Land Use Consultation Community Planning Alliance Response

https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/land-use-in-england

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use-framework/land-use-consultation.

This consultation closes at
11:59pm on 25 April 2025

Contact is landuseconsultation@defra.gov.uk

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use-framework/land-use-consultation/supporting_documents/Land%20Use%20Consultation.pdf

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use-framework/land-use-consultation/supporting_documents/LU_analytical%20annex.pdf

Dear Consultation Team

We are responding to the Land Use Consultation by email because the character limit on the questions is too restrictive to enable provision of comprehensive responses.

QUESTION 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our assessment of the scale and type of land use change needed, as set out in this consultation and the Analytical Annex?

Strongly disagree

Please explain your response, including your views on the potential scale of change and the type of change needed, including any specific types of change.

This document appears to start from the premise that there will be a need to change land use or production on agricultural land. This is incorrect. All the suitable, available and achievable[1] brownfield land should be used first, followed by brownfield land that requires remediation. Housing and employment space should not be considered for greenfield sites until all that brownfield land is fully utilised.

In addition, solar, for example, should be on rooftops and no ground level solar should be approved until all the rooftops are covered!

The Framework should explicitly protect land that is home to irreplaceable habitats, SBIs, SSSIs, etc, as well as undesignated land that is species/ecology-rich or environmentally important. Explicit policies are needed to, for example, restore our peat mosses, to provide carbon capture and storage facilities (we do not need to spend 22bn on unproven technology solutions) and to support the reversal of species decline.

We should also be reducing the carbon footprint of our food by increasing local production rather than decreasing it for development. This will be essential given the expected extreme consequences of climate change, leading to disastrous weather incidents in countries that currently produce much of the world's food. There is also a possibility that current wars will expand into Europe or even into the UK itself. We need to be much more self-sufficient.

[1] Housing and economic land availability assessment - GOV.UK

Please also see the attached briefing which summarises the three key principles that should be the priority in the Land Use Framework deliberations:

1. ***PREVENT*** *loss of best farmland,* ***PROTECT*** *ecosystems,* ***PREPARE*** *for climate change.*
2. ***RECYCLE OR REPURPOSE*** *first.*
3. Take and **EVIDENCE-BASED** approach to **ALTERNATIVES**.

QUESTION 2: Do you agree or disagree with the land use principles proposed?

Neither agree nor disagree

Please provide any reasons for your response including any changes you believe should be made.

Whilst we are generally supportive of the principles identified, there are a number of gaps, which we set out below.

Co-design must involve communities and MUST be done in alignment with the Gunning Principles[2] (ie involving communities from the earliest stage of an initiative, not just giving them the opportunity to comment on documents that have been created by others with no citizen input). Policy should encourage a move from the current Decide Announce Defend approach to an Engage Deliberate Decide mode.

Playing to the strengths of the land should be replaced by a principle called Protect, Prevent, Prepare: This principle would aim to protect nature, prevent loss of bmv agricultural land, irreplaceable habitats, SBIs & SSSIs and prepare for climate change through peatland restoration, water improvements and increasing our wetland habitats.

Decisions fit for the long-term should prioritise the use of all brownfield land for the built environment, in addition to prioritising resilience.

Responsive by design should ensure that land use policy will be fully evidence based and will require the use of the Treasury Green Book, the ENCA[3] guidance and the Mitigation Hierarchy[4]. Policy should also require adherence to a Green Claims code[5] for the public sector, that should apply to all documentation and processes. That code should be aligned with what applies to other businesses, including:

- claims must be truthful and accurate
- claims must be clear and unambiguous
- claims must not omit or hide important relevant information
- comparisons must be fair and meaningful
- claims must consider the full life cycle of the product or service
- claims must be substantiated.

QUESTION 3: Beyond Government departments in England, which other decision makers do you think would benefit from applying these principles?

