

# PPS15 – Draft for Consultation

## Consultation Questions

Questions on which we would particularly like your views:

1. Does the PPS strike the right balance between advocating the conservation of what is important and enabling change?

No. Too much emphasis has been placed on enabling change at the expense of heritage conservation. Conservation is already the management of change. The draft PPS creates more ambiguity and scope for loophole manipulation to the detriment of the historic environment.

2. By adopting a single spectrum approach to historic assets, does the PPS take proper account of any differences between types of asset (eg. are archaeological assets adequately covered)?

No. Whilst the single spectrum suggested in the draft Heritage Protection Bill was a laudable approach, the draft PPS is too generic to be of any use as a practical tool for practitioners, whether LPAs or Developers and their agents.

3. In doing so, does the PPS take appropriate account of the implications of the European Landscape Convention, and of the cultural dimensions of landscapes designated as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

No. Again the detail is too limited and the content too broad and open to interpretation.

4. Are the policies and principles set out in the PPS the key ones that underpin planning policy on the historic environment, or should others be included?

Yes, however the level of ambiguity is too great and the areas left open to discussion too many for the PPS to be effective.

5. Do you agree that it is the “significance” of a historic asset that we are trying to conserve?

No. Significance is only part of the story. Significance informs us as to why heritage assets are important and which parts are the most important. This is like separating relics from memory. The two are not mutually exclusive. Both have a part to play. Having the one without the other devalues the heritage asset. One might as well just have photographs and drawings than tangible objects if one adopts this approach.

6. Does the PPS comply with devolutionary principles with regard to what is expected at regional and local levels?

The principles may be expressed, but again the level of detail is woefully inadequate.

**7.** Does the PPS strike the right balance between the objectives of conserving what is significant in the historic environment and mitigating the effects of climate change?

**No.** It seems to suggest that mitigating the effects of climate change takes precedence, which should not be the case.

**8.** Does the PPS make it clear to decision-makers what they should do, and where they have more flexibility? Are there any risks or benefits you would like to highlight for the historic environment sector?

**No.** There is certainly flexibility, but at the expense of protecting heritage. Far too much flexibility is given. Too many ambiguities, too much left open to interpretation and argument. The risks to the historic environment are immense, the benefits minimal.

**9.** The draft PPS highlights the importance of ensuring that adequate information and evidence bases are available, so that the historic environment and the significance of heritage assets are fully taken into account in plan-making and decision-taking. At the same time we are concerned to ensure that information requirements are proportionate and do not cause unnecessary delays. Are you content we have the balance right? If not how would you like to see our policy adjusted? (Policies HE8 and HE9 are particularly relevant to this question.)

**Yes,** to some extent. The requirement for site analysis and investigation has always been the case and has always been proportionate to the scale of the proposal. What is unclear from the PPS and the draft Heritage Protection bill is where the resources are to come from to ensure that HERs are available to everyone and what a prescribed format for the HER might be. Some further guidance would be useful and ensure consistency.

**10.** In your opinion is the PPS a document that will remain relevant for at least the next 20 years? Do you see other developments on the horizon that have implications for the policies set out in the PPS?

**No.** The PPS in its current form needs major reworking to allay the fears of conservation professionals.

**11.** Do you agree with the conclusions of the consultation stage impact assessment. In particular, have we correctly identified and resourced any additional burdens for local planning authorities? Is the impact on owners/developers correctly identified and proportionate to their responsibilities?

**No.** There are additional resource implications for both local and regional planning authorities and developers. Not all LPAs have direct access to an HER. This fundamental assumption is therefore flawed. Considerably more information will need to be located within the HER before it can be considered to be adequate, which will have huge resource implications.

Assumptions made on the level of Conservation resource to be found in LPAs currently are incorrect. Since the 2008 EH survey, resource levels have fallen dramatically. In this area alone there are vacant posts in 5 authorities, which in some cases means that there

is no specialist in-house expertise available at all. Archaeologists face a similar downward trend.

Pre-application costs are set to rise for developers as the requirement for more pre-application research and discussion increases as a consequence of the PPS. The need for increased access to HERs will have more than the assumed marginal implications for increased costs.

The assertion that Policy HE9 is broadly similar to that set out in PPG15 and 16 is particularly misleading and dangerous for the historic environment as it suggests that “loss of significance can be justified on the merits of new development” – a listed building could be demolished simply because the replacement scheme is of high quality. Similarly demolition could be permitted where “it can be demonstrated that the material harm to or removal of significance is outweighed by the wider social, economic and environmental benefits, including climate change, that will be delivered by the proposed development”. This is completely at odds with both the direction and the wording of the PPGs.

**12.** Do you think that the policy draft PPS will have a differential impact, either positive or negative, on people, because of their gender, race or disability? If so how in your view should we respond? We particularly welcome the views of organisations and individuals with specific expertise in these areas.

No. There will not be a differential impact.

In short there are so many areas of concern for conservation professionals, LPAs and developers with the draft PPS that it will require considerable reworking. In its present form it is too ambiguous and lacking in detail to be an effective tool, except perhaps for the unscrupulous that may take advantage of these very qualities to the detriment of the historic environment.

Whilst it is recognized that a slimming down of the previous guidance was desirable, where the end product is 70% reduced it is clear that at least some of the, in many cases crucial, detail has been omitted. The resultant document is at best too vague and at worst potentially extremely detrimental to the historic environment. It will place our heritage at an unprecedented level of risk that has not been surpassed since the formative years of the conservation movement.