

## GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS for NATIONAL PLANNING

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Position at 4<sup>th</sup> August 2010

### Introduction

The Coalition Government has made a number of proposals relating to spatial planning at the national level in England. This contrasts with its moves to dismantle elements of spatial planning at the regional level. Given this, the move to strengthen policy making at national level could be seen to mark an intention to a clear and strong national policy framework within which a 'localist' style of planning can operate.

This RTPI Briefing Note deals with four elements of national planning:

- The proposal for a National Policy Framework;
- The proposal for a National Infrastructure Plan;
- The proposals for the existing system of National Policy Statements;
- Policy stances which require intervention at national level.

This Briefing Note only refers to England. The nature of devolution means that the Coalition Government has no responsibility for national spatial planning in the devolved nations.

It is relevant to note however, that all the devolved administrations have some form of national spatial framework: Scotland has a National Planning Framework<sup>1</sup>, the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of which was approved by the Scottish Government in June 2009; Wales has a spatial Plan<sup>2</sup>, an updated version of which was adopted in July 2008 and Northern Ireland has a Regional Development Strategy which is currently being reviewed<sup>3</sup>.

### National Planning Framework

#### Background

The idea for a 'National Planning Framework' was put forward in the Conservatives pre-election Green Paper on planning - *Open Source Planning*<sup>4</sup>. This stated that:

*We will integrate into one document – a national planning framework – the principal features of all national planning policies. This simple and consolidated framework will set out not only what the government's economic and environmental priorities are, but how they relate to each other.*

#### footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2009) *National Planning Framework 2*

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/278232/0083591.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Assembly Government (2008) *People, Places, Futures - The Wales Spatial Plan 2008 Update*

<http://wales.gov.uk/dpsp/wspatialplan/documents/wsp2008update/wsp2008updateee.pdf;jsessionid=w2xpMZJXghGfhsTXHJ3C7yvJQFbqn2QySfrRLpLvWymnMFN5LqNz!-616133670?lang=en>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/regional\\_planning.htm](http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/regional_planning.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Conservative Policy Green Paper No.14

[http://www.conservatives.com/News/News\\_stories/2010/02/New\\_homes\\_and\\_jobs\\_through\\_Open\\_Source\\_Planning.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2010/02/New_homes_and_jobs_through_Open_Source_Planning.aspx)

This proposal was brought into the Conservative Party Manifesto - *Invitation to join the Government of Britain*<sup>5</sup> which stated that:

*At the national level, for all forms of development, we will publish and present to Parliament for debate a simple and consolidated national planning framework, which will set out national economic and environmental priorities.*

The Coalition Agreement, published on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2010<sup>6</sup>, stated that:

- *We will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning framework covering all forms of development and setting out national economic, environmental and social priorities.*

## Timing

The Department for Communities and Local Government draft Structural Reform Plan<sup>7</sup>, which sets out the overall priorities and the actions which the DCLG will undertake states that, new national planning policy based on 'Open Source Planning' will be in place by April 2012.

However, it is understood that there is some discussion as to whether this NPF will need to be embodied in statute and, therefore, whether some work will need to have been done on this in advance of, or during, the Decentralisation and Localism Bill Passage through Parliament, scheduled to take place between November 2010 and November 2011<sup>8</sup>. It should be noted that the Government list of the main relevant elements of the Bill<sup>9</sup> do not include a reference to a National Planning Framework.

## National Infrastructure Plan

The proposal for a national Infrastructure plan was not contained in *Open Source Planning* or in the Party Manifestos or, directly, in the Coalition Agreement but was announced in the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2010 Budget Report<sup>10</sup>. Para 1.83 states that:

*This Budget confirms the establishment of Infrastructure UK (IUK) to lead work within HM Treasury to enable greater private sector investment in infrastructure, and improve the Government's long-term planning and delivery.*<sup>11</sup>

*In the autumn, the Government will publish a **national infrastructure plan** that will set out goals for UK infrastructure. This will include priority public and private sector investments and proposals for delivering and supporting investment on a cross-sector basis.*

It is relevant to note, however, that the Coalition agreement does set out commitments which may best be achieved through a National Infrastructure Plan. These include:

### footnotes

<sup>5</sup> [http://media.conservatives.s3.amazonaws.com/manifesto/cpmanifesto2010\\_hires.pdf](http://media.conservatives.s3.amazonaws.com/manifesto/cpmanifesto2010_hires.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> HM Government (2010) *The Coalition: our programme for government*

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg\\_coalition.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/16359212.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> DCLG draft Structural Reform Plan

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.number10.gov.uk/queens-speech/2010/05/queens-speech-decentralisation-and-localism-bill-50673>

<sup>10</sup> HM Treasury (2010) *Budget 2010*, HM Stationery Office

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/junebudget\\_complete.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/junebudget_complete.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Infrastructure UK was first announced in the previous administration's 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009 Pre-Budget Report

*We will reform the way decisions are made on which transport projects to prioritise, so that the benefits of low carbon proposals (including light rail schemes) are fully recognised; and*

*We will establish a high speed rail network as part of our programme of measures to fulfil our joint ambitions for creating a low carbon economy<sup>12</sup>.*

Whilst there is no reference to a national infrastructure plan in the Manifestos there is the commitment in the Conservative Manifesto that the Government will:

*encourage county councils and unitary authorities to compile infrastructure plans;*

This proposal was carried forward from *Open Source Planning*. The relationship between these local infrastructure plans and the national one is not made clear.

