**Revised NPPF Summary**

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Action: For information and discussion

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**Introduction**

1. The government published the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and its supporting documents on 24th July 2018. The final framework consolidates a number of policy proposals which originated from the Housing White Paper and the Planning for the right homes in the right places consultation in 2017 and were further refined through the draft revised NPPF consultation which ran from 5th March to 10th May 2018.

2. Alongside the publication of the revised framework, MHCLG have published a number of supporting documents. These include:
   - Draft revised National Planning Policy Framework: government response
   - National Planning Policy Framework: equality impact assessment
   - Housing Delivery Test measurement rule book
   - Government’s new planning rulebook to deliver more quality, well designed homes (press release)
   - Updated planning practice guidance – Viability & Housing and economic development needs assessments

3. The purpose of this paper is to provide a summary of the notable changes within the revised NPPF and its supporting documents.

**Plan and Decision Making**

**Sustainable Development**

4. There are no substantive changes to the opening of chapter 2 which sets the sustainable development objectives of the framework. One minor change is that reference is made to ‘uses’ rather than ‘development’ in the context of addressing objectively assessed needs through strategic policies (para 11b).

**Plan Making**

5. The government response indicates that national planning guidance will be further amended to provide additional detail on how some aspects of the plan-making chapter will be put into practice, including; the statements of common ground, evidence base requirements and plan reviews.
6. The draft NPPF’s reference to ‘strategic’ and ‘local’ policies have been clarified. The revised framework now differentiates between strategic and non-strategic policies which are defined in more detail in the glossary.

Chapter 4 Decision Making

Publicly available viability assessments

7. The final framework sets out government’s expectation that all viability assessments should be made publicly available. However, the government response document goes on to state that they acknowledge there will be circumstances where some information contained within the viability assessment may be commercially sensitive and should not be made publicly available.

8. National planning guidance therefore sets out an expectation that an executive summary that provides aggregated costs and does not separately identify commercially sensitive information should be provided in all cases. The guidance also provides illustrative examples of what may be considered commercially sensitive.

Viability at the plan-making stage

9. The revised NPPF’s para 34 on development contributions removes the possibility for plans to set out circumstances when further viability assessments may be required in determining individual planning applications. Instead, the revised framework in para 57 puts the burden on applicants ‘to demonstrate whether particular circumstances justify the need for a viability assessment at the application stage’.

10. In addition, para 57 states that the onus is on the decision maker to decide about the weight to be given to the viability assessment ‘having regard to all the circumstances in the case’.

Delivery

Standardised approach for calculating housing need

11. The new standardised methodology for assessing housing need is reflected in the revised NPPF and supporting documents. There have been no significant amendments to the methodology as of yet.

12. However, the government’s response in relation to the standardised methodology is certainly noteworthy. The response document states that government will consider adjusting the methodology in order to meet its 300,000-homes-a-year target in light of the impending publication of new household growth projections that are likely to be lower than previous estimates. It will "consult on the specific details" when the new projection figures are published in September.

Smaller Sites

13. The draft NPPF originally called for councils to ‘ensure that at least 20% of sites identified for housing in their plans are of half a hectare or less”. However, para 68 of the revised NPPF now requires LPAs “to ensure that at least ten per cent of their housing requirement [is] accommodated on sites of one hectare or less...”.
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Housing Delivery Test

14. There have been no significant amendments to the government’s new Housing Delivery Test. Government intends to apply the presumption in favour of sustainable development where delivery is below 75% of the housing requirement from 2020. Transitional arrangements for 2018 and 2019 have remained the same from the draft revised framework.

15. The response document also notes that local authorities would like more powers to drive build out. Government plans to consider this point further following the outcome of the Letwin Review.

Town Centres

16. The significant challenges facing town centres and in particular the retail sector is acknowledged within the revised framework. It is recognised that diversification is key to the long-term vitality and viability of town centres to ‘respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries’. As such, planning policies should make clear ‘the range of uses permitted in such locations, as part of a positive strategy for the future of each centre’ (para 85).

17. In addition, the draft revised NPPF’s reference to town centres in decline has been removed. A further change specified within the response document includes removing an expectation in national planning policy that primary and secondary frontages need to be defined.

Design

18. The importance of design standards is a key emphasis within the revised framework. Notably there was also strong references to design within Communities Secretary, James Brokenshire’s written ministerial statement announcing the revised NPPF:

‘Critically, progress must not be at the expense of quality or design. Houses must be right for communities. So the planning reforms in the new Framework should result in homes that are locally led, well-designed, and of a consistent and high quality standard.’

19. This rhetorical focus merges with policy within new para 124 which specifies ‘that being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential’ for achieving sustainable development. It goes on to list effective engagement e.g. with local communities, the use of ‘local design standards or style guides’, and the refusal of permissions for developments of poor design as ways in which the revised NPPF will seek to achieve this wider objective.

Greenbelt

20. There have been no significant changes to green belt policy within the revised framework. Parag 136 on exceptional circumstances to amend Green Belt boundaries now refers to these being ‘fully evidenced and justified’, which is a change from the draft version.

Implementation

21. The policies of the revised NPPF are ‘material considerations which should be taken into account in dealing with applications from the day of its publication’ (para.212).
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22. It goes on to say policies from the 2012 framework will still apply to examining plans submitted on or before 24th January 2019 (para 214).

23. Notably, footnote 69 within the revised framework has been amended to clarify that for spatial development strategies ‘submission’ in this context means the point at which the Mayor sends the Panel copies of all representations made. This appears to be an amendment to better accommodate the current stage of the draft London Plan (especially when compared to the original wording in the draft revised NPPF which indicated that ‘submission’ amounted to a later stage in the process – specifically the point when copies of the strategies intended for publication are sent to the Secretary of State).

24. As such, the consequence of this amendment is that the new draft London Plan will be examined against the original NPPF policies from 2012.