



Paul Butler Associates

Planning, Development & Heritage Consultants

Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

The next decade will be very different to the last

Paul Butler, Director

Paul Butler sees major changes on the horizon for developers, businesses and planning decision-makers.

Twenty years ago submitting a planning application was generally straightforward and planning permission could usually be secured on the basis of some proposals plans, a site edged red location plan and a completed set of application forms. Those halcyon days for developers and businesses are long over.

The planning system has become something of a minefield over the last decade with ever more supporting information being required by local authorities. Today the outlay for an applicant can be significant, even before a planning application (whether full or outline) is logged in and registered. In addition to demonstrating compliance with the local authority's own Development Plan, applicants also have to show how their proposal complies with up to twenty five national planning policy guidance documents (PPGs) and statements (PPSs).

Lead in times for planning have increased with all manner of reports having to be prepared to satisfy the local authority that national guidance has been met. Larger developers and businesses have generally coped best with the financial outlay necessary to tackle these policy requirements. The system has however become a nightmare for medium and smaller businesses, particularly for new businesses faced with having to foot the bill for documentation that can be disproportionate to the scale of the planning application.

At the same time some local authorities have been slow to take opportunities to deliver sustainable development that can potentially deliver the homes and jobs we need. The upshot is that for too many businesses and developers, gaining planning approval has simply become uncertain, expensive and time consuming. The tide appears to be turning though and the Government's new Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published on 25 July 2011 signals a significant change to the planning system's 'outlook'.

The Draft NPPF is intended to simplify national planning policy. If the document remains largely unchanged after adoption, it will mean the thousand or so pages of national policy guidance becoming obsolete. The danger is, of course, that some necessary checks and balances will be

lost – the principal concern of professional institutes such as the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC).

At the heart of the draft NPPF is a new set of core planning principles. The new guidance, which is championed by Greg Clark the newly appointed Minister for Cities, will usher in more proactive decision-making based on succinct and up-to-date plans which will be the starting point for determining planning applications. Making planning applications should become simpler too and local authorities are advised to only request supporting information that is relevant, necessary and material to the application in question.

The approach to decision-making may also change with recognition that achieving sustainable development becomes key. Local authority officers and planning committees are advised that when assessing and determining development proposals they apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. As always, there will be debate about what is or is not sustainable. Decision-makers are told to support sustainable economic growth and should assume that the default answer to development proposals is 'yes' unless there are good reasons to the contrary.

How far the Draft NPPF will change prior to adoption remains to be seen. It is hoped, however, that making a planning application in the next decade will be less fraught than during the past decade.

The Draft NPPF is out to comment until 17 October 2011.

Contact us for more information:

t. 0161 835 3530
e. pba@paulbutlerassociates.co.uk
w. www.paulbutlerassociates.co.uk

References

Draft National Planning Policy Framework
Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG)
Available at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/drafftframework>