

## **Response to consultation on changes to the current planning system October 2020**

### **Introduction**

1. 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. We have been campaigning for over 80 years to ensure that our National Parks are beautiful, inspirational places that are relevant, valued and protected for all.
2. National Parks play a vital role in sustainable development. They are home to rural communities and also support the 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. Many of these businesses rely on the high quality environment of these areas for their success.
3. Many of the benefits which National Parks provide, including tourism and rural economic growth, could be lost if the special qualities for which they are valued are undermined. National Parks are, of course, living and working landscapes but the challenge is to ensure that the range of benefits that these areas provide is not compromised by insensitive change, unsympathetic land use or irresponsible development. It is therefore essential that the planning system provides strong support for the protection and enhancement of designated landscapes.
4. We are concerned that some of the changes proposed in this consultation focus too much on housing delivery and there is insufficient recognition of the wider role that planning plays in delivering the statutory purposes of National Parks. Our response calls for a number of clarifications and changes to what is proposed. We have focused on those questions which have the most significance for National Parks in line with our remit but many of the issues we have covered would also apply to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and some are relevant to rural areas more generally.

### **Response to specific consultation questions**

**Q1: Do you agree that planning practice guidance should be amended to specify that the appropriate baseline for the standard method is whichever is the higher of the level of 0.5% of housing stock in each local authority area OR the latest household projections averaged over a 10-year period?**

5. We do not support either of these approaches. We are concerned that the proposed revised standard method will result in significant increases in the housing targets for local authorities in areas with National Parks leading to increased pressure for development in these areas. It is essential that any standardised approach takes account of the fact that there are constraints on

the amount of housing that can be delivered in areas such as National Parks and AONBs where stronger planning protections apply. Attempting to deliver significantly increased housing numbers in these areas would be in conflict with their statutory purposes and the requirement on all public bodies to have regard to those purposes. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the standard approach should not apply in these areas.

6. The existing National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) makes it clear that the standard method does not apply in National Parks and National Park Authorities (NPAs) are currently able to use a locally determined approach to assessing housing need which allows them to take account of the particular environmental constraints in these areas. There is nothing in the consultation document to suggest that this will not continue to be the case. However, it is essential that NPPG continues to make it clear that the standard approach to housing assessment does not apply in National Parks. We remain concerned that even if National Parks themselves are protected against inappropriate development, there is a risk that the new approach will lead to increased pressure for housing development just outside their boundaries and will thus have a detrimental impact on their settings.
7. The emphasis on increasing the targets for housing to be delivered through the planning system fails to take account of other factors which have an impact on the availability of new housing. For example, there are already a significant number of planning permissions for new housing which are yet to be implemented. Another factor that is particularly significant in National Parks is the high proportion of housing which is used as holiday lets or second homes. One way to help tackle this issue would be to require planning permission before allowing an existing permanent residence to be used as a second home.

**Q8: The Government is proposing policy compliant planning applications will deliver a minimum of 25% of onsite affordable housing as First Homes, and a minimum of 25% of offsite contributions towards First Homes where appropriate. Which do you think is the most appropriate option for the remaining 75% of affordable housing secured through developer contributions? Please provide reasons and / or evidence for your views (if possible):**

- i) Prioritising the replacement of affordable home ownership tenures, and delivering rental tenures in the ratio set out in the local plan policy.**
- ii) Negotiation between a local authority and developer.**
- iii) Other (please specify)**

8. We do not wish to comment in detail on this question. However, we support the intention to exempt 'designated rural areas' from the requirement to deliver First Homes but would like confirmation that the definition of 'designated rural areas' in this context will be the same as that included in the Glossary of the 2019 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) i.e. that the requirement to deliver First Homes will not apply in National Parks.

**Q14: Do you agree with the approach of allowing a small proportion of market housing on First Homes exception sites, in order to ensure site viability?**

9. Our understanding is that the First Homes policy will not apply in National Parks (see our response to Q8). However, we are concerned about this proposal as it potentially undermines the principles behind rural exception sites which were originally created to allow exceptions to normal planning policy so that affordable homes could be built to meet local housing need. The policy also enabled land to be acquired at a cheaper rate than land that could be used for market housing; this was an essential part of the economic viability of delivering rural affordable housing. So we do not support policy amendments which would place a greater emphasis on allowing general market housing on rural exception sites. It is precisely because exception sites have been used to address identified local housing need that many landowners have been willing to release land for housing and communities have been willing to accept new housing developments.

**Q15: Do you agree with the removal of the site size threshold set out in the National Planning Policy Framework?**

10. No, even if the 'First Homes' policy does not apply in National Parks as we understand to be the case, we are concerned that removing the site size threshold may make it harder to deliver affordable housing in areas adjacent to National Parks, thus leading to increasing pressure for development within National Parks.

**Q16: Do you agree that the First Homes exception sites policy should not apply in designated rural areas?**

11. Yes we strongly support this exemption, but as set out in our response to Q8, we would like clarification that the definition of designated rural areas will be the same as that used in the 2019 NPPF and therefore includes National Parks. We would also welcome clarification that the ambition to use primary legislation at a later date to introduce 'First Homes' nationwide will continue to allow for exemptions for designated rural areas including National Parks.
12. We are very concerned that the emphasis on discounted market sales housing could have a negative impact on the delivery of other forms of low costs homes, which may be more important for the social and economic wellbeing of communities in National Parks. Given the price premium and the demand for holiday homes in National Parks, 'First Homes' in these areas are likely to be unaffordable for most people working locally even with the initial discount and are highly likely to be sold on as second homes or holiday rental properties if there are no restrictions on future occupancy.
13. NPAs have a strong track record of supporting the delivery of affordable housing as part of small scale housing schemes and it is particularly important that they are able to continue this success. This means that they need to be free to allocate land for, and create planning policies to ensure the delivery of, the most appropriate form of affordable housing for their area. There is a very limited pool of suitable sites for new housing in National Parks and allocating these for 'First Homes' will reduce the availability of sites for other forms of affordable housing which would be more appropriate for meeting local needs.

**Q17: Do you agree with the proposed approach to raise the small sites threshold for a time-limited period?**

14. No, we strongly disagree with any measures which would limit the delivery of affordable housing on smaller sites. In many National Parks, the majority of housing development sites are for 10 or fewer units so make an important contribution to the overall provision of affordable housing. Raising the small sites threshold could significantly reduce NPAs' ability to deliver affordable housing.

**Q22: Do you agree with the Government's proposed approach to setting thresholds in rural areas?**

15. Yes, we welcome the proposal that local planning authorities should continue to be able to set a lower threshold of 5 units in rural areas as most housing in National Parks (and rural areas generally) is delivered on small sites. However, once again we would ask for confirmation that National Parks are included within the definition of 'designated rural areas' for the purposes of this proposal.

**Q24 Do you agree that the new Permission in Principle should remove the restriction on major development?**

16. No, the planning system already provides opportunities for developers to establish the principle and parameters of development through the site allocations process in the development of Local Plans and via the opportunity to apply for outline planning permission. There is therefore no need to extend the new Permission in Principle (PiP) to major development and if this were to happen it should definitely not apply in designated landscapes where national planning policy includes a clear presumption against major development other than in exceptional circumstances and following a rigorous examination (the major development test). Allowing PiP for major development in these areas would undermine this important principle, particularly if it does not include any requirement for environmental assessment. The major development test has played a key role in protecting designated landscapes over many decades and it is essential that it continues to be used for the determination of major developments in these areas and that they are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

For further information about any aspect of this response, please contact Ruth Bradshaw, Policy and Research Manager (email:ruthb@cnp.org.uk)