

CADRA NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK (NPPF) REVIEW

The Government published the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in August 2026. Alongside Local Plans, it will now form the basis on which CADRA reviews proposed developments in Reading and South Oxfordshire that may affect those of us living in north Reading.

This note provides a practical summary of the parts of the NPPF most relevant to our area. The references here are those used in the Government's framework, which can be read and downloaded at [UK NPPF](#).

NPPF Structure and New Local Plans

Running to 130 pages, the new framework restructures national planning policy into two operational tiers with thematic policy codes:

- **PM Policies (Plan-Making):** National rules governing how councils draft future Local and Neighbourhood Plans.
- **DM Policies (National Decision-Making Policies / NDMPs):** Standardized, national-level policies applied directly by decision-makers to determine planning applications and appeals.

Under **Policy PM6**, future Local Plans prepared by Reading Borough Council (RBC) and South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) cannot duplicate or restate national DM policies. Local plans will become shorter, spatial documents focused purely on-site allocations and local spatial policies.

New Policies and North Reading Issues

As we know, our area has severely constrained infrastructure, only two river crossings, limited land for new housing, and restricted active travel opportunities. For CADRA, the key policy areas are landscape protection in the gap between Caversham Heights/Emmer Green and SODC settlements, housing land supply rules, and the weight given to existing local plans.

1. Landscape Protection and "Gap Policy"

The statutory and policy grounding for protecting green spaces outside formal designations has shifted. While the gap between Emmer Green and SODC sits outside the Chilterns National Landscape (AONB) and is not designated Green Belt, the setting of the nearby National Landscape remains critical.

"Substantial" vs. "Great" Weight: Under the new **Policy N4**, the test for conserving and enhancing natural beauty in National Landscapes now uses the phrase **"substantial weight"** rather than the previous **"great weight"** test. While courts previously treated "great weight" as a very high legal bar, "substantial weight" represents a subtle shift that will need to be tested through future planning appeals and High Court litigation, however the pending Fairfax claim will only examine the procedures in place before August.

However, this policy aligns with statutory duties introduced under the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act. That strengthens rather than weakens protection for National Landscapes and their settings. The

Exceptional Circumstances Preserved: Crucially, major development affecting the National Landscape or its setting must still be refused under **N4(2)** unless exceptional circumstances exist and the proposal is demonstrably in the public interest.

2. Housing Land Supply: The Primary Threat

The main risk to the North Reading/SODC border comes from the housing-supply mechanisms rather than landscape policy.

Presumption Outside Settlements (Policy S5(1)(j)): This policy seems to replace the previous "Paragraph 11(d) Tilted Balance" rule. It creates a strong presumption in favour of approving development outside defined settlement boundaries if the local authority cannot demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply or fails the Housing Delivery Test, provided the site is "well related" to an existing settlement. Whether Reading counts as a "well related" settlement for sites in Oxfordshire will be contested.

SODC Supply Shortfall: South Oxfordshire District Council's latest published figures indicate a supply of 4.5 years (below the 5-year requirement). Speculative promoters (such as Gladman regarding the proposed North Reading Growth Area of 1,200 homes between Henley Road and Peppard Road) will almost certainly use Policy S5(1)(j) as their main argument. However, Inspectors will have to weigh whether a cross-boundary site

genuinely functions as an extension of the host settlement or represents uncoordinated countryside urban sprawl.

However, north Reading's infrastructure constraints (river crossings, roads, active travel etc.) can still be a primary line defence, especially as there are no realistic solutions within the period of the local plans.

3. Policy Weight and Annex A Consistency

The weight planning inspectors place on existing local gap policies depends on how consistent those policies are with the new national rules.

Annex A Limits Outdated Plans: This states that local plan policies "materially inconsistent" with the new NDMPs carry very limited weight unless examined under the August 2026 Framework. The SODC Local Plan 2035 (adopted December 2020) was not examined under these rules.

Exposed Gap Policies: Policies protecting the setting of the National Landscape remain robust under Policy N4. However, generic local and neighbourhood "gap" or "openness" policies not tied to landscape designations are more vulnerable under the growth-oriented framing of S5.

4. NPPF Policy Summary

1. National Decision-Making Rules (DM1–DM10)

- **Weight to Draft Plans (Policy DM4):** Dictates when emerging draft plans (e.g., the draft SODC Joint Local Plan) carry legal weight during decision-making.
- **Developer Contributions (Policy DM6):** Standardizes Section 106 rules, ensuring cross-boundary developments in SODC contribute to mitigating infrastructure impacts in North Reading (such as school places and Thames bridge corridors).
- **Unauthorised Development (Policy DM8):** Penalizes developers who alter land without permission before seeking retrospective consent.
- **Article 4 Directions (Policy DM10):** Sets national criteria for withdrawing Permitted Development Rights, protecting commercial cores like Caversham from uncontrolled residential conversions.

2. Spatial Strategy & Border Pressure (S3–S6)

- **Settlement Boundaries (Policy S3 & S4):** Establishes a presumption in favor of sustainable development inside defined settlement boundaries.
- **Housing Shortfalls Outside Settlements (Policy S5):** Replaces the old Paragraph 11 "tilted balance". Because SODC at the moment (Sept 2026) faces a 5-year housing supply shortfall (at 4.5 years), Policy S5(1)(j) could create a direct threat along the Emmer Green/Caversham Heights border by allowing housing on un-allocated sites, if developers can argue they are "well related" to the urban edge.
- **Neighbourhood Plans (Policy S6):** Provides legal protection for made Neighbourhood Plans (such as Kidmore End Parish) where housing delivery criteria are met.

3. Transport & Thames Bridges (TR1–TR8)

- Sets national hooks to challenge applications based on highway capacity. With North Reading constrained by the two Thames river crossings, Policy TR3 enables CADRA and RBC to object where cumulative cross-boundary traffic causes a "severe" impact on network capacity or active travel safety.

4. Landscape & Nature Protection (L1–L3, N1–N6)

- **Chilterns Setting (Policy L1 / Policy N4):** Mandates "**substantial weight**" to conserving the natural beauty of National Landscapes (formerly AONBs). This serves as the primary shield for protecting the green setting along the SODC/Reading gap.
- **Biodiversity (Policy N1–N6):** Standardizes mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and protects wildlife corridors along the Thames Valley and local woodlands.

5. Design, Environment & Heritage (DP, CC, F, HE)

- **Design & Amenities (Policy DP1–DP4):** Applies uniform design standards for scale, massing, and residential privacy.

- **Flood Risk** (Policy F1–F8): Mandates strict national rules restricting inappropriate development in Thames flood zones.
- **Heritage** (Policy HE1–HE10): Protects Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas (such as Hemdean Road and St Peter's), and non-designated heritage assets.