

Property Week

NPPF review won't solve central planning issue

By Dean Clifford (Great Marlborough Estates) Thu 15 March 2018

As Samantha Partington's piece suggests, the revisions to the NPPF will focus on maximising the use of land, strengthening protections for the green belt and putting a greater emphasis on converting planning permissions into homes.



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But while the [NPPF revisions are incredibly welcome](#), the government's analysis of the problem itself is questionable.

It is clear that the NPPF required a major overhaul. When it was introduced in 2012 it was lauded as the saviour of planning and the opportunity to escape the shredder-breaking reams of paper New Labour had introduced to the system.

However, while the sleeker, 60-ish-page document did streamline the system, it has not solved our issues in planning. Uncertainties are hidden behind ambiguous phrases that can be stumbling blocks to providing the housing we need. We can add another layer of complexity with policies such as the neighbourhood planning agenda, which can allow nimbys of all party colours to restrict development.

So a revision is required to add certainty to the planning system. However, the proposed changes are flawed.

First, strengthening protection of the green belt is contradictory to the opinions of most people in the built environment. The green belt should not be confused with greenfield.



“Strengthening protection of the green belt is contradictory to the opinions of most people in the built environment”

Source: Shutterstock/smudge

Also, research shows green belts can be environmentally damaging, as housing leapfrogs the belt, promoting excessive travel, while over-farming at the edge of the belt can lead to biodiversity loss. So the environmental argument is open to criticism.

Second, while the renewed emphasis on local authority collaboration and clarity in the developer contributions process should be applauded, the emphasis on only nimby councils is part of the problem. Many Tory backbenchers have argued that we need more housebuilding at the central level, rather than a good telling-off of councils at the local level.

This is not to be overly critical of the government's housing agenda. We have seen very positive steps on public investment and tenant protection. However, what we need is a new and better deal for planning.

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