

BBG response to the Government Consultation on Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework

Description of submitting organisation

British Berry Growers (BBG) is a crop association representing 95% of all English and Welsh commercial soft fruit growers. In this context, berries are strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries.

Response to Question 66

A progressive National Planning Policy Framework which recognises the drivers of the rural economy - still very reliant on agriculture and food production - is greatly needed. As an industry, berry growers can improve food security through extending the harvest season and increasing yields of healthy British fruit. To do this, they need the support of innovative horticultural technology.

British Berry Growers (BBG) is calling for a robust NPPF to bring consistency to the consideration of planning applications across the country, to guide local authorities and planning professionals, and to enable the rapid approval of compliant developments across UK farms.

Specifically, there needs to be support and recognition within the NPPF for the increasing importance of Controlled Growing Environments (CGE). These are polytunnels and greenhouses, which are essential to support UK food security in the face of international competition, and which are often subject to significant planning challenges.

There are considerable benefits to be derived from new CGE developments. They can bring:

- creation of well-paid rewarding jobs in rural areas.
- support for a vibrant cosmopolitan local community which in turn supports local facilities such as shop, school, pub, village hall, church, sports teams.
- rainwater harvesting and rainfall attenuation schemes to manage water levels in local streams - winter and summer.
- water recycling to ensure no impact on groundwater and watercourses.
- visual, environmental and wildlife enhancement through the establishment of, for example, wildflower buffer strips to encourage bees and other pollinators as well as natural predators of aphids, spotted wing drosophila and other crop pests.
- developer funded passing places installed in country lanes.

BBG recommends that a NPPF for CGE should:

- cover visual and environmental impacts, including commitments for water conservation and recycling.
- establish a code of best practice in consideration of the local community.

- consider traffic impact to ensure safe road use especially within village locations.
- require effective communication channels aligned to farm activities to keep local communities informed and aware.
- establish noise management measures

We would also recommend working with one Planning Authority, possibly Herefordshire Council, to create a framework and a template which central Government could incorporate into the NPPF, and BBG would welcome the opportunity to participate in this process.