



THE CASE FOR A LAND USE FRAMEWORK

It will be extremely difficult to deliver the multiple products and services the UK needs from its land over the next decade. The UK has finite land resources, and it is unlikely that we will be able to grow enough food, restore biodiversity and nature, de-carbonise the economy and adapt to climate change while also building all the new homes, transport and energy infrastructure the government has promised. It's time to try a new approach: a Land Use Framework for England - delivering integrated, collaborative and place-based decision making and optimizing multifunctional benefits from our land.

A Land Use Framework would enable us to:

- more effectively tackle the climate and environmental emergencies, rising inequalities and deliver net zero
- deliver on policy ambitions; including infrastructure, housing, transport, energy etc
- connect local, regional and national decision making; and joining up policy making across departments
- help individual landowners and farmers make long term plans as they face a raft of new support mechanisms.

Already land is being purchased by private equity and businesses for particular purposes, such as forestry and carbon sequestration, without any strategic or, indeed, democratic assessment of whether that land would be better used for other purposes, such as agroecological farming which

could deliver multiple benefits: food, biodiversity, reduced greenhouse gases and green jobs, or enabling people to live and work in their communities.

A more deliberative approach to land use decision making would enable more government targets to be achieved. The most appropriate land would be used for the mix of uses it is best suited to, delivering more outcomes for communities, the environment and a greener economy.

A framework would also deliver process benefits – reducing conflicts over land use, saving time and money. Collaborative approaches would help align and pool resources, share data, knowledge and skills, leading to better long-term decisions being made.

Finally, a framework could also help leverage and align private finance and philanthropic funds in support of transparent and democratic, fair and sustainable investments on land.

BACKGROUND

Momentum has been building for a Land Use Framework. Key reports such as the Foresight *Land Use Futures* report (2010), the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy (2019), the Committee on Climate Change's *Land Use: Policies for a net zero UK* report (2020) and the National Food Strategy (2021) all called for a framework. The FFCC's 2019 report *Our Future in the Land* set out a vision for 'a countryside that works for all', with rural communities which are a powerhouse for a fair and green economy. The priority objective within this land use workstream was to: 'Establish a national Land Use Framework in England, that inspires cooperation based on the public value of land, mediating conflicting land uses and encouraging multipurpose uses'.

Many organisations have recommended such an approach, including the Royal Society, Royal Town Planning Institute, Green Alliance, Shared Assets, CPRE, WWF, RSPB, County Councils Network, Chatham House, Institute for Government and the government's

Geospatial Commission. In January 2022 the House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee's report on nature-based solutions called for the Government to develop an overall land use strategy and the current Select Committee on Land Use in England is exploring how the decision-making process surrounding land use can be improved, including to foster integration and deliver multifunctional uses of land.



PROGRESS

FFCC have convened a **Land Use National Group** with high level representation from Government, NGOs and professional leaders to lead discussion about how the framework approach could be incorporated in government department thinking and planning and how lessons from the pilots could inform national level action.

A pilot project has been established in **Devon**. The county presents a mix of different types of land, competing land use pressures and complex land use governance arrangements. There are multiple local plans that try to address these issues but a Devon Land Use Framework would help navigate this complexity to join up approaches and help deliver all the demands placed on land.

A second pilot is underway in **Cambridgeshire**, which with its very different land pressures, is an ideal location for a complementary trial. In Cambridgeshire challenges

include: intense development pressures in the south and west of the county but under-investment in the north; major social and economic inequalities across the county; some struggling market towns; a degraded natural environment; eroding fenland soils; and some poor transport connections.

The pilots will test the Land Use Framework approach through action research – trialling the ideas through testing them in practice. They may focus on specific issues or sub-areas such as a river catchment. Stakeholders in each area will test the principles and identify what practices are most useful for their land use decision making. By working together, local government, farmers, landowners and other stakeholders can design a land use framework for their area, which will in time become embedded across many other policy documents and initiatives so that all are better aligned to delivering the same broad goals in the context of the climate and nature crises.

THE LAND USE FRAMEWORK APPROACH

A Land Use Framework is an approach to managing land use decisions that mediates competing pressures and encourages multifunctionality, enabling land to provide multiple benefits for public value. Ideally, a framework would consist of a set of agreed principles and practices that are embedded across local, regional and national organisations, guiding decision making. The framework could also be integrated into support schemes for landowners and farmers to encourage them to align their decisions to the same principles. A Land Use Framework should be designed and adopted to work across both rural and urban areas, also extending into coastal and estuarine environments. The approach outlined here is a starting point and likely to be adapted after testing it in practice.

Overall Objective

To establish an integrating, collaborative and place-based approach to land use decision making, to mediate complex requirements from land and to generate multiple benefits for nature, communities and a fair and sustainable future.

DRAFT LAND USE FRAMEWORK STRUCTURE

This diagram outlines six proposed principles under the headings: Place, People and Public Value

Land Use Framework



WAYS OF WORKING

Evidence based: land use decisions should be informed by critical enquiry and appropriate and reliable data (including mapping, scientific and qualitative data) to evaluate costs and benefits at several scales and over time.

Transparent and inclusive: land use decision making should involve multiple stakeholders in a genuinely inclusive and participative process to ensure legitimacy, mediate conflicts and negotiate solutions.

Strategic and granular: land use decisions should consider multiple scales – taking landscape and catchment scale perspectives to allow for strategic investment and nature recovery, but also facilitate small pockets of land to be used to meet local needs.

Learning from what works: a Land Use Framework should learn from good practice past and present. Many initiatives have experimented with various forms of coordinated decision making at different scales. The best of these should be emulated. Additionally, where possible, rather than creating new structures and layers of bureaucracy, a Land Use Framework should link to and improve existing mechanisms for delivery.

As the framework is developed into a working version, practices or protocols are likely to be identified to enable land use decisions to be tested. These might include risk assessments, gathering further evidence, local consultations and other methods to answer the questions posed under each principle.



ISSUES TO BE TESTED

The pilots are testing and shaping the principles outlined above but also trialing how a Land Use Framework can work in practice, addressing some complex areas including:

1. What scale is best for a local Land Use Framework?
Might districts, catchments, bio-regions or landscape character areas work better or differently than counties? The evidence from the initial (two-tier) county-based pilots will inform this.
2. How to ensure a range of voices are heard, including people who care about the consequences of land use decisions but might not normally be involved in decision making. This could include communities at risk of flooding, people keen to find land to grow food and those wanting to improve recreational access to green spaces. Active, genuine engagement and transparency about the processes are important and the engagement should try to focus on finding creative solutions to maximizing long term benefits for all parties. Some landowners and managers will already be more aligned to the principles and some will be more open to change than others, so processes must ensure these dynamics are taken into account.

3. How to integrate the Land Use Framework into local policy and decision making, and the relationship to Local Plans, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and all the other local and sub-national land use policies.
4. What role would national policy play and how that would work at a local level. Nationally there are discussions about whether a framework approach could be embedded within or be a complementary aspect of the National Planning Policy Framework, the ELMS agricultural support system, national infrastructure planning or other national policies.

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