

Planning
for Growth in
Historic Towns
and Cities

The National Planning
Policy Framework

Salisbury 20th June 2012
Conference Report





INTRODUCTION

These are challenging times for planning. The Coalition Government is bringing in wide ranging changes that are underpinned by new values and aims. Key strands in the changes are a commitment to localism, simplification of the planning system and the importance of planning to promoting economic prosperity. These changes are exemplified by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and its presumption in favour of sustainable development.



While this new agenda affects all aspects of planning, a particular challenge is how to reconcile a pro development national policy framework with the conservation of those qualities of our historic towns and cities that make them successful places in which to live, work and play. The Historic Towns Forum, with sponsorship from Terence O'Rourke Ltd, ran a conference to examine in detail the implications

of the challenges posed by the emerging new planning regime. A key aim for the day was to improve understanding of the relationships between the NPPF and the needs of historic places. The morning session looked at the background and principles; the afternoon was devoted to case studies from cathedral cities. This report summarises the seven papers presented and sets out some conclusions.



PRESENTATIONS

The NPPF, the National Heritage Protection Plan and where is PPS5?
 Charles Wagner, Head of Planning and Urban Advice, English Heritage



Charles explored how the NPPF addresses the historic environment by looking at those paragraphs that deal specifically with heritage issues and relating them to the whole of the Framework. He stressed that it is important to consider the framework as a whole to see the way it can be used comprehensively to achieve conservation objectives.

Key points were identified:

- The whole of the NPPF constitutes what the government means by sustainable development and proposals that fail to adhere to the historic environment policies (paras 126-141) are not therefore sustainable development.
- Economic, social and environmental improvements should be sought together and pursuing sustainable development involves seeking improvements to the quality of the historic environment.
- High quality design is a core planning principle of the NPPF and hence relevant to historic environment decision making.

- Great weight should be given to conserving designated heritage assets and harm to them through development is only justified where the development delivers public benefits that outweigh the harm to the heritage asset that is protected for public interest.
- Local plans should include a strategy and strategic policies to deliver conservation (protection and enhancement) of the historic environment; and shape the spatial strategy by helping to identify where development is or is not appropriate.

Charles followed the policy review of the NPPF with an overview of the National Heritage Protection Plan (NHPP). The NHPP is prepared by English Heritage (EH) and aims to be a sector-wide strategy for protecting our heritage.

It comprises eight interdependent measures: foresight; threat assessment/response; survey and identification; assessing character/significance; developing protection responses; managing change;



responding to change; and helping owners. Around £50m a year is devoted to these activities. The two biggest budget areas are: protection through advice and grants (38%); and protecting EH properties (37%).

The NHPP is a live document and will be the subject of formal review in 2014-15. Next steps include: increasing its exposure; making it real to the sector; promoting community participation; and gaining credibility through results. English Heritage is also exploring ways of delivering historic environment services through the Historic Environment: Local Authority Capacity (HELAC) programme, e.g. with Chichester.

Preparing the NPPF Historic Environment Practice Guide Brian Human, BRH Associates

Brian gave a short update on the preparation of the Practice Guide, which is being steered by a multi sector group from the Historic Environment Forum. The NPPF and the Guide are seen as being the final steps on the bumpy road of the heritage protection review that was initiated in 2000 with the publication of Power of Place.

Some key issues in drafting the Guide have been:

- Who is it for? – a mainly professional audience
- What is its purpose? – to guide use of the NPPF, not to clarify or interpret it

- How much detail? – core principles, details only where not covered by other documents
- How to reflect the bigger picture? – describes what a positive historic environment strategy looks like and the relationship to the development plan
- What is its status? – aim for it to be a material consideration
- Endorsement? – aim for CLG & DCMS support

It was hoped to issue the draft for wide consultation in July 2012, with the launch of the final document in mid November.



The NPPF, Growth and the Protection of the Historic Environment

Haydn Morris, Director, Terence O'Rourke Ltd



Haydn started by pointing out the long consensual history of supporting the historic environment dating back to the Civic Amenities Act 1967. This appears to be continued in the NPPF and sustainable development does not mean growth at any cost, this despite anti-planning statements from senior members of the Government.

