

The Department for Communities and Local Government has this week published the final version of the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) on a dedicated website.

In a written ministerial statement, Planning Minister Nick Boles said planning “should not be the exclusive preserve of lawyers, developers or town hall officials”.

Boles highlighted how the Government was:

- “issuing robust guidance on flood risk, making it crystal clear that councils need to consider the strict tests set out in national policy, and where these are not met, new development on flood risk sites should not be allowed;
- re-affirming green Belt protection, noting that unmet housing need is unlikely to outweigh harm to the Green Belt and other harm to constitute very special circumstances justifying inappropriate development;
- making clear that local plans can pass the test of soundness where authorities have not been able to identify land for growth in years 11 to 15 of their local plan, which often can be the most challenging part for a local authority;
- making clear that windfalls can be counted over the whole local plan period;
- explaining how student housing, housing for older people and the re-use of empty homes can be included when assessing housing need;
- ensuring that infrastructure is provided to support new development, and noting how infrastructure constraints should be considered when assessing suitability of sites;
- stressing the importance of bringing brownfield land into use and made clear that authorities do not have to allocate sites on the basis of providing the maximum possible return for landowners and developers;
- noting that councils should also be able to consider the delivery record (or lack of) of developers or landowners, including a history of unimplemented permissions; this will also serve to encourage developers to deliver on their planning permissions;
- incorporating the guidance on renewable energy (including heritage and amenity) published during last summer and making it clearer in relation to solar farms, that visual impact is a particular factor for consideration;
- allowing past over-supply of housing to be taken into account when assessing housing needs;
- on the 5 year supply of sites, confirming that assessments are not automatically outdated by new household projections;
- clarifying when councils can consider refusing permission on the grounds of prematurity in relation to draft plans;
- encouraging joint working between local authorities, but clarifying that the duty to co-operate is not a duty to accept.”

The Planning Practice Guidance website can be [viewed here](#) . The DCLG has also published a [list of the previous planning practice guidance documents being replaced](#) by the new guidance.

Cath Ranson, President of the Royal Town Planning Institute, described the site as “a significant step forward in making planning guidance easier and simpler for practitioners and the public”.

She added: “The publication of the guidance gives greater certainty to planners and communities which will help both deliver the high quality development and sustainable growth that England needs.”

However, Ranson said the Government needed to maintain a clear demarcation between policy that is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework, and practice which is in the National Planning Practice Guidance.

“Government must also resist the temptation to change policy by making changes to the NPPG rather than the NPPF,” she warned.

The RTPI president also suggested that there would be “value in a structured review when practitioners have fully digested the guidance suite as a whole, understand how the guidance is working on the ground and have been given the opportunity to report back on where revisions would be valuable.”

The written ministerial statement, which can be [viewed here](#) , also provided an update on: encouraging re-use of empty and under-used buildings; new homes: retail to residential change of use; new homes: agricultural to residential change of use; and change of use: extending access to education.