HOUSE OF LORDS

Land Use in England Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Land use in England

Monday 4 April 2022

3.30 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Cameron of Dillington (The Chair); Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville; Lord Borwick; Lord Curry of Kirkharle; Lord Goddard of Stockport; Lord Grantchester; Lord Harlech; Earl of Leicester; Baroness Mallalieu; Baroness Redfern; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

Evidence Session No. 7 Heard in Public Questions 74 - 86

Witnesses

I: Dame Fiona Reynolds, Commissioner and Trustee, Food, Farming and Countryside Commission; Sue Pritchard, Chief Executive, Food, Farming and Countryside Commission; Dr Alison Caffyn, Senior Researcher, Food, Farming and Countryside Commission.

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Examination of witnesses

Dame Fiona Reynolds, Sue Pritchard and Dr Alison Caffyn.

Q74 **The Chair:** Welcome to the seventh evidence session of the Land Use in England Committee. Welcome particularly to Dr Alison Caffyn, Sue Pritchard and Dame Fiona Reynolds, all from the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission. I have been looking forward to this session of evidence-taking, because you are, to some extent, one step ahead of us. You are prepared; you have some sort of pilot or framework that you are devising and experimenting with, so that is very good.

This session is being recorded. You have in front of you a list of interests that have been declared by members of the committee. The meeting is being broadcast live via the parliamentary website. A transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to that transcript where necessary.

Our final questions about where you have got to and about your latest thinking are the key ones, but the preliminary questions will lead up to that in this hour's session, so we must make sure that we leave enough time at the end. I will ask the first question.

What do you see as the key drivers shaping the changing land needs for food production? I know this is on biodiversity and the environment, but we are living in a fairly precarious world—put it that way—with a biodiversity crisis such that we have not seen before, a climate change crisis, a Ukrainian crisis and a worldwide pandemic crisis. It is all there. Food production is quite important to us. What skills and resources are needed, or will be needed, to manage change in food production to the best advantage?

Sue Pritchard: First, thank you for having us. We are delighted to be here. We are thrilled that you are doing this work. We think it is a really important piece of work.

Your preliminary question is absolute meat and drink for us at the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission. I am sure you have all been briefed, but very quickly for those of you who do not know, FFCC is an independent charitable organisation chaired by Sir Ian Cheshire, with 15 commissioners drawn from across food, farming, countryside, economic, environment and citizen groups, and NGOs. Of course, Dame Fiona Reynolds is one of our wonderful commissioners. We work across the UK with teams in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We are core funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Prince of Wales's Charitable Fund and the Ashden Trust. We have smaller project funding with others.

We have three substantial programmes of work. The first is food and health, and we are looking particularly at the moment at issues of affordability, hunger and hardship. The second is the farming transition, which I am sure we will talk a lot more about today. The third substantial

theme and programme is what we call the countryside that works for all, which is where our work on the land use framework particularly sits.

You can gather from that quick preamble that issues of food production, food security and land use are very much at the forefront of our minds. That is why it is so very important, in discussions about a land use framework, that we pay attention to the multiple demands on land, and food production at this particular time could not be more important.

Issues of food security, the food that we produce in the UK and how we produce food in the UK have been brought into sharp relief over the last three or four years. Some issues came to the fore as we were exiting the European Union. Further issues came up through the pandemic. Of course, now, with war in Ukraine at the forefront of many of our minds, the deeply interconnected interdependent food system and how what we eat and grow here is so dependent on what happens in other parts of the world is critically important.

In thinking about issues of food security and what we choose to produce in the UK, the things that we say and will talk more about shortly with regard to the land use framework are about multifunctionality and making the best use of all the land that we have available. It is about going with the grain of our ecology and our land, taking more responsibility for doing the kinds of things that we can do well in the UK in our ecology, in our ecosystem and in our climate in a way that absolutely pays attention to the arguably even bigger crises that we have in front of us, such as the climate crisis, the nature crisis and the crisis of public health and well-being.

It is a good question to start on, because it absolutely gets to the heart of all the questions that come to the fore when we start thinking about how we use land in the UK, and how we make decisions about how we use land in the UK in an open, transparent, equitable and inclusive way.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Q75 **Baroness Mallalieu:** I want to ask about ELMS. First, what opportunities do you think it could offer? Secondly, what are the main difficulties that it is likely to face? What effect do you think it could have on British farming and, in particular, British farmers and tenant farmers?

Sue Pritchard: That is a very good question. ELMS has huge ambition. The ambition set out in the original document, *Health and Harmony*, was incredibly bold and important. Of course, we are not the only country in the world rethinking how subsidy and investment in farming systems needs to change to act on the climate and nature crisis. It is very timely.

