

Response to the December 2025 NPPF consultation - with specific reference to PM13: Setting Standards

Prepared on behalf of LETI

The Low Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) is a voluntary network of over 1,000 built environment professionals, working together to put the UK and the planet on the path to a zero carbon future. Our aim is to clarify what this means in the built environment and develop the actions needed to meet the UK climate change targets. Our volunteers are made up of sustainability professionals, engineers, architects, planners, local authorities, academics, housing associations, developers, contractors and facilities managers, with support and input provided by other organisations.

We are writing to formally respond to the draft NPPF, published for consultation in December 2025, specifically the proposed policy PM13, which seeks to limit local authorities' ability to set local standards in planning policy, defaulting to Building Regulations, and specifically referencing energy efficiency standards. We see this as a huge risk locally and nationally, affecting vulnerable populations, slowing innovation and disabling local authorities from responding to their own local issues. Therefore, we strongly disagree with proposals under PM13.

This response summarises the key points of our response including the risks identified and a lack of publicly released evidence on the impacts of PM13. We have also pulled together supporting evidence with more detailed statements and data collated through our volunteer network. The evidence has been specifically compiled with local authorities who are extremely concerned, having invested time and resources into strengthening their local policies in response to environmental needs and constituent pressure.

Our key concerns are listed in summary below. Each point is expanded upon in more detail on the pages that follow.

Based on our analysis, PM13, as drafted, will be damaging locally and nationally and will impact residents (especially the most vulnerable):

1. It will prevent Local Authorities from using policy to reduce energy bills for residents (particularly necessary for affordable homes) and deliver other co-benefits (e.g. indoor air quality improvements).
2. It will conflict with Local Authorities' statutory climate change duties, prevent them meeting local carbon budgets and slow down Local Plan making by causing confusion.
3. It will undermine local democracy and the Government's devolution agenda.
4. It will negatively impact policies across other areas of sustainable development such as embodied carbon and climate change resilience.
5. It would constrain development by reducing Local Authorities' ability to address local issues including grid capacity and energy infrastructure planning.
6. The government has a Core Strategy for Growth Areas. Community support for these is stronger when they evidence high energy efficiency and wider environmental performance. Local policy has leveraged this and plays a key role in enabling this growth to come forwards.

We are also concerned about the lack of justification and evidence provided to explain why PM13 is proposed.

- A. The impact of PM13 on carbon emissions, equality and health, has not been assessed and shared publicly.
- B. PM13 states that there is a wide variance in local energy efficiency standards. However, all recently adopted local policies use the same energy metrics, which are also the industry preference due to their transparency and simplicity.
- C. There is no evidence that local standards create viability issues or that they affect the delivery of housing.
- D. Contrary to the justification used, local energy efficiency standards do not prevent the deployment of energy efficiency measures at scale. In fact, PM13 would be an unnecessary blocker to the innovations already being delivered to decarbonise the construction industry.

Additionally, LETI would highlight a simple win-win alternative to PM13. The proposal is to enable local authorities to adopt an 'optional' standard based on energy metrics, similar to the current approach to water efficiency standards. Where justified and viable, Local Authorities should be able to adopt an optional 'Zero Carbon policy' for new buildings. This optional standard would be proposed to MHCLG by Local Authorities, include a number of standardised requirements and modelled on the basis of energy policies already adopted and found sound. This approach would give similar advantages and 'protections' as the current system (e.g. the policies would still have to be found sound by the Planning Inspectorate) but would also enable a high degree of consistency across the UK. It would be a win-win solution.

Detailed response and supporting evidence

LETI has also prepared an evidence document in support of the above. This supplements our response and is cross-referenced in the detailed response on the following pages:

PM13 introduces significant issues and risks

PM13, if implemented, will be damaging locally and nationally and will impact residents (especially the most vulnerable):

1. PM13 will prevent Local Authorities from using policy to reduce energy bills for residents and deliver co-benefits (e.g. indoor air quality and health outcomes)

The cost of energy has been highly volatile and is unlikely to reduce. Vulnerable populations, particularly those with health conditions, are disproportionately less able to pay for energy to meet their daily needs. While the Future Homes Standard is expected to mark a shift away from fossil fuel heating, local authorities should retain the ability to test its efficiency outcomes against locally specific factors. In particular, when it is viable to do so, local authorities should be able to set higher energy efficiency standards which will also have co-benefits (e.g. indoor air quality and health outcomes). Without this lever local authorities will be prevented from using policy to help residents reduce energy costs and address indoor air quality concerns, beyond Building Regulations (a minimum performance requirement set at the national level without considerations of specific social and environmental circumstances, including vulnerability to fuel poverty and local air-quality context).

