

Waterway proofing of planning policy at all the different spatial levels

There is a need for waterway proofing of planning policy at all the different spatial levels in order to help unlock the economic, environmental and social benefits offered by the waterways and to secure the long-term sustainability and use of waterways as assets for the communities through which they pass.

Strategic Policy Objectives at All Spatial Planning Levels

To increase the economic, environmental and social benefits offered by the waterways and to support their development, regeneration and improvement through the planning system, consideration should be given to waterway policies that address the following:

- encouraging the improvement, development and restoration of waterways, including new waterway links;
- supporting the protection, conservation and enhancement of waterways' heritage and their built environment;
- supporting the protection, conservation and enhancement of the waterway landscape and the character, features and quality of its biodiversity, including waterway-related habitats and protected species, both fauna and flora;
- supporting the protection, conservation and enhancement of waterways as a water resource, including improving water quality, managing land drainage, and avoiding, reducing and managing flood risk;
- promoting waterways and towpaths as an integral part of the green infrastructure and open space network, performing a range of functions;
- encouraging the use of waterways as tourism attractions in their own right, as well as a way to connect other attractions, and so protect the provision of boat services and facilities where required;
- encouraging the development and improvement of waterway infrastructure in support of small and medium-sized enterprises and jobs in the craft manufacturing and service sectors;
- promoting waterways as catalysts for urban renaissance and as tools for improving urban and housing offers, boosting the competitiveness and quality of life of areas with waterways, and delivering transformational change;
- promoting waterways as catalysts for rural development, regeneration and diversification;
- encouraging the use of waterways and towpaths for leisure, recreation and sporting activities as part of the 'natural health service', acting as 'blue gyms' and supporting physical and healthy outdoor activity;
- promoting the use of waterways, towpaths and their environs as sustainable transport and recreational routes for walking and cycling, linking communities facilities, and providing passenger boat services on the inland waterways wherever practicable and economic;
- encouraging the transfer of freight from roads to waterborne transport where practical, economic and environmentally desirable – including use of waterborne

freight in the construction cycle, for the delivery of supplies and the removal of waste;

- promoting the use of waterways as a renewable energy resource – for example, using canal and dock water for heating and cooling buildings, the use of waterways and their environs for urban cooling and onshore hydropower;
- supporting the use of waterways as an educational resource and recognising waterways as active and inventive providers of open-air learning activities;
- promoting innovative uses of the waterway infrastructure – for example the use of towpaths as telecommunication routes;
- and recognising that living afloat contributes towards increasing choice in housing types and lifestyle, and contributes to the life, vitality and natural surveillance of the waterway. The draft CLG guidance on the requirement under the Housing & Planning Act 2016 (section 124) for housing authorities to “consider the needs of people residing in or resorting to their district with respect to the provision of places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored”, notes the need to consider the role of planning in making the necessary provision.

Overarching Guiding Principles for Policy Formulation

Planning policies at all the different spatial levels should take account of the following factors:

- There are different types of waterways, which have different characteristics and principal functions
- Waterways are multi-functional by nature.
- Waterways are public assets accessible to local communities free of charge.
- Individual waterways, towpaths and water spaces are a part of a wider network that crosses administrative boundaries and cannot be viewed in isolation.
- There are particular land use implications and locational requirements arising from the inherent constraint of inland waterways being ‘non-footloose’ assets.
- Development and regeneration can impose burdens and liabilities upon the waterway infrastructure, facilities and environs.
- There is a need to provide essential boat services and facilities to support the use of waterways for navigational purposes.
- There is a need to address the characteristics of underperforming waterways.
- Waterways and towing paths are spaces in their own right, and not just settings or backdrops to development or edges to policy designations.

Waterway Proofing for National Planning Policies

In waterway proofing national planning policy guidance - the National Planning Policy Framework, National Planning Practice Guidance, and National Policy Statements, the following questions need to be addressed:

- Are waterways included in the definition of infrastructure within national planning policy areas and planning delivery mechanisms?
- Are all the functions of waterways being fully recognised under different national planning policy areas, and are their contributions to national policy objectives being acknowledged?

- Is there flexibility within national planning policy and guidance to accommodate the inherent constraint of waterways being 'non-footloose' assets?

Waterway Proofing for Spatial Development Strategies

In waterway proofing Spatial Development Strategies, such as the London Plan, and Spatial Strategies for the emerging devolved city regions, the following questions need to be addressed:

- Are waterways recognised as a form of strategic infrastructure within the spatial development strategies?
- Are the different types of waterways and their different characteristics and roles acknowledged?
- Are all the functions of waterways being fully recognised under different spatial development strategies areas, and are their contributions to spatial development strategy objectives, outcomes and targets being acknowledged?
- Is there a spatial development strategy for the waterway network which provides an overarching vision and strategy for the waterway corridor(s) as a whole? This is crucial to ensure that the different Local Plans covering a particular waterway corridor are holistic and consistent in approach.
- Is there flexibility within spatial development policy and other strategies to accommodate the inherent constraint of waterways being 'non-footloose' assets?
- Do spatial development policies and strategies encourage the unlocking of the economic, environmental and social benefits offered by the waterways?

Waterway Proofing for Local Plan Policies

In waterway proofing Local Plan policies, the following questions need to be addressed:

- Are waterways recognised as a form of local infrastructure within the Local Plan?
- Are the different types of waterways and their different characteristics and roles acknowledged?
- Have the spatial and land use implications of waterway related issues, opportunities and proposals identified within the Local Transport Plan, local cycling and walking infrastructure plan, local infrastructure plan, local green infrastructure strategy, and so on, been fully translated into the Local Plan?
- Are all the functions of waterways being fully protected and promoted within the Local Plan?
- Are cross-boundary waterway-related issues and opportunities being fully considered with the adjoining local authority(ies)?
- Is there flexibility within the local planning policy framework to accommodate the inherent constraint of waterways being 'non-footloose' assets?
- Do Local Plan policies encourage the unlocking of the economic, environmental and social benefits offered by the waterways?
- Does the proposals map indicate waterways and their corridors?
- Do Local Plan policies encourage new developments to: integrate land and water; open up access to, from and along the waterway; explore the added value and use of water space; and view the waterway, towpath and environs as part of the public realm?

- Do Local Plan policies seek to encourage proposals for waterside development to enhance the use, enjoyment and setting of the adjacent waterway?
- Does the planning obligations policy within the Local Plan and/or any planning obligations SPD allow for planning obligations to be secured from the development of sites on the waterside, or those otherwise benefiting from the waterside?
- Does the Local Plan include any canal related infrastructure projects that will need to benefit from CIL revenue?

Waterway Proofing for Neighbourhood Plans

In waterway proofing Neighbourhood Plans for neighbourhood areas that includes our network, the following questions need to be addressed:

- Does the designated neighbourhood area boundary include our waterways and their corridors, rather than using them just as boundaries?
- Do Neighbourhood Plan policies encourage new developments to: integrate land and water; open up access to, from and along the waterway; explore the added value and use of water space; and view the waterway, towpath and environs as part of the public realm?
- Do Neighbourhood Plan policies seek to encourage proposals for waterside development to enhance the use, enjoyment and setting of the adjacent waterway?
- Does the Neighbourhood Plan allow for planning obligations to be secured from the development of sites on the waterside, or those otherwise benefiting from the waterside?
- Does the Neighbourhood Plan include any canal related infrastructure projects that will need to benefit from CIL revenue?

Also have a look at [“What your local waterway can do for your community – Planning for waterways in neighbourhood Plans”](#)