What we are trying to do in the UK is absolutely right, but I have to say that we share the frustrations of many that, so far, progress is a little slow, and there is perhaps insufficient clarity about the vision that we have for the UK's food and farming system to give people confidence that, however tough it is to make these transitions, and it will be tough

for very many people, at least we are all clear about the direction of travel.

I have an enormous amount of time for the staff in Defra who are working really hard to co-design the new scheme with farmers and landowners. One issue that has already come up is that the process of co-design and learning from tests and trials is out of sync with, first, the BPS rates changing and, secondly, the kinds of decisions that farmers and landowners have to start making if they are to recalibrate their businesses. As well as being the chief executive of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, I am a small farmer in Wales. Some of the decisions that you end up taking are years in the making. Farmers need a lot of clarity and guidance to be able to plan, with some degree of clarity and confidence, for the kind of food and farming system we will have in the UK in the long term.

It is vital that ELMS provides the right support for farmers to farm sustainably and to protect soil and water quality, and to deliver nature recovery across the whole farmed landscape. Our specific concerns are, very briefly, these. Are the schemes sufficiently ambitious to have the kind of landscape scale impacts that we all want, or will they end up reduced to rather more modest and piecemeal schemes, perhaps in the end even replicating the schemes that they are there to replace?

Will they favour large and well-organised landowners? There is a risk that well-organised landowners or consortia of landowners will hoover up the resources that are available and leave smaller farmers reliant on the much more modest entry level and partial opportunities. Tenants, especially tenants in upland areas, tell us that they are deeply concerned, and I think they have the right to be concerned, that land will be taken out of the rental market by landowners who think they will be able to get more returns from the new schemes through non-farming land use changes.

As well as ELMS, on the one hand, incentivising farmers in exactly the right way, and paying the right amount for the right things at the right scale, it is important that we pay attention to the regulatory baseline and make sure that there is an incentive for farmers to do the right thing, and perhaps not, as we hear in some cases, just reverting to pretty intensive practices and taking their chance in the marketplace, particularly in light of the crisis that Lord Cameron alluded to earlier.

Q76 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** I have a supplementary on the issue of food and farming. Henry Dimbleby thought about land use as part of his food strategy and came up with a three-compartment model. What are your views about what it does for food production and what it does for land use management or land use decision-making?

Dame Fiona Reynolds: First, we pay tribute to Henry for a remarkable and really important report. It is multifaceted. We are all eagerly awaiting the Government's response to it.

The three-compartment model raises challenges and problems for us, in the sense that it can appear simplistic. You divide the country into three and you do some things in certain areas and not in others. We believe, and I am sure we will talk more about this, in multifunctionality and that every piece of land offers something for nature, for food production, for recreation and enjoyment, and for all the multiple purposes that people have and want from land. The three-compartment model sends the wrong signal about multifunctionality, in our view. We hope that some of the ideas that we are proposing will replace that thinking. There are elements in Henry Dimbleby's report that are useful in relation to that, but we think we can do better.

The Chair: It was inherent in my question, but do you think farmers have the knowledge, understanding and training to be able to produce that multifaceted land management?

Sue Pritchard: It depends. There are some incredibly skilled farmers who are working very hard to develop their knowledge, skill and technical information. I am a member of a number of farming organisations that have very lively forums where farmers talk about the sorts of things that they are experimenting with, working on and developing all the time. Among some farmers and young entrants, and new entrants, to farming, we see an enormous amount of interest in doing the right thing and in experimenting with new techniques. Sometimes it is about stopping doing things and letting go of reliance on certain intensive practices and developing a much more knowledge-based skill set.

The Chair: That, of course, is the problem. Where is the knowledge coming from?

Sue Pritchard: Yes. As everybody in this room knows, farming is an enormously diverse sector. It is very difficult ever to say what farmers think, because farmers think many different things and do very different things. At FFCC, we are very concerned to find ways of talking more effectively to the so-called hard-to-reach farmers. In my experience, again as a Welsh farmer, they are not necessarily hard to reach. You just have to go to the right places to find them. That is probably not using podcasts, apps or smartphone activities. If you can even get your smartphone to work up a Welsh hillside, you are really on to something. Many farmers, as we know, are considerably older than the optimum age perhaps for using those sorts of electronic devices.

That said, farmers meet at markets. They meet in pubs. They meet in all sorts of different places. There are routes to working with and involving and engaging all kinds of farmers if we use a whole range of different techniques and approaches. We have been spending quite a bit of time in the team doing just that.

The Chair: Thank you very much. From deepest Northumberland, Lord Curry has a question for you.

Q77 **Lord Curry of Kirkharle:** Thank you, Chair. I apologise to my friends on

the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission that I am not there in person.

This links to Fiona's comment. Earlier, you mentioned food security, and you support the principle of public support for public goods. In fact, Fiona and I can claim responsibility for that phrase back in 2002. In the light of the war in Ukraine, do you think that producing food is now a public good?

