

Proposed Land Use Framework for England

August 2022

1. A Land Use Framework for England

The UK has finite land resources. Without a radical rethink we will not 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. A Land Use Framework for England is a systems thinking approach which will deliver integrated, collaborative and place-based decision making and optimise multifunctional benefits from our land.

Since 2018 the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (FFCC) has been convening discussions nationally, and trialling a Land Use Framework approach at a local level through pilots in Devon and Cambridgeshire, funded jointly by FFCC, Environment Agency and the Geospatial Commission¹. Over the last year support for a Land Use Framework has grown. Most recently, in June, Defra published the Government Food Strategy which states:

'In 2023, we will publish a land use framework that will reflect all our objectives for English Agriculture, the environment and net zero. It will also reflect and respond to the work of the House of Lords special inquiry committee into land use in England. This framework will inform incentives we build into our agri-environment schemes and should be a valuable resource for responsible authorities as they prepare their Local Nature Recovery Strategies.' (p15)

In response to this significant development, FFCC is now proposing a Land Use Framework which we've developed through our consultation and research with partners. The framework we propose has two important differences to the current government proposition.

1. A Land Use Framework must bridge across the whole of land use – urban and rural - and not only agriculture, nature and net zero land uses, but also the town and country planning system, and national planning schemes.
2. A National Land Use Framework must mesh with Local Land Use Frameworks if the approach is to succeed – both a top-down and bottom-up approach is required.

2. What is a Land Use Framework?

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. It consists of a set of agreed principles and practices for local and national organisations, businesses and communities, guiding transparent, inclusive, evidence-led decision making.

A Land Use Framework must help steer decisions about infrastructure and housing but also ensure that networks of green infrastructure, open spaces, trees and wildlife corridors contribute to urban and rural sustainability. Importantly it needs to cover both planning and land management decisions, joining up across a longstanding policy divide and working cross-departmentally at national government level, reaching beyond Defra and rural land use issues. Only by bridging current policy silos will the best multifunctional use of land be possible. As well as joining up policy, it should bring together different disciplines of research, data and evidence to inform decision making. It should also engage those whose plans are presently largely mediated by 'the

¹ See Annex 2 for more background to FFCC's work and initial findings from the two pilot projects

market', such as farmers and growers. It will help those investing in nature-based solution financial mechanisms identify the most appropriate opportunities.

A Land Use Framework will bring people together to make better decisions about land uses at the spatial scale appropriate to the nature of the situation. The approach has the potential to facilitate the transition from current, mainly homogeneous land uses to more multifunctional, complex, regenerative and nature friendly uses, at scale. Only then will we see the synergistic improvements to landscape, soil, water, biodiversity and beauty that people have told us they want and that will build resilience against environmental and economic shocks.

3. Achieving vital UK targets

A more deliberative and strategic approach to land use decision making would enable more government targets to be achieved, joining up the delivery of many complementary goals for jobs, housing, nature recovery and net zero. The most appropriate land would be used for the mix of uses it is best suited to, delivering better outcomes for communities, the environment and a greener economy.

Targets government has set out in the last few years that have significant implications for land use include:

- Net zero by 2050
- 300,000 homes a year
- 30,000 ha trees a year
- 30% of land and sea protected by 2030
- Strategic road and rail developments
- New flood and coastal defences
- Regional powerhouse cities and freeports
- Halving effects of air pollution
- Exceeding biodiversity and water quality objectives
- Restoring 75% of protected wildlife sites
- 70% of farms in the Sustainable Farming Initiative
- Sustainable soil management
- Enhancing natural scenery and heritage
- Designating new National Parks, AONBs and recreational routes

Some targets are held by Government at a national level and others are handed to local authorities and arms-length bodies to determine and deliver. To deliver these targets will require a new approach to land use - a coordinated top-down and bottom-up approach.

There are also important gaps in these targets which need to be filled:

- How much food should the UK aim to produce and where, to improve our food security, growing more of the healthy food we need that is suited to current and future UK growing conditions?
- How much land should be devoted to energy, such as BECCS², solar, wind, and where should it go?
- How can we incorporate green infrastructure across the landscape and improve public access to nature so that everyone can get the demonstrable benefits?
- How sustainable does the UK want to be for timber production – what type should the UK grow, and where?

These questions and targets are the material reality now facing planners, farmers, landowners, and land managers all around the country. They are important for ensuring the UK's short and long term sustainable growth. And they will help avoid sub-optimal decisions, for example use of the best and most versatile agricultural land for solar farms or tree plantations.

² Bioenergy with carbon capture and storage

A Land Use Framework also provides benefits in delivery – ‘getting stuff done’ – reducing conflicts over land use, saving time and money. Collaborative approaches help align and pool resources, share data, knowledge, and skills, leading to better long-term decisions being made. Engaging local communities at an early stage is more likely to direct their energies and local knowledge into creative, practical ideas and solutions.

A framework will help leverage and align private finance and philanthropic funds in support of transparent and democratic, fair and sustainable investments on land. It would provide more clarity and guidance to investors. At a local level, strengthening the horizontal relationships in places (‘engaging the system’) improves the likelihood of implementing Government’s national policy intentions, to support more resilient and adaptive communities.

4. The Land Use Framework approach

A Land Use Framework identifies a new ‘land-led’ organising principle to resolve complex systems issues through bringing different stakeholders together. The process starts with convening the leadership community who are willing to co-operate in service of the shared goal of improving land use decisions, working in a deliberative, collaborative and purposeful way.

