

## **NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK: PROPOSED REFORMS AND OTHER CHANGES TO THE PLANNING SYSTEM**

### **Item HP 26/3 referred from Housing and Planning Scrutiny Select Committee of 3 February 2026**

The Government intended to reform the plan-making system under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023. A consultation on the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and related reforms, including data centres, on-site energy generation, standardised viability assessment inputs, and site thresholds was open from 16 December 2025 to 10 March 2026. The Government would publish an update after analysing responses, which was expected to be in Summer 2026.

The revisions proposed as part of the consultation sought to progress significant structural improvements to the Framework, introducing a clear set of separate policies for both plan making and decision making, the aim of which was to achieve three main objectives:

- To ensure that national policy was accessible and understandable for everyone who used it;
- To establish a comprehensive suite of national policies on general planning matters which would apply across the country; and
- To make the policy more 'rules-based' and certain.

The consultation document was split into chapters that generally aligned to the chapters provided in the draft NPPF. In terms of the implementation for the transitional phase, the consultation confirmed that for decision making that the NPPF be a material consideration from the date of publication. The new NPPF would apply to new style local plans that would be produced through the new system under the Planning and Infrastructure Act. The new NPPF would therefore not apply to the local plan currently being progressed by Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council. The consultation noted that inconsistencies with development plans would fall away over time as new development plans were adopted that did not duplicate, replicate or modify NPPF policies. For decision making, due weight should be given to development plan policies in relation to their consistency with the Framework. Where these were inconsistent, little weight should be afforded, except where a Plan had been examined against the new Framework.

The consultation also proposed a number of substantive reforms to unlock more homes in the right place and further support the commercial development needed to drive growth. The following significant reforms were proposed in the consultation:

- Permanent presumption in favour of suitably located development
- Building homes around stations
- Driving urban and suburban densification
- Securing a diverse mix of homes
- Supporting small and medium sites

- Streamlining local standards
- Boosting local and regional economies
- Supporting critical and growth materials
- Embedding vision led approach to transport
- Better addressing climate change
- Serving and enhancing natural environment
- Taking a more positive approach to heritage assets.

Members reviewed the Borough Council's response to the consultation attached at Annex 1 to the report and a number of amendments, corrections and points of clarification were suggested. Attention was also brought to the Risk Assessment at Annex 2 to the report.

There was also detailed discussion in respect of securing clean energy and water, in particular the approach to planning for energy and water infrastructure in policy W1. Members expressed concern regarding household access to clean water as well as highlighting specific issues related to waste-water management. Members requested the inclusion of additional wording to strengthen the response including making the connection between increased housing growth. Furthermore, in instances where such infrastructure was deemed necessary, suppliers should be obligated to define the mechanisms by which the required improvements would be implemented.

Cllr King proposed, Cllr Davis seconded and the Committee

**\*RECOMMENDED:** That

- (1) the contents of the report, be noted;
- (2) the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council response to the Government's National Planning Policy Framework; proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system, be approved; and
- (3) delegated authority be granted to the Director of Planning, Housing and Regulatory Services to make any necessary minor changes to the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council's response to the National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system consultation prior to submitting the response, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Planning.

**\*Recommended to Cabinet**