Sue Pritchard: I have always been a bit nervous about the phrase "public good", because it has a very particular economic meaning. I have been saying for years, rather boringly, that if we keep using the phrase "public good", we get ourselves trapped in a very reductive economic definition of what it actually means. It is crucial to talk about public value, as Sir Michael Barber did to great effect in the public value framework introduced into government back in 2017. We are working with Sir Michael now on the land use framework.

It is very important to talk about public value and, in fact, both versions of that. What do we know about what the public value about food and food systems? We have learned a lot about that through the pandemic. Also, what is of value to the public? In our work we have revealed the enormous cost to the public purse of unhealthy food and a dysfunctional food system where, very often, the cost to the public purse shows up not in food systems but in the NHS through the costs of diet-related ill health. Now, of course, food security is a critical question.

I absolutely agree with you that food and functioning effective food systems are central to public value. In the big decisions that we will have to make, it is important to start thinking about what matters. The IPCC report today reminds us how little time we have to start making big decisions about how we go on as a society for the climate and nature crisis. There are lots of things that we can do without, but one of the things that we absolutely cannot do without at least three times a day is healthy, sustainably produced food. We have somehow lost sight of that.

When we come to questions of food security, it becomes really important to think as strategically, imaginatively and courageously as we can about the kind of food system we want in the UK and internationally. We must not do that at the expense of the same critical questions about climate, nature, health and well-being. We could start thinking about food waste. We could start thinking about the amount of land that is dedicated to growing feed for animals instead of food for humans. We could start thinking about the number of commodities that get used up making 200 varieties of sweet, rubbishy biscuits that make eye-watering profits for some big food companies but are probably not central to a healthy, sustainably produced diet. Being more imaginative about these questions is very timely.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: We had a round table of farmers a couple of weeks ago. I was a bit staggered, because they all seemed to be talking about regenerative farming and agroecology approaches. They

were not all dark green, hand-wringing greenies. If farmers generally adopt a multifunctional approach and become much more regenerative in their farming methods, can we feed the nation?

Sue Pritchard: Yes, we can. We commissioned a report two years ago, which was published at the end of 2020, by a French think tank, IDDRI, and asked that very question: "Can we feed the UK using agroecological methods?" The answer, to our relief, was yes, we can. Of course, it requires some significant conditions to be put in place. I have touched on some of them already, such as feed for animals and food waste. We must think more strategically about what we can grow effectively in the UK across our particular maritime climate. The modelling that they undertook for us was very clear. With the right conditions in place, we can provide enough food, and for export, for viable farm businesses to continue to feed the UK.

Q78 **Baroness Redfern:** With the ELM scheme, do you think that a different approach will likely be needed for different spatial scales, in that at farm or holding levels there is preference for a plan that covers the whole farm or holding? Concerns are being raised about the time and data required to complete a land management plan, particularly for larger holdings or estates. Could I have your comments on that, please?

Dame Fiona Reynolds: In response, perhaps I could raise a point about the relationship between the individual holding and the context in which it sits. The risk is that if decisions are simply made on an individual farm level, there is no certainty that we will deliver wider benefits for nature, for sustainable food production and for the wider economy and society. It comes back to the case for a land use framework to help to guide farmers in an area that might be a few farms, an entire catchment or even bigger than that, to contribute collectively to some greater goal. That is one reason why we favour the land use framework: it is to help to make those bigger connections and a more sustainable outcome.

Sue Pritchard: I am not sure whether size is the issue here, actually. There are some large landowners who have been doing a lot of work collecting data for some time. There are some smaller farmers and land managers who have not. It is likely to be more to do with the history of the particular holding and how well they have embraced the value of data collection and data management across their holding up to now.

Q79 **Lord Grantchester:** Lady Young asked, "Can we feed the UK?" I would ask, "Do we need to feed the UK?" There is a distinction between self-sufficiency and food security. Does that need to be rethought?

Sue Pritchard: Yes, you are right. There is a very clear distinction. At FFCC, we are big fans of progressive trading relationships with other parts of the world that can grow very important things in their ecologies and ecosystems better than we can. I do not want to give up chocolate, coffee or a good selection of wine. It makes sense for us to grow more of what we can grow here, and have progressive, supportive trading relationships with other parts of the world where they are able to grow

other kinds of food in ways that are more appropriate to their climate, landscape, context, conditions and so on.

Trade is a good thing. That said, it makes great sense for us to take more responsibility for growing more of the things that we can grow in the UK. We should be growing more healthy fruit, veg, nuts and pulses. We could be growing more top fruit and nuts, integrating trees and agroforestry across the farmed environment. There are all sorts of things that we can do to take more responsibility and to do more of what we can do well, going with the grain of our climate and our ecology, while recognising that viable farm businesses will always want to trade. We will want to support developing countries in particular to develop their own farming sectors, and trade appropriately with them.