Through our consultations, we have identified six ways of working that make this approach to land use decisions distinctive and relevant to meet the many and diverse policy intentions.

Six Ways of Working:

- **Establishing leadership commitment:** the Land Use Framework must be backed by senior institutional leaders across the system, who are willing to work together to create the right conditions for success. They must ensure the process has serious and long-term support (especially if it gets tough). The leadership responsibilities include agreeing the goal, convening the system, co-designing and testing the framework, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, learning and adapting³.
- **Transparent and inclusive:** the land use framework should involve multiple stakeholders (appropriate to the scale and the problem) in a genuinely inclusive and participative process. This will ensure legitimacy, mediate conflicts and negotiate robust solutions. Participatory mechanisms ensure a breadth of voices are heard, including those who care about or are impacted by the consequences of land use decisions but might not normally be involved in decision making.
- **Evidence based:** land use decisions should be informed by critical inquiry and appropriate and reliable data (including using mapping tools, scientific and qualitative data) to evaluate risks, costs and benefits at several spatial scales and over time. Hearing the lived experience of citizens is an important component of the qualitative evidence gathering.
- **Integrative:** land use decisions should have all the nation’s targets, needs and aspirations for land in view, to be considered coherently and collaboratively across a wider area. The framework needs to integrate issues of agriculture, climate change and biodiversity alongside those that come under the planning system, housing, industrial development, as well as transport, infrastructure, energy and so on. Identifying and joining up ‘temporal’ goals, as well as spatial goals, helps chart pathways to progress on sticky issues, setting consistent short-term milestones and long-term aims.
- **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 incorporating smaller pockets of land which meet local needs. Often much can be learned from starting with particular

³ For design guidance see *Systems Thinking for Civil Servants*, and other toolkits

and pressing problems, in which many people have a real stake, iterating top-down and bottom-up thinking.

- **Learning from what works:** a Land Use Framework should learn from good practice past and present. Many previous initiatives have experimented with forms of coordinated decision making at different scales, developing a deeper understanding of local and regional leverage points. The best of these should be emulated.

5. Governance of a Land Use Framework

We have examined broadly two possibilities to provide oversight of a Land Use Framework at the national level.

1. Establishing a Land Use Commission, whose responsibility it is to oversee, integrate and guide national priorities and targets, and support local arrangements
2. Working with what exists already, proposing new powers for an existing body

There are benefits to both. Creating a specific national body provides clear and unequivocal national leadership. An independent coordination mechanism which is land-led would avoid slipping back into silo-ed business as usual. Alternatively, locating the work in an existing body (which importantly should have a legitimate cross-department remit) could get a framework up and running at a time when speed is of the essence. Either solution must provide five important functions:

- leadership, system engagement, advocacy
- land-led data assembly and coordination, compiling national targets, and ensuring quality evidence is available to track progress towards them
- commissioning, curating and disseminating research
- ‘deep-dives’ into specific cross-sectoral challenges and issues that need further examination
- monitoring the progress of local frameworks for national alignment

We have focussed here on what can be done within the existing arrangements, prioritising pace and progress, given the critical importance of getting on with some of the targets.

Similarly, views vary about the best scale, or boundary, for a local Land Use Framework – counties, districts, catchments, bioregions or landscape character areas. The point of the framework is that it should work across spatial scales and sectors. The important thing is that a local framework will create a template for balancing and mediating decisions for land use in that particular area, with multifunctionality being optimised; rather than a simplistic series of trade-offs of competing land uses, which risk not landing all the potential benefits that could be gained. It could also be used by landowners, farmers, and managers to help navigate the complex choices they face in an increasingly volatile and uncertain future, and to align their land use business decisions with shifts in their local landscapes and national imperatives.

We propose that the Responsible Body for holding the Land Use Framework locally is the County, or groups of unitary or other authorities. This anchors the work in structures which have democratic accountability with citizens. It will enable coverage of the whole of England – we anticipate developing a Local Land Use Framework becoming a duty for local institutions in time, requiring some additional resourcing.

At a local scale the capabilities required are:

- local credibility and capacity to convene, facilitate, strategise and project manage in complex systems
- ability to engage and mobilise institutions, businesses, and citizens
- legitimate access to sensitive (commercial or personal) data
- ability to navigate and resolve asymmetric power dynamics, access to resources and ‘voice’

The essential role for the local body is to lead and manage the process; commission appropriate expertise to assist; involve and engage local stakeholders, landowners, and managers; ensure access to relevant data and evidence; align with neighbours on boundary spanning issues; report on progress to national bodies.

We have found this six-step systems process, which can be adapted for national or local scales, a useful route map for getting started.

Six steps systems process

1. Establish

- Convene a cross sector group of leaders from the public, private and third sectors, representative of a wide range of land use interests, to work together to lead the process.
- Establish effective partnerships with key stakeholder organisations, ensure clear communications and close alignment with other initiatives.
- Work with key land decision makers to curate the questions they are trying to answer and how better data would improve land use decisions.

2. Scope

- Develop a shared overview of land use priorities and demands.
- Evaluate relevant data, mapping, documents and systems to identify overlaps, gaps and inconsistencies, any poor functionality, missing perspectives and to establish what is known and not known.
- Expose current land use decision making processes, who is involved, what data and evidence is used, what factors and objectives are considered and identify gaps, limitations and constraints, identifying the implications, opportunities and constraints.
- Establish the objectives the land use decision makers are trying to achieve, questions they are trying to answer, surfacing underpinning values and assumptions.

