

Joint Statement: Planning for the climate crisis

From Adept, Campaign for National Parks, Centre for Sustainable Energy, Civic Voice, Coal Action Network, Community Planning Alliance, Cycling UK, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace UK, Mammal Society, National Flood Forum, Open Spaces Society, Ramblers, Rights: Community: Action., Town & Country Planning Association, UKGBC.

The planning system plays a vital role in cutting carbon and preparing us for the impacts of climate change. The Committee on Climate Change is advocating a strong focus on effective planning to deliver the action we need. But the current English planning system is not delivering on its positive potential to tackle the climate crisis. This briefing sets out the problem and shows how an urgent ministerial statement can seize the opportunity of a resilient, net zero future.

The climate crisis

The global impacts of climate change are rapidly intensifying with devastating social, ecological and economic consequences. The Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change has issued a stark warning to the world – human influence is responsible for unprecedented climate change, and the global effects will be severe. The global spotlight is on the UK in the run up to the crucial COP 26 Conference which is effectively our last chance to secure a sustainable planet. It is vital that all aspects of Government policy are coordinated to take united action to cut carbon and prepare for severe weather events.

Why does planning matter?

The planning system deals with a basket of issues of vital importance for tackling the climate crisis, including:

- **planning for renewable energy and controlling fossil fuel extraction** which directly cuts carbon emissions, by locating and designing new development to achieve multiple low carbon outcomes such as sustainable travel.
- adapting to climate change by locating development to **avoid flood risk from rivers and the predicted 1.5 metres of sea level rise** we expect by the end of this century. Planning can ensure that key design elements like natural flood defence, sustainable urban drainage systems and green infrastructure which are vital for flood resilience and urban cooling, are built into development.
- by **giving local communities a real voice** in their climate solutions, vital to their future health and safety.

The Climate Change Act 2008

The 2008 Climate Change Act sets out an overall carbon reduction budget and requires the Secretary of State to ensure all regulatory frameworks deliver on this budget. The planning system, including any national policy, must clearly deliver on this legal requirement if the budget is to be effectively implemented. There can be no significant carbon leakage points in our regulatory approach. As a result, planning strategies and development management decisions must ensure but they deliver on the obligations of the 6th carbon budget.

Why isn't the planning system delivering?

There are three major flaws in the current approach to planning for the climate crisis:

1. The provisions of the **Planning Acts and the Climate Change Act** need to be better connected so that planning can deliver emissions reductions. This means strengthening the policy guidance and the introduction of a legal provision for planning on climate change. This would function as the net zero test on planning. Provisions that define and require adaptation resilience standards to be met in planning decisions must also be put on a legal footing.
2. The **National Planning Policy Framework** (NPPF) does not give climate change the priority which the science demands. Climate change is included in paragraph 8 at the end of a long list of other environmental considerations. The most significant part of national policy on climate change is included as a footnote which is not a commensurate way to deal with a global crisis. The publication in July 2021 of the revised NPPF was an opportunity to show how planning can play a crucial role in climate mitigation, for example by strengthening the policy presumption against fossil fuel extraction, but the revised document ignores the implications of the 6th Carbon Budget Order. National policy sets out detailed methodologies for forecasting many issues like housing, waste and aggregates. There is no such

guidance for carbon reduction. The NPPF also fails to prioritise key climate impacts such as surface water flooding and overheating.

3. Due to the changes brought in by permitted development, where full planning permission is no longer required, planning authorities have no way of ensuring that the climate emergency is reflected in decisions. The current **prior approval** process does not allow local authorities to consider the impact of development on carbon emissions or overheating.

Taken together these problems help account for why only a minority of local plans have an effective approach to carbon reduction; why carbon intensive development, such as coal extraction, is still being proposed; and why so many decisions on the location and design of new homes will require expensive retrofitting. If we are to 'build back better' we need to urgently transform the built environment to both reduce emissions and be resilient to climate impacts.

Seizing the opportunity for a Ministerial statement on Climate Change.

The Secretary of State can issue a written ministerial statement on planning at any time which strengthens or explains Government planning policy. Such statements have to be taken into account by local planning authorities in planning decisions. We are collectively calling for a statement to be issued in the run up to COP 26 which fully reflects the Government's ambition to tackle the Climate crisis. The draft wording of this statement is set out below:

**Draft Ministerial statement to be issued by The Right Honourable Michael Gove MP,
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.**

Climate change is the greatest long-term challenge facing the world today. Addressing climate change is, therefore, the Government's principal concern for both the town and county planning and nationally significant infrastructure regimes. All planning strategies and all decision on applications for consent for development must reflect the Government's ambition to help business and communities build a net zero carbon future and prepare for the impacts of climate change. Accordingly, planning policies and all planning decisions must be in line with the objectives and provisions of Climate Change Act 2008 including the 2050 net zero carbon target and the detailed provisions of the 6th carbon budget.

In ensuring the 6th carbon budget is delivered local planning authorities and the planning inspectorate must ensure that:

- Development plan policies must, taken as a whole, be assessed for their carbon impact to ensure that locally determined contributions on carbon reduction demonstrably deliver on the sixth carbon budget. Clear carbon reduction targets in all development plan documents are vital in achieving this goal. Plans which cannot demonstrate a credible and evidenced policy framework to deliver the necessary carbon reductions will not be judged sound at local plan examination.***
- Planning applications which accord with local plan policy should be approved promptly. Where decisions are taken which do not accord with plan policy it is for the applicant to demonstrate how their proposals would accord with the carbon reduction targets established in the plan. Applications which cannot demonstrate such compliance must be refused.***
- Development plan policies must prioritise the long-term climate resilience of communities. This means building the capacity of people and places to plan for, better protect, respond to, and recover from flooding, coastal change and extreme temperatures. This includes making the best land use and development choices, protecting people and places, responding to and recovering from severe weather events whilst all the time adapting to the predicted impacts of climate change. It is essential that plans focus on the delivery of consistent, measurable outcomes that can be achieved in the next Adaptation Programme reporting period (2023–2029), to support resilient investment across the built environment.***

Today I am also announcing the specific clarification of policy in relation oil, gas and coal exploration and extraction.

National planning guidance around oil, gas and coal now needs to be updated in the light of the net zero commitment and the 6th carbon budget, which recommends entirely phasing out unabated fossil fuel electricity generation by 2035, following the coal phase out by 2024. In addition, the 6th carbon budget projections for the end of greenhouse gas emissions from steel making by 2035, requires the strengthening of the existing presumption against the development of coal mines, whether thermal, industrial or coking coal.

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Existing consents for infrastructure and extraction along with current levels of importation are sufficient to deal with a managed transition. Local plans are no longer required to define areas for further extraction given the remaining limited timeframe. Planning permission should not be granted for the extraction of coal, oil or gas unless in wholly exceptional circumstances, where the proposal is considered environmentally acceptable specifically with regards to the achievement of binding UK and international greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets.

END.

Joint statement from:



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