Lord Grantchester: The question obviously keeps changing as the answers come back. It then leads us on to how much we need farmers, and how we drive that change to farmers.

Sue Pritchard: How much do we need farmers? It is one of those questions that it is easy to ask and you answer it at least three times a day. If we do not have famers, we will all have to start digging up our gardens and creating allotments. Lots of economists say that farming and food systems are the foundational elements of the economy. They are not things that we can negotiate away from at the moment, in my view.

Q80 **Lord Borwick:** How can we best ensure that the right thing is being done in the right place at the right scale in farming? As I see the planning system, normally there is a proposal by somebody to change an existing use and move to something else within the local plan. Some of what you have said is that we should change to be better, and that is normally done by way of grants, ELMS or some other system. Is there any proposal that it should be by way of a planning system that says, "You must do it this way"? In other words, the landowner should not have control about what he does on his own land. Would you agree with that?

Dame Fiona Reynolds: We have an answer to your question, but I want to set a bit of context first. If we step back a little to the case for the land use framework, doing the right thing in the right place for the right reasons at the right scale is the million-dollar question of the moment. We all talk about this all the time, but we do not have mechanisms to achieve it. When you think of the asks that we are making of land—everything from food production, nature recovery, water management, tree planting to housing, infrastructure and development—we have a small land area in this country and huge and complex pressures, not to mention net zero. We do not have mechanisms for making those decisions in an intelligent way.

This is not a new problem. In fact, I am very fond of quoting a 1942 White Paper on the control of land use, which actually set out, in the context of the post-war reconstruction programme, a proposal for the right use of land and for the best way of achieving it. The White Paper talks about harmony between the many ambitions on land to meet a

mixture of public benefit and personal and private contentment. That is what we are grappling with.

We have had mechanisms in the past. [1]The county structure plans, which were introduced in 1968 and abolished in 2010, looked at agriculture in a very general way. It was not control, but they tried to have a positive view of land uses within a county area. Then, of course, we had the regional strategies, which were abolished in 2010. Post-war, we had ADAS. I am very conscious that that was advice to farmers but within a national picture of what the Government saw as important in food production across the country. We have tried to do it before, but we are without strategic mechanisms now. We have nothing, and that is what we are hearing. We go round the country talking to organisations and individuals, including many farmers, and they all say, "We need a process and a framework". That is what we have been putting together.

Our proposals would not take individual decision-making from landowners or farmers. They would not usurp local authority obligations and responsibilities. What they would do is provide the framework for better decision-making. That is the basis of the pilots that we are running at the moment in Cambridgeshire and Devon. It is also the basis of the principles in our proposals for an England land use framework. There are land use frameworks in Scotland and Wales. They have seen the benefits of such an approach, but we do not have anything in England at the moment. We are sitting with a negative situation at the moment, having had mechanisms in the past that certainly were not perfect, but we have lost them. That is why we think it is time to introduce something new.

Dr Alison Caffyn: The land use framework is not a zoning-type proposal. It is not the sort of framework that was mentioned in the national food strategy in the Dimbleby report. It is very much more a framework in which organisations, individuals and so on can make better decisions, or be encouraged and enabled, and given better data and evidence, to make better decisions.

Lord Borwick: The words "better decisions" and "better outcomes" are in the minds of the people coming up with the framework rather than in the minds of the people who own the land.

Dr Alison Caffyn: Not necessarily.

Dame Fiona Reynolds: Not necessarily. The Government have said—

Lord Borwick: You are absolutely right that it is not necessarily. Everyone might be agreeing with each other, and that is absolutely wonderful, but in the margin when they do not agree with each other, who wins?

Dame Fiona Reynolds: The extraordinary thing that we are finding, certainly in the pilot that I am leading in Cambridgeshire where we have

[1] Dame Fiona Reynolds subsequently corrected her statement. The county structure plans were abolished in 2004.

around the table local authorities, farmers, landowners and local voluntary organisations covering conservation, local food systems and a huge raft of people—at our first meeting over 50 organisations signed up to collaborate—is that they all agree that these complex demands from government need a process of prioritisation and rationalisation. They are pretty much all up for working together to achieve better outcomes.

The farmers are not saying, "I just want to farm for the market". I am very much in line with what Baroness Young said. They are all saying, "We want to do the right thing, but we don't know what the right thing is. Help us get to a better place". Of course, there will be tensions. Put a big new railway or new road through the system and of course someone will be unhappy. Put housing in the wrong place and someone will be unhappy. We live with those realities, but in the broader picture we are pretty impressed by the degree of convergence.

