



## Land Use in England Committee

### Corrected oral evidence: Land use in England

Monday 28 February 2022

3.35 pm

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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 Layard; The Earl of Leicester; Baroness Mallalieu; Baroness Redfern; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

Evidence Session No. 1

Hybrid Proceeding

Questions 1 - 14

### Witnesses

**I:** Rachel Fisher, Deputy Director of Land Use Policy, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs; Jonathan Baker, Deputy Director, Food, Farming and Countryside Programme, Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs; Joanna Averley, Planning Director, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

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## Examination of witnesses

Rachel Fisher, Jonathan Baker and Joanna Averley.

Q1 **The Chair:** Thank you all very much and welcome to our very first evidence session of the Select Committee on Land Use in England, looking at a possible land use strategy. You, the witnesses, have in front of you a list of the declared interests 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, but you will have the ability to make any corrections to that transcript before it goes on the website.

I remind members that we have to declare our interests because it is our first public session. I will declare my interests: I have family interests in land, involving farming, forestry and the letting of domestic and commercial property. I chair the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, which is an international environmental research station, and I am a director of an internet travel and airport parking and data business, as well as being president of the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers.

We have before us our witnesses, Joanne Averley, who is the chief planner at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; Rachel Fisher, who is deputy director for land use policy at Defra; and Jonathan Baker, who is deputy director of food, farming and countryside at Defra. Thank you all very much for coming before us.

What do you see as the emerging pressures on land use in England? How are you co-ordinating with each other and with other players, such as local authorities and other stakeholders such as the LEPs, the National Infrastructure Commission and other bodies, in trying to address the trade-offs between the competing land use demands? Just to name them, they are food, forestry, biodiversity, leisure, energy, housing and infrastructure.

**Joanna Averley:** The thing that we are reflecting on as we come in front of you this afternoon to talk about land use is a matter of managing and analysing competing demands on the use of land. It is a statement of the obvious but something that is really important to note at the outset. Planning provides the basis on which to make some of those decisions.

With colleagues in Defra and other government departments, we are doing a lot of work to consider today's challenges and the challenges that are coming tomorrow, whether that is flood risk, needs for energy or, very importantly, biodiversity net gain and local nature recovery. It is a very pressing and important issue that we are addressing in the department and with colleagues across Whitehall.

At the heart of it, I wanted to highlight the role and purpose of the planning system, as outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework. It is very clear; it is pretty much on the first page of the text that planning is there to promote sustainable patterns of development, and by that we mean economic outcomes, social outcomes and environmental

outcomes. We are ensuring that we have a planning system that is fit for today's and tomorrow's challenges and, as noted in the levelling-up White Paper, starting to look at how we can adapt the system, particularly through things like digital transformation, which we may come on and talk about, because we have the capability to understand the complexities of our existing context and land uses and the demands on land use much more readily through things like big data, digital mapping and analysis that flows from that. To reassure colleagues, we are doing huge amounts of work across Whitehall and particularly with Defra on biodiversity net gain, local nature recovery and other matters.

I wanted to highlight a really practical example that, particularly in DLUHC, we have been working on over the last 18 months or so. That is the update to the National Planning Policy Framework that we did last year July, in which we very much strengthened the emphasis on nature and sustainable patterns of development, and dealing with flood risk, for example.

Associated with that, we launched the national model design code last July. That is very much a collective effort where we bring together all these different policy agendas for local government to consider what is important to them and their places: nature, housing, design, beauty, transport and the use of resources. I can explain a little more if you would like to know more about it. That was very much a collective effort with colleagues in Defra and other government departments to make sure that we were capturing all those really important issues in one place. I can explain how that is being applied in the planning system right now, if that is helpful.

**Rachel Fisher:** I am really happy to support what Joanna said. It is also worth bringing up the recent Environment Act and the commitment to the environment improvement plan, and, as Joanna has mentioned, the local nature recovery strategies, which we see very much as being the bridge between land use planning, which sits in DLUHC, and the wider planning for nature recovery and nature-based solutions that we are doing in Defra.

Those local nature recovery strategies will be bringing together local partnerships, including local nature partnerships and the arm's-length bodies—the Environment Agency, Natural England, Forestry Commission and others—as well as local stakeholders, landowners, land managers, et cetera, to come together and identify local priorities in a national framework of nature recovery priorities.

Clearly, we have also been looking at the role of net zero and the net zero commitments in the net zero strategy in terms of land use, so we have been thinking a lot about trees and peat in particular. We have published our peat action plan and our trees action plan, as those are the two most important land use changes for delivering net zero.

We have been working again very collaboratively with DLUHC colleagues, but also with BEIS, the energy department, as well as other colleagues

across government, and we can talk more about the work that we have been doing, particularly on planning reform, to support the delivery of development that both protects but also enhances nature.

**The Chair:** You have various commitments and plans for 30,000 hectares per year of forestry, 400,000 hectares of biodiversity and the 30 by 30 plan. Do you sit down and work out how you are going to co-ordinate those particular targets on biodiversity?

**Rachel Fisher:** One of the things that my team is responsible for is looking at some spatially explicit analysis, to look at exactly that and to bring together the various targets that we have committed to, to understand the impacts of land use and how to best think through the questions of managing the trade-offs and maximising the synergies.

As Joanna and I were reflecting earlier, it has only been relatively recently that you have been able to do this level of digital analysis and these kinds of modelling, which enable us to really look and say, "If you want to maximise for net zero, what does that physically look like? What are the places where that would have the most impact? If you want to maximise for biodiversity, what does that look like?" We can really start to play that out in digital maps, so we are currently working through that.

**Joanna Averley:** The best example is the green infrastructure framework, which gives you a real indication of where this digital approach can give you the data, and the spatial data at a very fine grain level, and enable you to analyse what that means for adjacent communities. It is an incredible tool that Natural England and Defra have launched fairly recently. I would commend it to you as something that is worth a bit of a deep dive, because it has such a rich layer of information and it demonstrates how you can support really good decision-making at a local level.

Q2 **Baroness Mallalieu:** In light of this question, I will read out my interests. I am the owner of a very small livestock farm on the top of Exmoor National Park, which has just had its electricity restored, I am glad to say. I am therefore in receipt of some agricultural payments for that, which include Countryside Stewardship and the remains of the single farm payment. I am also president of the Countryside Alliance.

Farmers round my way, and upland farmers in particular, want to know when we are going to hear the details of ELMS, given that people want to make their plans right now. They need time to prepare for it and we seem to get endless delays. Poor Jonathan Baker is the person I ought to address that to first.

