

**EXAMINATION OF THE PORTSMOUTH LOCAL PLAN
MATTER 11: GREENING THE CITY POLICIES
HEARING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH
REPRESENTOR ID: 49679
21st SEPTEMBER 2026**

Introduction

1. We act as Town Planning Consultants to the University of Portsmouth ("the University").
2. We have been instructed by the University to appear on their behalf at the forthcoming Portsmouth Local Plan ("PLP") Examination Hearing in relation to Matter 11 and specifically draft Policy PLP41: Trees and Hedgerows.
3. The preparation of this Hearing Statement follows the submission of the University's Regulation 19 representation in relation to this policy and responds to Questions 8 and 9 of the Inspectors' questions for this Hearing session.

Matter 11 Questions

Policy PLP41: Trees and Hedgerows

Question 8) Is the 15% tree canopy cover requirement for major development at Part 1 (c)(i) justified and likely to be feasible for development anticipated in the Plan?

4. As explained in our Regulation 19 representation, the University's campus and development sites have important relationships with adjacent green infrastructure and key features such as trees and hedgerows. The permitted and emerging schemes in the University's Estate Masterplan all strive to replace and enhance natural features and achieve greater than the mandatory biodiversity net gain requirement either through on or off-site measures. This is linked with the University's own environmental sustainability and climate change requirements and objectives.
5. The University objected to this policy as the ability to deliver this requirement on major developments needed to be properly understood to ensure the policy requirement is deliverable. This was based on experience of the use of the quoted Natural England standard tree canopy cover as not being generally feasible in dense urban environments such as Portsmouth city centre, where there can be no existing trees and/or limited capacity to increase tree cover as part of a scheme.
6. To maintain the policy objective and avoid the 15% coverage figure creating an unachievable policy hurdle that is not feasible for planned and future development, we recommended more flexible wording in policy criterion c) i) to set this as an objective rather than a development requirement. We propose specific edits to the wording at paragraph 21 of this statement.

7. To be justified, the policy requirement should be based on proportionate evidence. We note the draft policy has been based on evidence as explained in the supporting paragraphs in the Regulation 19 and Main Modification (“MM”) versions of the policy. The cited evidence is useful in terms of understanding both the source and limitations of the 15% figure and whether it can be accepted as justified.
8. Modification MM139 explains the Council is “...*is looking to secure 15% tree canopy cover twenty years after permission is granted for on Major Development, in line with Forest Research recommendations of 15% canopy cover for coastal towns and cities*”.
9. The Forest Research document is the “*Portsmouth i-Tree Eco Technical Report*” (dated 28th November 2024, Examination Ref: GC20) prepared for Portsmouth City Council (“PCC”). This identifies an existing total tree canopy cover figure of 8.9% in the city (see pages 8 and 56). Paragraph 3.2.1 of the report explains there is no single agreed target canopy cover for urban areas. 20% tree canopy cover is identified as a “*good aspiration*” for inland towns and cities, or 15% for coastal settlements such as Portsmouth. This is sourced from an academic research paper referenced in the report¹.
10. The Forest Research also derives the 15% figure from “*England’s Urban Forests - Using tree canopy cover data to secure the benefits of the urban forest (January 2022)*”. This leaflet was produced by the Urban Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee Network and its partners. This is not available in the Examination Library and is published at: [England’s Urban Forests - Using tree canopy cover data to secure the benefits of the urban forest - Forest Research](#). From our reading, the leaflet was produced to encourage and advise local authorities on how to evidence tree canopy cover and then how to set a minimum standard (see pages 4-5).
11. The 15% utilised in the draft PLP is referenced on page 4 point 2) “*20% tree canopy cover can be a good aspiration for towns and cities, with 15% for coastal settlements which generally have lower tree populations.*” However, the guidance does not refer to achieving 15% on specific sites or developments, nor does it provide a timescale against which the 15% should be achieved. It is clear therefore that flexibility can be provided in the 15% point of reference and it is not intended to be a mandatory target for development sites.
12. Although the wording of the “England’s Urban Forests” leaflet demonstrates that it is intended for use by Local authorities, planners, urban designers and developers, it also states that it is “*guidance*” (see page 2). It is also presented as a leaflet rather than a specific technical evidence document to be used for policy formulation. The questions at pages 4-5 are posed, from our reading, as the beginning of a conversation on how to formulate specific policies rather than technical evidence and actual targets.
13. We also note there is no reference to a target tree canopy cover figure or equivalent in the December 2024 NPPF (see Chapter 15 generally and paragraph 136) or the PPG (see the Natural Environment section and the Trees and woodland sub-section). The origin of the coverage percentage is instead from Natural England’s Green Infrastructure Standards for England. This document is not cited in the NPPF or PPG so is not national

¹ Doick, K. J., Davies, H. J., Moss, J., Coventry, R., Handley, P., Vaz Monteiro, M., Rogers, K., and Simpkin, P. 201. The Canopy Cover of England’s Towns and Cities: baselining and setting targets to improve human health and well-being. Trees, People and the Built Environment 3 (TPBE3) Conference, Birmingham, UK.

planning policy and only technical guidance/expert advice from a statutory consultee. We comment further on this in relation to Question 9 below.

