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Trust



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cycling  
UK



RAMBLERS

sustrans

## Briefing from the Walking and Cycling Alliance on PLANNING POLICY

Westminster Hall debate (Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January, 9.30am)

### INTRODUCTION

This briefing outlines the views of the 7 organisations comprising the Walking and Cycling Alliance (WACA):

- The Bicycle Association, the national trade association for the UK cycle industry;
- The Bikeability Trust, the charity which promotes the Bikeability cycle training programme;
- British Cycling, the governing body for competitive cycling;
- Cycling UK, the national membership charity promoting everyday cycling;
- Living Streets, the national charity promoting everyday walking;
- Ramblers, the national charity primarily focussed on recreational walking; and
- Sustrans, the walking and cycling charity, best known for the National Cycle Network.

### BACKGROUND

In 2020, the Government proposed reforms to England's planning system in a [White Paper](#). Concerns about the original proposals prompted the formation of the [Better Planning Coalition](#) (BPC). BPC's members are united by a common goal: **a planning system fit for people, nature and the climate**. Four of the WACA organisations (Cycling UK, Living Streets, the Ramblers and Sustrans) are members of the BPC, while the others are broadly supportive of its calls.

WACA supported the amendments that BPC proposed to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill during its Commons stages, particularly those aimed at **incorporating climate, health and nature considerations into planning policies and decision-making**. We also proposed an amendment to **embed walking, cycling and rights of way networks in local planning authorities' Development Plans**.

Since the LURB was passed by the Commons, the Government has launched a consultation on:

- some [minor revisions to its National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF); and
- an '[NPPF prospectus](#)', outlining not only these revisions but also some further changes to the NPPF which it proposes to make in the future.

During the Commons debates on the LURB, the Government had suggested that WACA's (and BPC's) concerns would best be dealt with through the NPPF rather than through legislation. However **the new draft NPPF does not include any new policy on these issues**. Instead, it defers further action on sustainable transport, and indeed on the climate more generally, to a future NPPF revision.

We therefore urge MPs speaking in the debate to reiterate calls for action on these issues.

### INCORPORATING CLIMATE, HEALTH AND NATURE CONSIDERATIONS INTO PLANNING POLICIES AND DECISION-MAKING

The [Government's Levelling Up White Paper](#) defined Levelling Up Missions for public transport connectivity (Mission 3), health (Mission 7) and Wellbeing (Mission 8). Yet neither the Bill nor the draft NPPF revisions contain targeted measures to address these issues.

The BPC continues to seek amendments to the LURB, aimed at tackling the following:

- **Climate:** BPC seeks to ensure that national planning policies, local plan-making and development decisions are all consistent with the ‘net zero’ target and carbon budgets set under the Climate Change Act. This is particularly important for the WACA organisations, given the need to ensure that the location (as well as the design) of new developments supports active travel and public or shared transport, and thus to avoid entrenching car-dependence.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** BPC’s amendment would require English local planning authorities’ Development Plans to incorporate a ‘general health and well-being objective’ – to reduce health inequalities and improve well-being – and to consider this when making planning decisions. It specifically mandates local planning authorities and the Secretary of State where appropriate to have special regard to the creation of walkable ‘[20 minute neighbourhoods](#)’ and walking, wheeling and cycling routes.
- **Environmental Outcome Reports (EORs):** The Government has proposed that EORs will replace the current processes for assessing the climate, air quality and other environmental impacts of Development Plans and specific new developments. BPC’s amendment would require full parliamentary scrutiny for any proposed changes to these processes.
- **Permitted Development Rights (PDRs):** BPC fears that the over-use of PDRs (whereby planning permission is not required for certain types of development) risks enabling developments that would have adverse environmental, heritage and other impacts. BPC’s amendment would require the Government to establish a review of the impacts of PDRs, and to publish a report of its recommendations within 12 months of LURB coming into force.

For more information on these, see [BPC’s Commons Report Stage briefing](#).

## EMBEDDING CYCLING, WALKING AND RIGHTS OF WAY NETWORK PLANS IN DEVELOPMENT PLANS

The Government’s [new draft NPPF](#) lists (in Chapter 12) various “*aspects of policy which may require updating*”. These include “*better environmental and health outcomes [and] delivering appropriate infrastructure (including sustainable transport provision*”; adding that the Government “*proposes to assess what changes are needed to reflect the government commitment to encourage active travel through the ‘Gear Change’ programme ... and wider work to reduce carbon consumption from transport planning choices as set out in the Transport Decarbonisation Plan*”.

Regrettably though, action to address these issues has been **deferred to a future update of the NPPF**, with policies to enhance the ‘beauty’ of new developments being prioritised instead. Whilst promoting ‘beauty’ is clearly desirable, addressing the climate impacts of development is surely a lot more urgent and critical. **A beautiful development in an unsustainable location is still an unsustainable development.**

The Walking and Cycling Alliance therefore seeks the following, either in policy in legislation:

- A requirement for local planning authorities to **include Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans** (LCWIPs, drawn up by local transport authorities) **and Rights of Way Improvement Plans** (i.e. RoWIPs, drawn up by local highway authorities) **in their Development Plans**. This would address the problem of local planning authorities unwittingly (or even intentionally) frustrating the relevant local transport or/highway authority's aspirations for walking, cycling or rights of way networks, by not recording these networks in their own Development Plans. In practice, this would help to safeguard land that might be needed for walking and cycling routes or rights of way (e.g. disused railway lines), and to secure developer contributions to introduce or upgrade such routes.
- An amendment to the NPPF to **mandate local planning authorities to reject developments that are likely to entrench car-dependence**. At present, paragraph 111 of the current NPPF (or paragraph 113 under the proposed renumbering) makes it very difficult for councils to justify rejecting planning permission for car-dependent developments "on highways grounds", contrary to the Government's Net Zero goals. It should be amended to give them a clear mandate to do so, as clearly as paragraph 134 / 136 requires them to reject developments that are not beautiful.
- A further amendment to the NPPF to **support the principle of [20 minute neighbourhoods](#)**, where key facilities (e.g. schools, healthcare, public transport) are within a short walk of people's homes, thereby enabling more people to walk, wheel or cycle for their everyday journeys