National Planning Policy Framework

Exploring the implications of the new 2026 NPPF

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The implications of the new 2026 NPPF

Introduction

The new 2026 National Planning Policy Framework ("NPPF"), published on 17 August 2026, sets out the Government's latest national planning policies for England and provides the framework for both plan-making and decision-making.

The 2026 NPPF replaces the, now-outdated, December 2024 Framework and represents a shift towards a clearer, more nationally standardised and delivery-focused planning system. It introduces a suite of **national decision-making policies** with the intention of making development management decisions more certain, consistent and streamlined.

The principal thrust of the NPPF is the delivery of housing, but there is also a clear strengthening of support, more relevant to Glenny LLP core sectors (i.e. industrial, storage, distribution and logistics uses). National decision-making policies, in respect of these sectors are considered, in further detail, below.

Key changes

The NPPF is explicitly pro-growth. The Government's stated objective is to **boost** housing supply, **unlock economic growth** and provide a more certain and rules-based planning system.

The NPPF places much greater emphasis on **residential** (and mixed-use) development in sustainable and well-connected locations, with a particular focus on housing around **well-connected railway stations.**

A particularly important change, implemented by the NPPF, is the introduction of national decision-making policies. These are intended to standardise key development management considerations across England and reduce the scope for local policies to depart from national policy. As such, existing local development plan policies (where they are **materially inconsistent** with the new national policies) are to be given **very limited weight** in the decision-making process.

Whilst important to acknowledge residential objectives, as noted above, the purpose of this note considers, more specifically, the strengthening of national policy support for business growth, industrial development, freight and logistics, and data centres.

Industrial and logistics development

Industrial Development

The NPPF materially strengthens the national policy position for commercial and industrial development.

New NPPF Policy E2 requires **substantial weight** to be given to the economic benefits of proposals which allow businesses to invest, expand and adapt.

This is a clear strengthening of the previous position regarding economic support.

The policy also requires consideration, where relevant, of market signals, the availability of existing land and buildings, changing sector requirements and the specific locational requirements of the proposed use when assessing whether there is an unmet need.

For industrial developers, the key message is therefore straightforward: **economic benefits are now an expressly weighted consideration** rather than simply a general policy objective.

Freight and Logistics

New NPPF Policy E3 relates to **freight and logistics**, specifically. The policy supports the effective and efficient movement of goods and recognises the locational requirements of logistics use. In summary, policy supports freight and logistics developments that

- Have good access to appropriate transport networks,
- Use sustainable transport modes where possible,
- Minimise environmental and neighbouring impacts,
- Properly address night-time operations where relevant and
- Provide sufficient and secure parking for HGVs and other vehicles.

New NPPF policy E3, therefore, provides a stronger and more explicit national basis for warehousing, distribution, logistics and strategic employment sites.

Overall, the 2026 NPPF improves the policy position for well-located industrial and logistics development.

Data Centres

It has been well documented that **data centres** are one of the clearest beneficiaries of the NPPF. This aligns with Data Centres being designated, last year as **'critical national infrastructure'.**

The NPPF expressly recognises the requirements of a modern, data-driven economy and requires development plans to provide for sectors including high-technology industries, data centres and the infrastructure necessary to support them.

Importantly, this includes not just the data-centre buildings themselves, but also:
- Associated generating capacity,
- Electricity network infrastructure,
- Grid connections and
- Clusters and sites for data-driven and high-technology industries.

Green Belt

The NPPF retains the fundamental principles of Greenbelt policy. Development which is 'inappropriate' remains harmful by definition and substantial weight continues to be given to Greenbelt harm, including harm to openness.

The important point for **industrial and data-centre** schemes is, therefore, not that Greenbelt policy has been relaxed generally (in terms of decision making) but, rather, the balancing exercise has potentially changed.

Where a proposal remains 'inappropriate development', the applicant must still demonstrate Very Special Circumstances ("VSC").

The case requires the potential Greenbelt harm, together with any other harm, to be clearly outweighed by other considerations – industrial and data centre uses could now more readily achieve a VSC case given the support in the new NPPF, in relation to these uses, noted above.

Conclusions

The NPPF represents a materially more pro-growth planning framework.

For industrial and logistics development, the introduction of dedicated national policies and the requirement to give substantial weight to economic benefits should strengthen the planning case for well-located commercial development.