**Jonathan Baker:** Indeed, yes. We have released quite a significant amount of information recently. In November and again in January, we set out the details for the three parts of our environmental land management scheme. For the sustainable farming incentive, we set out what that first phase will look like. We have also set out more information about the local nature recovery element and then landscape recovery. Since then, we have opened up landscape recovery for the first set of

expressions of interest. The first phase of the sustainable farming incentive will be open across the summer.

We have set out a fair bit more detail, and for local nature recovery we will be providing more information before the end of the year on what those options will look like and what the payment rates are. That is already in addition to the information we have set out about when those other schemes will come on and when our grant offers are available to help farmers become more productive and more efficient, as well as the timeline over which we will be moving away from direct payments. We are building the pieces forward about what those different schemes are.

The reason why we are doing this is worth touching on, because it is relevant to the wider discussions. We have learned a lot from previous reforms that a really good way for things to go badly is to do a big-bang transition, where we stop the old scheme, as we have done before, and, often directly overnight, start up a whole new suite of schemes. We have found that is a really good way not to deliver things effectively.

What we are doing now, with the level of change that we are looking at for the farming sector but also for ourselves, is too important to get wrong. The process whereby we drop more information out about the first part of the sustainable farming incentive, farmers tell us how we can make it better and we then listen, learn and improve is very much a deliberate plan, so we can roll things out rather than drop things out.

**Baroness Mallalieu:** Can I press a little further on that? I listened to "Farming Today" last week and heard someone from a very large-scale farm of 10,000 acres saying, "I did everything right. I put in all the field margins. I did what I could, and I'm now going to plough them all up because it's simply not worth my while". At the end of the day, all your schemes, which look wonderful in theory, will be a lot of work for you for very little result if people do not take them up because the downside is too great. What are you going to do to ensure that the things you decide people can claim for are worth claiming for without the downsides, which certainly that person on the radio programme was saying had made him change his mind, which is the last thing any of us wants?

**Jonathan Baker:** Part of the context at the moment is that the agricultural markets, as many of the committee will know, are also quite high, so we see farmers acting and responding to that. We have almost 40% of farmers with the Countryside Stewardship agreement on their land, so we know that the scheme can work for farmers and we can see good levels of uptake.

As you say, the schemes that are available to farmers now are often enforced too rigidly and can feel too bureaucratic. They do not work around the farm businesses. They also do not adapt over time. Those are some of the things that we are looking to change when we roll out the next suite of schemes. That individual will have been applying for one of our current Countryside Stewardship offers, which is still structured the way it was in the common agricultural policy. We are looking to make it

more flexible at responding. We will keep the payment rates under review, especially in a rising market. We need to be mindful of that.

**Baroness Redfern:** I have no relevant interests to declare today. Before I ask my question, can I go back to Joanna? You mentioned local authority planning systems, and each local authority is at a different stage. How are you going to get everybody working together, so that they are able probably to work in clusters, which would be quite helpful?

**Joanna Averley:** The planning system in the country is basically guided by the National Planning Policy Framework, which in a sense sets the policy ambition and the policy guidelines for everyone. There are sometimes three tiers below that but, in terms of the main tiers below that, there are strategic plans that are prepared often by mayoral combined authorities, London being the most established and most advanced. A few other mayoral combined authorities have taken the opportunity to start to do their spatial development strategy.

Below that, you have local authorities operating at a district or a unitary level that are preparing their local plans. All told, there are about 350 local authorities across the country in charge of preparing a local plan, and we really recognise the importance of that local democracy in the planning system and those decisions being at the right spatial scale for those communities.

In the levelling-up White Paper there is discussion and presentation about further devolution, which will enable more local authorities to collectively think about how they bring forward regeneration and levelling up. Local authorities at the moment can already choose to prepare a joint plan where they have issues that span their administrative borders and where they see a benefit in thinking collectively about their spatial strategy for growth and environment.

**Baroness Redfern:** Data collection is very important in order to do that well, is it not?

**Joanna Averley:** Yes. If the question is partly about data, what is really powerful is that we in this country already have huge amounts of very rich and consistently collected data through, for example, the ONS and other data sources. Already in the planning system we are examining how we can modernise the way people spatially plan and define what goes where in order to meet the objectives of the NPPF for sustainable development, and how that supports the decision-maker and the applicant who is wanting to bring about development. We have a significant programme of work already going on, and it will be pivotal in the modernisation of the planning system that we are doing.

We are working very collaboratively with the private sector and local authorities that we are funding through various pilots and pathfinders, making sure that all that development—the software development and the use of data and its application—takes an approach whereby

everybody can learn from that experience. I can give a little more of a flavour of some of the programmes we have live.

**The Chair:** We will come to planning later in the session.

Q3 **Baroness Redfern:** I am jumping the gun. Sorry, Chair. Jonathan, I would like your views on the sustainable farming initiative cohort. Just over 2,000 have expressed an interest. Many farmers are tenancy farmers, who on average have a tenancy for three or four years, or something like that. How will we be able to attract those tenancy farmers? There is a difference between food farming and, say, forestry, which is over a long period of time.

**Jonathan Baker:** Many of you will know that tenant farmers make up a third of the farming sector, which is a significant proportion; they are managing a lot of the land. We are hoping for about 70% of farmers to be in the sustainable farming incentive scheme, so we have high ambitions for it. For it to work, we need it to be attractive to tenant farmers.

One way in which we have achieved that is by working really closely with the Tenant Farmers Association and tenant farmers themselves, as well as with landowners, to make sure that farmers can go into a sustainable farming incentive agreement that is three years long. We thought that was the right length of agreement, so that it would work for many farmers. We also designed the scheme in such a way that the activities you would do in it would not need the express permission of a landowner because they would be consistent with your agricultural tenancy, because we wanted to make it as easy as possible for that tenant to go into agreements, rather than build an extra series of steps that would need landowner approval.

**Baroness Redfern:** It is the tenant's decision rather than the landowner's.

**Jonathan Baker:** It is the tenant's decision, yes. Just to close the discussion, for the sustainable farming incentive that is very much about sustainable farming. For local nature recovery and landscape recovery, it is a slightly different conversation. We are looking for farmers to make space for nature and to do some different activities in there. Baroness Rock is leading an independent review on the Tenancy Working Group for us to make sure that, for local nature recovery, landscape recovery and other measures that we might talk about today, tenant farmers have the opportunity to access those schemes fully.

**Baroness Redfern:** They are coming forward, then.

**Jonathan Baker:** Yes. We had a good mix in the sustainable farming incentive pilot. We had a representative mix of tenant farmers, from uplands and so on. We are seeing a good level of interest, because we have designed the scheme in such a way that it works for them.

**The Chair:** Are you engaging with other farmers? The take-up has been

pretty limited so far, has it not?

**Jonathan Baker:** For the pilot, about 2,000 people expressed an interest. It was extremely easy to express interest, which is good, but it probably meant that a few people did it out of curiosity. We ended up with 938 people being offered and accepting a pilot agreement, which was about our expectation. We hoped to get around that. That element is broadly in line with our expectations.