Haydn pointed out that the NPPF requires plans to be: prepared positively; evidence based; and growth oriented. At the same time plans should: set out a positive strategy for the historic assets of the whole town; draw on the contribution this makes to the character of place; and identify constraints that the historic environment may have on the allocation of land for development, e.g. landscape and setting.

Plans should have an up to date historic environment evidence base and, where appropriate, landscape character assessments.

In summary:

- planning authorities have to accommodate the locally assessed need for growth;
- they are free to do so in a way appropriate to the locality so that a range of goals are achieved, including enhancing heritage assets;
- a sound evidence base is required for both and this should be prepared early on, i.e. at the same time as housing needs studies.

In practice things are more complex than this and key issues are:

- Planners have a range of tools available to conserve heritage assets, e.g. Conservation Areas, protected cones of view, and historic commons. In the face of the growth agenda, is this ad hoc range of tools sufficient to protect the integrity of our most valued historic towns?
- Should a historic town be protected as an entity in itself, not just the designated assets, but the wider surroundings and context, e.g. key

views of spires and cathedrals and the quality of the approach to a historic core?

- Does this mean that historic towns have a 'physical capacity', in both the core and the edges, beyond which there would be too much pressure for redevelopment overall thus threatening the integrity of the town?
- What are the most sustainable development patterns, urban extensions, village growth, garden cities?
- How can the planning authorities rise to the challenge of developing an approach that links creatively the evidence base, positive strategies and strategic priorities and policies?

Haydn concluded by stressing that sustainable development is about meeting multiple goals, including conserving the historic environment; solutions should be specific to the needs of the locality and we need bold, purposeful and visionary planning through strong local authorities. Our historic towns and cities are nationally important assets of international significance.

Cathedral Cities: A Special Case? The Very Reverend Nicholas Frayling, The Dean, Chichester Cathedral

Nicholas introduced Chichester as a special cathedral city that is in some ways akin to a market town with a range of cultural attractions, such as the Festival Theatre and the Pallant House Gallery. It sits within a beautiful and much loved landscape; and views of the cathedral are central to the setting and perception of Chichester.

He was not against change and development: he considered the new wing to the Pallant House gallery (Sir Colin Wilson and Long & Kentish, 2006) to be a fine addition to the City, though it faced local opposition.

However, he saw major problems arising from poorly thought out expansion:

- growth that reduces the attraction of the town, deters visitors and shoppers and reduces spending;
- the risk of encouraging the development of out of town shopping that detracts from and threatens the ambience of the City;
- exacerbating existing shortages in infrastructure that needs investment; and
- the risk of building houses without the necessary community facilities.

Nicholas argued that cathedrals have positive impacts and cathedral cities are a special case with distinctive

characters and we need to plan for them accordingly when considering growth. Major ingredients of our heritage are at stake. Key factors are:

- recognising the economic and social value of heritage;
- adopting individual solutions that recognise the distinctive character of cathedral cities;
- accepting 'measured' growth within recognised constraints;
- ensuring where detached settlements are the preferred option facilities are planned in from the outset;
- informing local people so they can make their views known; and
- working in partnership with local authorities to spread the benefits.



A Tale of Two Cities – Winchester’s Growth Dilemma
Steve Tilbury, Corporate Director, Winchester City Council



Steve described the two cities as ‘classic Winchester’ and ‘ordinary, everyday Winchester’, saying that they are in some ways separate and asking whether they can exist harmoniously side-by-side. He argued that there is another dichotomy in what is emerging as the planning system: a public perception of empowering local people and bureaucratic evidence based planning.



For the City the dilemma is ‘How much growth can the historic core and the “character suburbs” of Winchester absorb?’ Issues to be faced in answering this include amongst others:

- How many brownfield sites are available?
- How many back gardens can be developed?
- How much contemporary design is acceptable?
- What is the right balance between housing and employment?
- What is the impact on infrastructure of incremental town centre development?

Winchester recognises that it has to meet housing need; it wants to ensure it has a balanced population and growth does not have to mean a loss of historic qualities.

The Council recognises the risk of an ad hoc approach where the cumulative impacts of development overwhelm the historic environment and infrastructure. It has asked and answered the question, ‘When do you reach the point where development within the town boundary becomes more damaging than moving the boundary?’ The answer to that is a major development at Barton Farm as a central part of the planning strategy. The aim is to build a 21st century suburb that will feel part of the town over time. The belief is that the right kind of expansion can be a sensible response to caring for a historic environment.