3. Create

- Facilitate the co-creation of a 'working framework' which establishes shared principles and processes against which future decisions on land use should be taken.
- Use participatory methods, spatial mapping tools, data assembly and analysis to imagine and model the impacts and value delivered by decisions for different future scenarios.
- Test early iterations of the framework on sentinel priority issues and data sets, widening application as the framework develops.
- Incorporate multiple data sets to trial how land use challenges can be mediated and outcomes integrated, seeking convergences and ways that resolve any potential conflicts.

4. Test

- Test and trial the framework and principles in an iterative process in the real system, to identify what is achievable, how to maximise benefits and improve data and evidence.
- Coordinate more detailed network/issue analysis where necessary.
- Organise additional citizen and stakeholder engagement activities, including ensuring the voices of the citizens of tomorrow are heard⁴.
- Deploy creative, spatial modelling and visualisation mechanisms, and other powerful tools, to help landowners, decision makers and stakeholders envisage and scenario-plan alternative futures.
- Model exemplars of varied multifunctional landscapes and places to give confidence in the direction of travel for these long-term decisions.

⁴ E.g. the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner in Wales

5. Learn and adapt

- Design processes which regularly and systematically collect and analyse the formative and summative lessons learned, in cycles of reflection, action and adaptation.
- Identify where there are tensions and win-win opportunities and how conflicts can be better resolved or reduced.
- Ensure learning is owned by and informs the work of key decision making structures, including the design of local agricultural support schemes, those involved in Local Nature Recovery Strategies, the planning process and national infrastructure bodies, as well as individual landowners and managers.

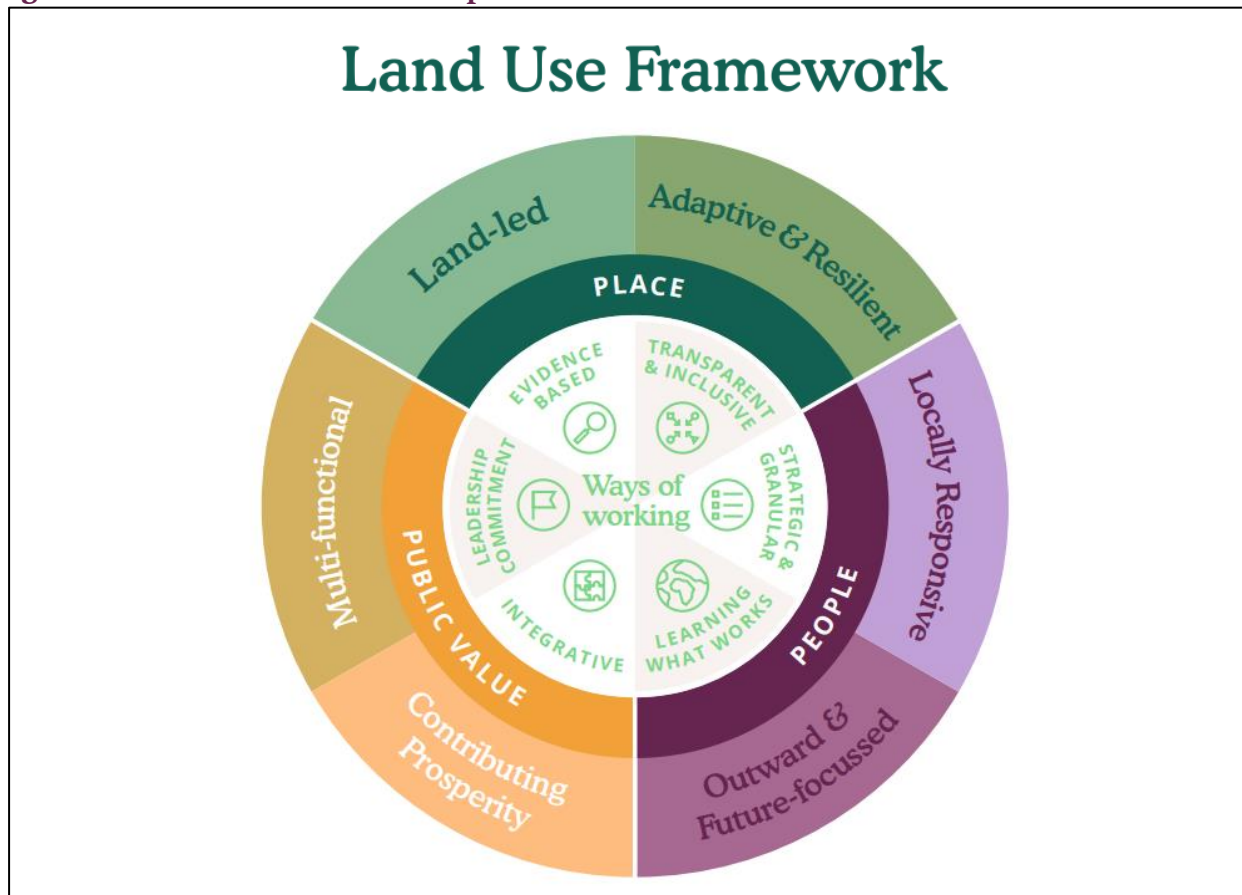
6. Embed and share

- Ensure that the Land Use Framework process and relationships are valued, embedded and sustained longer term amongst stakeholders.
- Report on progress to national, technical or professional bodies to ensure goals are delivered.
- Disseminate evidence and learning to policy, academic and professional bodies.
- Continue to connect and collaborate across institutional boundaries on landscape, catchment or strategic priorities.

