

Friday, 19th February 2016

THE LAND TRUST'S RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

Introduction to the Land Trust and reasons for responding

Below is the Land Trust's response to the consultation on proposed changes to national planning policy.

In the first instance, to put our response into context, the Land Trust is the national land management charity that provides cost effective management solutions for sustainably managed open space and green infrastructure. Further details can be found at www.thelandtrust.org.uk

Our vision is to improve the quality of people's lives by creating sustainable, high quality green spaces that deliver environmental, social and economic benefits. As such, we strongly believe that it is critical for all planned new development to be considered within the context of its wider place and setting.

Our business model enables us to provide high quality and sustainably maintained open spaces that deliver economic, environmental and social benefits and we see the planning system as being vital in bringing forward sustainable environmental schemes as an integral part of sustainable development. We have ownership and/or long term management responsibility for over 2,000 ha of land with more than 60 spaces across England.

Therefore, we feel that we are in a strong position to be able to put forward our views in response to this call. We have only provided a response to questions where we have a specific point to make, all other questions have been left blank.

Consultation Questions

Affordable Housing

1. Do you have any comments or suggestions about the proposal to amend the definition of affordable housing in national planning policy to include a wider range of low cost homes?

Response:

We have no specific comment with regards the proposal to amend the definition. However, we take this opportunity to highlight how important it is to ensure that “low cost” affordable housing and starter homes must not imply any expectations of lower standards for the environment in which the development takes place.

The evidence is clear that a healthy and attractive “natural” environment plays a critical role in supporting vital wider social and economic well-being, helping create social cohesion – any diminution of these expectations (especially to those that are potentially in most need) would be seen as a seriously retrograde step and potentially lead to much greater costs to society as a whole.

For example, our recent social value study found that the investment of £3 million per annum into the management of our green spaces, contributes the equivalent of approximately £90 million per annum to the health care and social sectors.

See the summary report at: <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Value-of-our-Green-Spaces-January-2016.pdf>

2. Do you have any views on the implications of the proposed change to the definition of affordable housing on people with protected characteristics as defined in the Equalities Act 2010? What evidence do you have on this matter?

Response:

Whilst we have no specific views on the proposed changes to the definition, we would highlight how important it is to ensure that there is no inferred suggestion about long-term sustainability and that overall expectations and the development of “in-perpetuity” solutions are maintained.

Furthermore, it is important to ensure that whilst a focus is on higher density housing development around commuter hubs, this is not at the expense of green public open spaces.

As per our response to Q1, the evidence for the social and economic benefits of green open spaces is clear. Therefore ensuring existing and new communities have access to green infrastructure needs to be included and incorporated into development plans.

Increasing residential density around commuter hubs

3. Do you agree with the Government’s definition of commuter hub? If not, what changes do you consider are required?

Response:

Yes. This looks like a reasonable suggestion from our point of view. It is particularly important to ensure that opportunities for all mediums of travel, including cycling and walking are considered as an integral part of any commuter strategy.

4. Do you have any further suggestions for proposals to support higher density development around commuter hubs through the planning system?

Response:

New, high quality, well designed, inclusive and accessible green spaces should be incorporated into higher density development projects, in addition to any existing open spaces.

This will ensure the needs of increased communities are catered for.

Furthermore, long term investment in the green infrastructure should be identified from the outset and funding allocated such as through CIL/S106 for implementing and maintaining the new and existing green open spaces in perpetuity.

Developments that take an integrated approach should be encouraged, such as incorporating cycling and pedestrian routes, nature corridors and natural play areas. They provide safe, clean, public spaces, to improve community health and wellbeing as well as support environmental benefits, such as flood alleviation, shade, reduced pollution and other ecosystem services.

5. Do you agree that the Government should not introduce a minimum level of residential densities in national policy for areas around commuter hubs? If not, why not?

Response: Not applicable

Supporting new settlements, development on brownfield land and small sites, and delivery of housing agreed in Local Plans

6. Do you consider that national planning policy should provide greater policy support for new settlements in meeting development needs? If not, why not?

Response:

Yes, but in doing so, we draw your attention to our concerns about implementation and the written and oral evidence we provided to the House of Lord's Select Committee on the Built Environment (29th October 2015).

Our messages, which are still relevant here, focused on the capacity of local planning authorities to fully address all necessary aspects of sustainability, such as:

- the importance of green infrastructure in development
- Consideration of long-term maintenance for green infrastructure within the design process
- Stronger and clearer support from Government on green infrastructure within the built environment
- Consideration of the long term investment mechanisms for maintaining green infrastructure.

See our response at: <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/news/the-land-trust-gives-evidence-at-westminster-select-committee/>

Supporting housing development on brownfield land and small sites

7. Do you consider that it would be beneficial to strengthen policy on development of brownfield land for housing? If not, why not and are there any unintended impacts that we should take into account?