**The Chair:** Are you offering training for this? Most of the farmers may want to take something up but would not know quite how to approach what you are asking of them. That must be crucial.

**Jonathan Baker:** Through the pilot, we are offering really focused sessions. In the pilots themselves we are teaching each other and sharing lessons, and we will provide additional advice from Natural England and others. Separately, we have the future farming resilience programme, which is about helping farmers to get access to free business advice, so they can make the changes they need to make to be successful. We are offering free business advice in that way, and the market itself provides a lot of advice.

Q4 **Lord Goddard of Stockport:** I have no relevant interests to declare. The committee said that the current value of carbon credits under the woodland and peatland codes remains low and not enough to incentivise uptake by farmers. How can those challenges be addressed to ensure that the decisions for optimal outcomes are delivered?

**Jonathan Baker:** At the moment, we are not seeing a private sector market for carbon credits that is causing a significant amount of change. As you said, the price is fairly low. We started off the conversation thinking about the long term, and our assessment in the long term is that the market is probably underpricing it. If you look forward, we see there being more interest in those offsets than there might be at the moment.

We are not completely reliant on just the public sector environment land management interventions that we are talking about, or on the private sector, to achieve that. We are making sure that through our environment land management schemes you can draw in private sector funding. When we published the sustainable farming incentive scheme, for example, we said, "As long as you're not paying for exactly the same outcome, you can go into a private sector agreement on the same land, so that you're getting two sources of income". For the time being, until the market for private carbon fully matures, we are very much looking to them to add strength to each other.

**Lord Goddard of Stockport:** Is there any timeline for that maturity? Is it a five-year plan? Is it a two-year plan?

**Jonathan Baker:** At the moment, we will see how the market responds. There is lots of interest in it, and we see people looking to buy up land or to talk to farmers and landowners to do things. The long-term dynamics look quite strong, so a private sector market should emerge that drives

actual land use change, but at the moment we are seeing the early foothills of that, so I do not quite know what the timeline is, I am afraid.

**Q5 The Earl of Leicester:** I shall read out my interests on the register. I am a trustee of the Burnham Overy Harbour Trust; president of Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust; president of Visit East of England; president of the Caravan and Motorhome Club; an NFU member; a CLA member; chairman of Wildlife Estates England, which is a CLA committee; Cook Estates Ltd, which is property management; Holkham Estates Company Ltd, which is also property management; Holkham Farming Company Ltd, which is agriculture; Holkham Holiday Parks Ltd; Holkham Property Company Ltd, which is property management; Holkham Emerald Ltd, which is agriculture; Holkham Innovations, which is power production; Holkham National Nature Reserve, which is agriculture and nature; and Chalk Hill Farm Barns (Management) Ltd. All of those add up to interests in farming, forestry, national nature reserve management, rural housing, commercial property and rural tourism.

**The Chair:** I am glad that you only have to do that once.

**The Earl of Leicester:** Yes, so am I. My question is probably mostly directed at Rachel and Jonathan. It is all about nature and biodiversity. What are the challenges and opportunities involved in measures to support nature and biodiversity, including nature-based solutions, local nature recovery strategies and biodiversity net gain? These have all been brought, in planning terms pretty recently, into an already congested planning environment.

**Rachel Fisher:** We are, as you allude to, in the foothills of the development of the delivery angle of local nature recovery strategies and mandatory biodiversity net gain. For both of them, we have been delivering elements of them for quite some time. For local nature recovery strategies, we ran five pilots last year, really looking at how it was going to dock into ELMS and how that starts to work. For biodiversity net gain, we are introducing mandatory net gain from November 2023, which gives us time to put together the transition period to enable developers but also local authorities to get up to speed on the delivery of net gain.

There is a huge amount of opportunity for us to learn from what has happened in biodiversity net gain previously, and we can come on to that. We have been working really closely with colleagues at DLUHC, as you would imagine, to make sure that the planning system reforms and the reforms to the NPPF, et cetera, all build in the biodiversity net gain.

We committed in the Environment Act to delivering statutory guidance for how local planning authorities should have regard to local nature recovery strategies. We will do that jointly with DLUHC. That means that we will have firm guidance for local planning authorities to have regard to LNRSs, which, as I am sure you will all remember from the debates on the Environment Act, are strategic spatial scale plans for nature recovery and nature-based solutions. We are looking at appointing responsible

authorities at the moment for delivering LNRs. Those are probably county and combined authority scale, so at a much more macro scale than the 350 local plans that Joanna talked about.

The idea is that you would have those sitting over the top, and those would be ready for the delivery of mandatory net gain in November 2023, so we would want to see local nature recovery strategies being developed very rapidly over the next 18 months in order for them to be in place for when mandatory BNG comes in.

One thing we will be doing that you will be interested in is providing a national habitat map. We are trying to aggregate all the data together in different data layers, which will enable the responsible authorities and local planning authorities, because they will be public, to really interrogate the existing data on habitats, species, et cetera, and really start to layer that up and then identify not just areas that are currently identified for nature recovery but areas that could be good for nature recovery, so really starting to think a little more strategically.

The idea is also that you would be able to bring together the plethora of different plans that currently exist and really understand how that fits together—you could imagine river basin management plans, et cetera, mapping across on to LNRs—which enables the responsible authorities to start to zone in on the areas they want to see invested in. That means that you can direct investment for example from biodiversity net gain credits or other private sector funding sources, so that you make sure that we are investing in the best possible areas for nature recovery.

**The Earl of Leicester:** That is quite a lot of pressure on the county councils, which have some sort of ecological department, but I read in our papers here that something like only one in four of the local planning authorities now have an ecologist. Now you are trying to bring in the private sector, which is laudable, but it has perhaps not had this experience, so it will be quite a tough ask.

**Rachel Fisher:** That is why the transition period is so important. We are providing some initial funding, particularly for the delivery of biodiversity net gain, to local planning authorities, which we announced at the launch of our consultation, which closes on 6 April, if anyone has not sent in their response. We announced just over £4 million for local planning authorities for this financial year, so that just starts to prepare the way.

We are also talking to the different ecological professional groups and others about what kind of training and support we can provide to local authorities. That is for biodiversity net gain. We are also thinking—again, at the county and combined authority level, at the more strategic level—about what kind of support in the form of real funding, guidance and training et cetera we can provide. It represents a shift in how we are addressing and thinking about delivering for the environment, but again we are working with colleagues at DLUHC, as well as the Planning Advisory Service and others, to try to make sure that the transition is managed as effectively as possible

**Joanna Averley:** Just to add on the skills, we are very conscious, as we update and modernise aspects of the planning regime to support levelling up, that we want to support that process of change and skills development. We are actively talking to the different representatives, whether it is membership bodies or professional bodies, to start to analyse the skills, capability and capacity picture as it is now, and then start to look at what this change programme looks like and to put in the appropriate support around local government.

