



BRITISH PROPERTY FEDERATION PRESS RELEASE

## **NPPF: Property industry welcomes ‘unprecedented’ power shift to local communities**

The British Property Federation (BPF) has today welcomed the largest ever transfer of planning power from Whitehall to local communities in its response to the consultation on the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The draft NPPF puts local plan making at the heart of the planning system, meaning for the first time that democratically-elected local authorities, rather than unelected regional quangos, will have the final say over what development should take place in their areas.

Under the proposals, a planning application would only be judged against the principles set out in the NPPF in the absence of an adopted core strategy, giving local authorities a strong incentive to plan positively to meet the needs and aspirations of their area while paying full regard to the principles of sustainability. Currently almost 70% of local authorities do not have an adopted core strategy, seven years on from the legislation instructing them to do so.

Liz Peace, Chief Executive of the British Property Federation, said: “The extra powers that will be given to communities are welcome, but with power comes responsibility. Although resources are stretched, preparing and maintaining an up-to-date core strategy should be seen as one of the most important functions of any local authority. For whatever reason most local authorities haven’t produced a strategy. At the very least the NPPF should incentivise them to prepare one.”

In its response the BPF again reiterated its support for the changes, believing they should lead to a framework which will be clear and succinct, help to create urgently needed jobs and homes and take into account the principles of sustainability.

Commenting specifically on other aspects of the draft NPPF, the BPF said:

1) Brownfield first. In its consultation response the BPF suggests an explicit reference to a brownfield land first policy to help allay concerns expressed by green groups that it would lead to the despoliation of the countryside.

Liz Peace said: “We do not believe that the draft NPPF seeks to undermine environmental concerns but if greater clarification would allay these fears then we would be happy to see some changes.

“We want to see as much new building as possible take place on brownfield land, accepting that in some cases ‘brownfield’ land may be of greater environmental value than greenfield sites.”

2) The presumption in favour of sustainable development. The BPF welcomes the presumption and believes that although it is not the radical change some have claimed, it will produce better outcomes for local authorities, communities and the development industry.

Liz Peace said: “While the presumption is an important aspect of the emerging NPPF, we do not see it as marking a radical change to the existing planning system. The crucial point, which so many of those attacking the draft NPPF have ignored, is that the presumption should not be exercised in a vacuum but within the context of a local plan drawn up by an elected local authority following extensive consultation with their local community.”

3) The presumption will create a ‘developers’ charter’. The BPF said that the presumption would help local authorities plan positively for growth, but would not mean that those without a plan would find unwelcome and inappropriate development thrust upon them.

Liz Peace said: “The suggestion that if there is no up to date plan then ‘anything goes’ is an inaccurate interpretation of the Government’s proposals. If an up-to-date local plan is not in force, then decisions about planning applications will be made in accordance with the principles set out in the draft NPPF.”

4) The definition of sustainable development. The BPF believes that the definition in the NPPF is widely accepted, but is happy to agree to a different form of words if this would allay the fears of environmentalists.

Liz Peace said: “The definition of sustainable development in the draft NPPF uses the classic Brundtland definition and talks appropriately about balancing economic, social and economic considerations. The Brundtland definition has the merit of familiarity. However, we recognise that it was designed to cover a wide spectrum of issues relating to the development of nations rather than built development per se and we are not wedded to this definition if a better form of words can be found.”