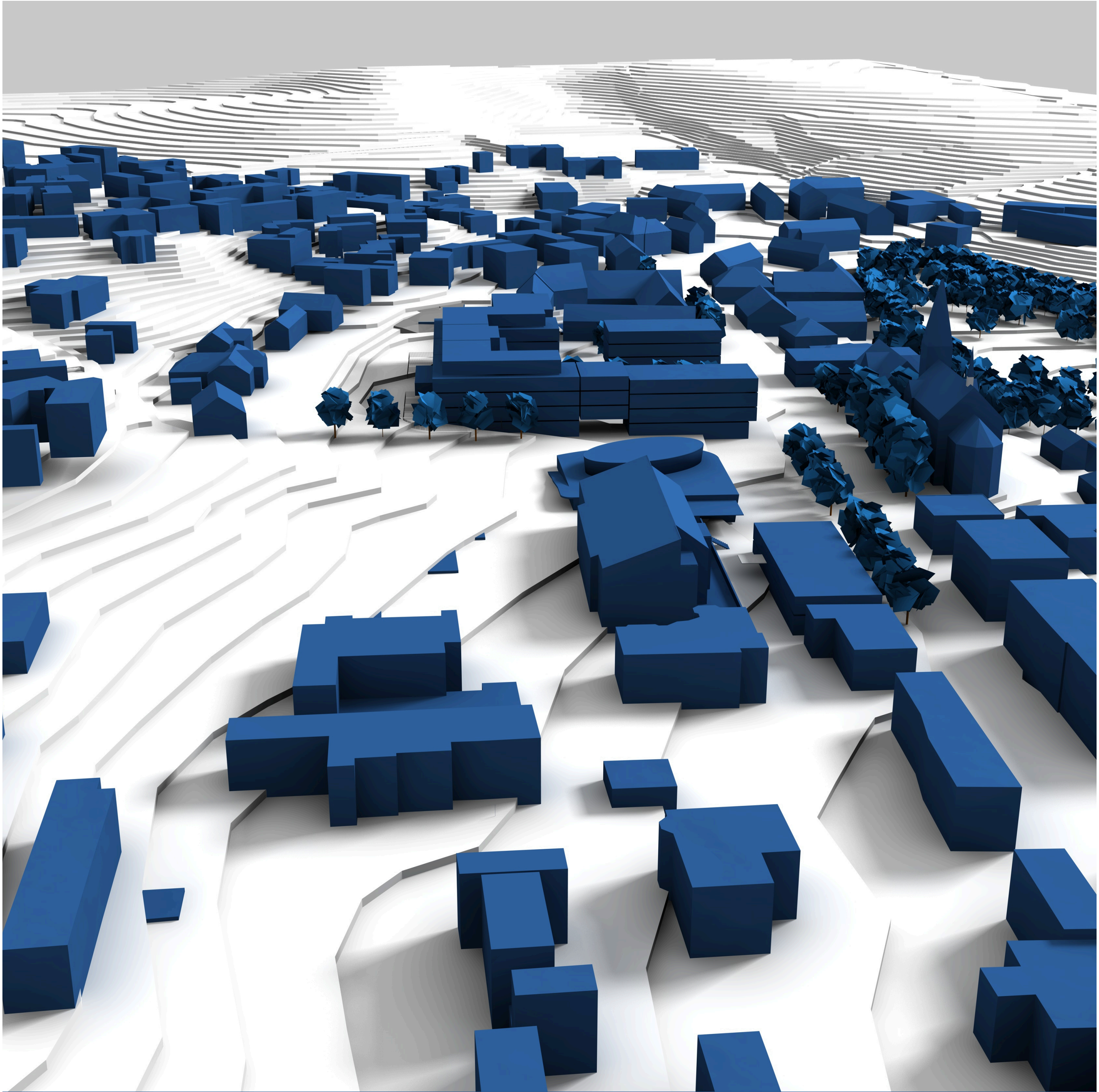
In respect of Data Centres, the NPPF expressly recognises 'data centres', 'digital infrastructure', associated 'generating capacity' and 'grid connections' as requirements of the **modern economy** and expects these needs to be planned for.

For Greenbelt land, the position is more nuanced. The Greenbelt remains protected and inappropriate development continues to require VSC. However, the strengthened national policy support for economic growth and strategic infrastructure means that the economic and public-interest benefits of major industrial and data-centre schemes may now carry greater weight in the overall planning balance (if a VSC route is to be pursued).

In summary, the 2026 NPPF **does not remove planning constraints**, but it changes the starting point: nationally important economic development, particularly where it responds to an identified need and has specific locational requirements, now has a considerably stronger policy footing.

All schemes and sites will, however, continue to be considered on their individual merits; having regard to their location, Greenbelt status, accessibility, infrastructure requirements and environmental, landscape, transport and amenity impacts.

This note seeks to provide a high-level summary only. Should you wish to further discuss to understand the implications for your specific sites and aspirations then please do not hesitate to contact Luke Thrumble, Glenny LLP's Head of Planning.



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