We have already done quite a lot of pilots on various areas. An active one at the moment is work on design coding—we did 14 pilots last spring and summer—and a very strong theme is peer-to-peer learning. Local authorities are adopting policies and new methods. They might be doing new digital things in the way they engage with the community. They are trying to prepare a design code. They learn from each other as they go, but then we collect that learning from that programme and launch into a significant dissemination process.

That is very much easier to do now, as we have all got used to hybrid learning and sharing; it is not unusual for us to host an event and have 800 people dialling in. Reaching audiences in a new way to get knowledge and learning out there has become much easier, but there is also very much an emphasis on local authorities learning from each other as they go.

**Q6 Lord Curry of Kirkharle:** On my interests, I have farmed all my life until three years ago. I am still a trustee of Clinton Devon Estates, which was involved in the ELMS trial. I have a number of responsibilities up here in the north-east. I chair the Rural Design Centre and I am president of Community Action Northumberland. I am a member of the NFU and the CLA.

Rachel, I would like to come back to the issue of biodiversity net gain. I fully appreciate from your earlier response that this is work in progress. The concept is brilliant. However, there are lots of challenges around how we deliver this, not least establishing baseline measurements. As you know, biodiversity challenges vary enormously geographically, and how one will monitor and enforce that the ambitions laid out in planning applications and infrastructure projects will be delivered—how it actually happens and is delivered on the ground—is an enormous challenge. I am very interested in what you have to say.

**Rachel Fisher:** We agree. We explore quite a lot of these issues and delivery challenges through the consultation document. We are hoping that more views from stakeholders will come through.

I completely agree that an accurate baseline measurement will be absolutely essential in determining whether we get genuine gains for nature. This is why we are continually updating the biodiversity metric to make the assessment criteria more objective. We are also talking to the ecology sectors to make sure that our net gain plan template and the metric calculator demand the right kinds of information and properly

assess the baseline. We are also working with other policy areas, such as the local nature recovery strategies and the natural capital and ecosystem assessment, to make sure that we can make better data available to practitioners.

On enforcement, we have been listening to the concerns raised by various stakeholders that a lack of enforcement, particularly for onsite gains, could undermine the gains promised in developments when mandatory net gain comes into effect. We know that effective enforcement will require not just the powers of the legislation but the capacity, the training and the transparency throughout the whole process and throughout the biodiversity net gain plans. We are looking at a lot of this now, ahead of the introduction of mandatory net gain in 2023. As I say, it is a work in progress and we are keen to continue to talk to stakeholders about how we make sure that it is really effective.

**Joanna Averley:** It is worth noting that these things are already policy in the nature section of the NPPF. There is the expectation that we are both safeguarding and enhancing biodiversity and wildlife. As I mentioned, we talk in the national model design code about 10% for biodiversity net gain, and that code is applied in the planning system now.

The NPPF is very clear that local authorities should turn down applications if they are not good enough; the national model design code is there as a backstop to inform judgments on what is good enough. That includes the broad spectrum of issues from environment and nature to beauty and design quality in its slightly purer form.

**Lord Curry of Kirkharle:** I appreciate that this is complex, but there will often be important trade-offs in the weight of various elements of biodiversity net gain. I just wondered how you are approaching that.

**Rachel Fisher:** Do you mean in the specific development or the overall policy?

**Lord Curry of Kirkharle:** In each application, it is often very difficult to replicate the biodiversity that exists currently, and there will be trade-offs and weightings necessary.

**Rachel Fisher:** That is what the metric tries to simplify and streamline, so part of what the metric, assessment and biodiversity net gain plan try to do is to set that out. You are right that this is challenging. That is why it is really important to provide the background of training and skills development that we have talked about for local planning authorities that will be assessing the net gain plans and needing to interpret and understand the net gain plans. It is also important that we have trusted professionals undertaking these assessments in the first place.

This is one of the things that we need to keep thinking about through the hierarchy of the delivery of net gains. The first thing is that you would deliver on-site. The second is that you would deliver near to site, usually

using an existing market. The third is the investment in statutory net gain credits. That is what we are trying to do; we are trying to thread a really difficult needle in changing the way development is delivered so that it is actually better for the environment.

**The Chair:** Just to follow on what Lord Curry was saying, there is a big difference between putting it in the NPPF and actually getting it operating on the ground, particularly given that in most district councils and planning authorities there is no environmental expertise at all. That will be your biggest problem. Again, it comes back down to training, does it not? Why did you decide on 10% as opposed to 5%, 15% or 20%? Do you know the answer to that?

**Rachel Fisher:** That policy decision was taken before my time, but my understanding is that it was felt that it was a weighing up between something that would be meaningful and something that would be undeliverable. The 10% is a minimum. It is a minimum of a 10% gain, and we know from a lot of the places that are already delivering biodiversity net gain that you can deliver significantly more than 10% on all sorts of different sites.

We know from the transition period and working with people who have been delivering net gain—this policy has been in place, in policy terms rather than in legislation, for a long time—that you can deliver much more, but the 10% was a good baseline, above which you would still wish places to deliver. Local authorities can set higher levels if they choose to.

**The Chair:** Joanna, do you want to comment at all on the practicality of this vis-à-vis local authorities?

**Joanna Averley:** You are reflecting two things. One is that we want greater certainty of outcome in planning applications, so that what is submitted is of good quality and has considered all these issues. Then it is about the outcome as the application moves into permission and is delivered on the ground. It is also about having local authorities with the skills and the capacity to advise local councillors and for those decisions to flow through.

We have done that through the updates to the NPPF last summer, where we brought these issues very much to the fore, and, as I said, through the complementary material that was issued in the national model design code. I know that I have mentioned it a few times, but it is a very clear framework for local authorities to work through to specify their expectation, for developers to respond, for communities to engage and say what is important to them, and for local authorities to judge what is offered and what is committed to through the planning application and the subsequent decision-making process.

It is quite a game-changer, and it gathers this really important menu of issues, alongside delivery of housing, delivery of good streets, delivery of good public transport and outcomes for active travel, and the wider set of issues that in the broadest terms are about sustainable development.

That is active in the system now. We have done some pilots. There is further work going on, and coming with it is this programme of capacity, capability and support for local government. So, as Rachel is indicating, we definitely do not want to drop things into the planning system and leave it there. We are doing a programme to support the uptake of this new expectation and the new opportunities that are presented by these agendas for local government.

