



Planning Policy Consultation Team

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Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system

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About Uniper

Düsseldorf-based Uniper is an international energy company with activities in more than 40 countries. The company and its roughly 7,000 employees make an important contribution to supply security in Europe, particularly in its core markets of Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

Uniper's operations encompass power generation in Europe, global energy trading, and a broad gas portfolio. Uniper procures gas—including liquefied natural gas (LNG)—and other energy sources on global markets. The company owns and operates gas storage facilities with a total capacity of more than 7 billion cubic meters.

Uniper intends to be completely carbon-neutral by 2040. Uniper aims for its installed power generating capacity to be more than 80% zero-carbon by 2030. To achieve this, the company is transforming its power plants and facilities and investing in flexible, dispatchable power generating units. Uniper is already one of Europe's largest operators of hydropower plants and is helping further expand solar and wind power, which are essential for a more sustainable and secure future. The company is progressively expanding its gas portfolio to include green gases like hydrogen and biomethane and aims to convert to these gases over the long term.

Uniper is a reliable partner for communities, municipal utilities, and industrial enterprises for planning and implementing innovative, lower-carbon solutions on their decarbonisation journey. Uniper is a hydrogen pioneer, is active worldwide along the entire hydrogen value chain, and is conducting projects to make hydrogen a mainstay of the energy supply.

In the UK, Uniper owns and operates a flexible generation portfolio of seven power stations, a fast-cycle gas storage facility and two high pressure gas pipelines. Uniper is developing a portfolio of renewable and low carbon energy projects.

Key Messages

We have answered the consultation questions most relevant to our business.

- The threshold for solar and onshore wind projects to be considered by NSIP should remain at 50 MW.
- Local authorities could recover the costs of processing planning applications through higher fees but this must be accompanied by cost transparency and an agreed level of service performance which at least meets existing standards.

Consultation Response

Question 72 - Do you agree that large onshore wind projects should be reintegrated into the NSIP regime?

Yes.

Question 73 - Do you agree with the proposed changes to the NPPF to give greater support to renewable and low carbon energy?

Yes. Whilst the positive obligation on LPAs to try and identify suitable areas is more proactive, it is a double-edged sword. Some LPAs lack the in-house skills to properly identify suitable sites for either solar or onshore wind: they do not make enquiries to the DNO for their area; they do not know how to properly design solar and/or onshore wind layouts; they are unfamiliar with the technologies; they are vulnerable to political 'persuasion' regarding the scale and nature of renewables. The outcome is inconsistent approaches and outcomes between LPAs.

The need for renewable energy is a national priority. As such, there should be a nationally applicable criteria-based policy set out within NPPF, derived from the core criteria referenced in the National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy (EN-3), against which all proposals can be assessed.

Question 75 - Do you agree that the threshold at which onshore wind projects are deemed to be Nationally Significant and therefore consented under the NSIP regime should be changed from 50 megawatts (MW) to 100MW?

No. The government has identified a national need for renewable energy and onshore wind proposals need to be reviewed as NSIP. In England most onshore wind proposals are in the range 20-50 MW. Many proposals are unpopular with local communities, are turned down by LPAs and are appealed to national planning by developers. Delays and costs can be reduced by developers applying direct to NSIP.

Question 76 - Do you agree that the threshold at which solar projects are deemed to be Nationally Significant and therefore consented under the NSIP regime should be changed from 50MW to 150MW?

No. Many solar proposals are unpopular with local communities, are turned down by LPAs and are appealed to national planning by developers. Delays and costs can be reduced by developers applying direct to NSIP.

Question 77 - If you think that alternative thresholds should apply to onshore wind and/or solar, what would these be?

The existing 50MW threshold to be considered nationally significant should be retained for both onshore wind and solar projects.

Question 82 - Do you agree with removal of this text from the footnote?

Yes. The text offered no useful guidance as to how the availability of agricultural land used for food production should be considered in decision making.

Question 98 - Do you consider that cost recovery for relevant services provided by local authorities in relation to applications for development consent orders under the Planning Act 2008, payable by applicants, should be introduced?

Uniper would be content if cost recovery for local authorities were to be introduced, subject to the proviso that local authorities commit to delivering the relevant services in an agreed timeframe. Costs should be transparent so that developers know that they are not being overcharged, a level of service performance agreed which at least meets existing standards and the performance figures published regularly. This must be accompanied by a commitment to meet the agreed service level, which might be achieved through, e.g., ringfencing the increased fees for those services and those services alone, or some sort of penalties or fee waivers.

The same would need to apply to all statutory consultees.

Question 99 - If yes, please explain any particular issues that the Government may want to consider, in particular which local planning authorities should be able to recover costs and the relevant services which they should be able to recover costs for, and whether host authorities should be able to waive fees where planning performance agreements are made.

All statutory consultees would need to be appropriately staffed and able to meet service levels compatible with the local planning authority performance agreements. This could require the same cost recovery principles to be applied to all statutory consultees.

Question 100 - What limitations, if any, should be set in regulations or through guidance in relation to local authorities' ability to recover costs?

The local authorities' costs should be transparent. Local authorities should be required to publish costs and service levels achieved to justify the level of fees.

Question 101 - Please provide any further information on the impacts of full or partial cost recovery are likely to be for local planning authorities and applicants. We would particularly welcome evidence of the costs associated with work undertaken by local authorities in relation to applications for development consent.

It is important to understand the cost of increased fees compared to the cost of project delays before any changes to application fees are made. Government should indicate the likely range of fees and the planning service level to be delivered. Project delays add to project costs. Increased planning fees may mitigate against delays but need to be proportionate to delay costs.

Full or partial cost recovery will increase the costs for developers but we consider this well worthwhile if it improves the speed and efficiency of processing planning applications.