

Waterstock Parish Meeting

Camilla Cottage, Waterstock, Oxon, OX33 1JT.
waterstockparish@camcott.co.uk: *chairman michael tyce*

1.10.11

The National Planning Policy Framework

The Government's proposed New Planning Policy Framework, in consultation until October 17th, is causing considerable concern, not least to The Campaign to Protect Rural England, the National Trust, and the Oxford Green Belt Network, of which we are a member. They fear it tips the scales on Planning Decisions too far in favour of development, casting aside the present system's considered balance between development and the environment.

Amongst their concerns are:

1. Its presumption of a default "yes" to "sustainable" development, without defining what it means by "sustainable". Not only will the presumption in favour of development make it far harder to refuse developments than before, but "sustainable" will be a field day for lawyers, who in the nature of things are most likely to be acting for developers.
2. This presumption in favour of development appears to apply equally to Green Belts, turning the existing situation – where the default answer to development is "no" – completely on its head, and at a stroke removing the major planning assumption on which Green Belts depend.
3. The Proposed Framework appears to give District Councils a positive steer to lift Green Belt status, and therefore development controls, from parishes which do not make a positive contribution to openness. This could affect up to 41 presently Green Belt villages in Oxfordshire.
4. The previous policy, that development should be positively steered to brownfield sites, is to be scrapped. This will inevitably steer development instead to cheaper to build on green fields, which will be permanently lost in return for short term economic gain. Even this is uncertain however, as there is little evidence that the previous planning policies frustrated housing development, which is more likely to be constrained by lack of money than lack of land in developer's land-banks.
5. The much vaunted "Localism" agenda, under which neighbourhoods are given the impression that they will be able to control their destinies, on closer inspection appears to have little substance. Neighbourhoods will not be able to veto development plans, but only offer advice on them to the District Council, which hardly changes the position at all from where we are now.
6. A planning system must recognise the need for a strong economy, of course, and development is essential to growth as well as to accommodating the needs of a much increased population. There is also a need, though, to preserve the natural environment and England's irreplaceable green fields as far as we can. Whatever the protestations of the Government, the proposed new Planning Framework weights the scales far more towards development, and therefore against the environment, than the existing planning system.

There is some level of protection if part of the village is, or could become, a conservation area.

But a change in our Green Belt status, or erosion of the Green Belt around us, which the South Oxfordshire District Council recently tried to do by taking land out of the Green Belt from Wheatley to the M40 (albeit thwarted at a Public Inquiry under the EXISTING planning regulations) will become far more likely if the new Framework comes into force.

If you would like to read more about the National Planning Policy Framework you can go to the OGBN website at www.oxfordgreenbelt.net, or CPRE at <http://e-activist.com/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=21&ea.campaign.id=11939&ea.tracking.id=cpre-web> where you can easily send a letter to your MP, and an e-mail form to the Government consultation, or the National Trust website <https://www.planningforpeople.org.uk/> where you can sign their petition and also see how to contact your M.P.

The consultation on the new National Planning Policy Framework closes on October 17th , and if you want to have Your Shout there is little time left to do so.