● Combined and local authorities (including local planning authorities)

Yes

[2] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/The%20Gunning%20Principles.pdf
[3] Enabling a Natural Capital Approach (ENCA): Guidance - GOV.UK
[4] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/natural-environment
[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-claims-code-making-environmental-claims/environmental-claims-on-goods-and-services

● *Landowners and land managers (including environmental and heritage groups)*

Yes

● *Others (please specify)*

Those who are programme managing initiatives that impact land use, including NSIPs.

QUESTION 4: What are the policies, incentives and other changes that are needed to support decision makers in the agricultural sector to deliver this scale of land use change, while considering the importance of food production?

There is a real danger that we are losing the skills necessary to increase agricultural production and productivity. The current losses of farmland for development, for solar and because of the inheritance tax changes mean that there is a real need for incentives to retain farmers and other skilled staff within the sector.

The most important policies are those that will prevent the loss of the best farmland, that will protect our ecosystems and natural capital and that will support preparation for further climate change incidents. These policies will need to be supported by incentives and funding to recycle or repurpose land and buildings (including genuinely prioritising the use of brownfield land, with funding for remediation, where necessary).

The policies must ensure, as set out in our response to question 2 above, that there is an evidence-based approach that requires the use of the Treasury Green Book, the ENCA guidance, the Mitigation Hierarchy and adherence to a Green Claims code for the public sector.

QUESTION 5: How could Government support more land managers to implement multifunctional land uses that deliver a wider range of benefits, such as agroforestry systems with trees within pasture or arable fields?

The key requirement is more funding for the sector. Farmers and communities would also appreciate stability and support for the countryside. If 85% of land *"can be classed as rural*", the funding received by these communities should reflect this.

There should also be incentives to support the sharing of equipment, staff and information to increase productivity and optimise the use of land for multifunctional purposes. Both tree and hedge planting, including orchards, should be encouraged, along with pond and wetland creation to maximise ecology-rich sites that support climate mitigation. Government support could be in the form of financial resources, local expertise and access to information services.

The reversal of the inheritance tax change would be welcomed, and tax incentives should be used to ensure the best farmland is retained for agricultural use, with financial rewards for increasing productivity.

QUESTION 6: What should the Government consider in identifying suitable locations for spatially targeted incentives?

Given that the document suggests that the LUF will not "*prescribe specific land uses in specific places*", this is a confusing question.

We do not believe the government should be identifying suitable locations for spatially targeted incentives. The principles and parameters should be set out in the LUF and appropriate levels of funding should be made available for land owners/land use managers to apply for, in exactly the same way as ELMS/SFI works now.

QUESTION 7: What approach(es) could most effectively support land managers and the agricultural sector to steer land use changes to where they can deliver greater potential benefits and lower trade-offs?

The priority for land use changes should be the existing brownfield land. Land managers and the agricultural sector should only need to steer land use changes once brownfield land has been repurposed. Please also see our response to question 5.

QUESTION 8: In addition to promoting multifunctional land uses and spatially targeting land use change incentives, what more could be done by Government or others to reduce the risk that we displace more food production and environmental impacts abroad? Please give details for your answer.

Monitoring land use change or production on agricultural land

This document appears to start from the premise that there will be a need to change land use or production on agricultural land. This is incorrect. The priority for land use change must be the regeneration and repurposing of brownfield land, as highlighted in the response below. Change of land use or production on agricultural land should be the exception and the monitoring regime must provide information about why any land use change has been considered necessary and what the loss of land equates to in terms of lost food production.

Accounting for displaced food production impacts in project appraisals

The LUF must encourage the right behaviours across the board, which would include prioritising the use of previously developed land to support the built environment. No housing and/or employment space should be considered for agricultural land unless and until all the brownfield land has been fully repurposed. It is already clear that there is no genuine need to lose 150,000 hectares of agricultural land to housing by 2050. Please see this Homes for Everyone report[6] for evidence about the availability of existing land supply.

