

Forum

Learning from the Past, Planning for the Future...

Blanche Cameron*

Ever since the National Planning Policy Framework hove into view, it has been polarising opinions, either for or against this most radical shake up of UK planning policy since just after the Second World War. Suddenly, what was a highly (some say over) complex system of thousands of pages of detailed planning guidance has been simplified to a 58 page document, which has been through a year of consultation before coming into law.

It is interesting to consider how the NPPF is now being viewed and applied in different contexts. Flatman and Perring's paper explores the potential (positive and negative) impacts of the NPPF on archaeological practice, in terms of conservation, but also in social and cultural terms – the fear being that, without the proper requirements in place, archaeological evidence may at best be conserved, but without sufficient capacity to research, understand and integrate its meaning for us and our future.

RESET Development advocates working with nature, for the ecological adaptation of the built environment. The UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2005 assessed the world's ecosystems and found almost every one of them to be damaged, if not in rapid and severe decline. The conclusion was this: that the capacity of the earth – our natural

life support system - to maintain human life beyond 2050 was in doubt.

RESET's emphasis therefore is advocating working with nature to increase our resilience to the impacts of climate shocks, and impending economic and resource shortages, but also to maintain and restore the ecosystems on which we rely for the benefit of ourselves and future generations.

It is interesting to see the parallels between this article on archaeological concerns and issues raised in consultation to the NPPF from built environment circles. The potential to lose knowledgeable people from local authorities through austerity measures is common to both. But the NPPF itself also tends to place the emphasis on product over process – the hard stuff. There is too little value placed on the multi-functionality that the hard stuff does or is capable of doing: that nature doesn't just give either as green roofs and walls, rain gardens, street trees, bioswales, parks and gardens for climate adaptation, or the cultural and social identity and understanding to be gained from the process of understanding of archaeological heritage.

So how might planning policy better understand and incorporate the value of integrating nature? Amongst other things, the Natural Environment White Paper currently going through parliament calls for 'bigger, better, more and joined' places where nature can thrive, ecological networks and sites, in towns and cities as much as in the non-urban

* Director, RESET Development,
4th Floor, 16 Hoxton Square,
London N1 6NT United Kingdom
blanche.cameron@reset-development.org

landscape. It also recognises the biodiversity value of towns and cities can be as great – and often greater – than in rural landscapes so often dominated by industrial agriculture, with its widespread use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and other inputs.

A wider understanding is needed at policy level to understand the value and potential of our existing assets – time will tell whether we are capable of developing this more mature approach, and conserving and secur-

ing these assets, and the capacity to interpret and pass on their meaning, for the benefit of the present and future generations.

RESET Development champions the ecological adaptation of our built environment - for a biodiverse, healthy and resilient future.

RESET's mission is to expand people's awareness, knowledge, skills and capacity for transformational action, through training, advocacy and research.