

ANNEX 1

**RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT NATIONAL
POLICY PLANNING FRAMEWORK**

Dear

This is Oxfordshire County Council's response to the consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework. It has been prepared and sent prior to a meeting of our Cabinet on 18th October 2011. On that date Cabinet will receive this draft response and be invited to ratify it; we will advise you as soon as possible afterwards if Cabinet have decided to make any changes to it.

Oxfordshire County Council welcomes the new Framework and in particular its objective of simplifying the planning system. The level of complexity which is enshrined in the current planning system means that many people in local communities, including employers and business people, feel constrained from engaging with the system, which is all the poorer from the lack of real community-wide interaction.

The Council welcomes the continuing emphasis given in the document to the protection of the natural and historic environment.

We welcome the emphasis given to economic growth and job creation and, accompanying this, the flexibility which will be given to local authorities to plan for their communities in a manner which will recognise both strategic needs and local priorities.

The County Council is concerned, however, that insufficient emphasis is made in the current draft of the Framework on local distinctiveness, to counter the negative effects of "anywhere" developments on small and characterful communities.

We support the implicit warning given to borough and district Councils that their local development frameworks need to proceed quickly to a state of adoption, in order to ensure that unplanned development does not occur by default. We suggest that some local authorities may need additional resources in order to carry out their planning duties in a timely fashion, and believe that there should be a realistic period of transition before the new presumptions take effect, in order to allow for reasonable and well thought out strategic planning decisions to be made with full community consultation.

We welcome the move from a presumption in favour of development, to a presumption in favour of sustainable development, this being in the interests of every person within our communities.

We also welcome the increased flexibility which the new advice offers to local communities, via their elected Councils, to plan wisely in accordance with local needs and priorities.

From the point of view of an upper tier authority such as Oxfordshire County Council, however, we are concerned that the wording of the Duty to Co-operate may be somewhat vague, and we believe that the role of the upper tier authorities as the supplier and co-ordinator of strategic infrastructure provision must be recognised as an essential component of the statutory planning system. In particular, we would wish to see a duty placed on upper tier authorities to prepare and adopt a Strategic Infrastructure Framework, with which Local Development Frameworks would be required to comply. The preparation of such a document after full consultation with communities, businesses and local councils would lead to shared objectives and vision, and would eliminate the tensions which are already starting to arise between different tier authorities in respect of the operation of the Community Infrastructure Levy. Each stakeholder would be clear about infrastructure priorities, their purpose, timing and funding.

We hope that these comments will be considered to be helpful and we look forward to being able to work further with Ministers towards improving a planning system with which all members of our communities should feel able to engage, and of which they should be proud.