Where higher local energy standards have been implemented this has resulted in design teams integrating energy analysis more deeply into the design process during early design stages when efficiency savings are easier to achieve. Where it can be proven locally that higher standards are viable and feasible for developers it should be possible to dramatically ease the cost-of-living pressures for UK citizens. Our analysis suggests that this could lead to significant savings for residents (please refer to the evidence document and our analysis of a typical semi-detached house).

2. PM13 conflicts with Local Authorities' statutory climate change duties, will prevent them meeting local carbon budgets and slow down Local Plan making by causing confusion

The December 2025 consultation draft NPPF states that one purpose of the planning system is to “mitigate and adapt to climate change”. The consultation document lists 12 key policy changes; several of them reference key National Policies that “support the transition to net zero”, prepare local plans to mitigate climate change, support local economic growth and ensure high quality, robust, resilient built environment design.

- CC2 Mitigation of climate change
- CC3 Adaptation to climate change
- S1 Positive plan-making
- DP3 Key principles for well designed places

As drafted, PM13 prevents LPAs from fulfilling their legal duties. It states that “quantitative standards set through development plan policies should be limited to infrastructure provision, affordable housing requirements, parking” and “Not cover matters which are already addressed by Building Regulations.” As drafted, it does not align with or support the wider NPPF purpose and is inconsistent with the Government’s Design and Placemaking Practice Guidance, which has a much stronger emphasis on the need to address climate change impacts. It conflicts with statutory climate duties placed on local authorities and creates confusion.

While the Climate Change Act does not legislate sectoral limits, all sectors have to significantly reduce emissions. Analysis supporting the 6th and 7th Carbon Budgets shows that the buildings sector will need to reach close to zero carbon in the 2040s without offsetting.

A number of Local Authorities have Net Zero targets ahead of the national 2050 target and PM13 would remove their ability to influence new buildings. Local authority planning staff have invested time in upskilling, developing a stronger understanding of energy performance and how to assess it, which has allowed the effective creation of sound, feasible and viable local policy.

Based on the scale of construction targeted across the UK, if adopted, PM 13 will have a detrimental impact on meeting the Carbon Budget. A study undertaken in Greater Cambridge (one of several key growth areas) compared the expected FHS performance with an emerging net zero operational performance standard based on high performance fabric and on-site renewable energy generation. The analysis suggests that with the adoption of PM13, the scale of construction and all new homes being built to the anticipated FHS, carbon emissions would exceed the allocated local carbon budget (please refer to the evidence document).

Parliament has placed a clear legal duty on Local Planning Authorities through the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (s.19(1A)) which acts beyond the Planning & Energy Act. This ensures their development plans secure mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change.

3. PM13 will undermine local democracy and the Government's devolution agenda

Where local policies are to receive 'very limited weight' it goes against devolution and regional planning. In the English Devolution White Paper, December 2024, the Deputy Prime Minister wrote "If we are going to build an economy that works for everyone, we need nothing less than a completely new way of governing – a generational project of determined devolution." This includes performing functions in the housing and strategic planning, and environment and net zero areas .

4. PM13 will negatively impact policies across other areas of sustainable development such as embodied carbon and climate change resilience

The current wording of PM13 has led to concerns about its impact on other quantitative environmental policies. As drafted, it could lead to potential unintended consequences. Several sustainable development factors require local quantification and PM13 risks constraining these policies despite their contribution to viable net zero pathways. For example, embodied carbon is a major unregulated contributor to emissions. Although it is not yet regulated through the Building Regulations, it may be in the future. Many local authorities already require the reporting of embodied and whole life carbon to increase material efficiency, drive the development of low carbon materials and deliver proven cost efficiencies and see the benefit in maintaining and developing local requirements to limit these increasing emissions. Managing overheating requires region-specific, metric-based approaches that prioritise passive design before mechanical cooling. Waste management and circularity policies could also be at risk. These policies encourage retrofit, material reuse, recycled content and design for disassembly, delivering clear health, economic and environmental benefits. Embodied carbon, overheating and circular economy objectives cannot be delivered through Building Regulations alone. They rely on local policy tools that PM13 would constrain.

