

# **THE HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE'S EXAMINATION OF THE DRAFT NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK**

## **Evidence on behalf of the Inland Waterways Association's Restoration and Navigation Committees.**

### **Executive Summary**

- IWA registers its strong support in principle for the review of the planning system which is necessary to provide greater encouragement for sustainable growth and job creation.
- IWA does not believe that the measures put forward constitute a threat to the countryside, to Green Belts, or to heritage assets as the emphasis is clearly on Plan-led and sustainable development.
- IWA consider that the role of tourism is underplayed in the Framework's text and the untapped potential for urban and rural tourism in regenerating local economies should be stressed.
- The importance of sustainable transport is also highlighted in the Framework's text but the omission of any specific reference to sustainable freight transportation along estuaries and inland waterways should be rectified.
- IWA's key concern is the operation of the Duty to Co-operate in order to provide effective larger-than-local strategic vision. Linear waterway restoration schemes often cross many Local Authority boundaries and there needs to be a unified approach in the preparation of related Local Plans.
- Whilst the IWA support the examination of the Duty to Co-operate and the requirement to involve of stakeholders in Local Plan preparation, the different preparation and processing timescales for Local Plans may pose difficulties for Local Plan Examination Inspectors in assessing and judging this requirement.
- In order to ensure that wider strategic considerations are understood and provide the context for Local Plans, IWA believe there is a need to establish this coordinated thinking and "common ground" at the outset.
- IWA consider that such problems could be resolved via a requirement for Local Authorities to produce a Strategic Context and Priorities (SCAP) document at the outset of the Local Plan process.
- A requirement to produce a SCAP to set out common ground and purpose with other Local Authorities where there are joint interests would pave the way for joint working at later stages of Local Plan formulation and assist larger-than-local strategic planning issues and the Duty to Co-operate to be assessed by Inspectors at Local Plan Examinations.

## **Representations**

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) has carefully considered the Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) document and regards its contents as highly relevant to the future of the country's inland waterways system. The NPPF is timely because it immediately precedes the formation of the National Waterways Charity which will come into effect in April 2012.

IWA broadly welcome the contents of the NPPF because it shares the Government's view that action is needed to stimulate the national economy and to generate growth and jobs. The development and redevelopment of Britain's canals and rivers has been a major factor in securing investment in urban and rural regeneration schemes with new waterfront development stimulating investment and delivering sought after sites for both housing and job creation. There remains a huge untapped potential which can be encouraged and sensitively exploited through the positive operation of the planning system.

IWA is very conscious of the need to ensure that the operators of the planning system are fully aware of the potential for growth and job creation that waterways offer and the very active role the private and voluntary sectors can continue to play in this field. The starting point for unlocking this potential must be the inclusion of suitable proposals and policies in future Local Plans in order to stimulate and manage change. In some cases such change is confined to specific sites such as run down canal or riverside frontages but it also extends to the whole length of a canal restoration scheme crossing Local Authority (and sometimes Local Enterprise Partnership) boundaries. Examples of this are found in the very active work being conducted on the Wey and Arun navigation in Surrey and Sussex and along the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal.

Clearly, the IWA and the Canal Societies and Trusts wish to ensure that those projects which have the potential to regenerate the local economies along the lines of these navigations are recognised and fully safeguarded in Local Plans. For a wide variety of reasons in the past, this has not always been the case. In its submissions to the Government on the National Waterways Charity the IWA stated as follows:-

*“The planning system is unduly restrictive in encouraging the protection of the line of disused waterways only when there is a reasonable degree of certainty of a restoration project proceeding in whole or in part within the development plan period. Such lines should also be protected when there is clear potential for restoration outside the time span of the development period”.*

It went on to say:-

*“Derelict waterways are linear entities which often cross planning authority boundaries. It's not good for one planning authority to protect a part of a proposed restoration, perhaps because work has started or is about to start, if another then fails to protect the route because no work is planned in its area for the foreseeable future. Restoration schemes may take several decades to achieve their aims and*

