

Retrofit, senior living and... mansard roofs? Key takeaways from the new NPPF

Government also makes case for new national development management policies



The government wants to encourage mansard roof extensions

Just in time for Christmas, the government has published a draft of its new national planning policy framework (NPPF), which local authorities use to make their local plans.

The draft document, part of a consultation launched yesterday, details ministers' planning reforms for England. These include previously announced plans to water down housing targets and introduce controversial national development management policies which would take precedence over local plans.

However there were also some surprising inclusions, including policies on retrofit, housing for older people and even a detailed paragraph on mansard roof extensions.

Here are the key takeaways from the draft NPPF.

Housing targets

As [previously reported](#), the “standard method” (by which housing need for local authorities is calculated) will remain, but only as an “advisory starting point” and “a guide that is not mandatory”. “Over-delivery” will be taken into account if an authority has delivered more homes than were planned for in the preceding plan period. Green belt protections will be strengthened. The duty for local authorities to co-operate on local plans will be removed.

There will be more guidance on what could be an exceptional circumstance to justify less housebuilding. For example, if housing need can only be met by building at densities which would be “significantly out of character with the existing area”. However, this discouraging of densification seems to contradict with another new paragraph, which says “density should be optimised to promote the most efficient use of land” on brownfield sites.

Despite housebuilders warning that these changes could lead to a fall in development, the document reiterates that the government “remains committed” to delivering 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s.

Senior living

Senior living gets a look-in, with the draft saying planners should take retirement housing, housing-with-care and care homes into consideration when forming their local plans.

Retrofit

A new policy supporting retrofit has been added, which says “significant weight should be given” to the need to support energy efficiency improvements through the adaptation of existing buildings, particularly large non-domestic buildings, to improve their energy performance, including through installation of heat pumps and solar panels.

National Development Management policies

These are a new set of rules from central government intended to save plan-makers from having to repeat nationally important policies in their own plans, so that plans can be quicker to produce and focus on locally relevant policies. The government claims they should also provide more consistency for SME housebuilders.

The idea of national policies that supersede local plans has proven controversial, with some MPs seeing the move as a [“power grab” by central government](#). However, the consultation stresses that they “would not impinge on local policies for shaping development,” nor “direct what land should be allocated for particular uses during the plan-making process.”

Small sites

As revealed earlier in December, ministers will consult on planning reforms to unlock small brownfield sites in UK cities and build thousands of homes.

The NPPF acknowledges views that existing policies were not effective enough in supporting housebuilding and government will look for proposals to encourage greater use of small sites.

The government had said [it would review its policy on the development of small sites](#) after Andrew Lewer, a Conservative backbench MP, put forward an amendment to the levelling up and regeneration bill going through parliament.

Mansard roofs?

We'll leave you with arguably the most critical addition of all: an in-depth passage on mansard roof extensions.

- e) support opportunities to use the airspace above existing residential and commercial premises for new homes. In particular, they should allow upward extensions where the development would be consistent with the prevailing height and form of neighbouring properties and the overall street scene, is well-designed (including complying with any local design policies and standards), and can maintain safe access and egress for occupiers. They should also allow mansard roof extensions where their external appearance harmonises with the original building, including extensions to terraces where one or more of the terraced houses already has a mansard. Where there was a tradition of mansard construction locally at the time of the building's construction, the extension should emulate it with respect to external appearance. A condition of simultaneous development should not be imposed on an application for multiple mansard extensions unless there is an exceptional justification.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities is taking comments on the draft NPPF until March 2.

A “missed opportunity”

Ian Fletcher, director of policy at the British Property Federation, said that as it stands the draft NPPF “seems like a missed opportunity to overhaul the system, increase resource for our local authorities and support growth.” While the proposals give increased consideration to delivering a mix of homes to meet need, Fletcher said “we continue to be concerned that changes to housing targets will see less homes delivered and some areas of the country unable to meet their population growth.”