6. The Principles of a Land Use Framework

Six Land Use Framework principles have been identified under the three headings of **Place, People and Public Value**, illustrated in Figure 1. These principles help shape our aspirations for future land use, capturing shared values about the optimal future use of land in all parts of the country. Taken together they help to operationalise the framework. The ways of working are embedded in the centre of the diagram.

Figure 1 Land Use Framework Principles



The framework has been developed into a draft working version, by setting out a series of questions under each principle – see Table 1. Answering the questions explores how each principle is being applied to a land use decision making situation. Table 1 links each question to potential practices, protocols and data which can help check each principle has been applied. This is being further developed through discussions with pilot stakeholders, including the addition of outcome indicators. We anticipate the number of questions will be expanded.

Table 1 Land Use Framework Assessment

Principles	Questions	Processes, data and evidence	Outcome indicators
Place			
1. Land-led	What would be the optimal uses of the land given its geology, morphology, soil types and prevailing weather?	Soil survey, BMV classification, geological maps, aspect, slope and climate data	
	What has the land been used for in the past, how was it managed and does that have relevance for future uses and management?	Historical maps, local knowledge, culture and food traditions	
	Will the proposed land use enhance existing wildlife habitats?	LNP opportunity mapping,	
	Is the proposed use appropriate to its wider setting and the local landscape character?	Landscape character maps,	
2. Adaptative and resilient	Is the land being used in a way that adapts to and mitigates change created by the climate crisis and the uncertainties and risks brought by increased flooding and drought?	Flood risk maps and forecasts, local knowledge about flooding and droughts,	
	Does the proposed land use help mitigate or reduce the effects of shifting seasons and temperatures and potential new pests and diseases?	Long term weather predictions, risk assessments and government alerts/guidance	
	Does the proposed land use help address national net zero targets?	Carbon credits, renewable energy generation, active travel provision	
	How adaptable are the proposed land uses in responding to multiple future scenarios?	'What works' reviews from international and national research. 'Futures' research and analysis from different disciplines.	

Principles	Questions	Processes, data and evidence	Outcome indicators
People			
3. Locally responsive	How are those who own, manage or farm the land involved in and incorporating local needs and aspirations into plans?	Neighbourhood plans, community surveys/forums, engagement around ELMS, housing needs	
	What is being done to strengthen or extend community engagement longer term?	Volunteer opportunities, citizen science projects, increased access, further outreach to hear more views	
	Does the decision-making process bring together views from the rural communities, local towns and villages and urban settlements?	Incorporating service plans at different scales – local and regional health services, primary, secondary tertiary education, transport links, business/employment hubs	
	How are local environmental experts being consulted during the decision making?	Biological records, local recorder network,	
4. Outward and future focused	Is local decision-making taking into account impacts on communities outside the immediate area?	Impact assessments e.g. further down the catchment, in the wider landscape and along transport routes. Plus supply chain impacts nationally and in communities overseas	
	How are impacts on the nonhuman world being addressed?	Biological surveys, habitat enhancements	
	How might the proposed land use be impacted by future population shifts?	Strategic plans in different sectors	
	How are the needs and wellbeing of future generations being integrated and addressed?	Long term planning and forecasts, engagement with young people, considering potential new technologies and innovations (plus the business models which underpin their implementation).	

Principles	Questions	Processes, data and evidence	Outcome indicators
Public Value			
5. Multifunctional	Is the land being used to its full capabilities to bring about multiple benefits to address varied human and ecological needs?	Assessments of complementary opportunities; food production, clean air and water, energy, carbon sequestration, nature recovery, public access, community health, wellbeing, diversity and resilience.	
	How will organisations and agencies work together to take more coherent account of potential unintended consequences?	Internal risk assessments, data from external regulators, campaign groups.	
	How will multifunctionality be monitored and maintained or extended longer term?	Monitoring programmes, integrating innovations and agroecological principles	
	How effectively is management and planning joined up across functional boundaries across inter- organisational boundaries, to achieve better outcomes?	Reviewing collaborative and inter-organisation processes and mechanisms.	
6. Contributing prosperity	Is the land being used to sustain or increase local livelihoods and jobs?	Economic impact and opportunity assessment, skills assessments, knowledge sharing.	
	Is the land being used appropriately for productive agriculture?	RPA maps, agricultural methods, soil analysis, run-off risk, river catchment status, waste management plans	
	Will the proposed land use link to and strengthen local supply chains?	Supply chain mapping and local sourcing, circular economy and recycling	
	Will profits from the proposed land use be retained/ invested locally or extracted to other parts of the country or world?	Beneficial ownership, shareholder registers, responsible governance	
	Will value be created, missed or destroyed with the proposed land use change?	Value mapping of economic, natural capital, ecosystems services, food production, social and public values	

Annex 1. Evidence sources

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Annex 2. Background and what we have learned to date

Since 2018 the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (FFCC) has been convening conversations nationally and at the local level to explore the issues, including a national multi-stakeholder consultation at St George's House⁵. FFCC recommended the development of a Land Use Framework in our 2019 report *Our Future in the Land*. We are not alone. Key reports such as the Foresight *Land Use Futures* report (2010), the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership's *Natural Capital Leaders Platform* (2014), 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) have all called for a framework. Other organisations recommending such an approach include the Royal Society, Royal Town Planning Institute, Green Alliance, Shared Assets, CPRE, WWF, RSPB, County Councils Network, Chatham House and the government's Geospatial Commission⁶. CPRE's recent report *Building on our Food Security* identifies the continuing loss of high-grade agricultural land to development.

