

# Briefing

March 2023

## KEY MESSAGES

A Land Use Framework can help provide a road map - convening leaders to define, debate and agree strategic goals for land. It must join up the planning framework with other land use decision-making, to be truly useful.

Better use of data is vital – utilising existing (good-enough) data and bringing it together effectively leads to better decisions.

A Land Use Framework should be neither top-down nor bottom-up but based on shared principles and improved capacity for action – nationally, regionally and locally.

Effective public engagement improves the legitimacy and implementation of difficult decisions. Many communities want to lead changes, if they are properly involved from the start.

Landowners' ability to take a long-term view beyond political cycles is helpful. Clear national and local policies and incentives (weighted appropriately) will help them to be confident in long-term planning for the changes needed.

# How to develop and deliver a Land Use Framework in England

## Initial lessons from the county pilots

This briefing sets out some lessons from two county-level pilots set up by FFCC to explore how a Land Use Framework could support better land use decisions.

A Land Use Framework was a recommendation in FFCC's report *Our Future in the Land*, launched in 2019. The recommendation was made after 18 months of deliberation and inquiry with stakeholders and communities on the subject of land use and land use decision-making. Whilst all acknowledged that land is central to government policies, sector and community decisions, many were concerned about the idea of a top-down 'strategy' or plan, that implied centralised control, unwelcome to many landowners. Exploring and developing the notion of a land use 'framework' – an enabling arrangement to improve land use decision-making – unblocked many anxieties and elicited widespread support from across the political spectrum, green groups, farmers organisations and civic society. More details about the steps and ways of working to develop a Framework are in [FFCC's Land Use Framework policy document](#).

As part of its inquiry process, FFCC worked in places around England – Cumbria, Cambridgeshire and Devon. Two of the places – Devon and Cambridgeshire – were keen to trial different ideas or components of a Land Use Framework that were grounded in the material reality of their county-wide strategic challenges. The pilots – supported by a national leadership group drawn from expert stakeholder groups – were designed to both develop the model and process, and to investigate how it would work in supporting land use decision-making. Different, but complementary, approaches have been taken in each pilot. In Devon, the approach has been 'data up' with in-depth data analysis in sub areas and catchments; whereas in Cambridgeshire a whole county, strategic, layered map-led approach has been trialled.

The pilots are ongoing, with funding to the summer. Lessons from the work so far have been brought together in this briefing for policy makers. The aim is to ensure what is being learnt from the pilots can be used in the development of a Land Use Framework for England.

## Initial lessons

### Scope and scale

- All stakeholders involved in the pilots recognise that the pressures on land use are increasing, that there are a growing number of initiatives to address them, and that there is an urgent need to join up issues and make better decisions. A Framework can be a helpful way of doing this, empowering and enabling local leadership (of both local, regional and national bodies) to address issues across silos and deliver positive change.
- The need for change is most often expressed around joining up the planning system for the built environment with other land use changes and enabling planners and other decision makers to take a more holistic approach to decision-making. If a Framework is given statutory weight, alongside those policies that it should help join up (such as Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Biodiversity Net Gain and the planning system), that would enable it to do this.
- Land Use Frameworks can facilitate the creation of a shared, long-term vision for an area – setting out what combination of housing, employment, transport, landscape, seascape, biodiversity, food production, natural beauty etc. future generations should enjoy. This cannot be done without a way of considering and visualising the connections between different land uses in an area.
- These pilots have been undertaken in the absence of a national framework. They have had to develop their own working model of a framework, whilst national debate about what a framework is continues. The experience of the pilots demonstrates that there must be both a national framework based broadly on principles, and a more local perspective, to bring effective public engagement and legitimacy. A national framework would set out common purpose, national targets, curate and standardise data etc., and help give a steer to relevant agencies and bodies, facilitating understanding and senior buy-in at a local level.

### Leadership

- It is essential that leaders of relevant organisations lead from the start, using the framework as an opportunity to define, share and debate their strategic goals in respect of land use decisions at the outset. Demonstrating how a Framework can help them deliver these priorities, for example through a clear roadmap, is important.
- Whilst there are many options for a 'local' spatial scale, counties and/or Combined Authorities seem to be the right level to integrate national and more local considerations – with the authority that comes with being the democratically accountable body, and with multisector responsibilities and interests. The advantage of using existing structures and boundaries is that organisations and leaders have knowledge, power, democratic legitimacy and long-term commitments in the area. The leadership groups established in our two pilot counties have been valuable in bringing together leaders to have strategic conversations about land use.

