

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 12th September 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Climate Change and Environment and Urban Renewal

SUBJECT: Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to advise Executive Board on the proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and to present the potential implications for Halton.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1. Members consider the proposed reforms and potential implications for Halton; and**
- 2. Members approve the delegation of preparing a response to government to the Director of Planning and Transportation in consultation with the portfolio holders for Climate Change and Urban renewal.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The government is seeking views on a proposed approach to revising the NPPF.

3.2 The consultation closes on 24th September. It is proposed that Halton will develop a response to the consultation.

3.3 The Consultation also sets out proposals in relation to planning fees, local plan intervention criteria and appropriate thresholds for certain Nationally significant infrastructure projects.

3.4 The proposed reforms are predicated upon the view from government “that sustained economic growth is the only route to improving the prosperity of our country and the living standards of local people.”

- 3.5 The government believes that amendments to the planning framework and local plan coverage are vital to achieving this.
- 3.6 The proposals contained in the consultation document include:
- a. make the standard method for assessing housing needs mandatory, requiring local authorities to plan for the resulting housing need figure, planning for a lower figure only when they can demonstrate hard constraints and that they have exhausted all other options.
 - b. reverse other changes to the NPPF made in December 2023 which were detrimental to housing supply.
 - c. implement a new standard method and calculation to ensure local plans are ambitious enough to support the Government's manifesto commitment of 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament.
 - d. broaden the existing definition of brownfield land, set a strengthened expectation that applications on brownfield land will be approved and that plans should promote an uplift in density in urban areas.
 - e. identify grey belt land within the Green Belt, to be brought forward into the planning system through both plan and decision-making to meet development needs.
 - f. improve the operation of 'the presumption' in favour of sustainable development, to ensure it acts an effective failsafe to support housing supply, by clarifying the circumstances in which it applies; and, introducing new safeguards, to make clear that its application cannot justify poor quality development.
 - g. deliver affordable, well-designed homes, with new "golden rules" for land released in the Green Belt to ensure it delivers in the public interest.
 - h. make wider changes to ensure that local planning authorities are able to prioritise the types of affordable homes their communities need on all housing development and that the planning system supports a more diverse housebuilding sector.
 - i. support economic growth in key sectors, aligned with the Government's industrial strategy and future local growth plans, including laboratories, gigafactories, datacentres, digital economies and freight and logistics – given their importance to our economic future.
 - j. deliver community needs to support society and the creation of healthy places; and
 - k. support clean energy and the environment, including through support for onshore wind and renewables.
- 3.7 The government is seeking views on:
- a. whether to reform the way that the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) regime applies to onshore

wind, solar, data centres, laboratories, gigafactories and water projects, as the first step of the Government’s NSIP reform plans.

- b. whether the local plan intervention policy criteria should be updated or removed, so the Government can intervene where necessary to ensure housing delivery; and
- c. proposals to increase some planning fees, including for householder applications, so that local planning authorities are properly resourced to support a sustained increase in development and improve performance.

The document sets out how and when the Government expects every local planning authority to rapidly create a clear, ambitious local plan for high quality housebuilding and economic growth.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The draft NPPF includes a revised method for assessing housing needs (a formula to calculate number of homes needed by local authority) – ‘the standard method’ – is proposed. The outcome of the method seeks to support Government’s ambition to deliver 1.5 million new homes over the next 5 years.

4.2 The revised method differs from the existing method in that it is calculated using a percentage (0.8%) of existing housing stock levels (rather than household projections as currently). It also applies a stronger affordability multiplier and removes the ‘arbitrary’ 35% ‘urban uplift’ (which currently applies to Liverpool).

4.3 This ‘standard method’ results in a local planning authority housing number. Government are ‘absolutely clear that authorities may justify planning for a lower number only where they can evidence hard constraints to the planning inspectorate.’

4.4 The new formula increases targets across all regions relative to the existing standard method. A summary of the numbers for Halton under the existing and new method are shown below.

4.5

Halton Current Method	Proposed ‘Standard Method’	Average annual net additions
203	540	172
DALP Figure (annualised)	350	

4.6 Halton’s current Delivery and Allocations Local Plan (DALP) was adopted in 2022, and the guidance in NPPF (paragraph 34) remains that Local Plans should be reviewed every 5 years. The DALP would therefore need a review completed by March 2027.

- 4.7 In any future review of the DALP, based on the draft NPPF requirements, the following would need to be taken into account:
- 4.8 The need to release safeguarded land to meet development needs.
- 4.9 A review of the Green Belt to identify possible 'grey belt.'
- 4.10 50% of new homes on developments in the Green Belt need to be affordable.
- 4.11 Green Belt development will need to take into account provision of wider infrastructure e.g. schools, GP surgeries, care homes.
- 4.12 Brownfield development proposals on previous developed land to be reviewed positively. In Halton there is often a viability gap on brownfield sites to bring these sites forward into housing supply.
- 4.13 Need to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply.
- 4.14 The release of Green Belt to address unmet needs for traveller's sites.
- 4.15 Going forward, it is proposed that any future review of Halton's DALP will require input from Members, previously this input was via the LDF Working Party. Further update reports will be presented to respective Council Committees, for example the Environment and Urban Renewal PPB and Exec Board.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no financial implications at this stage. However, Members are advised that a future review of the DALP will require significant resources for the Planning Team and if additional resources are not available existing duties and responsibilities will need to be reprioritised.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

The proposed NPPF reforms will have implications for the Council's priorities as follows:

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Chapter 6 of the document refers to strengthening planning obligations to provide more affordable and an expectation that housing needs assessments explicitly consider the needs of those who require social rent, see also 6.6 below.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

The document promotes the support of economic growth in key sectors aligned with the government's industrial strategy and future local growth plans.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

The document refers specifically to meeting the needs of looked after children stating that every child should have a loving, secure home close to their communities.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Please refer to section 6.1 above.

In addition, the document wishes to support a mix tenure of developments and developments that deliver a high percentage of social rent, or other affordable housing tenures should be supported.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

There are a number of references to supporting green energy and the environment.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

The document recognises that meeting community needs goes beyond providing homes and jobs and refers to how planning processes support society in delivering a wide range of services and facilities to be sustainable and to support healthy living.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 As the published NPPF is a draft for consultation, there are no risks identified at this stage.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The document and consultation seek views on the potential impacts of any of the proposals in line with the Equality Act 2010.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Chapter 9 of the document seeks views on revisions to the NPPF to increase support for renewable energy schemes tackling climate change and safeguarding environmental resources.

9.2 Chapter 5 places emphasis on promoting Brownfield and Greenbelt developments.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-reforms-to-the-national-planning-policy-framework-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system#full-publication-update-history>