**Baroness Redfern:** That is really important, because local authorities are quite strapped for cash and have to be very careful. To move things on very quickly, that is important in relation to my previous question. They must work in clusters so that they can move. Do you have any information that local authorities are doing that because they do not have individual expertise on those sorts of things?

**Rachel Fisher:** On our side of the House, as it were, we have local nature partnerships, which have been in existence for a number of years in any case, and they bring together the various bodies in a local authority area and in clusters of local authority areas. They are roughly contiguous with LEPs—I say roughly, because they were not set out in that way. The idea of having about 50 local nature recovery strategies is to try to simplify the landscape and bring people together, because it is more meaningful to talk about environmental issues at a more strategic, higher level. That is why we have decided not to do this at a local planning authority level and to raise it up a bit. It is also to help to encourage people to come together more.

**Lord Curry of Kirkharle:** I would just like to ask one follow-up question following Rachel's last comment. Are the local nature recovery strategies also likely to inform how ELMS will be targeted?

**Rachel Fisher:** During the pilots for the local nature recovery strategies, one of which was in Northumberland, we employed local convenors who worked with land managers and landowners to explore the relationship between ELMS, the incentives that we are putting through ELMS and what that would look like in terms of local nature recovery strategies. The idea is that local nature recovery strategies will inform the spatial prioritisation of ELMS spending in a national framework and the objectives that ELMS has set out and committed to. There is definitely that kind of synergy between the two policies.

Q7 **Baroness Mallalieu:** Assuming that a scheme is produced which the local authority is satisfied meets its 10% net gain, what is the provision for auditing that this is achieved?

**Rachel Fisher:** Again, that is very much a live policy development at the moment. We are working through what the ongoing management and enforcement will start to look like.

I probably should have said this in the last round of questions, so I will say it now. We are very much trying to look at how we can use digital and automated systems as much as possible to make sure that we can

make it as simple as possible for the local authorities. The idea is to have a digital biodiversity net gain plan that feeds through to the register of biodiversity net gain sites. Then, for that register of sites, we need to work through exactly what the monitoring and enforcement would be. Currently, you would deliver biodiversity net gain through something like a Section 106 agreement, so through the planning system, so you would be reliant at that point on planning enforcement.

We also legislated in the Environment Act for conservation covenants, so we are working out how the conservation covenants could also be used to deliver biodiversity net gain as a legal lever and in the enforcement.

**Q8 Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville:** My interests are that I am vice-president of the Local Government Association and a patron of the Community Land Trust Network. This goes back to Baroness Redfern's question. How do you see the decision about land use and planning interacting with the levelling-up agenda and the targets to build more housing?

**Joanna Averley:** Thank you for your question. As specified in the levelling-up White Paper, we see planning as a key enabler. In any course of life, in any business, we never progress without a strategy or a plan. What the planning system is about, and where it relates to levelling up, is the ability for local authorities to properly strategise for the change they want to see come about in their area. Many of us will be able to reflect on places that have used the planning system to help focus investment; to give clarity to the private sector, which we need to come forward with jobs, development, homes or transport projects; and to give the integrated view of change that you want to see come about within the next five to 10 years.

It is also important to underline that it is important to create market and investor confidence. Manchester is often cited. Having worked there since the mid-1990s, I have seen the growth of that city, which used planning in many different guises—not just the local plan, but other forms of planning—to shape investment and development and create a place of quality that was adaptable to economic change and attracted investment. We can see where planning can play a really important role.

Levelling up is about making sure that those economic benefits come to locations across the country, but that those economic benefits are complemented by the provision of housing, a better landscape, access to green space, nature and things like that. Levelling up is a very full view of meeting a community's needs and the opportunities and potentials of a community. Planning is one way in which a local authority can strategise and come up with a physical plan that is spatial and talks about neighbourhoods, land, sites, environments and ecologies and the need for social infrastructure that supports development and a community. It is interwoven. Planning is an enabling process and a tool in the levelling-up programme.

**Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville:** That sounds fine for

the future, but currently something like a million planning applications are extant. How do you see those fitting in with the levelling-up agenda or the biodiversity net gain? Developers are holding on to planning applications for which they have permission, and as far as I understand it they do not necessarily have to bother with the biodiversity net gain.

**Joanna Averley:** Invariably, when you have something that is a quasi-judicial process where there is a point of decision—in this case, the granting of a planning application—there is a legal construct as to what is permitted. Obviously, in many instances, you will not have a full planning application. You might be coming back with reserved matters, further aspects of the scheme and further detail.

Invariably, I am afraid, there tends to be a life before and life after a policy change. That is probably inevitable, but since last summer and before that we have had a really strong agenda to make sure that as projects come forward they have very clear and high expectations as to what they should deliver for communities. This is not just for housing, but for the environment, transport and that wider set of obligations. There are things that come with being given planning permission, such as the benefits to the community and being clear about what those are.

**Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville:** Will that encourage developers to bring their applications forward to help solve the housing crisis?

**Joanna Averley:** It will give them greater clarity of expectation. A core objective for us in the department, and I know for Ministers, is to make sure that there are strong plans in place. Unfortunately, we do not have very good coverage of local plans across the country. One of our objectives, as outlined in the levelling-up White Paper, is to make sure that we have local plans that are streamlined and focus on the important things, and are delivered in good time, but that, most importantly, deal with the issues for that local authority and community that adopts a plan.

In a sense, if you do not have an adopted plan, you are without a strategy. The private sector, the development industry and those bringing forward and promoting development can make arguments for why this land is better than that piece of land and so on, whereas the power of having a plan is that your strategy is clear, the sequence by which you want land to come forward and for what purpose is clear, and the community can be clearer in its expectations as to what will result.

**Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville:** The levelling-up White Paper notes that the Government are investing in spatial modelling techniques, and I am familiar with those for traffic modelling on big infrastructure schemes. They are supposed to help local government with its planning. What investment is being made in spatial modelling techniques that will help local government? Will that have the impact you are expecting? Obviously you do, but can you substantiate that?

**Joanna Averley:** It is interesting that you are talking about transport modelling, because that perhaps has been the most data-driven way of looking at how we move around a city, and, as you will know from that, we have been quite good at looking at numbers and strange little flow diagrams that demonstrate bus journeys and things like that. We are now able to look more fully at lots of different layers of big data and big information and use that in the planning system.

I will just explain a little more about the scale of investment and some of the live things that we are doing at the moment. In the Autumn Budget, a further £65 million has been committed to supporting the planning modernisation, and part of that is a significant sum towards this digital programme. That is in addition to the £93 million that was already committed, so that is a big investment.

I will just explain a few of the things that we are already doing. First, we have been working with 10 local authorities on local plan pathfinders. I am sure that you will all, at some point, have picked up the local plan for your local area. It is probably paper-based, it is probably quite heavy, it may well be quite dense and not very engaging, and it may have taken quite a long time to prepare. There will then be a spell of time before the next one is prepared; on average, local plans take about seven years to prepare. Unfortunately, the extent to which they invite and gain community engagement is not what I suspect we would all like for it to be a really important conversation for local communities.