Winchester and its Setting: Should it Curb Growth? Richard Baker, City of Winchester Trust

Richard described the setting of Winchester in the valley of the Itchen from which chalk downland rises to the east and west. The City has expanded from its Iron Age origins, with major phases of expansion in the 19th century, 1900 to 1947 and 1947 to 2011. Development has been predominantly to the west of the River Itchen.

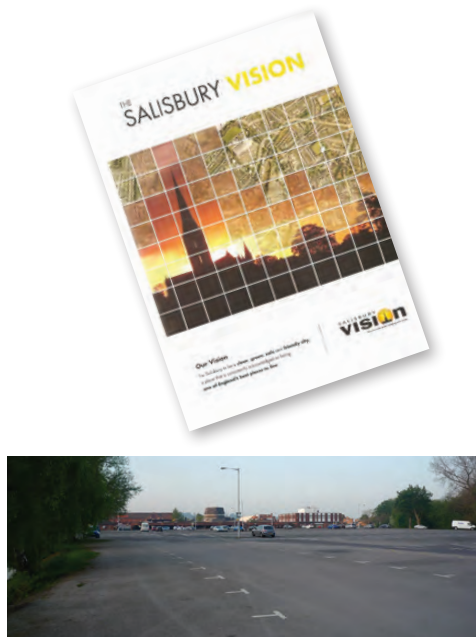
The city is still quite compact; it is surrounded on all sides by countryside and the interaction between the town and country is evident in all directions.

A key challenge for planning is how to protect the landscape setting. A number of designations currently seek to protect parts of the setting - National Park, SSSI, local planning policies for SINCs and Local Gaps. Richard argued that these are fragmentary and inadequate and the setting needs to be defined by working to natural boundaries and forms. Under this analysis the setting to Barton Farm in the north is vulnerable and development there should not be supported. Designation of a Green Belt would be one way of giving the setting a more rigorous protection.

Richard posed the 'China Cabinet problem' as an analogy for urban growth. The cabinet has a capacity to store and display precious china securely and safely. If china continues to be acquired, the capacity of the cabinet will be exceeded. China within the cabinet may then become damaged from overloading, and the elegance of the cabinet suffer from external storage. He argued that setting studies show the Winchester 'china cabinet' is full. Sensitive redevelopment and regeneration of sites within the City, rather than development of land in the landscape setting, is believed to be the way forward to accommodate growth.



Salisbury: the Maltings Redevelopment Project
 Richard Deane, Salisbury Civic Society



Richard described the history of the inner city Maltings site, which sits on the west side of the River Avon. Much of it was formerly in commercial use for maltings with its own railway line. The malting buildings were demolished in the 1960s and part of the site was redeveloped for a Sainsbury's supermarket and an associated retail development. Blandness replaced the distinctive malt houses. The larger part of the site is public open space parking. There are links from the site to the Riverside Walk and to the town centre via the uninviting Market Walk.

Thinking about the future of the Maltings site has followed a structured approach to assessing the needs of the City, developing a vision and embodying policies in the Core Strategy.

The Council's planning policy now allocates the land for retail-led mixed use development that will enhance Salisbury city centre's position as a sub-regional shopping and cultural centre.

The future of residential development and car parking within the scheme is the subject of ongoing debate. The development is a strategic objective in the Salisbury Vision. The development will:

- be expected to be sensitive to Salisbury's skyline;
- maintain local distinctiveness by respecting the scale and building forms of the historic urban fabric;
- create a sense of arrival;
- facilitate improved links to the Market Square and city centre;
- provide an improved range of facilities and be attractive to tourists; and
- potentially act as enabling development for improvements along Fisherton Street, e.g. the restoration of the art nouveau shop front at number 47.

The approach to development of the Maltings is consistent with the NPPF.

CONCLUSIONS AND WAYS FORWARD

The conference provoked a lively discussion of the interdependencies between heritage and planning, especially planning for housing growth. The papers and discussions ranged from strategic to detailed issues and from technical to political considerations.

