of a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), as required by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). With respect to Stage 3: Derogations, only IROPI is mentioned in this paragraph, with no reference to the assessment of alternative solutions prior to this, the consideration of Priority Features and how they affect the IROPI consideration and that adequate compensation must be secured. More broadly, the cumulative effect of these changes could weaken established environmental safeguards and potentially compromise the Government’s legal commitment to halt the decline of species abundance by 2030.

We support the revised definition of Habitats sites within the glossary which captures candidate SPAs and SACs, listed or proposed Ramsar Sites, relevant marine Sites and compensatory habitats. Any reduction in this definition following this consultation should be matched with the reinstatement of current paragraph 194, to ensure these sites are not lost from the face of policy.

Finally, the intrinsic value of rivers and streams should be explicitly recognised in this policy, with a dedicated provision similar in strength to that for irreplaceable habitats. In line with “Making Space for Water” principles, development that would cause loss, culverting, deterioration or fragmentation of river corridors should be strongly resisted.

**184) Are there any further issues for planning policy that we need to consider as we take forward the implementation of Environmental Delivery Plans?**

The Government must ensure appropriate safeguards are built into Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs) as part of secondary legislation and outline clearly how these are interpreted within national planning policy. This should include clear guidelines on where EDPs cannot be used, such as proposals affecting irreplaceable habitats, and circumstances where offsetting through a nature restoration payment would not be feasible (for example, where the species or habitat concerned is so location-specific that its environmental context cannot realistically be replicated elsewhere).

Specifically, we also suggest reinstating the policy previously set out at paragraph 193(d) of the extant National Planning Policy Framework, which gave explicit support to development proposals brought forward primarily for nature conservation purposes, could help the implementation and delivery of EDP conservation measures. Providing clear in-principle policy support for development whose primary objective is habitat creation, restoration or enhancement would give greater certainty to land managers and delivery bodies, and help ensure that EDP measures can be progressed efficiently and without unnecessary policy barriers.

As this framework is still at an early stage, we look forward to engaging with Natural England as the detailed proposals develop.

**185) Do you agree the government should implement the additional regard duties under Section 102 of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons.**

**186) Do you have any evidence as to the impact of implementing the additional regard duties for development?**

**187) Do you agree with the approach to plan-making for the historic environment, including the specific requirements for World Heritage Sites and Conservation Areas, set out in policies H1 – H3? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**188) Do you agree with the approach to assessing the effects of development on heritage assets set out in policy H5? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

**189) Do you agree with the approach to considering impacts on designated heritage assets in policy HE6, including the change from "great weight" to "substantial weight", and in particular the interactions between this and the statutory duties? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

190) Do you agree with the new policies in relation to world heritage, conservation areas and archaeological assets in policies HE8 – HE10? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree

191) Do you have any other comments on the revisions to the heritage chapter?

192) Do you agree with the transitional arrangements approach to decision-making? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree. 193) Do you have any further thoughts on the policies outlined in this consultation?

194) Do you agree with the list of Written Ministerial Statements set out in Annex A to the draft Framework whose planning content would be superseded by the policies proposed in this consultation? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.

195) Do you consider the planning regime, including reforms being delivered through the Planning and Infrastructure Act, provide sufficient flexibility for energy generation projects co-located with data centres to be consented under either the NSIP or TCPA regime? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please give reasons.

196) Would raising the Planning Act 2008 energy generation thresholds for renewable projects that are co-located with data centres in England (for the reason outlined above) be beneficial? Yes/No a) If so, what do you believe would be the appropriate threshold? Please provide your reasons.

197) Do you have any views on how we should define ‘co-located energy infrastructure’? Please provide your reasons.

198) Do you think the renewable energy generation thresholds under Section 15 of the Planning Act 2008 for other use types of projects should be increased, or should this be limited to projects co-located with data centres? Yes/No a) Please provide your reasons.

199) What benefits or risks do you foresee from making this change? Please provide your reasons.

200) Would you support the use of growth testing for strategic, multi-phase schemes? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please explain your answer. 201) Would you support the optional use of growth testing for regeneration schemes? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please explain your answer.

202) Do you agree greater specificity, including single figures, which local planning authorities could choose to diverge from where there is evidence for doing so, would improve speed and certainty? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please explain your answer. If you agree, the government welcomes views on the appropriate figure – for example, whether 17.5% would be an appropriate reflection of the industry standard for most market for sale housing.

203) Are there any site types, tenures, or development models to which alternative, lower figures to 15-20% of Gross Development Value might reasonably apply? a) Please explain your answer. The government is particularly interested in views on whether clarifying an appropriate profit of 6% on Gross Development Value for affordable housing tenures would make viability assessments more transparent and speed up decision-making.

204) Are there further ways the government can bring greater specificity and certainty over profit expectations across landowners, site promoters and 113 developers such that the system provides for the level of profit necessary for development to proceed, reducing the need for subjective expectations? a) Please explain your answer

205) Existing Viability Planning Practice Guidance refers to developer return in terms a percentage of gross development value. In what ways might the continued use of gross development value be usefully standardised? 206) Do you agree there circumstances in which metrics other than profit on gross development value would support more or faster housing delivery, or help to maximise compliance with plan policy? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please explain your answer.