### Timing

As shown above, the Coalition's Budget Report committed the Government to publish a National Infrastructure Plan 'in the Autumn' of 2010. However, there is currently no information on HM Treasury website on the timing for this - nor, indeed, any further information about Infrastructure UK.

## National Policy Statements

National Policy Statements (NPSs) were introduced in the 2008 Planning Act<sup>13</sup>. The Coalition Government has announced changes to the way in which NPSs will be approved. The 29<sup>th</sup> June 2010 DCLG press release which announced the proposed abolition of the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC)<sup>14</sup> also stated that:

*... all National Policy Statements (NPS), the Government's future infrastructure blueprints, will now be subject to ratification by Parliament. Ministers believe these critically important national documents must have the strongest possible democratic legitimacy.*

The previous Government announced its intention to publish NPSs on:

- energy policy - with specific NPSs on nuclear power, renewable energy, electricity networks, fossil fuel, and oil and gas infrastructure;
- ports;
- national networks;
- waste water;
- hazardous waste;
- water supply; and
- airports.

### footnotes

<sup>12</sup> This follows a commitment in the Conservative Manifesto:

*A Conservative government will begin work immediately to create a high speed rail line connecting London and Heathrow with Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds.*

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga\\_20080029\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga_20080029_en_1)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/newsstories/newsroom/1626268>

## Timing

The energy NPSs<sup>15</sup> and that on ports<sup>16</sup> were published in November 2009. The timetable set by the previous administration was that the NPS on national networks was expected in March 2010 with all the others, except airports, expected in 2010 – with airports being programmed for 2011.

The Coalition Government has not set a new overall timetable for NPS but it has announced that:

*the Government will be launching a re-consultation in the autumn on the draft energy National Policy Statements.*<sup>17</sup>

## Policy stances which require intervention at national level

There are a number of Coalition Government policies which can be seen to pre-suppose some form of intervention at the national (English) level. These take two broad forms.

First are the relevant policies of the Government as a whole and of other Government Departments which will require a national view of spatial policy to implement them successfully. Notable policy areas that fall into this category are climate change mitigation and adaptation, the economy, energy, land utilisation and protection, minerals, transport, water and waste.

The Government are already putting into place a framework of new policy documents on some of these key areas. For example, DEFRA launched a consultation on a natural environment White Paper on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2010<sup>18</sup> and of waste policy on 29<sup>th</sup> July<sup>19</sup>. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) published *A Strategy for Sustainable Growth*<sup>20</sup> on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2010. In this, it stated that:

*With Communities and Local Government (CLG) and HM Treasury, BIS will be publishing a White Paper on sub-national growth.*

Additionally, however, there are a number of extant national policy documents for these areas from the previous administration including, for example:

- The Government's 2009 *The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan: National strategy for climate and energy*<sup>21</sup>;
- The 2009 *UK Renewable Energy Strategy Consultation*<sup>22</sup>;
- The Department for Transport's 2008 *Delivering a Sustainable Transport System*<sup>23</sup>; and
- 2010 *High Speed Rail* documents<sup>24</sup>;
- DEFRA's 2008 *Future Water: The Government's Water Strategy for England*<sup>25</sup>; and its

## footnotes

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.energynpsconsultation.decc.gov.uk/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/closed/portsnps/>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/news/pn10\\_083/pn10\\_083.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/news/pn10_083/pn10_083.aspx)

<sup>18</sup> <http://ww2.defra.gov.uk/our-responsibilities/nat-environment/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/waste-review/index.htm>

<sup>20</sup> [http://interactive.bis.gov.uk/comment/growth/files/2010/07/8782-BIS-Sustainable-Growth\\_WEB.pdf](http://interactive.bis.gov.uk/comment/growth/files/2010/07/8782-BIS-Sustainable-Growth_WEB.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/publications/lc\\_trans\\_plan/lc\\_trans\\_plan.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/publications/lc_trans_plan/lc_trans_plan.aspx)

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/consultations/cons\\_res/cons\\_res.aspx](http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/consultations/cons_res/cons_res.aspx)

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.liftshare.com/business/pdfs/Dft%20-](https://www.liftshare.com/business/pdfs/Dft%20-%20Delivering%20a%20Sustainable%20Transport%20System%20-%202008.pdf)

[%20Delivering%20a%20Sustainable%20Transport%20System%20-%202008.pdf](https://www.liftshare.com/business/pdfs/Dft%20-%20Delivering%20a%20Sustainable%20Transport%20System%20-%202008.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/rail/pi/highspeedrail/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/quality/water/strategy/pdf/future-water.pdf>

- 2007 *Waste Strategy for England*<sup>26</sup>.