Several important conclusions emerged from the day:

- conservation of the historic environment must be seen in its wider social, economic and environmental context;
- the NPPF should be used in its entirety to support effective conservation of the historic environment;
- effective planning needs to start from a clear vision of the future of the place
- local plans should include historic environment strategies, setting out an approach that embraces the whole place;
- the historic environment evidence base and strategy should be prepared at an early stage and help to shape spatial and land use strategies;
- the historic environment evidence base should be wide ranging and include landscape character assessments;
- setting is central to the character and perception of historic towns;
- planning solutions should be specific to the locality, which may not be homogeneous, and needs to be fully understood;
- ensuring amenities, services and infrastructure are built into developments from the start;
- the design of both buildings and spaces is a critical part of the historic environment debate;
- new developments can be of high quality and add character to places; and
- it is important to work with local communities - getting buy-in through consultation and engagement



However, there remain critical issues to resolve:

- How will the NPPF be interpreted and implemented?
- How will the conflicts and political differences between the needs of the historic environment and meeting other pressing requirements, especially for housing, be resolved?
- How will the potential tensions between localism and technical evidence based planning be resolved?
- What are the most appropriate spatial options for meeting housing need – densification, urban extensions, dispersal, new settlements?
- What aspects of the historic environment should be protected?

- Do historic towns and cities have a finite physical capacity, thinking about both inner and outer areas?
- Is the range of tools available to planners adequate, especially in protecting setting?
- Are there sufficient resources for historic environment work?

The conference identified the following priorities for action:

- improving education and awareness on planning, heritage and design;
- engaging the younger generation in these challenges and opportunities;
- broadening the debate and building alliances;

- raising awareness and skills among elected members;
- taking advantage of the window of opportunity that localism provides, before central government reverts to its usual top down approach;
- using the opportunities created through the NPPF for proactive conservation;
- getting on with preparing up-to-date local plans;
- building continuity for quality into development from master planning to on-site enforcement; and
- promoting good practice and support through the NHPP, HELAC and the NPPF heritage practice guide.



Presentations from the conference are available to HTF members on the HTF web site:

http://www.historictownsforum.org//salisbury12_presentations

ANNEXE: SPEAKER PROFILES

Richard Baker

Richard is a retired architect, and is a member of the City of Winchester Trust's Planning Policy Group. Most of his professional career was spent working in local authority planning and conservation departments in London and Hampshire. He co-authored a booklet, 'Winchester and its Setting', published by the Trust at the end of 2011, which was the basis of his presentation.

Richard Deane

Richard graduated with a degree in Chinese from Leeds University, but spent most of his working life as a stonemason. He worked for twenty years for Salisbury Cathedral. He has been a committee member of the Salisbury Civic Society since its inception in 1983 and is currently the Society's Vice-Chairman and Secretary of the Development Committee.

Nicholas Frayling

The Very Reverend Nicholas Frayling trained for retail management, but changed career and became a welfare officer at Pentonville prison. In response to a vocation to the ordained ministry, he studied theology at Exeter University and parish ministry in Peckham and Tooting, and moved to Liverpool in 1983 as Canon Precentor of the cathedral. Nicholas has become noted for his work for reconciliation, not only between faith communities but also between Britain and Ireland.

Brian Human

Brian is a former Chair of the Historic Towns Forum (HTF) and is a member of the Executive. He is an experienced planner with a strong belief in the importance of visionary and technically robust planning in supporting sustainable communities. He has worked in urban land use, transport and environmental planning for over 30 years.

Haydn Morris

Haydn is Director at Terence O'Rourke Ltd and has spent almost all of his working life in planning. After starting in local government, at county and district level, he entered private practice more than 26 years ago. His positive and common sense approach to planning has enabled him successfully to negotiate complex development proposals, many in Green Belt locations, involving listed buildings or conservation areas and in other areas of constraint.

Steve Tilbury

Steve is Corporate Director (Operations) at Winchester City Council and is a member of the HTF Executive. He has held other senior positions in local authorities and at the headquarters of Sport England. His current role includes responsibility for strategic planning, environmental services and supporting the Winchester Town Forum as it prepares its 'Vision for Winchester'.

Charles Wagner

Charles has been Head of the Planning and Urban Advice Team in English Heritage for a year since he returned from a two year secondment with the Homes and Communities Agency. Prior to that at English Heritage he was Head of Planning and Regeneration Policy, and before that he was Historic Areas Adviser for London North and East and Historic Areas Adviser for the East Midlands.