We have considered existing guidance and legislation, such as the Public Value Framework, introduced in 2017, and the Treasury's Magenta Book, the Environment Act 2021, the Agriculture Act 2020 and the National Planning Policy Framework, 2021 among other things. Our approach is consistent with the Office for Science's new report *Systems Thinking for Civil Servants; driving improved outcomes in complex situations*. In 2021, we established two action research pilots in Devon and Cambridgeshire, lessons from which are informing our proposition.

Whilst we all emphasise or prioritise particular characteristics, we are united in our view that the time has come for an open, transparent, inclusive and evidence led process for making better decisions about land use. The current House of Lords 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. At an England scale, there are calls to join up land use policy making across government departments, especially between land use planning, agriculture, the natural environment and the proposals in the new net zero strategy. FFCC detailed the case for a national Land Use Framework and outlined proposed principles in March 2022⁷.

FFCC's Land Use National Group⁸, has tested the case for a framework, pooled ideas about how it might work and how the approach could be incorporated in government department planning. In early June we convened a policy workshop 'Landing a Land Use Framework' where 30 leading thinkers from academia, think tanks, government and NGOs shared how they thought a Land Use Framework might best be introduced.

FFCC's two pilot Land Use Framework projects are located in places which were keen to trial the approach; Devon and Cambridgeshire⁹. Both are large, multi-tier counties with a contrasting mix of intense land use pressures and complex governance arrangements. The pilots have brought together land use stakeholders to adapt their own version of a framework and test it out in practice through action research. Working together, local authorities, farmers, landowners, government bodies and other stakeholders can design and test a Land Use Framework for their place, with the potential to support other land use questions, so that all are better aligned to delivering the same broad goals in the context of the climate and nature crises.

⁵ <https://ffcc.co.uk/library/making-the-best-use-of-our-land>

⁶ See Annex 1 for a full list of references

⁷ <https://ffcc.co.uk/library/a-land-use-framework-for-england>

⁸ The Group includes high level representation from Government, NGOs and professional leaders and is chaired by Dame Fiona Reynolds

⁹ The pilot projects will continue trialling their locally adapted approaches until March 2023, when a full evaluation will be produced.

The pilots are about to start trialling their frameworks, but much has already been learned:

- Local appetite for a Land Use Framework was strong – people in most sectors could see the need and were frustrated at having witnessed poor land use decisions. They were particularly keen to see the long-standing land management and planning divide bridged.
- People’s understandings of what a Land Use Framework might be and how it would work varied. Some people focus on what they think is needed in their own arena or to meet their particular agenda. Some are worried it will bring more bureaucracy or increase their work burden, some perceive a threat as well as an opportunity.
- The potential for a LUF to enable positive change through unlocking different ways of thinking and better use of information or expertise was seen as a particular attraction. It also helps to articulate the process benefits, such as being able to address cumulative impacts of decisions and reducing disputes.
- A LUF has the potential to reveal and interrogate many different sources of data – data sets which exist already and are publicly available and those that exist but are inaccessible and opaque. It also reveals the gaps in information and data which, if filled, could unlock better quality decisions. Collaborative working also makes it more likely that the data and evidence will be shared and improved.
- Local leadership is important. Credible local leadership – both institutional and social – in the pilot areas means key organisations and communities took the proposals seriously and ensured quality engagement.
- A LUF brings stakeholders together to have sometimes difficult conversations about how decisions they are making are impacting each other and what the wider public benefit will be. Having those conversations is valuable in itself, as mutual understanding is improved and any subsequent decisions are more likely to take other interests into account.
- Some local stakeholders believe there needs to be national LUF principles embedded in planning policy, farming incentives and environmental regulation in order for the system to work to best effect – a dynamic top down and bottom-up approach.
- A LUF could be used to broker collaborative land use plans across landscapes with several landowners, for example facilitating a Landscape Recovery Scheme plan. It could also potentially be used by one landowner to plan longer term for their land, to help make more sustainable decisions and engage with a wider range of stakeholders and interests in so doing.
- Local communities were interested in the potential for a LUF to help them input to a broader range of land use decisions at an earlier stage than current systems. Their local knowledge and lived experience could be better harnessed to avoid poor decisions and unexpected consequences.
- Some stakeholders want to explore how a Land Use Framework would work, testing it in real world situations. Some are interested in one issue or perspective, whereas the value of the LUF is to bring multiple land uses together to explore the relationships and complexity.

In Devon, funded by the Geospatial Commission’s National Land Data Programme, the pilot team have explored the data and evidence challenges that those making land use decisions face (see Annex 3). As an early step in Cambridgeshire the team wanted to gather the opinions of lesser-heard voices on land use change which provided valuable additional insights (Annex 4).

The pilots are moving ahead, guided by each of the local leadership groups. Both are in different ways also looking at how spatial modelling and visualisation of land use pressures may help inform wider understanding and better decision making. They will report in full in March 2023.

There are many issues still to consider. There have been discussions about whether a framework approach could be embedded within or be a complementary aspect of the ELMS agricultural support system and Local Nature Recovery Strategy guidance, as hinted at in the recent Food Strategy. But to straddle the land management–planning divide it would also need to be embedded within the National Planning Policy Framework and potentially led by a new Land Use Commission, (noting that some critical issues – e.g. food security/sovereignty – currently have no body or mechanism to advocate for them).