In doing pathfinders, we have been looking at the digitisation of plans. It is about lifting plans into a digital space so that people might engage with the conversation first and foremost, but then also that we move plans out from being wholly paper-based, 2D and PDF-based to being plans and policies that you may well be able to interact with on your phone. In the same way that you have just voted, you might be able to say, "Okay, the proposals for my community are X. Do I like it? What's important to me? What are my top 10 issues?" and all those sorts of things. You can start to use digital mapping to make policy interactive in a digital space on a plan, a tablet and so on, always sustaining traditional forms of engagement to complement that. We have been doing work in that space already.

We are also funding local authorities with regard to how to use digital tools for engagement. You may have already come across quite a lot of newish businesses in this sector that are enabling communities to talk about what is important to them on their street corners and in their local parks and to use digital platforms to engage with planning in a meaningful way.

Two other things are live. We have just expanded this programme. We have been funding, and therefore supporting, local authorities, and innovators in this sector—proptech, or property technology, companies—to digitise how to put a planning application in. That might sound obvious. We have probably got quite used to doing that; if anybody has applied for their passport recently, they have probably done it all online.

Planning is one of the public policy areas that have probably been a bit slow in adopting technology, so we have a programme of work that is about helping people to put their planning applications in online, draw their outline boundary and put it into the system. Behind that is a programme that enables local authority officers to free up their time to process that application in a meaningful way. This is very common in other areas, but planning is now taking steps to be a much more digital process. It will make it more engaging, faster, more streamlined and clearer.

**Baroness Bakewell of Hardington Mandeville:** Can I make one last comment, which I do not expect you to respond to? That is fine in an urban area. Down in the very rural areas, there is no digital, so some sections of the community will be excluded from this process.

**Joanna Averley:** Yes. We are very conscious of that. It is not wholly to replace traditional forms of engagement, and we do everything open-source so that all local authorities can pick it up and use it. It is very much about creating a market and a set of products that others can hopefully pick up and use.

Q9 **Lord Layard:** I have no relevant interests. Could I pursue the previous question, especially in relation to housing? The Government were elected with a target of 300,000 houses a year and then produced the White Paper on how that might happen. Perhaps you could tell us a little more on where things have moved since the White Paper. I am thinking of three things: there were the ambitious local targets; then there was to be less detailed scrutiny of individual proposals; and then there was to be a single simplified value-based charge on development to raise more money for the local authority. These are really important, and in some ways rather exciting and encouraging, proposals, but where are you now on all that?

**Joanna Averley:** As you know, we put the White Paper out almost 18 months ago now, and we received 44,000 responses to that consultation. As you will all be aware, we have been working through those responses to the consultation and have had lots of digital and face-to-face engagement over the intervening time. We have been looking at what those responses mean and how we evolve from that. It has been a process of iteration since the White Paper. With the Secretary of State and the levelling-up agenda, we have continued to evaluate the package and make sure that it sits alongside the objectives for levelling up.

That means a couple of things. For example, you will see that there is a strong reference to compulsory purchase and making sure that is fit for purpose to support levelling up. That is related to how we make sure that we get the best use of land. There is a very strong emphasis on brownfield land, and many other things besides, including things like the streamlining of local plans.

On your specific questions, we continue to watch very carefully the local housing need calculator that was put out at about the same time; it was

not in the White Paper but separate. We are making sure that we continue to review it and understand its implications as we look at levelling up and other agendas. That is as it is at the moment. As with any national policy, we will keep a very close eye on it.

More things will be said about the reform package itself. It is not appropriate for me to go into some details at the moment, but it has been an evolutionary process since the White Paper. The levelling-up White Paper more recently outlined that we would consider options for the infrastructure levy, which is, as you said, this new form of betterment for development. We have Section 106 and the community infrastructure levy; it is an additional tool and evolution from that into an infrastructure levy. At the moment, we are not highlighting the details of that.

**Lord Layard:** Will there be a statement on all this at some moment?

**Joanna Averley:** Yes, the levelling-up White Paper will be followed by a Bill.

**Lord Layard:** As you know, a lot of people have got excited about the idea of a presumption that land within 800 metres of commuter stations could be built on if it were not special protected land. Does the department have any view on that, or is it working on that?

**Joanna Averley:** The NPPF talks very much about how to use land efficiently. One of the things that it talks about, which you will probably be very familiar with, is how we use land efficiently next to public transport hubs. Colleagues who are familiar with how London is planned, and particularly familiar with public transport planning, will be aware of PTAL. This is the way of evaluating the location of a site and its accessibility to public transport, which is the PTAL rating, and the density assumptions that are put against sites depending on their public transport provision and accessibility. The NPPF talks about those principles in broad terms as being a way to use land efficiently, so that, when you are near public transport, we should use land effectively. Even when you are not near transport, we should still make efficient use of land and approach development in the right way in relation to density.

In a former life, I worked on two major projects that have looked at exactly this issue. One was Crossrail 2, not Crossrail 1, and one was High Speed 2. In particular on Crossrail 2—I was working for Transport for London at the time—we did quite innovative work looking at how you model transport infrastructure investment and relate it to development that it would precipitate by changing the market, but also by being on the front foot in the development of land in and around stations in exactly that way. If you are interested, I could point you to that business case, which is quite strong. The housing case for Crossrail 2 looked at exactly that issue, but we are not looking at that issue in more detail in the body of work that we are doing at the moment.

Q10 **The Chair:** The planning White Paper proposed the abolition of the duty to co-operate, which seems strange. Joanna, you were talking about the

ladder of planning, which is NPPF and the strategic plans. The plans are still rather metropolitan-based, which worries quite a lot of us around this table—in other words, being told what we want to have by the metropolitan representatives. I was just wondering how you see spatial planning frameworks developing. You have them in Manchester and London, and one or two other people are beginning to look at them. How do you see those coming along?

**Joanna Averley:** They will be very locally driven, both with regard to the geography and those who choose to start to do more joint planning, but it is a very interesting area of planning policy that addresses many of the issues that you have raised around the table. The London plan is a very interesting example of where green and blue infrastructure planning and environmental planning have been addressed in a very fulsome way for a number of years now. It is therefore quite an interesting model.

I take your point. Every geography is different, and how Bristol and the Greater Bristol area will bring forward their SDS, and how the majority of the Manchester authorities bring forward their joint plan, are all really important documents. As they progress, it will be really important to observe how they absorb all these different policy drivers.