Sue Pritchard: Let us be clear. Landowners do not have carte blanche to do whatever they like on their land. We already have regulatory mechanisms in place to limit harms. In our view, those need to start increasing, given what we know about water pollution, air pollution and so on, and the effects of some agricultural practices on those critical issues.

If you lived in a grade 2 listed building, you would not expect to be able to put in UPVC windows. We are used to regulating things that are of national importance. Soil, biodiversity, streamside corridors and the quality of water are all of national importance, as well as being important to individual farmers and land managers.

Lord Borwick: I understand what you are saying, but normally when we demand that somebody does something like build a road across their land, we compulsorily purchase their land, which is a cost on the country overall, and take their ownership away from them by means of compulsory purchase. Are you saying that if there is a disagreement, as is possible, between a farmer and the national plan, he would be forced to do it, or that his land would be purchased compulsorily in order to be set aside for nature purposes or to grow trees on it even though he wants to earn a living growing barley on it instead?

Dame Fiona Reynolds: At the moment, there is no provision in law for that kind of arrangement. The majority of the people we talk to are ready to embrace the new ambition for sustainable and regenerative farming to deliver nature benefits, but they do not know the right place.

A recent NAO report on the tree-planting ambitions, as you all know, showed that it was incredibly difficult to get targets met because people did not know the right place to plant the right kind of tree. People are crying out for help with those spatial decisions. Of course, there will be individuals who say, "Actually, I'm just going to opt out and go for the market solution". We are quite worried about that, because if enough farmers do that and the ELM scheme does not prove effective, we do not see a smooth path to a more sustainable farming system. If the ELM

scheme comes forward faster with the right support and, we believe, a more spatially helpful framework of the kind that we are talking about, we think that most farmers are ready to adopt that.

Dr Alison Caffyn: It is not seen as a top-down framework. It is very much also a bottom-up framework. Farmers and landowners would be part of the conversation that developed their own local land use framework. They would help to co-design what it would look like. It is not perceived as something that is imposed from the top down.

Sue Pritchard: We have found in our work so far, both in Cambridgeshire and in Devon, that farmers and landowners see themselves as part of a community that is steeped in these really complex decisions. We are talking about growing food. We are talking about flood prevention. We are also talking about more resilient and adaptable communities that are able to meet whatever challenges come down the line in the face of the climate and nature crisis. For some communities—Devon and Cambridgeshire are good examples—the sorts of questions that whole communities will have to deal with are becoming more and more pressing. The farmers we have been speaking to certainly see themselves very much as part of communities that want to be part of those big decisions.

The Chair: Baroness Young has a supplementary to ask her co-members of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission.

Q81 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** Yes. I should say that, as well as Fiona being a wonderful commissioner, I am a wonderful commissioner as well.

I want your response to this musing. If you think about the common agricultural policy, over 35 or 40 years we trained farmers exquisitely to be infinitely responsive to subsidy. That had huge impacts on land use, biodiversity and what we grow. What is the replacement? It is clearly not ELMS. ELMS is less money covering fewer people and with less welly. What are the building blocks—

The Chair: It is the same amount of money initially. I agree that it will not last.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Mr Sunak appears to have got his shovel in somewhere, because it will get smaller and smaller, I suspect. Very swiftly, because I can see the Chair glaring at me, are there five big levers that will produce the same scale of impact as CAP did?

Sue Pritchard: There is possibly one big lever. We can perhaps write to you with the work that we are doing on it. It is leveraging private finance alongside public finance for big, strategic land use change. We know that that is starting to happen anyway. Private equity and business is starting to buy land and change land use for particular purposes. We think it is really important that that is done in a more thoughtful and deliberative way. Private finance is probably the critical other lever, alongside public policy, in these conversations.

The Chair: It would be very helpful if you could send us your thinking on that, because it is an important part of our work.

Q82 **Lord Harlech:** Turning from agriculture to housing, how does the Government's levelling-up agenda and housing policy impact on rural areas in general and the farming sector in particular?

Dame Fiona Reynolds: The levelling-up White Paper has come as a disappointment to many rural organisations, as I am sure you have seen, because it almost treats the problem as if it is a cities' problem, and if you live in a rural area it is almost blind in the Government's eyes. There is a lot of concern.

Many people in rural areas feel left behind, partly because they already have poorer services and a lack of access to things that people take for granted in cities and towns. It is important that the levelling-up White Paper addresses not just the big cities and towns but the within-region disparities, particularly a strand of specifically rural investment to deal with them. A lot of people are asking for that at the moment.

By the way, I think that most of us as individuals were pretty shocked that the levelling-up White Paper did not have an environmental pillar. That struck us as an extraordinary omission. If you do not level up sustainably, you will not achieve long-term benefits. There are some gaps and inadequacies in the White Paper that we hope will be put right as it is implemented.