The LUF should ensure that policies require alternative options to be fully examined and articulate the risks associated with any unnecessary loss of land to the built environment, including the risk of allowing solar on farmland and infrastructure across the countryside.

Protecting the best agricultural land from permanent land use changes

Yes, additional protections are necessary in policy. As an example, footnote 65 in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) should be moved to the substantive text and should emphasis that the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land must be prevented. Footnote 7 of the NPPF should also be moved to the substantive text to provide more protection for our ecosystems and the most important natural capital assets.

It should also be noted that a temporary land use change may cause permanent loss of land for agricultural purposes and could also result in the permanent loss of endangered/threatened species in that location.

Other (please specify)

A comprehensive land use framework must consider the following risks:

[6] https://homesforeveryone.org/Homes-For-Everyone-Briefing.pdf

- **Global environmental risks**: The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report highlights that, over the next ten years, three of the four most pressing risks are extreme weather events, biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse, as well as natural resource shortages. These risks must be factored into all land use decision-making processes.
- **Threats to food production**: Climate change poses a significant risk to food production within the UK. While the UK's food self-sufficiency rate fluctuates, the increasing global challenges of climate change, nature loss, war and water insecurity mean the UK cannot rely on significant imports indefinitely. The long-term decline in the UK's natural capital represents an escalating threat to domestic food security. It is, therefore, essential that we prevent the further loss of farmland.
- **Nature islands and nature deserts**: The focus on allowing developers to 'pay to plunder', with the creation of new habitats using the funds generated, will create inequity of access to nature for some communities, and will result in disconnected nature islands (with a loss of wildlife foraging, food and water corridors). It is not enough to just pay to create new habitats, they take years to become established and populated and are, effectively, nature deserts in the short term. Mitigation and compensation (in accordance with the Mitigation Hierarchy) must provide appropriate recompense for any loss of natural capital.
- **Urbanisation and infrastructure expansion**: The growth of urban areas and infrastructure exacerbates climate-related issues, including increased flooding due to impermeable surfaces, urban heat islands and pollution from air and sewage contamination. We must reduce our land take for development and plan for the right things in the right places – like houses/employment space on previously developed land, freight on rail and water and buses on existing roads, rather than building new roads or additional lanes on motorways.
- **Cumulative land loss and associated impacts**: It is not merely the 150,000 hectares projected to be lost to development by 2050 that should concern policymakers. There must be consideration of the 'bigger picture'. The impacts of development include:
    a. a huge loss of natural capital that currently supports climate mitigation, nature's recovery and/or our future food security
    b. the mortality of birds and wildlife due to, for example, loss of habitat, collisions with power lines or increased exposure to pollution
    c. extensive economic harm to farmers and/or rural/tourism businesses.

As set out in our response to question 2, the government should also ensure that policy is fully evidence based and requires the use of the Treasury Green Book, the ENCA guidance, the Mitigation Hierarchy and adherence to a Green Claims code for the public sector.

QUESTION 9: What should Government consider in increasing private investment towards appropriate land use changes?

There is a lack of trust in solutions which rely on private investment due to the excessive returns and benefits demanded by investors. Any use of private sector funding must be accompanied by an appropriate contract that sees the public sector rewarded for any public funding utilised in the initiative. Such an arrangement also must not give investors influence in land-related decisions or yet more advantages in the planning ecosystem (there is currently significant bias towards developers).

In relation to enabling the greater use of nature-based solutions, it is astounding that the government has invested £22bn in unproven carbon capture and storage systems without any consideration of the alternative nature-based solution - restoring our peat mosses. This would be much more cost effective and much less environmentally harmful! One of the many advantages of carbon sequestration via peatland is its own negligible carbon footprint. There is no requirement for manufacturing of major technology or equipment and no ongoing use of fossil-fuel based power (although we do recognise that restoration techniques might involve some initial machine-using groundwork and some installation of plastic dams or pipes). Restored peat mosses require relatively low maintenance, perhaps some weed incursion control, but mostly it is over to the forces of nature and time to deliver the benefits.

