



Association of Directors of
Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport

Meeting Notes of the Planning Sub-Group

25 March 2025, 11am

Held on Microsoft Teams

Present

Sarah McLaughlin (Chair), Adam Birchall, Anne Clitheroe, Barry Wyatt, Oliver Boulter, Caroline Smith, James Chadwick, David Arnold, David Dale, Georgina Brightwell, Andy Howe, Jonathan Wellstead, Lucy Hargreaves, Matthew Usher, Laura McCulloch, Mike Garrity, Oliver Meek, Stacey Wylie, Caroline Sutton

Apologies

Paul Barnard, Matt Jericho, Tim Crawshaw.

Item	Notes	Actions
1	<p>The effectiveness of planning policy protection for ancient woodlands and trees Mia De-Villiers-Hill, DEFRA</p> <p>Presentation made (slides shared) How planning policy is working to protect ancient woodland and veteran trees</p> <p>Environment Act 2021 commitment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> undertake a review of NPPF (this is finished and published Nov 2024 – presents findings only) amend TCPA to require LPAs to consult MHCLG if they are minded to grant permission for development affecting ancient woodland or veteran trees <p>NPPF 186c (now 193c) has been updated and now states that development resulting in loss of irreplaceable habitats should be refused</p> <p>Review commissioned has sought to see how LPAs apply this policy</p> <p>Methodology for review was explained by Mia</p> <p>Findings Identification of ancient woodland or veteran trees was often poor with LPAs often not identifying them correctly.</p>	Looking for recommendations from this forum

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	<p>An analysis showed that where mapping was used, these ancient woodlands or veteran trees were more likely to be identified. Mapping was not however always used.</p> <p>Not all planning applications considered loss and deterioration so NPPF policy was not applied and therefore refusal was not triggered when it may ought to have been.</p> <p>Planning appeals for refusals based on impacts to ancient woodland and veteran trees are often dismissed with 2/3rds dismissed. If loss is identified para 186c is most likely invoked dismissing any appeal.</p> <p>Summary of Findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification or the lack of has knock on implications to the planning determination • Impacts such as deterioration of these trees are not well understood by LPAs so can be not given the correct weight and consideration. • Minority of planning applications have the appropriate mitigation conditions attached • Compensation strategies are not often secured on planning applications <p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness of the correct application of the NPPF tree policy • Training for LPA officers to be apply to determine these applications correctly and give the correct weight and consideration to these habitats. • Updating national guidance <p>Questions and recommendations</p> <p>Sarah Q: Does the assessment show any regional variations on the application of the tree policy? A: the analysis did not look in to that level of detail, however ancient woodland is more focused in the south east of England. Follow-up: It would be useful to know where to prioritise any such training package</p> <p>Jon Observation: PINS have an inspector training manual – states unless there is any credible evidence to the contrary, then a robust field study should be sufficient to determine whether ancient woodland is indeed ancient woodland. May be worth a conversation with PINS to provide any updates.</p> <p>Oliver Meek Q: Seems that there is no standardised approach to the assessment of ancient woodland. Is there any opportunity to standardise this? A: thanks, definitely</p>	<p>Request to all for additional ideas on how to deploy info</p>