A further lever authorities currently utilise is offsetting, where justification is acceptable. This provides essential investment into local decarbonisation projects, which will slow if dis-allowed.

5. PM13 would constrain development by reducing Local Authorities' ability to address local issues including grid capacity and infrastructure investment

Planning for new homes and decarbonisation are inherently linked to local infrastructure capacities. The local grid must support increasing demands from buildings, industry and electric vehicles. All new buildings and homes add demand to the grid; buildings and infrastructure act as a system where investing in more efficient building fabric and energy performance can reduce spending on infrastructure (and emissions generated in expanding it), sharing the responsibility for the system optimisation between consumers, developers and government. The current growth trajectories are also adding more pressure to the infrastructure we do have.

Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) and Local Plan Policy can identify these issues and plan for energy efficient buildings and renewable electricity generation. There is already evidence of severe grid constraints in parts of the UK temporarily pausing new connections. There is precedent for localised approaches to infrastructure where varying local water standards mitigate areas of water scarcity. Maximising the use of on-site renewable electricity should take a similar approach.

A local approach to energy standards will recognise regional variation in housing typologies, densities, climates, demographics, viability and supply chains. It will ensure energy use is matched to on-site energy generation; this is not possible by relying solely on Building Regulations, despite the anticipated FHS. A local approach improves management and growth of clean energy grids and land use to match supply and demand, reducing losses incurred through distribution over larger distances. For example, the Greater Essex LAEP combines the assumed energy efficiency and infrastructure needs to meet a 2050 net zero target with the land use requirements set out in the Spatial Development Strategy. Without integrated planning, there is a risk that land will be required for energy generation (such as ground mounted PV) when it is under considerable pressure for other needs such as housing, infrastructure, agriculture, and economic development, including data centres. Land is a finite resource and must be used efficiently.

6. The government has a Core Strategy for Growth Areas. Community support for these is stronger when they evidence high energy efficiency and wider environmental performance. Local policy has leveraged this and plays a key role in enabling this growth to come forwards.

Energy efficient homes and developments are more popular with the local community and home buyers because of the benefits they bring in terms of reduced carbon emissions, better health, improved air quality and lower running costs. Net zero developments typically garner more support from the local community. In areas where there may be objections to increased development, such as in Growth Areas, this additional support can be valuable in supporting the streamlined delivery of more homes. PM13 would negate this support by homogenising the requirements to a single national standard.

We are also concerned about the lack of justification and evidence provided to explain why PM13 should be introduced.

A. The impact of PM13 on carbon emissions, equality, health and biodiversity, has not been assessed and shared publicly.

MHCLG have three statutory duties when considering restricting local authorities from setting local requirements which go beyond the minimum national standard. The Duty to have due regard to the environmental principles policy statement when making policies (Environment Act 2021), the

Biodiversity duty which requires public authorities to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity; and the Public Sector Equalities Duty, which ensures that public authorities consider how their functions will affect people with different protected characteristics.

PM13 is not accompanied by any assessments showing that environmental, social and economic consequences have been considered. In particular, it is not clear whether PM13 is compatible with the UK's legally binding carbon budgets under the Climate Change Act (in itself a duty of the Environment Act). The consequences of preventing local quantitative targets related to other emissions causing or related to climate change including embodied-carbon, waste management and the circular economy are also not assessed. Local authorities are required to prepare thorough evidence bases to justify proposed policy changes and it is expected that for any national changes, a full and transparent environmental impact assessment should be made available.

The potential social impacts of PM13 such as energy costs related to mitigating the cost of living pressures, equalities or health impacts for vulnerable populations have also not been assessed. Any policy that limits local climate action should undergo transparent assessment for climate compatibility, equality impacts and health outcomes before adoption.

B. PM13 references wide variance in energy efficiency standards; this is not the case with all local policies recently adopted (and backed up by evidence bases) using the same energy metrics.

It is misleading to suggest that there are varying standards for energy efficiency across different local plans. To date the vast majority of plans either already found sound or adopted are all using consistent energy based metrics, measuring methodologies and boundaries. These set out requirements related to space heating demand, energy use intensity and a renewable energy or energy balance requirement. The metrics match those recommended by the Climate Change Committee and those incorporated into the industry backed UK Net Zero Carbon Buildings Standard. Indeed, in the Inspector's report for the Uttlesford Local Plan 2021-2041 Examination, the Inspector notes in paragraph 133 that "the use of the EUI metric is becoming more common nationally".