There should be an appropriate monitoring regime to ensure such schemes deliver the agreed benefits. Any such initiatives must be staffed by highly experienced programme managers.

The government must also ensure that policies are robust enough to cover circumstances where, for example, in the event of potential cost escalation or overrun, there is protection for the public purse in relation to any commitments made.

QUESTION 10: What changes are needed to accelerate 30by30 delivery, including by enabling Protected Landscapes to contribute more? Please provide any specific suggestions.

- *Strengthened Protected Landscapes legislation (around governance and regulations or duties on key actors) with a greater focus on nature*

Whilst we agree that the regulations around Protected Landscapes should be strengthened, this is true for all aspects of our natural environment, including undesignated ecologically rich land. Given the release of over 2,400 hectares of Green Belt, including best and most versatile farmland, irreplaceable habitats and numerous sites of biological importance in the recently adopted Greater Manchester spatial plan, it is clear that there are no genuine protections for nature or for our natural capital assets.

It is hard for Protected Landscapes to deliver more when they are under repeated threat of development. In Greater Manchester, for example, there is a current planning application which aims to completely fell a woodland site of biological importance and replace it with a 22m high warehouse! In the same area, a 335-hectare peat moss (irreplaceable and restorable, according to Natural England) is also under threat from construction, with Natural England suggesting it will either be significantly damaged or completely destroyed by the size and scale of the proposed developments.

- *Tools: such as greater alignment of existing Defra schemes with the 30by30 criteria*

Any tools created must support the comprehensive range of nature-rich areas, including those that are not considered to be Protected Landscapes or within Nature Recovery schemes. Any environmentally/ecologically rich site should be able to apply for funding, for example, to ensure that these proposals do not result in a two-tier countryside, with nature islands/deserts as mentioned above.

A detailed monitoring regime should also be implemented to support understanding of the achievement of the government's goals and aspirations.

● Resources: such as funding or guidance for those managing Protected Landscapes for nature

As set out above, any resources created to support the achievement of 30x30 must be accessible and appropriate for undesignated but environmentally/ecologically rich sites.

● Other (please specify)

We look forward to having the opportunity to review the delivery strategy that will be published later this year. We hope it will propose genuine policy protections for nature-rich areas. Without such protections, it will be extremely challenging to accelerate progress towards 30by30.

QUESTION 11: What approaches could cost-effectively support nature and food production in urban landscapes and on land managed for recreation?

Communities are best placed to identify initiatives in their own areas (which may involve tree/hedge planting, community orchards and allotments, bird and bat boxes, fun for young people, like a maize maze, etc). To deliver such initiatives, communities will need access to funding.

The Homes for Everyone Report, see our response to question 8, identifies opportunities to reduce development pressure on urban green spaces.

QUESTION 12: How can Government ensure that development and infrastructure spatial plans take advantage of potential co-benefits and manage trade-offs?

There must be an evidenced-based approach that requires all initiatives to follow the Treasury Green Book to appraise alternatives and to quantify impacts such as those that affect our natural capital and/or our socio-economic requirements. See also our response to question 2 above.

QUESTION 13: How can local authorities and Government better take account of land use opportunities in transport planning?

There must be an insistence on prioritising **sustainable** passenger and freight transport options to reduce the environmental/ecological impact of transport requirements on land use.

In relation to employment spaces, there are huge benefits to transporting freight by rail or water, including reduced carbon emissions, reduced traffic collisions and reduced air, noise, light, vibration and water pollution. Encouraging employees to travel by public transport also brings benefits in terms of productivity.

In relation to new dwellings, an integrated approach to planning for housing and planning for transport needs to be taken. The government and local authorities should consider the approach recommended by Create Streets in 'Road to Nowhere'.

By increasing the density of housing, it is possible to increase walking and cycling, to support public transport, to reduce land take and to increase green space for residents. This has been very successfully achieved on the continent (Vauban & Rieselfeld, Freiburg, Germany).