On the 'local' question; could several scales be applied with smaller local areas, nested inside larger counties? Some people have advocated a regional spatial scale for Land Use Frameworks, akin to the former regional spatial strategies. Certainly, some issues such as energy and transport infrastructure might benefit from larger spatial scales than others. The Land Use Framework approach will work best when the principles and overall approach are incorporated into cross departmental government working and when local areas and land management sectors are able to agree what will work best in each area (in the same way as NPPF guides Local Plans currently but the Local Plan takes precedence in decision making).

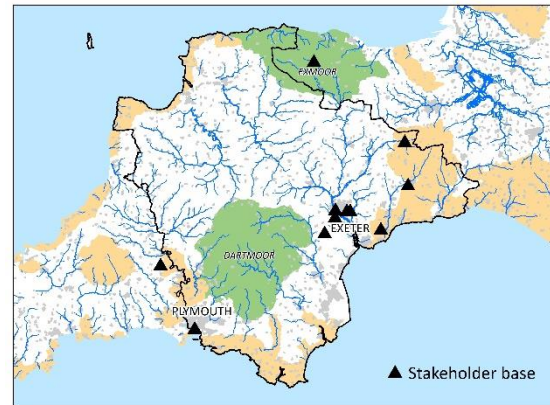
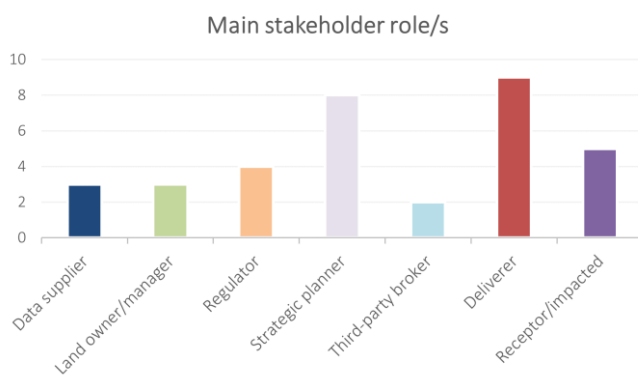
FFCC will continue to convene discussions and the action research pilots over the next 8-10 months. We will be further developing the ideas and questions in this document and welcome suggestions and input from all quarters to land an effective Land Use Framework for England.

Annex 3. Understanding Data and Evidence for Land Use Decision-Making in Devon

The **Devon Land Use Framework** (DLUF) pilot project is part of the Environment Agency and Devon County Council led Flood and Coastal Resilience Innovation Programme and is also helping to deliver the Geospatial Commission’s National Land Data Programme, with FFCC leading both projects working with multiple local partners. Part of this process has consisted of a series of conversations with local stakeholders to understand how they currently use spatial data and evidence for land use decision-making, and what are the challenges, gaps or recommended solutions.

Stakeholders

The following stakeholders have been interviewed by members of the DLUF and Geospatial Commission teams. The conversations have taken place between Feb 2022 and July 2022, each lasting approximately 60-90 minutes.



Organisation	Individual positions
Devon Wildlife Trust	Conservation Manager
Environment Agency	Flood & Coastal Risk Management Senior Advisor
East Devon District Council	Green Infrastructure Project Manager
Blackdown Hills AONB	Manager
Devon Biological Records Centre	Manager
Clinton Devon Estates	Head of Wildlife and Conservation; Farm Manager; Head of Forestry and Environment
Exmoor National Park	CEO; Head of Conservation
South West Water	Natural Resources Team Manager
Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Planning Team	Strategic Planning Manager; Strategic Planning Specialist
Forestry Commission	Environmental Land Management Officer; Woodland Resilience Officer
Westcountry Rivers Trust	Evidence and Engagement Officer

More stakeholder interviews will take place in 2022, with the intention to speak with local farmers, Devon County Council, Natural England, Dartmoor National Park, National Trust and others.

Types of Land Use Decisions Made

Planning:

- Nature recovery planning.
- Local development/housing planning.
- Renewable energy planning.
- Water resources planning.
- Flood-risk planning.
- Planning woodland planting and deforestation.
- Planning new walking/cycling trails.
- Planning accessible green space.
- Contribution to planning applications – provide data, review applications.
- Consultee on agri-environment schemes.

Delivering:

- Agriculture and forestry.
- Habitat creation and restoration.
- Delivery of flood-risk mitigation schemes.
- Delivery and maintenance of water supply and removal infrastructure.
- Delivery of catchment-wide natural measures to improve water quality and reduce flood-risk.
- Delivery of improved accessible green space and access infrastructure.

Managing:

- Managing designated sites (e.g. nature reserves).
- Agriculture and forestry management.
- Designation of non-statutory designated sites (e.g. CWS, local historic sites).
- Monitoring and managing river water quality/quantity impact.
- Regulating non-permitted land use changes.

Activities that indirectly influence Land Use Decisions:

- Collection and provision of data.
- Creation of models and tools.
- Desk studies and mapping.
- Advice.
- Advocacy.
- Community engagement.
- Citizen-science schemes.

Types of Data and Tools Used

Spatial Datasets:

- Habitats and species data.
- Statutory and non-statutory designated sites.
- Soils and geology.
- Land cover / use.
- Crop types and agricultural census data.
- Topography (e.g. Lidar).
- Flood-risk data.
- Water quality data.
- Weather and climate forecasts.
- Field boundaries & land ownership.
- Building addresses and types.
- Landscape character assessments.
- Public Rights of Way & access land.
- OS base maps and data.
- Aerial imagery (satellites, planes and drones).
- Live sensor data (e.g. water quality/quantity).
- Population data (current and predicted).
- Visitor surveys.
- Road networks and services infrastructure.
- Census data and social statistics.