### Data

- Bringing data together to make it useable is challenging – there are a lot of data, and it is often of variable quality and not comparable. This takes time and expertise that isn't available to many stakeholders. These factors can result in the value of data in decision-making being questioned, as the resolution available either tells the users nothing new or is out of date already. Making spatial data easy to understand is vital for empowering decision-makers, especially where data users are not data experts.
- Data comparability across a large spatial area is vital to support decision-making. There may be more accurate or granular data available for specific areas, but for the purposes of a Land Use Framework, the need for comparability is a priority. A discussion between interested parties on this issue is important at the outset, with a view to agreeing the principle of comparability and the data sets to be used.

- A lot of data exists already (to the point where it can be overwhelming) and the emphasis should be on using this to inform decisions. Gaps may be identified, and work commissioned to fill them, but the imperfections in existing data should not be an excuse for inaction. Useable tools can and should be developed with existing data, even if they aren't perfect, which can support better decision-making than currently.
- Much data exists and are used in silos – the process of bringing together data is valuable in considering strategic land use issues and making data holders think beyond their area of expertise or interest. This is valuable in its own right, as is the product that results from bringing together the data.
- Critically, any data-based tool is only going to help with decision-making. It is not going to provide 'the answer', and so should always be treated as an important way of informing decision-making, alongside other (arguably more complex) elements – such as ethical and values-based considerations, future climate and nature scenarios, and community and landowner views and knowledge.

## Communities

- People are willing to accept change, including new housing and energy infrastructure, if they can positively engage in decision-making. They want some agency about changes to the places where they live and work.
- People want to live close to the services they need – whether they live in rural or urban areas – and generally would like to live in communities that are mixed demographically. They support change that will help deliver that.
- The mechanisms that currently exist for communities to influence land use change largely involve blocking or slowing development. There is an opportunity to bring citizens together to generate a positive vision for their area that goes beyond just built development.

- People may need to see evidence of intentions to value their perspectives and support in order to consider other land use issues (nature, energy etc.). A clear sense of challenges and boundaries enables people to articulate a positive vision of change.
- Significant consideration needs to be given to how communities are engaged – the scale at which it is done, the questions that are asked, and how the conversation is managed and bounded.
- Deliberative democracy techniques are almost always more effective than traditional consultations. Upstream investment in time and resourcing will generally avoid prolonged conflict and opposition.
- Good participatory processes will engage sectors of the community which are seldom heard, such as young people, families, and a mix of classes, to avoid some interests dominating debate. It is important that different 'communities', including those who own land (see below) within an area, talk to each other. A Land Use Framework can help facilitate this.

## Landowners

- Landowners are generally aware that they can help address the nature and climate crisis. Their ability to take a long-term view of the issues beyond political cycles is useful. Clear government policies and incentives that are weighted towards the more valuable changes can support them in this.
- They are willing to engage in processes, including community engagement, that enable them to make more sustainable decisions.
- A clear business case for any change is important. Farmers and landowners respond to market and government signals, but the current lack of clarity on policies, regulations and incentives are limiting the necessary change on the ground. A long-term, strategic Land Use Framework can help with this.
- Landowners' capacity to engage with the development and delivery of a Land Use Framework is variable. Having relatable 'champions' can help get other farmers on board. Ensuring that a Land Use

Framework is understood and used by organisations and individuals whom landowners look to for advice will be important in ensuring it has an impact.

## Next Steps

The work on Devon and Cambridgeshire is continuing. In Devon, through workshops and one-to-one interviews, we are exploring how a Land Use Framework can support pilot sites to work with others to inform their land use decisions. We are investigating the gaps and challenges surrounding the use of spatial data in decision-making, and collaborating with pilot sites on designing a prototype that responds to these challenges.

Devon County Council has committed to developing a Land Use Framework under their Food and Carbon Strategies.

In Cambridgeshire, FFCC have partnered with Vizzuality to create a prototype data decision-support tool for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. We are currently working with stakeholders to understand what features a fully developed data tool would need to help them coordinate their work across silos. We are also working with stakeholders to test the principles developed under the Cambridgeshire Land Use Framework in an effort to prove the concept.

A fuller evaluation of the pilots will be conducted when the work is completed in the Summer.

### PARTNERS

The pilots have been carried out with the support of The Geospatial Commission, The Environment Agency, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, WWF and Devon County Council. We are grateful for their support. This briefing represents the views of, and has been produced solely by, The Food, Farming and Countryside Commission.