High-density, compact, walkable/cyclable developments must be mandatory and, instead of funding new roads, developer contributions should pay for public transport.

QUESTION 14: How can Government support closer coordination across plans and strategies for different sectors and outcomes at the local and regional level?

The government should insist that climate mitigation, nature's recovery and our future food security is given the same level of priority as economic growth.

This is not currently the case. Environmental and ecological assets and issues are subordinated (the Greater Manchester spatial plan provides a good example of this).

The LNRS should inform local plans, rather than nature's recovery, for example, being unnecessarily constrained by proposed development.

To ensure a greater level of local and regional democratic accountability, those with decision making power should be reminded that the Nolan Principles apply to land-use decisions as much as in any other area of public life.

The government should also ensure that all sectors, at all levels adhere to the same principles:

1. **PREVENT** loss of best farmland, **PROTECT** ecosystems, **PREPARE** for climate change.
2. **RECYCLE** or **REPURPOSE** first before impacting land that could be used to support climate mitigation, nature's recovery or our future food security.
3. Adopt an **EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO ALTERNATIVES** using Treasury Green Book guidance and Enabling Natural Capital Approaches.

QUESTION 15: Would including additional major landowners and land managers in the Adaptation Reporting Power process (see above) support adaptation knowledge sharing?

Yes

Please give any reasons or alternative suggestions.

This should be adopted for major landowners and land managers and should be voluntary for those under an agreed threshold. All reporting should be to a predetermined standard and MUST meet the requirements of the Green Claims Code (see our response to question 2 above).

QUESTION 16: Below is a list of activities the Government could implement to support landowners, land managers, and communities to understand and prepare for the impacts of climate change. Please select the activities you think should be prioritised and give any reasons for your answer, or specific approaches you would like to see.

- *Providing better information on local climate impacts to inform local decision making and strategies (for example, translating UK Climate Projections into what these mean in terms of on-the-ground impacts on farming, buildings, communities and nature)*
- *Providing improved tools and guidance for turning climate information into tangible actions (for example, how to produce an adaptation plan for different sectors)*
- *Developing and sharing clearer objectives and resilience standards (for example, a clear picture and standards of good practice for each sector under a 2°C climate scenario)*
- *Supporting the right actions in the right places in a changing climate (for example, prioritising incentives for sustainable land uses where they will be most resilient to climate change)*
- *Other (please specify)*

All of the above actions would be welcome, but all reporting and information must adhere to the Green Claims Code (see our response to question 2). When considering the right actions in the right places, the brownfield first policy MUST be robustly applied to ensure that urban or rural greenfield land can be focused on climate mitigation, nature's recovery and future food security.

In addition to the above, funding for landowners/managers, farm clusters and communities will be essential.

QUESTION 17: What changes to how Government's spatial data is presented or shared could increase its value in decision making and make it more accessible?

- *Updating existing Government tools, apps, portals or websites*
- *Changes to support use through private sector tools, apps or websites*
- *Bringing data from different sectors together into common portals or maps*
- *Increasing consistency across spatial and land datasets*
- *More explanation or support for using existing tools, apps or websites*
- *Greater use of geospatial indicators such as Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) and INSPIRE IDs to allow data to be more easily displayed on a map*
- *Other (please specify)*

Again, all the above actions would be welcome. In addition, the government could consider:

- Video-based guidance/training with case studies and examples to help first time users.
- Alerts when new data is available.
- Any data that is available to public sector employees, developers, landowners, etc MUST also be openly available to communities.
- Any use of private sector tools must be free to use by communities.

When considering the land use requirements of housing or employment need, an evidence-based approach must be taken. ONS has a range of datasets which appear to be ignored by decision-makers.

QUESTION 18: What improvements could be made to how spatial data is captured, managed, or used to support land use decisions in the following sectors? Please give any reasons for your answer or specific suggestions.