14. From this, we note there is source material based on research which could be used to justify the introduction of a standard and the 15% figure. This is not in the NPPF or PPG though. The justification for the 15% target also has its obvious limitations. It is based on desk-top analysis of settlements and identified as an aspirational and guidance figure from academic research. Care therefore needs to be taken on how it is used in the formulation of Local Plan policy.
15. We also note from the evidence base that there has been no exercise undertaken to examine how the 15% tree canopy cover can be achieved on specific development sites in the Plan area. For example, we would have expected a topic paper supporting this policy to sample allocated sites in the emerging Plan to identify how the 15% target could be achieved feasibly. There is no such evidence at this stage of the Examination in the Topic and Background Papers and Examination Library.
16. From this overview, we understand how the target has originated in terms of the source of its justification. A key area that is missing from the justification is whether the 15% target is feasible for development in the city as this has not been assessed and evidenced based on locally specific evidence.
17. As the University understands and acknowledges PCC's objectives in introducing a standard, we are not recommending its deletion for the policy to achieve soundness. We are however recommending flexibility in policy wording to allow the promoter of a major development to explore whether a scheme can achieve the standard whilst delivering other wider sustainability and biodiversity requirements/benefits. The recommended policy wording is presented at paragraph 21.

Question 9) Is the policy positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy?

18. Our evaluation is as follows:
 - (i) **Positively prepared:** Yes, the policy is consistent with achieving sustainable development and specifically the environmental objective (see 2024 NPPF paragraph 8 c)).
 - (ii) **Justified:** No, as explained at paragraphs 6-15 above, the evidential justification has its limitations so the policy target and its setting as a mandate on major development is not fully justified.
 - (iii) **Effective:** No, as also explained at paragraphs 6-15, the deliverability of the policy in terms of how it can be achieved in major developments has not been evidenced.
 - (iv) **Consistent with national policy:** No, whilst the policy objective is arguably consistent with the general tree related objectives of national policy, there is no reference to a percentage tree canopy cover target in the NPPF and/or PPG. The Natural England standard is also not national planning policy.
19. To achieve soundness, we therefore recommend flexibility is introduced into the wording of the policy on how major development is expected to achieve the 15% tree canopy

cover target. This wording moves the 15% figure from a mandate to a target, reflecting the limitations in the evidential justification for it to operate as a fixed requirement for major development. Introducing flexibility also ensures the policy can operate more effectively as if the 15% target cannot be achieved, then this allows an applicant and PCC to consider other options for achieving the overall objectives of the policy. That can then ensure consistency with national planning policy.

20. We note from MM138 how PCC has already introduced flexibility into the draft policy with additional text referring to securing suitable off-site tree planting provision through agreement if on-site tree replacement provision cannot be secured. The University welcomes this layer of flexibility in the draft policy which is consistent with the recommendations we are making below.
21. We recommend the following revisions to the policy as currently proposed to be revised at MM stage (**new text** and ~~deleted text~~):

- 1. Planning permission for development will be granted where:*

- a) Proposals can demonstrate how they have been informed and influenced by the presence of trees on the site, and with particular regard to any Tree Preservation Order designations;*

- b) It can be demonstrated satisfactorily that the need for and benefits of the development clearly outweigh any loss or deterioration of woodlands, hedgerows or trees of high amenity value; and*

- c) **It can also be demonstrated that** ~~Tree canopy cover is increased in line with the Natural England Green Infrastructure Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standard and via the following objectives as follows:~~*

- i. Tree canopy cover of at least 15% is provided on new major development;*

- ii. Replace lost trees at a ratio of 1:1.*

Where robust evidence agreed by the Council can demonstrate that criterion c) i. and/or ii. cannot be delivered on-site, then off-site provision will be considered.

No changes are proposed to criterion 2.

22. We present overleaf in **Figure 1** an example of such an approach in the Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2015-2035 and Policy EE9. This sets a target for tree planting and canopy cover in a specific part of the Plan area. It then allows for off-site planting to be considered once it has been demonstrated that this cannot be delivered on-site. This achieves the same objective as recommended at paragraph 21 above.

Figure 1: Central Bedfordshire Local Plan Example

Policy EE9: Forest of Marston Vale

Central Bedfordshire Council will continue to support the creation of the Forest of Marston Vale to deliver the environmentally led regeneration of the area. Development proposals within the Forest of Marston Vale will be required to:

1. Demonstrate how they will deliver 30% tree canopy cover, within the public realm, across the development site. This can be achieved through a combination of retaining and protecting existing trees, woodlands and hedgerows, and the on-site planting of new trees, woodlands and hedgerows; and
2. Contribute to the environmentally led regeneration of the Forest of Marston Vale, in line with the aims of the Forest Plan.

Only where robust evidence agreed by the Council can demonstrate that 30% tree canopy cover cannot be delivered within the public realm on site, will alternative delivery mechanisms be considered.

Overall Conclusions

23. Against this background, for the PLP to achieve soundness based on the University's observations on draft Policy PLP41, we recommend the following modifications:
- (i) Revise the wording in line with the text presented at paragraph 21 of this statement.
24. We look forward to discussing this submission at the forthcoming Local Plan Examination Hearing.

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