

# A Land Use Framework for England

Briefing for policymakers

February 2023

There are many national and societal needs that rely on the use of land. However, in England there is no tool to allow them to be delivered in a joined-up way. This results in inefficiencies and missed opportunities.



A solution to this, proposed by the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (FFCC) in 2019, is to develop a Land Use Framework for England.

This has since been echoed by many expert bodies, from countryside charities, like CPRE, to academic reports, like UCL's Nature Positive Innovation Commission, to government papers, like the National Geospatial Commission national strategy. It was a recommendation in Henry Dimbleby's 2021 Food Strategy, and in their response to that, the Government has committed to producing a Land Use Framework for England in Spring 2023.

FFCC's recommendation described a Land Use Framework as an enabling mechanism that brings together data, maps, people and sets out principles to follow to help those making land use change decisions deliver multiple benefits and better public value.

It is hoped that the government's proposed Framework will also reflect the findings of the recent [House of Lords Land Use Committee report](#), in particular that it is a cross-government framework, covering all major land-uses.

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/583/land-use-in-england-committee/news/175072/england-needs-a-land-use-framework-says-lords-committee/>

## Why do we need a Land Use Framework?

**There is a finite amount of land yet increasing pressure on what it has to deliver.** The current system, where different needs are delivered in isolation by different teams and organisations, using partial data and following policies set by different government departments, is inefficient, often sub-optimal and has unintended and unforeseen consequences. A Land Use Framework would bring together people and organisations, data and maps, to set out the principles decision makers should follow, empowering local leaders to deliver across policy siloes. **This would mean each piece of land would deliver a number of things society needs, not just one.**

## Attributes of an effective Framework

At a minimum, to be effective a Land Use Framework for England must:

- be **owned and delivered across government, covering all major land use changes** to tackle siloed approaches.
- enable **each land use change to deliver against several issues** so that economic, environmental and social targets are met in ways that deliver real public value.
- facilitate **effective use and integration of data** to enable better decisions, by making available existing data at national, regional and local level.
- be neither top down nor bottom up alone, but must **facilitate genuine landowner, community, civil society and business involvement** in the ways that national targets are met at the local level.

## How would it integrate with other plans?

The Framework would wrap around other plans such as the National Planning Policy Framework and the new Local Nature Recovery Strategies, with the principles and data informing the development and delivery of such plans. It would differ from a strategy or plan in supporting and bringing together existing plans, with the emphasis on enabling rather than requiring. It would signal priorities, allowing other plans and funding streams to align in delivering those priorities. It would enable national and local

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leaders to deliver across siloes and landowners to make decisions in the light of these clear priorities.

## What's next? And who can help?

With a Land Use Framework for England currently under development and publication expected in May it is vital that Defra are supported in developing an ambitious framework that is shared and owned across government and which has the attributes above.

**MPs should be advocating for a bold and ambitious approach** to the relevant Ministers, from Defra, DLUHC, BEIS, DfT, DCMS, Cabinet Office and Treasury, through conversations, parliamentary questions etc. These should stress the opportunity developing a Framework presents, to align scarce resources and private finance, and satisfy citizens interests for more involvement in the decisions that affect them and their communities and to better public value from government expenditure.

Where not already doing so, **local councillors should be considering how a Land Use Framework could operate in their area** and encouraging their sponsor department at the national level, DLUHC to work with Defra to develop an effective Framework.

## Where is it being trialled and adopted?

FFCC is trialling the Framework in two counties in England and will publish final lessons in June 2023.

In **Devon**, principles have been developed and will be tested by existing projects operating at different spatial scales. A prototype decision support tool is also being developed and data gaps identified. Representatives from existing projects and local organisations have come together to develop and deliver the pilot: [ffcc.co.uk/devon-land-use-framework](https://ffcc.co.uk/devon-land-use-framework)

In **Cambridgeshire**, a listening exercise was carried to understand communities' needs. Working with farmers, local authorities and organisations, a framework is being tested and a spatial modelling prototype developed that brings together existing data to enable better decisions on complex and contested issues: [ffcc.co.uk/cambridgeshire](https://ffcc.co.uk/cambridgeshire)

In addition to these pilots, some local authorities are considering or developing land use frameworks to

support better coherence between current policies, organisations and data and deliver more from each piece of land.

**Surrey County Council** is beginning to develop a Land Use Management Framework with partners. The Council is currently mapping the issues and pressures and bringing data together, before identifying opportunities and funding available to create projects which deliver multiple benefits. The Council has already delivered [a project](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roadworks-and-maintenance/our-major-maintenance-projects/horsell-common-sang-project) which exemplifies the type of land use change that should become the norm using a Land Use Framework: three flood attenuation ponds were created, alongside new habitat development and the creation of new footpaths that link a housing estate with the local school. <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/roadworks-and-maintenance/our-major-maintenance-projects/horsell-common-sang-project>

A Land Use Strategy was introduced in Scotland in 2011 and the [Third Land Use Strategy for Scotland](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-third-land-use-strategy-2021-2026-getting-best-land/) was published in 2021. Wales published [Future Wales](https://www.gov.wales/future-wales-national-plan-2040), a national spatial plan to 2040, in 2021.

Scotland: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-third-land-use-strategy-2021-2026-getting-best-land/>

Wales: <https://www.gov.wales/future-wales-national-plan-2040>

## How might it work in certain scenarios?

### Example: Housing decisions in an English county

The National Land Use Framework has brought together data and maps, and created structures within the local authority and between the local authority and county stakeholders, that allow the local authority to identify possible sites for housing development.

These are reflected in the Local Plan and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Data shows that these sites wouldn't lead to increased flooding or loss of nature, but that new development on these sites could actually be an opportunity to deliver other national targets and societal benefits.

Following the principles of the Land Use Framework, the landowners for these sites and local communities are involved in discussions about possible development at an early stage. Best practice engagement techniques are followed to set parameters, reconcile differing views and agree trade-offs and next steps.

As a result, several small developments sites are agreed, where housing would be designed to meet local needs, in keeping with local character, and support climate mitigation (e.g. through heat pump and solar panel installation). Planning permission is granted quickly.

The developments are sited where they don't require car use and some developments include new infrastructure for the community – schools, doctors' surgeries, new green space etc. They also include measures to enhance nature and manage climate change, such as tree planting or wetland creation, both on site and in other parts of the county, through Biodiversity Net Gain.

### Example: New energy infrastructure

An electricity generation company wants to build a solar farm. The company identifies prospective sites using the National Land Use Framework and the local interpretations of it, and the data and maps they are based on. They contact landowners and work with them to identify specific locations. Local communities are consulted at an early stage and their views help refine the location.

Because funding streams are more coherent under the Framework, the landowner is able to identify funds which could fund environmental improvements that can be carried out alongside installation of the solar panels.

A final site is agreed and approved. Additional hedgerows are planted alongside the panel installations and improvements made to stiles and access gates.

### Example: Climate adaption and flooding

It is becoming increasingly clear to a community that they will be especially at risk of flooding, due to climate change, in the medium term. They want to work together to anticipate that risk, to start to remediate local infrastructure and identify where nature-based solutions, such as wetting land higher in the river catchment, could help.

They bring the community together, with landowners and infrastructure businesses, and work out, through modelling the data in their places, where investment and adaption now would enable the community to become more resilient to face uncertain futures. They are able to identify funding streams that can support work to achieve it and secure funding to enable the community and landowners to carry out the work. As a result the community and the land are less affected by climate change, and flooding is reduced.

**Find out more about the Land Use Framework at**  
[ffcc.co.uk/land-use-framework](https://ffcc.co.uk/land-use-framework)