



tcpa



tcpa briefing

planning for a natural and healthy environment

TCPA Briefing Paper 9

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1 Background

The Planning White Paper of 2007 stated that the planning policy framework would be significantly streamlined to provide a more strategic, clear and focused framework context for plan-making and decision-taking at the local level. The overarching objective of streamlining Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) is to make them clearer, more accessible and more effective, by separating out policy from guidance.

In its final form, the PPS on Planning for a Natural and Healthy Environment <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/naturaleenvironmentconsultation> will replace PPS9: *Biodiversity and Geological Conservation*; PPS17: *Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation*; parts of PPS7: *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas*; and parts of PPS20: *Coastal Planning*. The previous Government intended that the final PPS would be published later in 2010, supported by updated practical guidance, developed with stakeholders.

2 Summary of the consultation and proposals

The draft PPS sets out planning policies on the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment and the habitats and species it supports, on green infrastructure, on open space, and on land and related facilities for sport, recreation and play. Two key objectives of this single new PPS are to:

- bring together related policies on the natural environment and on open and green spaces in rural and urban areas, to ensure that the planning system

delivers healthy sustainable communities which adapt and are resilient to climate change and also gives the appropriate level of protection to the natural environment; and

- deliver, for the first time, planning policy on green infrastructure, including contributions made by private assets (for example back gardens) and public assets (for example parks).

The new policy recognises that there is a difference between planning for individual open space and **planning at a broader scale for green infrastructure**. For example:

- **Policy NE2.1** requires the relevant regional authority to address **regional, sub-regional and cross-boundary issues** in relation to **biodiversity, geodiversity, landscape protection and green infrastructure** in its regional strategy.
- **Policy NE4.1** requires local planning authorities to set out in their Local Development Framework a **strategic approach for the creation, protection and management of networks of green infrastructure**, using much of the evidence base collected for the PPG17 open space strategies. This policy emphasises the value of green infrastructure in **adapting to the impacts of climate change** by providing flood water storage areas, sustainable drainage systems, urban cooling, and local access to shady outdoor space.

In summary, the PPS sets out:

- **plan-making policies** on local and regional collaboration to acquire an appropriate evidence base, and on approaches for incorporating natural environment priorities and targets into local and regional plans; and
- **development management policies** on determining applications in relation to the natural environment, such as policies on maintaining green infrastructure networks, recreational and play facilities, and sports developments.

3 TCPA policies and key messages

The TCPA welcomes this new PPS, with its greater focus on the multiple benefits of green infrastructure (such as resilience to the impacts of climate change, and more general benefits for healthy living), and believes that the final PPS will enhance the national policy framework for England and support planners in making a significant contribution in the provision of appropriate green infrastructure in new and existing communities. However, the TCPA points to several areas for further consideration, drawing on knowledge gained from its lead partner role in the INTERREG IVC GRaBS (Green and Blue Space Adaptation in Urban Areas and Eco Towns) project (see <http://www.grabs-eu.org> for further details):

- **The spatial planning approach:** The focus of the PPS is very much on conservation (with the 'Natural Environment' title disproportionately emphasising this), but conservation and good place-making objectives do not have to be mutually exclusive. The new, consolidated PPS should address a wide mix of issues, from high-density urban environments to rural areas rich in wildlife. A **more holistic spatial planning approach** is needed – which recognises the benefits that open spaces play in tackling the impacts of climate

change, in creating sustainable neighbourhoods, and in proactive planning for health and well-being.