Spatial Tools:

- Defra MAGIC Map.
- Google Earth.
- DCC Devon Environment Viewer.
- EA Catchment Data Explorer.
- EA NFM Studio.
- HEC-RAS, SCIMAP, CADDIES-2D, SCALGO-Live.
- FC Land Information Search.
- FC Ecological Site Classification.
- ArcGIS, QGIS, Council systems (Iadox?), PTMapper.

Evidence Used or Produced:

- Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans.
- Organisational Management Plans and Strategies.
- RPA and Land Registry data
- Condition reports (e.g. State of Park).
- Environmental evidence reviews / natural capital assessments.
- Nature Recovery Networks mapping.
- Bespoke risk/opportunity mapping.

Data and Tools noted to have Particular Value

- **MAGIC Map (Defra)**. Useful to have lots of datasets in one place, via a relatively simple user-interface.
- **NFM Studio (Environment Agency - Devon and Cornwall)**. An open, online tool for assessing catchment hydrology, flood risk and the potential for Natural Flood Management measures.
- **Satellite imagery (Google Earth)**. For gaining a general understanding of a site and identifying features of note regarding land cover or land use.
- **SCIMAP (Durham University)**. An open tool for mapping surface water flow pathways and erosion risk.
- **Tellus SW Lidar data (NERC, BGS)**. An open 2m DTM and DSM with seamless coverage from Exeter westwards. Useful for understanding slope, aspect, elevation and to feed into hydrological models.
- **Ecological Site Classification (Forestry Research)**. An open, online tool for planning woodland planting, by identifying tree species that are ecologically suited to particular sites.

Gaps and Challenges

- Overwhelmed by large range of datasets and tools available. Unsure which is most appropriate.
- Numerous data sources / platforms, which can be confusing.
- Differing license conditions can make their usage complicated.
- Open data (often national) is usually not as accurate or high resolution as restricted data (often local).
- Restricted funds often mean that purchasing commercial data is not viable.
- Data is often collected using different methods and therefore not always comparable.
- Some long-term monitoring programmes (e.g. EA water quality monitoring) are being severely reduced due to funding cuts, therefore monitoring data is becoming less frequent, less detailed, with less sites.
- Sometimes the only available data is poor quality or out-of-date, or no data exists at all to sufficiently understand an aspect of the land (e.g. detailed soil data, climate predictions, public usage).
- Poor data quality can impact confidence in decision-making, e.g. over-lapping polygons with differing attributes; inconsistent terminology used to describe features.
- Time/resource to analyse data is lacking.
- Data may be misunderstood and used incorrectly due to lack of time or training.
- Insufficient procedures in place to ensure data is interpreted consistently within an organisation. Therefore, decisions are sometimes subjective.
- Different software systems used within or between departments and organisations, making data sharing inefficient.
- Planning systems and processes can be disjointed and ineffective at considering modern land use requirements and pressures.

Potential Solutions identified by stakeholders

- A single place for all (or at least key) datasets relating to urban and rural land use planning, recognised across government and all sectors.
- Open access (or allocated funding) for key datasets and tools, where possible.
- Improve data quality, e.g. increased frequency, detail, spatial resolution of data; increased quality assurance.
- Encourage data sharing to minimise duplicated effort (e.g. developers' habitat survey data could supplement local habitat databases).
- Make more data spatial (e.g. useful data currently held in spreadsheets or PDFs but could be made spatial).
- Clearer guidance / increased training for interpreting and applying key datasets and tools.
- Consider a built-in need for advisors or third-party brokers, to ensure data/tools are used correctly.
- Develop a more consistent approach to using data and tools for land-use decision making, considering opportunities and impacts for all sectors and stakeholders, at current and future timescales.
- Update the planning system/processes to meet modern-day requirements. Modify the system as a whole, rather than bolt on additional steps or datasets that make the process disjointed and inefficient.
- Greater collaboration between data providers and users (e.g. between academia and land managers).

Annex 4. Listening to land use concerns in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Introduction

One of the most useful early steps taken by the Cambridgeshire pilot project was a ‘listening tour’ in spring 2022. FFCC held ten listening events (four in person, six online) around Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The exercise was in no way representative, but we captured the thoughts of a broad range of groups including farmers, young people, parish councillors, Women’s Institute, community groups, countryside access interests, community farm volunteers, food banks and local residents. A feedback event enabled us to share and further discuss the findings. The exercise was supported by WWF-UK’s Land, Food and Farming Fund.

What do you value and what improvements would you like to see?

We asked what people valued about their local area and what is special about where they live. The answers varied both within and between sessions, but most expressed a strong affinity with their local area and many spoke movingly about what the local nature and countryside and rural community meant to their lives. Those living in urban locations also described how important local green spaces are to residents in towns and in Cambridge itself. Key themes included: landscape, community, heritage, food, nature, access, villages and the green of the countryside.

People wanted to see improvements in planning and delivering housing developments with sustainable features and green spaces better integrated. They were concerned about affordability of housing and how land prices locally affect the situation.

“Housing developments could be done in a more thoughtful, integrated and holistic way. Developers are dodging their responsibilities – we are not being heard – there’s lots of consultation but it’s not acted on.”