**Lord Goddard of Stockport:** You chose your words quite carefully at the end. The majority of Greater Manchester councils will bring the plan. The idea was that it would be the whole 10, rather than nine. What happens to the one that does not? If the nine bring a revised spatial plan forward and it is adopted, what happens to the one authority that did not get involved with that?

**Joanna Averley:** We will have to see. I cannot comment on it an awful lot for the following reason: as the chief planner, and as it starts to go towards the Planning Inspectorate's inquiry, I should not really comment on it in any level of detail.

**Lord Goddard of Stockport:** Should a spatial strategy for a metropolitan authority be reliant on all component parts taking part? Is that not the mechanism: that the 10 must agree to something?

**Joanna Averley:** If we take it into the theoretical, ideally, as we have talked about, you plan for the geography that makes sense for the things that you are trying to address. If you have holes in that geography, that is obviously not the best way forward. In the levelling-up White Paper, there are really important statements about devolution and local authorities coming forward and talking about how they want to adapt into the future to deliver levelling-up agendas. That is an interesting opportunity to consider some of these broader spatial issues.

Q11 **Lord Borwick:** First, I should declare my interests in Mayfield Market Towns Ltd Federated Investments LLP, Countryside Properties (Bicester) Ltd and Bicester Lane Ltd.

I want to talk about the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. It has been mentioned that the Government have stepped back from that. Will that have an

effect on the project? Are they stepping back because it is going so well or because it is going so badly?

**Joanna Averley:** The important thing is that we and the Government recognise the importance of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc. It has some of our pre-eminent and most innovative businesses and universities. Its ability to support economic growth is really clear.

The Government completed a 12-week public consultation process in the autumn, in October, and we are just analysing the outcomes and the views that were expressed through that and considering the responses. The levelling-up White Paper, as we have just been discussing, includes this flexible approach to empowering local areas to deliver on their own ambitions, and we are seeking to engage local authorities in the OxCam area about the approach that they want to take in that regard and to continue to work how they want to work in a cross-boundary way. That is where we are at. We are evaluating the consultation responses, and we will say more about that when we have completed that process.

**Lord Borwick:** You are saying that you were expecting the Government to step back at this stage anyway because it is being taken forward by the relevant local authorities. Does that summarise it in another way?

**Joanna Averley:** The levelling-up White Paper says that local authorities can consider how they want to work in a cross-boundary way and come together around the levelling-up agendas, which are the economy, skills, business, housing, quality of life and environment. The next step is our consideration of the consultation responses and Government's response to that.

**Lord Borwick:** Even that particular project, the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, is not really relevant to the whole national levelling-up project, because it is not a nationally depressed area of the country. The Oxford-Cambridge Arc is generally a fairly wealthy area of the country, is it not?

**Joanna Averley:** As we know, we need every part of the country to reach its potential.

**Lord Borwick:** You need every part of the country to do well, yes.

**Joanna Averley:** Yes, indeed.

**Lord Borwick:** You are saying that the Government are waiting for these responses to levelling up.

**Joanna Averley:** Just in case I was not being clear, we ran a consultation process through to October last year. We are analysing those responses, and we will put out our response to that consultation. I am afraid I cannot comment much more than that for today.

Q12 **Lord Grantchester:** I have relevant interests in land through farming and leisure and having been past president of the RABD, like the Chair, and past chairman of Dairy Farmers of Britain co-operative. I have

commercial experience of farm shops and through the business, being a member of both the NFU and the CLA.

My question is about energy, and I have a supplementary. How could land-use pressures on energy and infrastructure that currently fall under the system of nationally significant infrastructure projects be better integrated with other land-use decision-making processes, including those in your own departments and at the local level?

**Joanna Averley:** As you said, the NSIP regime—the national strategic infrastructure projects scheme—in the Planning Act is how we take a market-driven approach to delivering major infrastructure. In doing so, as the projects and proposals come forward they are flagged very early in conversations, particularly with the local government and stakeholders. As part of that consultation process, they give communities and local authorities an ability to start to plan and respond to those proposals, particularly with regard to the local plan and its relationship to local development.

We have been taking forward a significant programme of support for colleagues across Whitehall through the national infrastructure strategy, with the objective of improving and continuing to streamline the NSIP regime to deliver better, greener and faster. As colleagues will know, one of the key anchors of all the regime is the other national documents and the national policy statements owned by different Whitehall departments. We work actively with colleagues across different government departments as they review those documents.

At the heart of it is an objective to deliver these projects about 50% faster. Again, we are working with colleagues in the Planning Inspectorate, and focusing again, as people have mentioned, on support to local government and the system to make sure that these projects reflect their complexity. We always discuss with local government how they see the system, how it operates in their particular locales and where that process is putting extra pressures on them. It is a very active programme of work in DLUHC, because we sit in the centre of the planning regime, but we work very closely with colleagues across Whitehall. because aspects of this—for example, the national planning statements—are owned by the respective Whitehall departments.

**Lord Grantchester:** I would reflect that the NSIP regime is quite well developed and has been going well. How dynamic it is to reflect different priorities coming forward is very important. There are a lot of smaller, less significant energy developments that, when combined in an area at a more local level, could also be quite significant and yet not be under the NSIP protocols. Is there an element of strategic thinking on the importance and focus of guidance and emphasis on choices between the agricultural use of land being prioritised as against other uses like energy usages, and how then to embed necessary changes in outlook through local authorities? I always reflect that the local plans tend to be bottom-up. How do they interact with changing priorities on a more strategic level?

**Joanna Averley:** As you know, the NSIP regime is predominantly focused on major infrastructure. There are thresholds as to what sits in the NSIP regime, but Jonathan may want to come in on the relationship to agricultural land in particular.

**Jonathan Baker:** With regard to agricultural land, it is for the local authorities to determine their local priorities and have regard at that level. I know that some of them, particularly local enterprise partnerships in areas with high degrees of highly productive horticulture crops, do account for that in their local plans, but that is where that element of prioritisation sits in the local authorities.

Q13 **Lord Grantchester:** I want to come back to a question that should really have been asked earlier about the schemes and agricultural choices for farmers. How are the budget envelopes being set between competing scheme options as regards the implications for land use?

**Jonathan Baker:** "Very carefully" is the very short answer. The fuller answer is that we published a Written Ministerial Statement at the end of last year that set out our immediate priorities for environmental land management, which were about climate adaptation and mitigation, water quality, soil restoration and wildlife. So when we made more money available for ELMS, those were the outcomes that we prioritised. We reprioritised the ones where we saw that there was the greatest need, which was where there were the biggest gaps compared to current prioritisation through Countryside Stewardship.

We have not worked out what the priorities will be across the rest of the agricultural transition, so from 2025 to 2028 and beyond there is an open decision to be made about which outcomes we prioritise for environmental land management. In doing so, we will have to think about our tree-planting and net zero commitments, as well as some of the other things that we talked about at the beginning of the process.

