

NPPF HAPPY 10TH ANNIVERSARY

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Happy Anniversary

Sunday 27th March marks the 10th anniversary of the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), we are now on the third iteration. For those that remember, it came forward through much fanfare and was lauded as the solution to all planning problems. It was also labelled a developer's charter by the mainstream press. While it has certainly had an influence on the planning system, it is hard to agree that it met the high expectations from 2012.

At the time, Grant Shapps said that "This is a document that will take over one thousand pages of Planning Law and a further six thousand pages of Guidance (much of it as you know contradictory) and replace the whole lot with one simple, short document!" The Framework definitely reduced a large number of documents however in doing so, we saw (and continue to see) numerous legal challenges to decisions. It can hardly be said to have made the planning system simpler.

'If anything, the planning system is as complex as it has ever been.'

The presumption in favour of sustainable development was at its core and sold as being a step-change in approach. It wasn't and sustainable development was already fundamental to the planning system.

To be fair, the Framework should never have been held out to solve the problems of planning. Many other forces have been at play including the abolition of regional planning, removal of top-down housing targets (they didn't disappear for long!) and starving it of resources. We know that further complexities will be added with the introduction of Design Codes and Biodiversity Net Gain in the immediate future.

What for the next ten years? Major planning reform has been cancelled.

'It is likely that a form of regional or strategic planning is to emerge.'

One may expect that the NPPF will have to evolve to set the parameters and expectations for this new tier of the system.