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Briefing on the new Planning Policy Statement on Climate Change

Background

In 2005 Friends of the Earth began a campaign alongside the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) to persuade the Government to issue detailed policy guidance on planning and climate change. This recognised the significant contribution of planning to reducing carbon emissions by, for example, reducing the need to travel or delivering more renewable energy. After intensive work the government published the final PPS in December.

What is the PPS

The PPS is the Government's national framework of planning policy for England. It is not legally binding but can it also cannot be ignored. Councils must fully consider the PPS when making their plans and in making individual decisions on planning permission. In some cases where local plans are old the PPS will carry even more weight in the decision. Ignoring a PSS could result in a legal challenge.

Why is the new PPS a 'supplement' to PPS 1?

PPS 1 sets out the core objectives of the planning system. The government is trying to indicate that climate change is one of those core principles.

So what does the new PPS do?

The PPS introduces the following main policies:

- The PPS places climate mitigation and adaptation at the heart of planning decisions. Paragraphs 1 to 7 set out the vital need for action on climate and commits planning to deliver on, amongst other things, zero carbon development. There is strong language in Para 7 about harnessing the enthusiasm of local communities to deal with climate change. This is an important recognition of the role of local people in working collaboratively to achieve solutions.
- Commits planning to deliver on CO₂ reductions targets and obligations of forthcoming Bill. (Para 7)
- A strong promotion of renewable energy and clarity about limiting restrictive policy. (Para 13, 19, 20)
- Strongly promotes decentralised energy systems. (Para 26)
- Allows council to move faster than Government building regulations to achieve higher levels of the code for sustainable homes. (Para 31)
- Allows council to require a percentage of energy use from new development to come from decentralised renewable sources. (Para 26)

- Strongly promotes designing in climate issues such as passive solar gain, urban cooling etc. (Para 24)
- Strongly promotes sustainable transport systems. (Para 24)
- Commits Local Authority to consider bio diversity and climate. (Para 9)
- Commits regions and LAs to consider water resource issues. (Para 13)

What difference will this make?

The PPS is in effect now but it often takes months for local councils to catch up unless they are positively pushed to think about these issues. Local action can make a big difference. A useful starting point is simply asking how your council is going to respond to the PPS or how existing planning documents will be updated.

What's wrong with it?

Policy could always go further. There is no silver bullet here that says carbon intensive development will always be refused. That would be unworkable in context of the government's other objectives on housing or aviation. We still have to actively make the case for low and zero carbon decisions but this document helps enormously with this task.

Some commentators have concluded that this document prohibits the Merton Rule. There is no prohibition but it is true that Para 26 sets out a different and more flexible framework. This framework aims not to restrict developers on how they meet the renewables energy source so long as it is renewable and localised.

The PPS does not specify that this is solely to be met from Micro generation although this is an important part of the mix. The benefit of the PPS is that it allows Local Planning Authorities to go beyond the 10% figure and require a higher proportion of energy from localised sources.

Innovation in building design

The PPS aims to encourage innovation in building design but it sensibly insists that local standards of energy efficiency from homes should not duplicate building regulations and must the code for Sustainable Homes as the basic standard. Thus it insists on higher levels of the code but does not mitigate the creation of a whole new set of localised standards.

In conclusion

It's worth bearing in mind that many local authorities still make decisions with no reference to climate change issues. This PPS will mean they can no longer go on ignoring the issue.