In the short term, we have agreed those priorities. Looking from 2025 onwards, we will need to go through a regular process where we are clear about how we are prioritising the available money in the rural environmental land use schemes.

Q14 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** I really just wanted to take further a point that has come out from quite a lot of what is being said. There is quite a lot of change and flux in the planning and agricultural land use systems, but I am not entirely clear who makes the decisions about competing priorities and at what level. Local plans do not necessarily look at the various uses that agricultural land can be put to unless it is development, transport or some of those issues. There are competing uses of land for carbon, access and recreation, agricultural production and horticulture. Should we become more sufficient in timber, agricultural production, food security and food supply?

Who is doing the master plan and where does that happen? It does not currently happen at local level. Who would best be the organisation to do that? The Cambridge University sustainability initiative said that, if all the

demands we currently see coming down the track for land were to happen, we would need a third more land surface in the UK. Where are the crunch decisions capable of being made about these competing priorities, and how does that fit with the fact that the vast majority of our land is decided on by 100,000 individual farmers making decisions?

**The Chair:** While the panel is just thinking about that, Baroness Young, could you just declare your interests, which you forgot to do?

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** I am chair of the Woodland Trust and the Royal Veterinary College. I am vice-president of the RSPB. I am a member of the steering group for the Royal Society investigation into multi-functional landscapes. I am a member of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, and a campaigner for Keep North Beds Green in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, which I hate.

**Rachel Fisher:** The first thing to say is that we are trying to amass the data, evidence and information that enables us to take those crunch decisions and enables those decisions to be fleshed out. As you will know from the work that you have been doing with the Royal Society in particular, a lot of work is being done in academia and in government to really understand what kinds of incentives and systems need to be in place to drive multifunctional land use and make those kinds of decisions easier for people to take.

As for the right set of people, one reason why we have introduced local nature recovery strategies is to deliver that middle layer and to focus minds at a strategic scale on the decisions, trade-offs and synergies that you can have through multi-functional land use. They are being delivered through responsible authorities, particularly local government, again to try to dock that into democratic accountability and the local planning process. We are trying to create an overarching system in which decisions are taken at a local level that also support landowners and land managers to take decisions on their land and which of the incentives that we are setting up through ELMS would make the most sense for them.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** If a farmer is approached by someone with very deep pockets who wants to buy his land for carbon, he will do that, will he not, rather than saying, "This should be a nice mixed farm with green edges, some flood risk management, woodland and better control of run-off into our water supply, et cetera"?

**Rachel Fisher:** Presumably that is a market decision. That is an individual decision for a landowner to take. One of the things that we can do through LNRS and the wider work that we are doing on ELMS and other schemes is to provide advice and guidance to landowners not just on, "You could do the single monocultural thing, or ... ". The same would be true for housing, would it not? Somebody comes up and says, "I'll offer you X amount of money to build some houses on this site". It would then need to go through the planning process. Again, a landowner will take a decision based on what is best for his site and his land.

The question then is about where we are providing the advice, guidance and the wider ecosystem to support multifunctional land use and decisions that are taken by individual landowners. What are the things that he or she would need to think about? Where could they go for additional information?

**The Chair:** How would DLUHC answer that question?

**Joanna Averley:** I would just refer us back to the role and purpose of strategic policies that sit, for example, in a mayoral combined authority, and spatial development strategies: housing; infrastructure, including energy but transport and other matters as well; community facilities; and how to conserve and enhance the natural and built environments.

This is the layering of issues that we have continually come back to. As Rachel said, sometimes land is there to do a multitude of different things and to bring a multitude of benefits. That is really at the heart of this joint agenda. It might be a housing site, but it should also deliver a sustainable urban drainage system and biodiversity net gain. This multitude of outcomes from individual developments is really important.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** Where would the decision be made to tell the guy with the very deep pockets not to spend his money on a carbon sink because there are other ideas that might make better use of it in a multifunctional way?

**Joanna Averley:** There are two elements to that. One is that the planning system already talks about how we bring forward land predominantly for development and housing, but we are putting into that the expectation that nature is at the heart of those schemes as well as housing or commercial development. Without putting words into Rachel's mouth, the whole point about the local nature recovery is that it gives you this extra layer of consideration, which spans a little beyond what would be a core normal urban setting.

In the levelling-up White Paper, the Government directly talk about greening of the green belt, for example. That is where you can see an example of a traditional planning function, which is about urban containment and the green belt things like that, potentially taking on a new function depending on the relationship of the green belt to local nature recovery. There is an objective to look at land in a very fresh way with the levelling-up White Paper talking about the greening of the green belt, for example.

There is this extra layer of considerations that will come in very actively, and local authorities will put that into a local plan because that is how you make the decisions that flow from it. That is how you permit things to happen in planning terms.

**Baroness Young of Old Scone:** There is no intention in the planning system to require individual farmers to apply for planning consent or to somehow be part of the planning system in terms of their land use

decisions, is there?

**Joanna Averley:** Not currently, no.

**The Chair:** Just going back over the evidence we have heard, one of the questions that has come out very clearly for me, from Baroness Redfern and others talking, is that co-operation between local authorities will be imperative to get any form of strategic planning in place. I would have liked to see a levelling-up White Paper that looked between urban and rural Britain and England. The real difficulty will be getting the parts of rural Britain to do this strategic planning. I have not really got a very clear idea from any of you of how you quite see that happening, what bodies will be involved in that or how it is going. I do not know whether you could shed some light on my ignorance.

**Joanna Averley:** It is a bit remiss of me not to mention national parks, which are planning authorities. They are terribly important in this agenda, depending on where in the country you are, but we are blessed with a very significant coverage of national parks in this country.

At the moment, as mentioned in the levelling-up White Paper, it is about local authorities deciding what is the right geography for them as they consider devolution. In the current system, local authorities are free to join up with neighbours and do joint plans. It is about that local definition and identification of the right spatial scale at which to plan, with mayoral combined authorities and spatial development strategies sitting above that where there is a mayoral combined authority or, in London's case, the mayoralty in London. We have different tiers at the moment.

**Rachel Fisher:** It is important to say, particularly in a rural context, that there are also neighbourhood plans. There is very local, community-led planning as well. One of the things that our department is responsible for is rural-proofing. We are currently in conversations with DLUHC colleagues about the rural-proofing of planning policies and how we ask those very fair questions about how this will deliver for rural areas if we are to see a significant amount of land use change in order to deliver on all our various objectives. Clearly, that has an impact for rural communities. We will want to be able to do that in a way that involves people and helps make sense of all the different competing agendas that we have outlined today.

**The Chair:** I would like to thank our witnesses very much for their appearance. It has been a very useful session.