There are two kinds of housing, as we know: market housing and affordable housing. On market housing, we do not have a good system. It is a very top-down imposition of numbers on local authorities. Everywhere we go, we hear concerns about the tensions that that provides, not least because it is not even a question of saying, "Where is the best place to put housing?" It is a call for sites process, which means that if someone comes forward with a site, it becomes a preferred site, whether it is in the right place or not. It might be on a flood plain or in a place where only car-borne transport can take place, which is a very short-term and unsustainable location for housing. There are a raft of issues to do with the market housing position that are not working at the moment.

Of course, there is a crisis of affordability in rural areas, and inadequate resources and support for more permanently affordable rural housing, not just the first generation but the longer term, and keeping housing in the tenanted sector for those who really need it. Again, Sue and I have been working with others on very specific—and, we think, easy-to-implement—proposals for rural housing. At the moment, the response to that still seems a little bit elusive. We think it is a crucial issue for rural areas.

Q83 **Baroness Redfern:** You have already answered my question in part. Is the planning system fit for purpose in dealing with rural needs and priorities? Could you tease that out a little more? Could you comment on local authorities' problem in bringing forward affordable brownfield sites?

Dame Fiona Reynolds: I am afraid that my answer to the question, "Is the planning system fit for purpose?" is no. You will not be surprised to hear that. Lots of people have frustrations with the planning system.

I should say, by the way, that I, along with many others, including FFCC, were relieved when Michael Gove pulled the previous White Paper proposals for zoning, as Alison mentioned earlier. We did not think that was the right solution, but we have a problem with the planning system at the moment and the way it operates, particularly to deliver housing, the call for sites, as I said, and getting previously used sites, not just brownfield—there are many definitions of previously used sites—into the system for housing.

Probably 20 years ago there were brownfield-first policies and very specific financial incentives to help with recycling land. In our towns and cities, there is huge scope to remodel, reshape and to make possible sustainable living—the 15-minute city. There are all the arguments that we know about, with people walking to work, to school, to health and other centres. We could do an enormous amount of good, and substantially meet our housing needs without needing to use greenfield sites if we were really serious about it. There are whole rafts of ways in which the planning system is not where it needs to be.

Baroness Redfern: The affordability of some brownfield sites is an issue for many local authorities.

Dame Fiona Reynolds: Yes, it is. Again, if we were really serious about it, there are ways of funding.

Baroness Redfern: Such as?

Dame Fiona Reynolds: Through betterment, effectively, going back to the old argument that developers pay a contribution for affordable housing. You could ramp up the percentage of affordable housing within a commercial development and allocate resources where big profits are made from development to specific sites where affordable housing could be built. Quite a lot of work has been done in rural areas on affordable housing, where the benefits that would flow through the revitalisation of rural communities would benefit all kinds of other rural businesses. We will need jobs in the countryside to look after the nature recovery sites. There is a business model that suggests that this is a good investment to make for the long-term future.

The Chair: Does the local plan have a role in the mechanism for reconciling different priorities for land use, or is that too much connected with development, housing and so on?

Dame Fiona Reynolds: Local plans operate at such a local level now. The only requirement is a duty to co-operate with neighbouring authorities, and it is unclear how effective that is. Of course, one does not want to say that they are useless. There are certainly things they can do, but our evidence and the conversations that we have been having

demonstrate that it is at a level larger than local planning that the majority of the decisions that we are talking about need to be made. Local plans are focused primarily on development sites. In fact, they call agricultural land "white land". It is almost as if it is invisible in the process. We think that land is much more important than that.

Dr Alison Caffyn: That is particularly in two-tier authorities, which is the case in Devon and Cambridgeshire where we are doing our research. We have been talking to lots of local planners. One in Cambridgeshire said something along the lines of, "We are having to make the least-worst decision rather than the best and more optimal decisions". They have shared a lot of frustration with us. It is the same thing when we talk to local communities; there is a huge sense of frustration. They are not necessarily anti new housing developments around market towns and so on, but they see so many missed opportunities for integrating more trees, more biodiversity, more play areas and more transport connections, cycle routes and so on. They are frustrated that much better decisions could be made if there was a more integrated and holistic system.

Q84 **The Chair:** Moving on to your land use framework, starting at the top, do we need a land use strategy for England? If so, how would we produce it and where would it come from? Would there be some sort of overarching land use outcome? How are we going to organise that from the top? I know you said that you essentially wanted your framework to be bottom up.

Dr Alison Caffyn: It can be a bit of both. The important thing is that it is not just top down. We have been researching and having discussions about this since 2017. That is what has led us to advocate the framework approach rather than a strategy. Strategies vary, but they are seen as a little bit more prescriptive and top down, with perhaps not enough scope for the level of detail for the huge range of land use decisions and different types of organisations, situations and land itself.

