

Forum

The National Planning Policy Framework and Archaeology

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This helpful addition to the literature and thinking around planning and archaeology comes at an exciting time, as the Localism Act, streamlining of non-planning consents, economic recession and political change all converge. It is striking, in the review of archaeology and planning policy over some thirty years, what a revolution we have experienced in that time. When PPGs 16 and 15 were introduced in 1990s, they professed not to place any new responsibilities on local authorities, but in practice their implementation required a new zealotry, a significant new commitment and in many cases new skillsets among local authorities. Despite the challenges for even-handed *implementation*, it is to the enormous credit of authorities around the country that the PPG policies were implemented to the extent they were.

So when PPS5 emerged in 2010 (after, it must be said in appreciation, a very great deal of lobbying and hard work) it was able to address a relatively small number of shortfalls in policy. The authors note, quite rightly, that the principles in PPS5 persist in the NPPF – and to that extent PPS5 (and the in-depth lobbying and discussion that informed it) *has* shaped archaeology in England in the short period of its existence.

I hope, too, that this has in some way been helped by the momentum created by the Southport initiative – a collaborative, heritage sector initiative that, immediately after PPS5 was published, seized the strong statements about the value and public benefit of historic environment work, and identified a series of actions intended to realise that benefit. The agenda and actions, developed by the 100-plus heritage bodies and individuals who engaged in the Southport initiative, were published in the Southport Report (<http://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/node-files/SouthportreportA4.pdf>) which was funded with support from English Heritage and launched by John Penrose MP in July 2011. The Institute for Archaeologists continues to monitor the follow-through on Southport, at its annual conference.

The authors have articulated, and explored well, some of the main concerns now facing us under the NPPF. The value of non-designated heritage assets has been well proven over the last thirty years: do we need a planning law change to protect this value, for example at appeal? It is clear that HERs are vital: they must be funded. Clear, unambiguous guidance is also a pre-requisite: the forthcoming revised Practice Guide will need to tackle the inherent conflicts between curatorial controls and neighbourhood empowerment. The absence in NPPF of the important principle (that was in PPS5) that new knowledge could compensate for the loss of the actual heritage asset is a major concern:

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but it is one that could be mitigated given sufficient local authority resourcing. The real crux, then, is that local authorities are facing unprecedented cutbacks, adding uncertainty in the race to get Local Development Plans in place by March 2013. So the paramount concern must be resourcing. Judgements under the Localism Act will only be of the right quality if the debate is robust, well-informed

and well-prepared. So there is everything to play for. We have, at last, achieved widespread recognition – not just among heritage practitioners but in local and national Government – that heritage assets make a vital contribution to the economic, social, educational and cultural life of the nation. However, they will only do so if local authority functions can operate, sustainably, to manage them.