

Response to technical consultation on planning

The Campaign for National Parks is the independent national voice for the 13 National Parks in England and Wales. Our mission is to inspire everyone to enjoy and look after National Parks – the nation’s green treasures. Our response has been endorsed by all the National Park Societies (NPSs) in England.

National Parks are our finest landscapes with the highest level of protection. Their statutory purposes are to conserve and enhance wildlife, cultural heritage and natural beauty, and to promote opportunities for public enjoyment and understanding of their special qualities. For over 75 years the Campaign for National Parks has been working to ensure that our National Parks are beautiful, inspirational places that are relevant, valued and protected for all.

National Parks contribute significantly to the well-being of the nation, by providing safe, attractive, healthy places for recreation. They also play a vital role in sustainable development through protection of the landscape, wildlife and key environmental resources and services, like water provision and carbon storage in peat soils and forests, which can mitigate the effects of climate change. As well as being inspiring places for people to enjoy and improve their health and well-being, National Parks make a significant contribution to the economy through tourism, farming, and other related businesses.

Our response focuses on only a few of the questions in the consultation document as we found it impossible to analyse the implications of all the proposals in this lengthy and wide-ranging document in the time available. We are disappointed that DCLG choose to provide only an 8 week consultation period for such a large consultation, particularly over a time when many people are taking leave. We do not believe that this demonstrates good practice in undertaking consultations and a genuine willingness to ensure that all relevant issues have been taken into account in decision-making.

We are particularly concerned at further proposals to extend permitted development rights in Article 1(5) land by removing the need for planning permission when converting light industrial and storage and distribution buildings to residential buildings. As we set out in some detail in [our response to the consultation on greater flexibilities in change of use](#) which closed in October 2013, there are strong arguments for retaining planning permission in National Parks and we reiterate the key points below. We were really pleased that the Government listened to the concerns we raised in response to that consultation and has decided that permitted development rights for conversion to agricultural to residential use would not apply in Article 1(5) land. However, we are disappointed that the same consideration has not been extended to the latest proposals, some of which have similar implications.

Here is our response to specific questions:

Question 2.2: Should the new permitted development right ...(ii) apply in Article 1(5) land i.e. land within a National Park, the Broads, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, an area designated as a conservation area, and land within World Heritage Sites ...?

No, the new permitted development right should not apply in Article 1 (5) land. Any change of use will have a range of impacts in areas such as access, parking, lighting, landscape,

noise, highways and environmental issues which need to be taken into consideration as part of the process of determining whether the new use is appropriate for the location. Such factors need to be given even greater consideration in isolated locations and in National Parks, where decisions also need to take account of the statutory National Park purpose to conserve and protect the special qualities of the area.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) emphasises the special status that National Parks should be afforded in planning policies and decisions and makes it clear that they have the highest status of protection. These proposals would conflict with this. They are also contrary to the Government's own advice as set out in the English National Parks and the Broads Circular which states that 'the Government recognises that the Parks are not suitable locations for unrestricted housing and does not therefore provide general housing targets for them'.

The changes would also undermine the NPAs' statutory duty to seek to foster the social and economic well being of communities living within the National Park by undermining policies that support local occupancy of new dwellings. Appropriate change of use should be encouraged, particularly where this helps to ensure the future upkeep of traditional buildings, however such changes of use need to be carefully managed and monitored to ensure that the potential impacts of any proposed new use are properly considered and that due account is also taken of the cumulative impacts within an area.

This is what the existing planning process is designed to do and the National Park Authorities (NPAs) have policies relating to local occupancy conditions on new homes and conversion schemes to ensure that the majority of new residential development is being used to meet local housing needs. Most also have a policy framework which guides new residential developments to the most appropriate locations, such as particular village(s) or areas which are served by public transport and community facilities. This both restricts new development from taking place in environmentally unsustainable locations and helps support existing services in village centres. The proposed changes would undermine these policies.

The high quality environment in National Parks makes them attractive places to live particularly for those who are retired or looking to purchase a second home in a rural area. Average house prices in National Parks are already significantly higher than the average house price in their respective region. The premium for a property in a National Park varies from 27% to 90% but in five of the 10 National Parks it is over 60%¹. This means that the need for affordable housing is a significant issue for NPAs and restricting the occupancy of new housing to people from the local area is vital to sustaining rural communities so it is unlikely that the proposals would benefit existing rural communities.

Existing planning policies in National Parks ensure that there is a means of identifying, reducing and, if necessary, mitigating for, any negative impacts. Without the need for a planning application, there will be no mechanism to negotiate contributions to affordable housing or S106 requirements.

Although a prior notification process is proposed, this does not include any requirement in relation to wildlife protection. The proposed changes will remove the ability of NPAs to alert those undertaking conversions to the requirements of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 so that they can undertake wildlife surveys where appropriate.

In addition, we are concerned that the proposed changes would offer a significant incentive for owners to convert buildings to residential use as the value of residential dwellings is higher than that of industrial buildings. This could have unintended consequences for

¹ Valuing England's National Parks – Final Report for National Parks England, May 2013

employment, service provision and the local economy in National Parks. If such buildings are genuinely no longer required for industrial use, allowing them to be converted to residential use without planning permission risks allowing buildings which potentially have a detrimental impact on the landscape and visual amenity to remain in place for much longer than would otherwise be the case.

Finally, the requirement for prior approval, whilst removing NPAs' ability to manage and monitor certain important aspects of the development, is unlikely to lead to reduced bureaucracy or a much speedier decision, particularly if the reduced fees for local planning authorities restrict the resources they are able to devote to this.

Question 2.16: Do you agree that parking policy should be strengthened to tackle on-street parking problems by restricting powers to set maximum parking standards?

No, we do not agree that parking policy should be changed to restrict local planning authorities' ability to set maximum parking standards. It is important that all local planning authorities have the ability to manage parking alongside all the other impacts that the planning system is designed to deal with. When used appropriately, maximum parking standards can facilitate higher density development and more appropriate urban design in areas that have good public transport accessibility. Their continued use would help maximise the amount of new housing that can be delivered in existing town and village centres, thus reducing the pressure for development elsewhere in National Parks. This proposal also risks undermining localism by removing the local planning authority's ability to use the most appropriate parking standards for a particular local situation, taking into account the local impacts and the views of the local community.

Question 2.18: Do you agree that there should be a permitted development right for the installation of solar PV up to 1MW on the roof of non-domestic buildings?

No, we do not agree with this proposal and believe that it should not apply at all in Article 1(5) land. It is currently proposed that this would not to apply to roof slopes which front a public highway in Article 1(5) land. However, this fails to take account of the potential visual impacts as a result of increased numbers of solar PV panels on roof slopes away from public highways. In some cases these could be in locations where there would be significant impacts across a wide area, including on recreational users of public rights of way and access land. Requiring planning permission would allow full consideration of such impacts and ensure that the decisions made take account of National Park purposes. NPA planning policies generally support the installation of renewable energy infrastructure where it is appropriate in scale and location so the need for planning permission would not reduce the ability to provide solar PVs where it is appropriate to do so. However, removing the need for planning permission could result in a proliferation of solar PVs in unsuitable locations which would be counter-productive in terms of encouraging renewable energy infrastructure as it would make the technology very unpopular with local residents and amenity groups. We are also concerned that this proposal could lead to the erection of non-domestic buildings solely for the purpose of installing solar PVs which would be completely inappropriate in a National Park.

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