- *Development and planning: such as environmental survey data*
- *Farming: such as supply chain data and carbon or nature baseline measurements*
- *Environment and forestry: such as local and volunteer-collected environmental records*
- *Recreation and access: such as accessible land and route data*
- *Government-published land and agricultural statistics*

The Green Claims Code must be adopted and adhered to by all sectors as, for example, environmental survey data related to development and planning can be incomplete, out of date and/or does not cover the whole of the development area.

A comprehensive monitoring regime should be established to ensure baseline and ongoing data capture provide genuine decision support. Feedback on monitoring data should be requested from all users, including communities.

Citizen science could provide additional opportunities for capturing spatial data, working with schools as part of the sustainability curriculum, for example.

Trust in the data is essential. ONS may be able to supplement some spatial data with additional datasets for validation purposes.

QUESTION 19: What improvements are needed to the quality, availability and accessibility of ALC data to support effective land use decisions?

The proposals set out in the LUF will generate improvements to the quality, availability and accessibility of the ALC data. That said, much of our agricultural land supports declining populations of farmland birds. It would be beneficial for the surveys to capture information about these populations to further support decision-making and understand more about the natural capital value of the land. Details about the underlying soil system should also be captured (if the agricultural land overlies peat, for example).

QUESTION 20: Which sources of spatial data should Government consider making free or easier to access, including via open licensing, to increase their potential benefit?

Communities should not be disadvantaged by the cost of access to information. Other users will secure access via their workplace, whereas residents will need to either fundraise through donations or pay for access themselves. This leads to inequities of access to data which must be eradicated. Any data that communities need to understand land-use decisions must be available free of charge.

QUESTION 21: What gaps in land management capacity or skills do you anticipate as part of the land use transition? Please include any suggestions to address these gaps.

- *Development and planning*
- *Farming*
- *Environment and forestry*
- *Recreation and access*
- *Other (please specify)*

The key gap will be the lack of knowledge about how to use the Treasury Green Book and the Enabling a Natural Capital Approach when assessing initiatives. There is also a huge lack of understanding of the term ‘sustainable development’, with many interpreting it as just the materials dwelling, employment spaces and roads are built with (with no consideration being given to the impact of the change of land use, for example).

Training will also be needed to increase awareness of environmental and wildlife/nature laws and regulations.

Understanding the viability of developments and/or land use changes must also be considered a priority.

For residents, information and guidance about the opportunities for community-led initiatives should be provided.

Many of these gaps can be addressed through short videos, guidance notes and templates.

QUESTION 22: How could the sharing of best practice in innovative land use practices and management be improved?

There are many examples of ways to share best practice that can be adapted from other types of initiative. These could include setting up interest groups (knowledge sharing communities), rewarding excellence (publicity, awards ceremonies, etc), creating a 'buddy' system (where high performers are linked with those who are struggling to achieve productivity improvements, for example).

QUESTION 23: Should a Land Use Framework for England be updated periodically, and if so, how frequently should this occur?

Yes, every 5 years

Please confirm how communities have been/will be involved in the workshops planned during February and March 2025 and how they will be involved in the future.

QUESTION 24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed areas above? Please include comments or suggestions with your answer.

Neither agree nor disagree

Whilst we recognise that the actions listed are all important, the Government should make it clear that the LUF sits above all other spatial planning requirements, with a view to enforcing the 3 key principles:

1. ***PREVENT*** *loss of best farmland,* ***PROTECT*** *ecosystems,* ***PREPARE*** *for climate change.*
2. ***RECYCLE OR REPURPOSE*** *first.*
3. Take and **EVIDENCE-BASED** approach to **ALTERNATIVES**.

Government policies must also ensure, as set out in our response to question 2 above, that there is an evidence-based approach that requires the use of the Treasury Green Book, the ENCA guidance, the Mitigation Hierarchy and adherence to a Green Claims code for the public sector.