

NPPF IMPLICATIONS - DESIGN POLICIES

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Welcome to the second part of our series on the implications of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on planning appeal decisions. This segment discusses the changes in design policies and the new subsection on achieving appropriate densities.

Chapter 7 in the 2012 NPPF *Requiring good design* has been replaced by the new NPPF Chapter 12 *Achieving well designed places*. When the Draft NPPF was published there was a feeling that the role of good design and place making within the Framework had been de-emphasised.

The final NPPF has responded to this criticism through Paragraph 124 by stating that the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve.

This emphasis on good design was supported by Housing Secretary James Brokenshire in his Written Ministerial Statement upon the launch of the revised Framework, 'Critically, progress must not be at the expense of quality or design. Houses must be right for communities. So the planning reforms in the new Framework should result in homes that are locally led, well-designed, and of a consistent and high quality standard.'

Notwithstanding, it would be misleading to see the new chapter in the NPPF as a like-for-like replacement of the 2012 chapter. The 2012 NPPF in Para 60 stated that it was proper that planning policies and decisions **should seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness**. This ambition has been subtly de-emphasised in the new NPPF through paragraph 127 which states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments **are sympathetic to local character and that planning decisions and policies should not stifle appropriate innovation or change** (such as densities). It is of note that the densities are explicitly mentioned in this paragraph whereas in the 2012 NPPF only form and style was

mentioned.

In fact, the new NPPF includes a new subsection on achieving appropriate densities. The emphasis on this factor in delivering housing is encapsulated in paragraph 123 which states that, 'where there is an existing or anticipated shortage of land for meeting identified housing needs, it is especially important that planning policies and decisions avoid homes being built at low densities, and ensure that developments **make optimal** (our emphasis) use of the potential of each site'. This policy will have a particularly marked effect in many authorities where large swathes of Green Belt land exist, housing targets are challenging and decisions around appropriate spatial strategies need to be taken.

Chapter 12 'Achieving well-designed places' is where this intent is translated into policy. Paragraph 124 specifies that 'being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential' for achieving sustainable development. Effective engagement e.g. with local communities (including through workshops), the use of 'local design standards or style guides', and the refusal of permissions for developments of poor design are some of the ways the revised NPPF aims to achieve this objective.

Crucially, para 130 requires local planning authorities (LPAs) to make sure that the quality of approved developments does not materially diminish 'between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted schemes.