Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

PLANNING NEWSLETTER

By Email Only

Message from the Chief Planner

November 2025

This Newsletter provides updates on the latest announcements from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and other government departments and agencies relating to planning practices and policy. Please see overleaf for the list of contents.

The Housing Secretary, Steve Reed, has announced some policies to be consulted on as part of the revised NPPF to speed up suitable planning applications for development within a reasonable walking distance of well-connected train and tram stations; alongside changes to call-in which will require councils to notify the Secretary of State where they are likely to decline applications for 150 homes or more; and removing the mandatory requirement for public inquiries for called-in applications. There are also proposals to reduce the requirement for statutory consultation and to remove Sport England, The Gardens Trust and Theatres Trust from the list of statutory consultees – read on for details of how to have your say.

Also in this newsletter: if you're looking to expand your planning team in 2026 please do consider applying for the next round of Pathways to Planning, our graduate scheme with the LGA. All graduates hired through the programme receive a £10,000 educational bursary to help fund part time study for a planning masters, and your authority may also be eligible for a salary bursary, worth £40,000. And, a reminder to LPAs to update their plan preparation timetables, and to publish their Infrastructure Funding Statements, by the end of December.

All previous Chief Planner Letters and Newsletters are available on GOV.UK here.

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Chief Planner

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

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Policy and Delivery Updates

Housing Secretary announcement regarding development around stations

The Housing Secretary Steve Reed has announced some reforms that will be proposed through the revised National Planning Policy Framework relating to development within a reasonable walking distance of well-connected train and tram stations. The proposals will apply across all local authorities and to Green Belt sites. They will also include minimum housing density standards for sites in scope, to make the most of sustainable growth opportunities for local housing, jobs and businesses.

The Housing Secretary also announced plans to require councils to inform government when they are minded to decline applications of 150 homes or more, so Ministers can decide whether to call them in. This will be implemented through a new Consultation Direction and a change to legislation, and supported by a revised call-in and recovery policy. Particular attention will be paid to those applications where a planning committee intends to refuse it contrary to the advice of planning officers.

Applications called in will also be sped up through the removal of the mandatory requirement for public inquiries, with the option to consider matters through written representations before reaching a decision, where appropriate. The measures were announced on 21 November in a Written Ministerial Statement. The statement also outlines plans to reform the statutory consultee system (see next item).

Have your say on statutory consultee reforms

Statutory consultees play a crucial role in the planning system by providing expert advice on significant environmental, transport, safety, cultural and heritage issues, ensuring informed and balanced decision making. However, a lack of clarity in the requirements for consultation and an overreliance on statutory advice can contribute to delays and inefficiencies in the planning process.

MHCLG wants to ensure that statutory consultees offer practical, timely advice, focused on what is necessary for development approval. To that end, on 18 November MHCLG published a consultation that proposes the removal of Sport England, the Gardens Trust and Theatres Trust as statutory consultees in planning applications. This will help rationalise the planning system as set out in March in the Written Ministerial Statement on the Reform of the Statutory Consultation System. Since Spring, MHCLG has worked with key statutory consultees to develop broader reforms. These aim to cut by up to 40 per cent applications requiring input from bodies including Highways England and Active Travel England. This will save time and effort for developers and councils.

MHCLG expects the proposed reforms to reduce delays and uncertainty in the planning process and remove bottlenecks to economic growth. Responses to the proposals are invited until 13 January 2025 using this link: Reforms to the statutory consultee system - GOV.UK

Housing Minister urges Planning Inspectors to be flexible in support of local plan adoption

The Housing Minister, Matthew Pennycook, has written to the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate to outline his expectation that local plans submitted in the current system should be examined with an appropriate degree of flexibility.

The Minister writes that expectations around the evidence needed to establish whether the legal and soundness tests have been met – including with respect to the Duty to Cooperate – should be proportionate to the context in which plans in the existing system are being prepared. The letter says: "It remains important that we do not see the adoption of poor-quality plans, or accept overly long examinations […]. However, within those bounds, where plans are capable of being made adoptable, I want Inspectors to seek to do so in the examination process."

The letter also revokes the letter issued in March 2014 by the then Minister Nick Boles. This will enable Planning Inspectors to recommend Green Belt reviews if needed, to help meet development needs in line with national policy. Government will be publishing the regulations and guidance that will underpin the new plan making system in due course.

LPAs reminded to update plan preparation timetables

MHCLG has asked all local authorities that intend to submit a plan within the current plan-making system to provide an updated plan preparation timetable by the end of December 2025. Keeping Local Development Schemes up to date is a legal requirement for LPAs and it is essential timetables are revised where necessary to reflect any slippage. MHCLG is aware that some LPAs that have missed, or are likely to miss, milestones have not updated their timetables.

Councils should update their timetables using this form. MHCLG wishes to thank those LPAs that have already revised their timetables and asks that they simply confirm these are still accurate. Councils that are planning to submit in the current system but have not been contacted by MHCLG should also use this link to share their revised timetable.

Pathways to Planning applications open now

Are you looking to strengthen your planning or development team in 2026? Local planning authorities, statutory consultees and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) can now apply to hire a graduate planner or surveyor for September 2026 through Pathways to Planning.