Response:

No. We do not believe that a brownfield always delivers the best overall outcomes for society. Some brownfield land has far greater environmental value than green field

We believe that there is a need for a much clearer understanding around the most appropriate use of land and Government needs to recognise that although there are pressures to build houses, it should not necessarily always be on brownfield, as this type of land can have greater value as open space, delivering significant benefits to society, such as improved health and well-being, community cohesion, education and environment. This is of particular importance in already densely populated areas and in urban areas, public green open space is already at a premium, so losing more could be detrimental.

High density developments need access to green open space as much as low density developments, and in many cases, the need is far greater.

Therefore, planning policy for the built environment needs to ensure that it has measures in place to identify the right type of activity to be used on the right type of land.

Our view is that we need a land use strategy for England.

Our views on this can be found at the following links:

[Brownfield or Greenfield: it's not a black and white issue](#)

[Is brownfield development the answer to housing needs?](#)

8. Do you consider that it would be beneficial to strengthen policy on development of small sites for housing? If not, why not? How could the change impact on the calculation of local planning authorities' five-year land supply?

Response:

Yes, although it is important to consider the cumulative impact of such small developments on the environment and on a wider strategic level, provisioning for amenities, such as green space provision for existing communities.

As our social value study demonstrates, people living in and around our green spaces benefit significantly from access to green space, such as with physical and mental health, local economic uplift and reduced anti-social behaviour.

We calculated this in financial terms, with the outcome being that people value our green spaces at two and a half times the cost of maintaining them per year.

See the summary report at: <http://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Value-of-our-Green-Spaces-January-2016.pdf>

<p>9. Do you agree with the Government proposal to define a small site as a site of less than 10 units? If not, what other definition do you consider is appropriate, and why?</p> <p>Response: Not applicable</p>
<p>10. Do you consider that national planning policy should set out that local planning authorities should put in place a specific positive local policy for assessing applications for development on small sites not allocated in the Local Plan?</p> <p>Response: Not applicable</p>
<p>Ensuring housing is delivered on land allocated in plans</p>
<p>11. We would welcome your views on how best to implement the housing delivery test, and in particular</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you consider should be the baseline against which to monitor delivery of new housing? - What should constitute significant under-delivery, and over what time period? - What steps should be taken in response to significant under-delivery? - How do you see this approach working when the housing policies in the Local Plan are not up-to-date? <p>Response:</p> <p>Whilst we support the aim to speed up housing delivery in principle, we believe that it is important to ensure that the process to do so does not just become merely a “numbers game”.</p> <p>Therefore, it is critical that such a process remembers that the function of the NPPF is to “promote sustainable development and the protection and enhancement of the natural environment”. As such, we would expect appropriate sustainability measures to be included.</p> <p>We believe that a failure to meet appropriate standards for sustainability (including addressing environmental issues and provisioning of sustainable green space) should constitute under-delivery.</p>
<p>12. What would be the impact of a housing delivery test on development activity?</p> <p>Response: Not applicable</p>
<p>Supporting delivery of starter homes</p>
<p>13. What evidence would you suggest could be used to justify retention of land for commercial or similar use? Should there be a fixed time limit on land retention for commercial use?</p> <p>Response: Not applicable</p>
<p>14. Do you consider that the starter homes exception site policy should be extended to unviable or underused retail, leisure and non-residential institutional brownfield land?</p>

Response:

Yes, but only on the basis of our responses to Q1. and Q7.

15. Do you support the proposal to strengthen the starter homes exception site policy? If not, why not?

Response: Not applicable

Encouraging starter homes within mixed use commercial developments

16: Should starter homes form a significant element of any housing component within mixed use developments and converted unlet commercial units?

Response: Not applicable

Encouraging starter homes in rural areas

17. Should rural exception sites be used to deliver starter homes in rural areas? If so, should local planning authorities have the flexibility to require local connection tests?

Response: Not applicable

18. Are there any other policy approaches to delivering starter homes in rural areas that you would support?

Response: Not applicable

Enabling communities to identify opportunities for starter homes

19. Should local communities have the opportunity to allocate sites for small scale Starter Home developments in their Green Belt through neighbourhood plans?

Response: Not applicable

Brownfield land in the Green Belt

20. Should planning policy be amended to allow redevelopment of brownfield sites for starter homes through a more flexible approach to assessing the impact on openness?

Response:

As we state in our response to Q7, we support an approach that considers the right type of activity on the right type of land and in the right areas.

Therefore, we believe this should apply to all land, irrespective of Green Belt designation or not.

Transitional arrangements

21. We would welcome your views on our proposed transitional arrangements.

Response: Not applicable

General questions

22. What are your views on the assumptions and data sources set out in this document to

estimate the impact of the proposed changes? Is there any other evidence which you think we need to consider?

Response: Not applicable

23. Have you any other views on the implications of our proposed changes to national planning policy on people with protected characteristics as defined in the Equalities Act 2010? What evidence do you have on this matter?

Response: Not applicable