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	<p>Oliver Boulter Q: Solar PV applications that came right up to ancient woodlands, negotiated a 25m buffer but has resulted in some commentary on the impacts on ancient woodland. Some guidance on this development may be useful. What development proposals impact on ancient woodland, particularly if solar PV impacts ancient woodland. A: Thanks</p> <p>David Dale Q: Nature Recovery strategy – does this impact on ancient woodland protection? A: Answers from DEFRA and this policy from MHCLG this week, answer TBC.</p>	<p>Possible future agenda item</p> <p>All to send any recommendations to Mia's email</p>
<p>2</p> <p>10 Year Infrastructure Strategy James Harris, National Infrastructure Commission</p>	<p>Sophie Donaldson and James Harris – Presentation given (slides shared)</p> <p>Presentation on National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) and the future change to National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA)</p> <p>NIC provides long term advice to gov on national infrastructure</p> <p>Will become NISTA National infrastructure and service transformation authority from 1st April</p> <p>NIC Produce the 10 year infrastructure strategy (to be published with the spending strategy in June) Three core objectives of the strategy;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enabling resilient growth (removing barriers to growth) 2. Delivering clean energy 3. Ensuring social infrastructure can support public services <p>Aims are to bring the longer term view of the delivery of infrastructure.</p> <p>Principles</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mission orientated prioritisation 2. Providing longer-term confidence 3. Addressing cross-cutting challenges 4. Ensuring deliverability and affordability <p>Spatial planning advice for the 10 year infrastructure strategy Pillar 1: sub regional spatial planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritising investment <p>Pillar 2: sectoral spatial planning</p>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on a specific sub-sector of infrastructure <p>Pillar 3: spatially coherent strategic direction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make collective decisions with joined up policy – better decision making from central government. <p>Recommendations for pillar 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Spatial Development Strategies (SDS) can help – ensuring that infrastructure providers are active in their delivery. • Ensure all SDSs are aligned <p>Recommendations for pillar 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill existing gaps in existing sectoral spatial plans • Tie up link between sectoral strategies and national policy statements <p>Recommendations for pillar 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating the conditions in central government which allow all strategies to be weaved together as a spatially coherent strategy • NISTA will need to have a role in joining up all government departments <p>Transport infrastructure – NIC asked 3 questions</p> <p>3a - Transport advice for the 10YIS How do economic conditions prioritise transport infrastructure</p> <p>3b - Transport and growth Advice that ageing transport network needs investment and economic activity depends on this. Transport infrastructure is growth enabler – other things must be delivered along side transport infrastructure. Capital resource is limited so needs to be utilised effectively</p> <p>3c summary Gov needs to invest more in surface transport in next 10 yrs than previous 10.</p> <p>There is an identified need to address poor national and regional productivity. Housing growth is a dimension to this, labour force needs to be connected to the transport infrastructure network. Mass transit is a large part of the puzzle with identifiable deficiencies. However making most of existing access is also important.</p> <p>There is a need for transport infrastructure to be an enabler to productivity in ‘second’ cities in England There is also a need to ensure London remains internationally competitive, and support growth in high potential clusters</p>	

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	<p>Cross-boundary coordination for example for things such as east-west rail is important.</p> <p>Questions: Sarah Q: Link between strategic picture and list of NSIPs and the smaller scale issues too. Hard for local residents to get head around what the infrastructure strategy looks like. Is there appetite for a spatial portrait of infrastructure projects across England? And that these are deliverable? A: Infrastructure pipeline exists but these projects do not always get delivered. Government keen to have a more reliable comprehensive pipeline. Hoped to pull together all infrastructure projects and display these spatially.</p> <p>Adam Q: Predict and provide vs decide and provide approach? What is the national highways approach? Viability – level of infrastructure that new developments need to carry is too high – bids needed to make stuff happen. Is there a link between your work and Homes England? Working with large rural authorities anything for these? A: National highways -policy position comes from DfT. Decide and provide is a difficult sell. Mitigating growth is focus and utilising existing assets more effectively. Very aware of viability concerns</p> <p>Anne Q: Is the time for feeding in to the 10 YIS now? A: LPAs were already asked to input in to the infrastructure strategy – process should have already been communicated out.</p> <p>Barry Wyatt Q: Investment for growth vs investment for climate resilience. How to get the balance right? Increasing risk to existing infrastructure that is susceptible to climate change. A: Trade-offs between these but limited resources. Tough to turn theoretical understanding in to practise. Need to understand what investment unlocks growth and those projects necessary for climate resilience. SDS will need to pull together all this information that authorities may already have to steer investment as a clear message back upwards from authorities.</p>	
<p>3 Roundup</p>	<p>Sarah stated that a future viability session may be a useful agenda item and relates to a number of different elements of the planning system that all impact on viability.</p> <p>Lucy – Going to be a consultation on the detailed national scheme of delegations.</p>	

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	<p>Statutory consultees will be consulted on the remit of these statutory consultees – opportunity to refresh the list and their responsibilities (May consultation)</p> <p>David – reminder of live consultation on DEFRA land use framework Local Gov reorganisation and devolution – sessions being run 4 April by LGA</p> <p>Georgina – are we expecting a consultation in May on NDMPs? Answer from Lucy – no timeframe yet (possibly May) but yes is coming.</p>	
<p>4</p> <p>Confirm date of next meeting</p>	<p>22 April 2025</p>	