The framework approach develops shared principles that could be embedded in national policy. They could be embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework, in ELMS incentives or in certain national systems and decision-making processes around national infrastructure. There could also be a local level. That is what we are working on. We are six months into some 18-month pilots in the two counties where we are working.

We are just getting to the interesting stage where all the stakeholders we have brought together to design their local framework are beginning to debate how it would work and how they could hook in either existing processes such as environmental impact assessments and neighbourhood plans or the upcoming processes such as the local nature recovery strategy and the opportunity mapping that will go along with that. Could the framework hook into the things that are happening, and help to develop some new process where there is nothing or where there needs to be new evidence or new research?

A lot of the data does not join up. The mapping is not necessarily complementary or at the right scale. By bringing people together and getting them to align their decision-making behind shared principles, we think we will get better decisions right across the scope, from development and spatial planning right through to individual landowners and farmers making their own decisions.

The Chair: Going back to the overarching national strategy or framework—whatever you like to call it—who would produce that? Would it be DLUHC? Would it be the National Infrastructure Commission? Where do you think it would come from?

Sue Pritchard: This is one of those excellent examples that Sir Michael Barber anticipated with the public value framework. He suggested that for the big, cross-cutting themes there need to be mechanisms that operate across departments. We do not need to rehearse how it sometimes works when a single department leads; we have 40 years of experience that this sometimes does not work as effectively as it could. The public value framework set up mechanisms where departments with a particular interest in the topic—let us face it, there are many departments with an interest in this topic—need explicit mechanisms to work more collaboratively together, with particular strategic objectives in mind.

The Treasury is a key player in that too. How do we get best value from all the different ways in which we are trying to have some impact on land and land use decision-making? I think that the Government have a mechanism available to start to play with, work with and explore. It has been accepted already in Treasury.

Lord Harlech: In the trial framework areas, how do you decide what success looks like? What are your quantifiers? Are you using metrics or is it a subjective decision that you make at the end of the trial: "This has worked. That has not worked"?

Dr Alison Caffyn: I think our measure of success will be whether the people engaged in it—the local authorities, the Environment Agency, the National Trust, all sorts of different organisations—find it useful and whether they want to carry on using it in their processes. They are involved in trying it out. If they are willing to take it on, and perhaps keep adapting it, because we see it as a work in progress that will keep changing, that would be success.

Lord Curry of Kirkharle: The reason for having or recommending a framework for land use would suggest that there are currently practices that we should be discouraging. Can you give us an example of current land use practice that you think should be discouraged?

Dame Fiona Reynolds: Perhaps I can tell you a little bit about what is happening in Cambridgeshire. The fens, as most people know, are highly unsustainably managed at the moment and emit carbon dioxide rather than acting as a carbon sink. There is already a government initiative,

backed by Cambridgeshire County Council's work on its own sustainability strategy and Defra, supporting a future for the fens project.

Clearly we need different solutions for the fens either to be farmed in a very different way or for some of them to be returned to nature, as the Great Fen project and Wicken Fen are already doing in part. The people who are involved in that say that they need an even bigger system to work in. For example, where infrastructure should go in the fens has a material impact on sustainability, as does where new development should go or how we connect the farming system with the food supply chain in Cambridgeshire. There is a huge demand for vegetables, but the fens may not be the right place to grow them.

We need to look outside. We cannot solve these problems just by looking at one particular area or land use type. The participation of people who are involved with water management and the big fenland projects as well as with the local authorities has been, "This is adding value to our discussions on how we find a more sustainable future for the fenland".

Q85 **The Earl of Leicester:** This is the inverse of what Lord Curry was talking about when he asked whether there were any land uses we should not be doing. What are the future land uses? Are there future land uses that you have identified that we should embrace? How can we improve the processes to achieve that?

Dr Alison Caffyn: A couple of examples came up in Devon when we were talking to people. There are large-scale things, such as using the framework as a sort of facilitating mechanism to work with a number of farmers or landowners across a wider area to come up with perhaps a landscape recovery scheme proposal, and put together a mosaic of more nature-rich agriculture across quite a large landscape.

It could also be looking at much finer detail and coming up with mechanisms that would help to bring community aspirations together, perhaps for growing their own vegetables and setting up allotment sites or community growing sites on just a few acres, but being able to link that with farmers or landowners locally, and bringing a mechanism where it is made easier for both sides to come up with that sort of arrangement and make sure that the arrangement would work.

Dame Fiona Reynolds: I see onshore wind as an issue coming at us. It is coming at us very fast because of the crisis in Ukraine. It is about a process to reconcile the tensions between the appropriate place to put onshore wind and whether that can be consistent with continuing farming, and with how you relate the different land uses in the vision for more sustainability.