It can be assumed that the Government will wish to revisit these (although some commitments such as reducing emissions and increasing the proportion of renewable energy are embodied in national legislation and/or international agreements). However, the fact remains that in order to achieve such policies and commitments, there will need to be co-ordination and mutual reinforcement between such policies and national planning policy.

The second form of such policies is those that are more specific. These include commitments in the Coalition Agreement<sup>27</sup> including, for example:

*We will mandate a national recharging network for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles.*

*We will maintain the Green Belt, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and other environmental protections, and create a new designation – similar to SSSIs – to protect green areas of particular importance to local communities.*

*We will cancel the third runway at Heathrow and We will refuse permission for additional runways at Gatwick and Stansted.*

In addition, there are policies in the two coalition Party Manifestos which require a degree of central spatial policy direction. These include, for example, from the *Liberal Democratic Manifesto 2010*<sup>28</sup>:

*We will aim to double the UK's woodland cover by 2050.*

*Introduce landscape-scale planning policies with a specific remit to restore water channels, rivers and wetlands and reduce flood risk by properly utilising the natural capacity of the landscape to retain water.*

### footnotes

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/strategy/strategy07/documents/waste07-strategy.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> HM Government (2010) *The Coalition: our programme for government*  
[http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg\\_coalition.pdf](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> [http://network.libdems.org.uk/manifesto2010/libdem\\_manifesto\\_2010.pdf](http://network.libdems.org.uk/manifesto2010/libdem_manifesto_2010.pdf)

## RTPI Comment

The Royal Town Planning Institute has long advocated – and campaigned for - some form of English national spatial framework. In October 2000 the RTPI published *The United Kingdom Spatial Planning Framework: A Discussion*<sup>29</sup>, which was designed to promote discussion on – and exert pressure for – a national spatial framework. In 2006 it published a report – *Uniting Britain*<sup>30</sup> – which looked at available data sets to start mapping spatial aspects of national policy. It, therefore, very much welcomes the Coalition’s thinking on this level of planning and is very keen to work with the Government on developing all these initiatives.

The RTPI feel that this joint working would be valuable as there is currently uncertainty as to the nature of the National Planning Framework. Is it, as open source Planning states, a *simple and consolidated* bringing together of all national planning policies (PPSs and PPGs)? This view is reinforced by the letter sent to Chief Planning Officers by the Secretary of State in relation to the revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies<sup>31</sup>. This stated that, whilst the PPS on RSSs is cancelled *all other PPSs will continue to apply until they are replaced by the National Planning Framework*.

Or will it go further, as the Coalition Agreement states, *set out national economic and environmental priorities*? This implies that there would be sections on aspects which are not covered by existing DCLG guidance. In this case, what is its relationship with; the existing and proposed National Policy Statements, other Government policies and the National Infrastructure Plan?

Equally importantly, what will its relationship be with Government spending decisions, including the Regional Growth Fund, which will impact in different ways in different parts of the country? The promised White Paper on sub-national growth will be relevant here. Additionally, will it act as a material consideration (in practice or in statute) for neighbourhood and local planning?

There is also some uncertainty as to the nature of the National Infrastructure Plan about which, as is stated above, there is very little information. There are examples of such plans in countries including Mexico<sup>32</sup>, New Zealand<sup>33</sup> and National Infrastructure Protection Plan in the U.S.<sup>34</sup> but there seems to be no transparent discussion about the form that an English plan will take nor about its status in, for example, spending decisions and prioritisation.

The RTPI believes that the current thinking and plans of the Coalition Government could provide the opportunity to achieve an integrated approach to planning and investment at national level which has not been previously achieved in England. However, there is the equal risk that the plethora of different plans, policies and proposals set out in this Briefing Note could lead to a fragmentation of policy making and to inefficient investment which would impact adversely on the abilities of the Government to achieve its own bold objectives.

### footnotes

- <sup>29</sup> Wong, Cecilia et al (2000) *The United Kingdom Spatial Planning Framework: A Discussion*, RTPI <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/download/747/The-United-Kingdom-Spatial-Planning-Framework-A-Discussion.pdf>
- <sup>30</sup> Wong, Cecilia, et al (2007) *Uniting Britain*, RTPI <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/download/241/spatial2.pdf>
- <sup>31</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1631904.pdf>
- <sup>32</sup> <http://tv.usmexico.org/?p=40>
- <sup>33</sup> <http://www.infrastructure.govt.nz/plan/mar2010>
- <sup>34</sup> [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/NIPP\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/NIPP_Plan.pdf)