- **The spatial planning scale:** The draft PPS recognises that networks of green space will cross boundaries and extend beyond urban fringes. In order to create a well-connected, well-managed network of green infrastructure, planning will need to take place at a broader scale and more strategic level than that of local planning authorities. Policy NE2.1(i) requires the relevant regional authority to address regional, sub-regional and cross-boundary issues in relation to biodiversity, geodiversity, landscape and green infrastructure; and Policy NE4.1 states that local planning authorities should build on work undertaken at the regional and sub-regional level – but **further guidance is required on what planning activities should be applied at each spatial scale to harness natural processes and systems.** Through the GRaBS project, the TCPA has learnt that the Regional Development Agencies are key drivers in collecting the evidence base for green infrastructure delivery. The Government’s announcement in the Queen’s Speech of a Decentralisation and Localism Bill includes a series of planning reform measures and the abolition of regional planning. The TCPA is a strong believer in the need for strategic-level planning to co-ordinate development and infrastructure between different areas, and to provide a wide range of environmental policies. **Without regional planning, alternative drivers and delivery agents will need to be considered to take forward important strategic scale planning issues** such as achieving a natural and healthy environment through joined-up green infrastructure networks.
- **Green infrastructure networks and management:** The importance of a **network** of green infrastructure in achieving maximum benefit is recognised in the draft PPS. However, there is insufficient recognition of the need for this green infrastructure to be **well managed and particularly well watered** if it is to perform its crucial role in supporting adaptation to climate change. In any new or existing development incorporating green spaces, a well-considered management plan for the green infrastructure network will be essential. The draft PPS encourages planners to prioritise considerations on green infrastructure, but the appropriate, rather than tokenistic, green infrastructure must be put in place and maintained correctly. Local planning authorities have made significant investment in the preparation of PPG17-compliant open space strategies that set local objectives for strategic planning and the long-term management of their open spaces. Nationally, over 95% of local authorities now have a strategy in place or are in the process of completing one, and the TCPA believes that it is important that the final PPS makes the most of this resource and keeps such strategies as a requirement.
- **Improving the skills of planners:** If policy- and decision-making is to be effective in conserving and enhancing the natural environment, as set out in the draft PPS, there needs to be **further training to improve and update the technical knowledge and specialist skills of planners.** This is especially true in terms of securing and maintaining green space in and around developments as adaptation measures, through the use of planning obligations and conditions. This is especially true in terms of securing and maintaining green space in and around developments as adaptation measures, through the use of planning obligations and conditions. The Homes and Communities Agency Academy’s Mind the Skills Gap report of 2007 identified green infrastructure as one area in which further training is becoming essential, particularly in cross-sector and cross-boundary working to deliver a green infrastructure strategy.

- **Assessing the value of green infrastructure:** Green infrastructure adds tangible value to a settlement in economic and as well as social and environmental terms. A **comprehensive assessment of the economic value of green infrastructure** (for example how it affects property prices) would be a valuable addition to the evidence base for planners and decision-makers. The Northwest Regional Development Agency (a partner in the GRaBS project) has been researching the economic benefits of green infrastructure, supported by a bespoke North West Green Infrastructure Unit. The research provides a strong case for seeing green infrastructure as adding real value to the North West's economy. Such approaches should be seen as best practice and disseminated more widely.
- **Connections with transport:** Green infrastructure has a key role to play in **supporting alternative means of transport**. The TCPA's Eco-towns Green Infrastructure Worksheet (the principles of which can also be applied to other sustainable developments) highlights the role of green infrastructure in providing excellent walking and cycling opportunities. The design, planning and delivery of green infrastructure should be linked to policies on transport.

4 Further information

Mind the Skills Gap. Homes and Communities Agency Academy, 2007.

http://skills.homesandcommunities.co.uk/sites/default/files/mind_the_skills_gap_full_report.pdf

The Economic Value of Green Infrastructure. Natural Economy Northwest, 2008.

<http://www.nwda.co.uk/PDF/EconomicValueofGreenInfrastructure.pdf>

The Essential Role of Green Infrastructure. Eco-towns Green Infrastructure Worksheet.

TCPA, 2008. http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/etws_green_infrastructure.pdf

Biodiversity by Design: A Guide for Sustainable Communities. TCPA, 2004.

http://www.tcpa.org.uk/data/files/bd_biodiversity.pdf

No Trees, No Future: Trees in the Urban Realm. The Trees and Design Action Group,

2008. <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/tdag>

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment 'Sustainable Cities' website,

at <http://www.cabe.org.uk/sustainable-cities/green-infrastructure>



tcpa

- **we are:** independent and open to all who want better places
- **we have achieved:** greener cities, new towns, and better homes
- **we create:** ideas, knowledge, publications, campaigns, and independent policies
- **we aim to:** secure homes, empower communities, and deliver a sustainable future
- **...through planning**

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