Sue Pritchard: Flood resilience is another very important one. It is very timely and needs some very creative and joined-up thinking.

Q86 **The Earl of Leicester:** As an aside, where I live in Norfolk, allotments are becoming less and less popular, so they are shrinking.

Finally, what organisation or organisations might be best placed to plan, decide and deliver this? Is it individual organisations that the Government choose—"That is the best performing organisation"—or is it an amalgamation of organisations?

Sue Pritchard: We see the optimal solution being a collective of the anchor institutions in any particular place. That will almost always be the county council, the Environment Agency and other anchor institutions that have particular statutory responsibility for place.

That said, the questions that come up in each place need to involve and include the people who have a real stake in the outcome. That could also include communities at risk of flooding or that will be impacted by housing developments or other infrastructure developments. It needs to be as inclusive as possible. Not only is that more effective in getting all the information together in the room; it is more likely to be able to resolve the tricky questions that might otherwise slow up rapid and effective decision-making, as people call in decisions, seek judicial reviews and so on if they are very controversial. It needs to be the appropriate collective of organisations and institutions that is right in that particular place.

The Earl of Leicester: You have been working in Devon and Cambridgeshire. I am interested in the cultural issues you are coming across. There are so many government departments, quangos and county councils versus district or borough councils embedded in their silos. How can you overcome the cultural, "That is my department and we don't deal with that"?

Dr Alison Caffyn: I was just going to mention silos and trying to join up the silos. I think that is what the framework can help to achieve: bringing people together and having difficult conversations about very complex issues. If we can bring them together, they will understand each other's viewpoint better. The framework would help to mediate between different demands.

We also see there being process benefits. You might take a little more time to come up with more imaginative opportunities, but you should also reduce the number of judicial reviews or level of objections to various proposals. There should be process benefits in working through a framework approach.

Dame Fiona Reynolds: I do not think I said earlier that we have a very clear, five-step process for our work at county level. First, it is bringing people together and establishing a leadership group so that we get all the key organisations involved. Secondly, we gather data and evidence. Thirdly, we listen to people's concern and wishes, especially the less heard voices. Fourthly, we are developing a process for mapping and integrating data. I pay tribute to the Geospatial Commission, which has been incredibly helpful to us as we work through the tangle of data that does not talk to each other and operates at different scales. We have had some very interesting discussions in Cambridgeshire on that.

Only then do we prepare the draft land use framework, which people can argue with, tease out and try something else. It is an iterative process. It is not one hit and there you have it. It will be a document that evolves and shapes. Again, I am very impressed that everybody who is part of this process at the moment is confident, not in a superficial way but quietly confident, that together we can produce something meaningful. That is incredibly valuable, because we all talk about land use frameworks, and lots of people are calling for them, but we are actually trying to put something in place.

The Earl of Leicester: Playing devil's advocate, what are the negatives of the land use framework? You have been working through it and it looks like you are very enthusiastic, but you must have come across a few things where you thought, "Oh, that doesn't work".

Dame Fiona Reynolds: The biggest negative is that we overcomplicate it. The data is complicated, as is the ability to get the data from different sectors to talk to each other, which is necessary. You could either make a monster of that or you could say, "Let's have a good enough convergence". With the best being the enemy of the good and those kinds of arguments, it could get ferociously complicated. Our job through the leadership group is to try to walk our way through something that is good enough, if not completely perfect.

The Chair: What is your timeframe for all this? Land use has to remain flexible as new problems arise, decade by decade rather than year by year. What is the timeframe in your framework?

Sue Pritchard: We are already seeing some outcomes as we go. It picks up the question that Lord Harlech raised earlier. We are not waiting for a kind of summative conclusion at the end of the process. We are learning as we go, and people working with us are learning as they go too. It is very much an action research process. We are already engaged in doing some things differently and learning as a result of that.

We must not forget that there is such strong support for this particular approach because most people recognise that things are just not working at the moment. That is what we found when we were engaged in our FFCC inquiry phase. Although people were a bit anxious about the idea of a strategy, everybody recognised that the time had come to find new ways of going on together to try to make decisions about these really difficult and intractable issues.

I think the point that Fiona is making is that it needs to be a good enough, inclusive, iterative and dynamic process that is capable of dealing with what is, but also with what is about to come next. That is what we are trying to set out. It is why we do not use the word "strategy" because, too often, strategies get written in stone, stuck on a shelf and nobody looks at them ever again. We use "framework" to describe something that is more dynamic, more iterative, more engaging and more inclusive—all the things that we think we have not done so well at in the past.

The Chair: We thank all three of you very much for your evidence. It has been a very useful and very good session. If you feel over the next few months, as your experiments develop, that you want to come back to us, please write to let us know your thoughts. We would be delighted to hear from you. Thank you, all three, very much.