

Appendix A Final NPPF – summary main changes

Set out below is a summary of the main changes of the final NPPF 2026 compared to the draft NPPF 2025.

General

- National Development Management Policies are to remain non-statutory but are material consideration for the purpose of decision making for applications.
- Weight of existing local plan policy: Where an existing local plan policy is materially inconsistent with the new framework that policy will carry “very limited weight” in planning decisions. This is a slightly relaxed position from the draft which previously said that if existing Local Plan policies were in anyway inconsistent they should carry limited weight.
- Statutory Development Plans: Further details on what they should and should not contain, the time period changing from 20 years in the draft to minimum of 25 years in the final, how housing figures can be used, further details on how the tests of soundness will apply.

Local Plans

- Local Plans period: This has been reduced from a minimum of 15 years to 10 years. A 10 year plan would have a lower total housing requirement than a longer plan, but the annualised figure would stay the same. For North Herts this is currently 1,036 homes per year.
- Test of soundness: the test of ‘realistic’ has been altered to ‘effective’ in how Local Plans should be tested at examination.
- Site allocations: authorities are now required to identify appropriate sites rather than the most appropriate sites in order to reduce the burden on authorities

Decision Making

- Viability:
 - The requirement of standardised viability inputs such as develop profit, benchmark land value, development costs etc have been removed between the draft and final version, with the Government concluding that further work and engagement were required before introducing a standardised system.
 - Greater flexibility for application stage viability has been introduced in recognition of the more difficult economic position. The final reinforces the principle that viability should primarily be tested at plan-making stage but removes the reference to ‘limited’ circumstances where sites may not be able to rely on viability arguments to simply circumstances. In relation to the examples where this might apply (see below), it changes the references from significant/ substantial different to materially

different; and amends costs that were unforeseen to costs that were not taken account of:

- where development differs materially from the typologies tested at plan stage;
 - where a site's characteristics differ significantly from plan assumptions;
 - where abnormal or unforeseen costs arise;
 - where economic circumstances have changed substantially, such as during a recession.
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- Local Development Orders: Change in emphasis, Local authorities are “strongly encouraged” to make use of local development orders (LDOs) to provide certainty to applicants about the prospects of permission rather than “encouraged” to use LDOs.
 - Planning conditions: The final NPPF keeps the requirement for using “model” planning conditions but now states ‘unless there are strong reasons for using a different planning condition’ rather than ‘unless a different planning condition is more appropriate’.
 - Article 4 Directions: The final NPPF endorses the use of Article 4 Directions to remove permitted development rights where it is necessary to protect local amenity or the well being of the area, such as supporting the vitality and viability of parts of town centres. The final NPPF removes the requirement where such directions relate to changes from non-residential to residential use, they should be limited to situations where they are necessary to avoid wholly unacceptable adverse impacts.

Sustainable Development

Plan-making

- Producing a spatial strategy: Policy S2 introduces an explanation that designations and associated policies for gaps around settlements should only be used where necessary to maintain the separate identities of settlements and their physical separation; and should not apply to land in green belt.

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- Presumption in favour of development (Policy S3): The final NPPF adds an explanation of where developments falls partly inside and outside a settlement, then Policies S4 (within Settlements) and S5 (Outside Settlements) should apply to the relevant part.
- For proposals within settlements, Policy S4 keeps the reference to Development should be approved unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects. However in relation to the adverse effects, the text now changes the definition from unacceptable impacts to the test being substantial adverse impacts.

Climate Change

Plan-making

- Planning for Climate Change (Policy CC1): The final NPPF adds a reference to “the objectives and provisions of the Climate Change Act 2004” in relation to local plans taking a proactive approach to mitigating climate change and supporting a transition to net zero.

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- Mitigating climate change (Policy CC2): The final NPPF amends the references from “should not increase the extraction of fossil fuels” to “should involve the extraction of fossil fuels.”
- Wildfires (Policy CC3): amendments of the incorporation of suitable measures to the incorporation of proportionate measures.

Housing

Plan-making

- Travellers (Policy HO1): For Spatial Development Strategies, and Local Plans where SDS do not yet exist, the final NPPF adds a reference to “as a minimum over the plan period” in relation to the assessment of permeant and transit site accommodation needs.
- Land for Strategic Development: Policy HO4 references Garden City principles instead of New Town principles in relation to example of design principles.
- Meeting needs of different groups (Policy HO5):
 - Accessibility: To set a proportion of housing required to be delivered to the requirements of M4(2) (accessible and adaptable dwellings) and M4(3) (wheelchair user dwellings) of building regulations is now applied to major sites rather than all sites but those requirements can now exceed local needs, not just reflect them.
 - Tenure mix: The final NPPF has amended the expectations of tenure mix to apply to allocated sites rather than for site of 150 homes or more; and that expectations on tenure mix is now caveated by “where this would be appropriate and deliverable”.
- Build-out rates (Policy HO10): The final NPPF puts much more emphasis on the importance of build out rates both in relation to local authorities allocating sites and developers in delivering existing permissions.

High-quality communications

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- Telecommunications (Policy CO1): The final NPPF adds that substantial weight should be given to the benefits of maintaining or improving network coverage, capacity, reliability and resilience, including along rail corridors.