*routes crossing authorities' planning boundaries are vulnerable to disparate attitudes."*

It will be appreciated from this that the IWA regard it as crucial that Local Planning Authorities act in concert and co-ordinate their plans, proposals and policies where waterways pass through two or more Local Authority areas. IWA have therefore examined the Draft Framework to establish whether the "Duty to Co-operate" is sufficient to achieve the larger-than-local strategic aims where linear waterway restoration, regeneration and management needs to be co-ordinated and reflected in the formulation of two or more Local Plans. These issues are raised in the penultimate question posed, namely:-

***"Does the NPPF, together with the "duty to co-operate", provide a sufficient basis for larger-than-local strategic planning?"***

### **Detailed Points**

IWA support the following:-

- The requirement for each local planning authority to produce a Local Plan. (Para.22)
- The setting of strategic priorities, especially the inclusion of references to leisure and transport. (Para.23).
- The emphasis on engagement and collaboration in Plan making (Para.25), subject to the reservations set out below.
- The requirements for 'Planning strategically across local boundaries' (Paras. 44-47) subject to the reservations set out below.
- The need for planning policies to support economic development. (Paras. 73-75)
- The emphasis on promoting sustainable forms of transport (Paras. 82-84), subject to the reservations set out below.
- The objective to create sustainable communities with access to open spaces and recreational facilities. (Para.124)
- The protection of open space and the concept Local Green Space (Paras.128-132).
- The safeguarding of the historic environment and heritage assets and the identification of these assets most at risk. (Paras.176-191)

IWA consider the Framework could be strengthened by reference to, or greater emphasis being placed on the following:

1. Tourism: the role of tourism is underplayed and is not the same as 'leisure'. Tourism is only referred to in its rural context in Para. 81 in the section entitled "Planning for prosperity/Business and economic development".

2. Waterway Freight Transport: reference to opportunities for the use of estuaries and inland waterways for sustainable freight distribution should usefully be made in Para. 89.

### **Key Concerns**

Whilst registering wide-ranging support for the Framework, IWA remains concerned that, notwithstanding the Duty to Cooperate, the provisions for cross-boundary strategies and joint working, and the testing of these factors at Local Plan Examinations, there will still be a tendency for some Local Planning Authorities to be too insular to deliver a larger-than-local strategic dimension. Where there is a failure to achieve common ground between Local Authorities on key larger-than-local issues, with Local Plans being examined independently at different times, it will pose difficulties for Inspectors' in assessing "soundness" based on the Duty to Co-operate.

Local Authorities with high levels of environmental and historic assets, for example, may see it as reasonable that they should plan to absorb relatively lower growth than less well-endowed areas and seek to decant some growth to other areas. Furthermore, priorities for housing provision or transport may well be very different in one Local Authority compared to another with, for example, some willing to protect the line of a disused canal and others not. **Unless there is some clearly defined mechanism for the establishment of common ground and securing compatible local strategies at an early stage in the formulation of the new Local Plans, the overall jigsaw puzzle of plans, proposals and policies could be dysfunctional.** Whilst the Framework goes some way to point Local Authorities in the right direction and urges them to embrace engagement and collaboration, strategic and wider interests may well be lost in a myriad of local issues and problems.

In order to ensure that wider strategic considerations are understood and form the basis for Local Plans, IWA believe there is a need to establish this co-ordinated thinking and "common ground" at the outset. **IWA advocate that the NPPF should require Local Authorities to produce a Strategic Context and Priorities (SCAP) document to set out common ground and purpose with other Local Authorities where there are wider interests, thereby paving the way for joint working at the later stages of Local Plan formulation.**

The SCAP will assist larger-than-local strategic planning issues to be assessed by Inspectors at Local Plan Examinations to ensure compliance with the Duty to Co-operate. IWA believe its concerns are well-founded and that the solution must be to require Local Authorities at the outset of the Local Plan process to prepare, consult on and adopt a SCAP document.

**9<sup>th</sup> September 2011**