207) Are there types of development on which metrics other than profit on gross development value should be routinely accepted as a measure of return e.g. strategic sites large multi-phased schemes, or build to rent schemes? a) Please explain your answer

208) Do you agree that guidance should be updated to reflect the fact a premium may not be required in all circumstances? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) In what circumstances might a premium, or the usual premium, not be required? b) What impact (if any) would you foresee if this change were made?

209) Do you agree that extant consents should not be assumed to be sufficient proof of alternative use value, unless other provisions relating to set out in plans are met? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please explain your answer. 210) If extant consents were not to be assumed as sufficient proof of alternative use value, should this be at the discretion of the decision-maker, or should another metric (e.g. period of time since consent granted) be used? Decision maker discretion / Another metric / Neither a) If another metric, please set out your preferred approach and rationale.

**211) What further steps should the government take to ensure non-policy compliant schemes are not used to inform the determination of benchmark land values in the viability assessments that underpin plan-making?**

**212) Do you agree that the residual land value of the development proposal should be cross-checked with the residual land values of comparable schemes; to help set the viability assessment in context. Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please explain your answer.**

**213) Do you agree that a 2.5 hectare threshold is appropriate? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree.**

Strongly disagree

We do not support the introduction of a new “medium development” category and therefore do not agree that a 2.5-hectare threshold is appropriate. We do not see a clear policy rationale for creating a new size-based classification beyond those already established in planning practice. We are concerned that the threshold may be designed, in practice, to justify reductions or flexibilities in developer obligations, including environmental requirements such as biodiversity net gain (BNG), green infrastructure provision and other mitigation measures that are essential to meeting Environment Act targets.

A 2.5-hectare site is not insignificant in environmental terms, particularly in suburban or rural areas. Developments of this scale can have substantial landscape, biodiversity, drainage and cumulative impacts, and should not be subject to a lighter-touch approach.

**214) Do you agree that a unit threshold of between 10 and 49 units is appropriate? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree**

Strongly disagree

For the same reasons, we do not support the proposed 10–49 unit threshold. While we recognise the important role of SMEs in housing delivery, environmental protections and standards should not be diluted based on developer size or scheme scale. Developments of 10–49 homes can collectively contribute significantly to habitat loss, fragmentation, recreational pressure and pollution, particularly where multiple schemes come forward within the same authority area. Introducing a separate category risks embedding an assumption that schemes below 50 units warrant reduced obligations,

which would be inconsistent with the scale of environmental challenge and statutory nature recovery commitments.

**215) Do you foresee risks or operability issues anticipated with the proposed definition of medium development? Yes/No.**

Yes

**216) If so, please explain your answer and provide views on potential mitigations.**

The primary risk is that the new category will create a de facto lighter-touch route for schemes below 50 units, leading to reduced environmental safeguards and weaker delivery of biodiversity net gain, green infrastructure, sustainable drainage and other mitigation measures. Even small or medium-sized sites can have significant local ecological impacts, particularly in sensitive landscapes or where cumulative pressures are already high. There is also an increased risk of threshold gaming, with sites being subdivided or phased to fall within the medium category.

If the category is retained, it must be made explicit in national policy that environmental protections including BNG, the mitigation hierarchy, protected site safeguards, and requirements for sustainable drainage and green infrastructure apply equally to medium developments. Strong monitoring and reporting of cumulative impacts at local plan level will also be essential.

**217) Do you have any views on whether the current small development exemption should be extended to cover a wider range of sites – indicatively to sites of fewer than 50 dwellings, or fewer than 120 bedspaces in purpose-built student accommodation? a) Please provide your reasons**

**218) If the exemption were to be extended, do you have any views on whether the development of 120 purpose-built student accommodation bedspaces is an appropriate equivalent to a development of 50 dwellings for the purposes of the levy exemption? a) Please provide your reasons.**

**219) If the exemption were to be extended, do you have any views on whether the exemption should be based solely on the existing metrics (dwellings/bedspaces) or whether there should also be an area threshold. 220) If you do have views on possible changes to the small developments levy exemption, please specify the potential impact of the possible change of the levy exemption on people with protected characteristics as defined in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. 221) What do you consider to be the potential economic, competitive, and behavioural impacts of possible changes to the levy exemption? Please provide any evidence or examples to support your response.**

**222) Do you agree with the proposal to extend the Permission in Principle application route to medium development? Strongly agree, partly agree, neither agree nor disagree, partly disagree, strongly disagree. a) Please provide your reasons, particularly if you disagree. 222 223) Do you have views about whether there should be changes to the regulatory procedures for these applications, including whether there should be a requirement for a short planning statement?**

**224) Do you have any views on the impacts of the above proposals for you, or the group or business you represent and on anyone with a relevant protected characteristic? a) If so, please explain who, which groups, including those with protected characteristics, or which businesses may be impacted and how. 225) Is there anything that could be done to mitigate any impact identified?**

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Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 90 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world and animals.

For questions or further information please contact:

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[www.wcl.org.uk](http://www.wcl.org.uk)

The following organisations have inputted into this response. (Partners signing-on may not necessarily support every aspect of this collective response.):

Ancient Tree Forum

River Restoration Centre

ZSL

Bumblebee Conservation Trust

ALERC

Buglife

Woodland Trust

River Action

RSPB

CPRE – The Countryside Charity  
Campaign for National Parks  
Bat Conservation Trust