People wanted more flexible rural transport and more for young people to do. Many wanted to see more horticulture and agroecological farming, with the Cambridgeshire county farms being used as a model to lead the way.

“More diverse farming models – are there smarter ways to do this?”

People were concerned about river water quality and the loss of biodiversity. They wanted better access to land and nature, improved rights of way and valued the health benefits of enjoying the countryside.

“Reduce use of chemicals to control weeds in public spaces but also farmland – there are so few insects left”

What future changes are you concerned about?

We asked the groups to think about the local land and landscape in the future and what they were concerned about, looking ahead 10 or 20 years and beyond. Certain themes came up regularly:

Development

- **Poorly thought-out** housing developments
- Lack of accompanying **infrastructure** to build happy, healthy communities
- Village **expansion** and villages **merging, losing character**
- Lack of **joined-up thinking**
- Developers have **too much power** and are **not held to account**

“We’re worried about planning issues and the general direction of travel – where the developer is king and there’s a continued lack of affordable

housing. Most new houses are for incomers and there’s more commuting away for work.”

Resilient Communities

- **Dormitory towns** and polarising communities between locals and those working elsewhere
- Loss of **identity** of the original community and heritage

“Targets are skewing what is being done and the decisions being made. Single issues are prioritised over a holistic view.”

Water and energy

- New houses being built where there **isn't enough water**
- New houses being built **without solar panels**
- River flow levels are low, **pollution and abstraction** are threatening water supplies
- **Increased incidences of flooding** due to **drainage issues** and **increased development**
- **Lack of long term planning** - water companies are only asked to look **30 years ahead** – not long enough. Similarly **lack of clarity over long term flood defence plans**

"I'm concerned about flood prevention infrastructure and the amount of money that needs to be invested in this. There are real challenges to delivering on this. Hard decisions will need to be made about what areas to allow to flood."

Not being heard

- Consultations **are not listened to**
- The people making decisions **do not live or even visit area**
- Planning officers change often meaning a **lack of continuity**
- No one taking responsibility for the **whole picture**
- Consultations are very specific, and people have already made up their mind.

"There are too many councils and tiers of government – it makes the planning system messy and complicated, and uncoordinated – people can't navigate it."

Lack of opportunities

- **Lack of opportunities** for **young people** and jobs on/in the area
- **High house prices** and not enough affordable housing

Ideas for action

Views on potential action and how local people could be involved included:

Making rural areas more attractive places to live and work

- Seems to be a strategy to make bigger villages bigger and leave smaller villages alone. Should all be increased, with associated services and travel links
- Develop stronger links with agri-tech in Cambridge and Norwich – need more people on the land too, smaller and more versatile agri-tech and bringing back old knowledges too.

- People who can't afford to live in Cambridge come to villages and buy up properties that local people can't afford.
- University also a dominant land-owner
- Not enough opportunities for young people in agriculture.

"It's difficult for new entrants to farming – there are no small holdings. Could county farms be subdivided to provide more smaller units for people to farm agroecologically."

Changing Agriculture and Declining Biodiversity

- **Loss of farming land** to housing and fewer job opportunities
- The unique nature of this area **doesn't suit the new farm incentives**
- Small farms being lost in favour of big industrial units and farming costs are so high the scale of production is bound to increase
- **Biodiversity loss** – it is not enough to set goals, people need to be incentivised. Is biodiversity off-setting going to work?
- Tree planting – needs to be in the right place

"There's a real challenge around peat and continuing to cultivate it. We need a more nuanced approach about how to preserve these soils and have them productive as well. ... The crops we used to grow are failing – we need to farm more sensitively and innovatively and mitigate the carbon aspects."

"Our rivers – their flow levels are so low, water supplies are threatened, pollution is affecting chalk streams, there's over abstraction and pollution from agricultural run off and sewage."

Making housing developments better and use good examples of what we already know

- Integrate **trees, allotments, green space** into plans and make sure they are delivered
- More **transparency and accountability** for housing developments
- Change targets to **allow decision makers to base decisions on holistic challenges**
- Plan in greenspace, play areas, work space and growing space when designing new developments and during the local plan process

Better consultations

- Get planners out to **visit real places and join up the elements of the planning process**
- People should be consulted in more **imaginative ways to collaboratively create a vision.**
- **Citizens assemblies** around land.
- **Co-creation** of things instead of consultations

“It needs to be easier to input into consultations - people are consulted but only at late stages. This needs to be turned upside down and people consulted at the beginning before the plans are drawn up.”

So What?

We found a real appetite for doing things differently and better. Participants had a good grasp of how the current system failed in multiple ways and poor land use decisions continued to be made. There was limited ‘NIMBYism’ – communities wanting to prevent change at all costs. People generally understood the need for change, but immense frustration was expressed over how it came about and the opportunities that were being missed in the process. Development is not being planned or delivered well enough, there are many opportunities for better quality and more sustainable development – for people and the environment - that are not being realised. There is a lack of joined up thinking and planning leading to poor but foreseen consequences

However, communities have creative and innovative ideas and suggestions which would improve land use decision making. **Key lessons** include:

- There needs to be a better way for communities to input and influence decisions
- Systems need to encourage and incorporate people’s ideas, information, aspirations, knowledge, warnings
- Integrate broader expertise on things like health, social care, education, biodiversity, the climate into planning processes
- Prioritise people, places and nature over profits
- A Cambridgeshire Land Use Framework needs to integrate these points