Sustainable use of materials

NDMPs

- Assessing benefits of mineral development (Policy M3): The final NPPF adds 'processing; in addition to mineral extraction in relation to substantial weight.

Effective use of land

Plan-making

- Planning for an effective use of land (Policy L1): The final NPPF adds a further requirement that local plans should set out where particular parts of the plan area, there is scope for intensification through additional development.
- Achieving appropriate densities (Policy L3):
 - Within settlements, residential or mixed-use developments should increase density and that while an area's character should be taken into account in decisions, this should not preclude development which makes the most of an area's potential. However, new text has been added which clarifies that the only exception to this should be "where there is a clear justification that this is either inappropriate or not possible".
 - There is an additional clause in relation to proposals on the outside of settlements but on land at edge of the existing built-up area which is either allocated or has permission, that these should also make the best use of the sites' potential.
 - The consultation draft set a minimum of 50 dwellings per hectare within reasonable walking distance of well-connected stations. The final version reduces this to 35 dwellings per hectare, with a minimum of 45 dwellings per hectare near stations served by at least eight trains per hour. Local Plans are still encouraged to set minimum densities for other locations within their areas; and that these should be considered minimum densities, and these should be exceeded especially in areas of high connectivity.

Green belt

Plan-making

- Altering Green Belt boundaries (Policy GB3): "Exceptional circumstances" are still required for altering green belt boundaries in local plans; these include a local authority being unable to meet its identified need for development in full, having examined all other reasonable options for doing so. However, where a development plan's spatial strategy has identified suitable land around well-connected stations for development, exceptional circumstances do not need to be demonstrated to justify altering green belt boundaries.

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- Development which is not inappropriate in the Green Belt (Policy GB7): Housing and mixed-use development around stations defined as “well-connected” will not be considered inappropriate, provided it is of an appropriate scale, does not prejudice long-term development proposals and complies with the NPPF’s “golden rules”.
- Golden Rules (Policy GB8):
 - The NPPF sets out three circumstances in which a site-specific viability assessment may be justified to allow developments not to meet golden rules. In relation to criteria a: previously development land, the final NPPF adds an additional requirement that development proposals also have to show it is demonstrably burdened by costs associated with that previous development which were not taken into account in the viability assessment that informed the local plan.
 - The final NPPF also adds that development proposals that provide contributions significantly below the requirements “will only be acceptable in exceptional cases where fully evidenced and justified”.

Achieving well designed places

NDMPs

- Key principles for well-designed places (Policy DP3): The final NPPF has removed the reference to refuse development proposals that are not well designed. Policy DP3 now says that proposals should be refused if, without clear justification, they conflict with key elements of the design policy, or with any explicit design standards set out in the development plan. It also adds that substantial weight should be given to compliance with relevant development plan policies when assessing the design quality of proposals rather than just in relation to NPPF policies.
- Policy DP3 also now includes a specific reference to women and girls in relation to designing public spaces.

Transport

NDMPs

- Locating development in sustainable locations (Policy TR3):
 - The final NPPF has added an additional clause in relation to ensuring significant adverse impacts from the development on the transport network or highway safety should be mitigated to an acceptable degree using a vision led approach.
 - Addition of reference to women and girls in relation to safe and inclusive streets
 - Additional text added in relation to applying a flexible approach to applying parking standards on the recognition of retail and other large sites which attract a large number of people – this is in the context of making better use of land.

- Assessing transport impacts (Policy TR6): The final NPPF takes a stronger stance in relation to refusing proposals that have a severe adverse impact on transport network or an unacceptable impact on highway safety.
- Public rights of way (policy TR8): There is a change from maintain to a requirement of protect and enhance in relation to public rights of way.

Health

Plan-making

- Planning for healthy communities (Policy HC1): There is now explicit reference to reducing health inequalities.

NDMPs

- Community facilities (policy HC3): There is addition of provide 'new and improved' community facilities rather than simply provide.

Pollution, public protection and security

Plan making

- Planning for clean and safe spaces (Policy P1): In relation to land allocations, additional text has been included to ensure that ground conditions do not constrain development or pose risks to its safe and appropriate delivery, including risks associated with land instability.

NDMPs

- Living conditions and pollution (Policy P3): The final NPPF provides more explicit reference to ensuring suitable mitigation measures to secure acceptable living conditions.

Natural environment

NDMPs

- Protected landscapes (Policy N4): The final NPPF reinserts the requirement that proposals for major development in such areas should be "refused" other than in exceptional circumstances. The draft had said such proposals "should only be supported" in exceptional circumstances.

Historic environment

NDMPs

- Conservation of heritage assets (Policy HE4):

- The final NPPF has removed the reference to 'enhance' in the requirement to conserve and enhance appropriate to an asset's significance
 - Text has been added in relation to avoiding harm "(or where that is not possible minimise harm)"
- Loss of removal of heritage assets (Policy HE10): Archaeological assets has been incorporated into policy HE10 loss or removal of heritage assets.

Glossary

- Definition of reasonable walking distance of a well-connected station: The final NPPF defines reasonable walking distance as around 800 metres, or around 10 minutes. A well-connected station is defined as one within a top 80 Travel to Work Areas (TTWAs) by Gross Value Added, served throughout the daytime by at least four trains per hour overall. All of North Herts station lie within the top 60 TTWA (as previously defined in the draft).