All policies either adopted or under development are also supported by extensive evidence on their technical feasibility and viability. In the case of those policies that have already been found sound at examination, they have been proven to have been positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy. Furthermore, they are recorded as necessary to meet the legal duties placed on Local Planning Authorities in relation to climate change mitigation in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act.

The industry has already moved toward consistent energy-based metrics, measuring methodologies and boundaries. Suggesting wide variation misrepresents the current situation, where approaches are increasingly aligned. (Please refer to our evidence document which illustrates this)

C. There is no evidence that local standards create viability issues or that they affect the delivery of housing.

The uplift in capital cost for achieving net zero homes compared with building regulations standards are a small proportion of overall construction costs and are rarely the defining factor in whether a development is viable or not in a given area.

Land prices also inherently respond to local needs and standards. Less ambitious standards in terms of energy efficiency will therefore not necessarily result in lower overall costs.

Net zero standards have been demonstrated to pass viability tests through examined evidence bases in areas in which they have been tested - including those where land values are typically low. Evidence submitted as part of Local Plan examinations has demonstrated that local energy efficiency standards going beyond the minimum Building Regulations are viable where proportionate and supported by appropriate technical feasibility and viability work.

Analysis undertaken by Bioregional across three local authorities (Bath & North East Somerset, Cornwall and Central Lincolnshire) also shows that the adoption of policies using best-practice absolute energy metrics has not resulted in a systemic reduction in housing supply. In Cornwall and Bath & North East Somerset, the introduction of higher energy performance standards was followed by increases in housing planning applications, with no increase in refusal rates, indicating that these requirements have not acted as a barrier to development. The overall findings suggest that, when underpinned by proportionate evidence and viability testing through plan examination, energy-based net zero policies can be implemented without undermining housing delivery, including in areas with varying land values. (Please refer to the evidence document)

D. Contrary to the justification used, local energy efficiency standards do not prevent the deployment of energy efficiency measures. In fact, PM13 would be an unnecessary blocker to the innovations already being delivered to decarbonise the construction industry.

Local energy efficiency standards and policies supporting sustainable development are proven to drive innovation, upskilling and economic growth. They do not prevent the deployment of energy efficiency technologies at scale.

The NPPF Consultation states that *"The policy as drafted would limit local standards for energy efficiency, as we are concerned that varying standards across local plans make it difficult for the construction sector to adapt and deploy energy efficiency technologies at scale"*.

Viable, but ambitious local planning policy creates opportunities for economic growth, upskilling and innovation for the supply chain, and supports the development of expertise across the UK. A few examples include:

- Accelerated low-carbon design innovation
- Expansion of the low carbon materials supply chain and local manufacturing
- Demand for expert skills such as certified designer specialists, airtightness specialists, heat-pump engineering and building modeling
- Installer training programmes and specialist construction skills
- Thriving SME sectors delivering low carbon technologies, including ASHPs and heat recovery systems
- Trades gaining expertise in delivering better quality and air tight homes
- New business models including re-used material marketplaces and deconstruction services

Evidence shows that energy efficiency technologies (e.g. heat pumps, Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery, triple-glazed windows, photovoltaics etc.) have emerged and gradually achieved a greater share of the market precisely due to standards which were going beyond Building Regulations.

In addition, innovation supports the next stage of regulatory development, enabling more streamlined collation of technical feasibility. Strong local policy has historically been a major driver of innovation, skills development and supply-chain expansion. Restricting this ability risks slowing down progress in the wider sector.

There is a simple win-win alternative to PM13: enable local authorities to adopt an 'optional' standard based on energy metrics.

This would be similar to the approach already adopted for water efficiency standards. Where justified and viable, Local Authorities should be able to adopt an optional 'Zero Carbon policy' for new buildings. This optional standard would be proposed to MHCLG by Local Authorities and modelled on the basis of energy policies already adopted and found sound. It would include a number of optional requirements (e.g. Space Heating Demand, Energy Use Intensity limit, Upfront Embodied carbon limit) which Local Authorities would be able to consider and, when justified and viable, adopt in their draft Local Plan.

This approach would present similar advantages and 'protections' as the current system (e.g. the policies would still have to be found sound by the Planning Inspectorate) but would also enable a high degree of consistency across the UK. It would be a win-win solution.

We would support this alternative.