Pathways to Planning, which is run by the Local Government Association on behalf of MHCLG, selects high achieving candidates from a pool of thousands to create interview shortlists for employers at no cost. All graduates hired through the programme receive a £10,000 educational bursary to help fund their part-time study alongside work. Local authorities with high housing delivery and local plan needs will also be considered for salary bursaries, worth £40,000, for employing a graduate planner.

The scheme will start considering salary bursary applications as early as December 2025, so act now to secure this offer. To find out more and apply, see Pathways to Planning website here: Pathways to Planning: information for employers | Local Government Association.

Register now for MHCLG's Planning Skills and Capacity Survey

The Planning Capacity and Capability Programme at MHCLG commissions a wide range of evidence to ensure that local authorities are equipped to implement the government's planning reforms and have the support they need. This includes the regular Local Authority Planning Skills and Capacity Survey.

The next round of the survey will launch in early 2026 via DELTA, which is widely used across local government for secure and efficient data collection. This will make it simpler for local authorities to participate, with the aim of boosting response rates. The survey will include questions about recruitment, retention, skills and learning, operating models, and staffing profile.
MHCLG has emailed local authorities to ask that they confirm their main contact for the survey and provide a back-up contact. If your authority has not received an email, please get in touch at LPA.SkillsSurvey@communities.gov.uk. **The deadline to register is 6 December 2025.**

MHCLG would like to thank the authorities that took the time to participate in the 2025 survey. The final report will be published shortly, and is already helping to shape recruitment and retention support for local planning teams.

MHCLG reminds local authorities to publish Infrastructure Funding Statements

Developer contributions play a vital role in delivering much needed affordable homes and infrastructure that support new development and ensure development proceeds in a sustainable way for communities. Infrastructure Funding Statements (IFSs) are a key statutory requirement under the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended), and enable communities, developers and other stakeholders to understand how developer contributions are being used to benefit local areas, including through the provision and improvement of infrastructure.

The regulations require any local authority that has received developer contributions (section 106 planning obligations or Community Infrastructure Levy) to publish an IFS online by 31 December each year. Please see the Planning Advisory Service guidance on producing an IFS.

Following the publication of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report on Improving local areas through developer funding on 17 October 2025, we would like to remind all local planning authorities of their statutory duty to publish an IFS where applicable. This follows a letter from the Chief Planner earlier this year. Local planning authorities can also email their IFS (either as an attachment or a link to the published report) directly to: developercontributions@communities.gov.uk.

DfT launches review of Airports National Policy Statement

On 22 October the Transport Secretary launched the review of the Airports National Policy Statement (ANPS) in a statement to Parliament. The review will reflect important changes in legislation, policy and data and ensure that any proposed airport scheme meets the Government's four tests:

1. That it contributes to economic growth across the country;
2. That it meets our air quality obligations;
3. That it is consistent with our noise commitments;
4. And crucially, that it aligns with our legal obligations on climate change, including net zero.

As part of the review the Department for Transport (DfT) will seek independent advice of the Climate Change Committee on any relevant amendments proposed to the ANPS to ensure they are consistent with government's net zero commitments. If amendments are needed as a result of the review, DfT expects to consult on a revised ANPS by summer 2026.

The Transport Secretary also provided an update on the assessment of proposals received over the summer for delivering a third runway at Heathrow. DfT, Treasury and expert financial and technical advisers considered seven proposals, of which two remain under active consideration. DfT is seeking further information on these two proposed schemes with a view to reaching a final decision on a single scheme shortly. This will inform the remainder of the ANPS review.

MHCLG updates register of Compulsory Purchase Order decisions

Since March 2024, MHCLG has published a register of decisions on all compulsory purchase orders in England submitted for confirmation since 2019. The intention behind publishing the register is to increase transparency around how decisions are taken, and to improve knowledge and awareness of the purposes for which compulsory purchase powers may be used. The register is updated quarterly and the latest version, which was published in October, can be found here.

Reforms to Natural England's approach to delivering planning advice for public bodies

On 22 October, the House of Lords agreed a Government amendment to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. Once enacted, this will modify the way that Natural England provides advice to public authorities under section 4 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 ("the NERC Act").

Currently the NERC Act requires Natural England to provide advice on any matter related to its general purpose. The amendment will replace this broad duty (insofar as it relates to development requiring permission under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) with a requirement for Natural England to publish an operational statement setting out its approach to casework prioritisation and the types of advice LPAs can expect based on environmental risk and opportunity.

This legislative change will formalise the approach first shared in 2024 – to shift Natural England's focus to higher risk and higher opportunity casework – and will align Natural England's role more closely with that of other statutory consultees. It will also align with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015, which defines when Natural England should be consulted.

The change will support Natural England's shift toward providing more targeted, timely advice where it is most needed. Natural England will prioritise cases according to environmental risks and opportunities. Targeted advice will help to resolve issues upfront and embed opportunities for nature recovery, enabling growth and nature recovery to progress together.
To support this shift, Natural England will continue to expand its suite of standing advice. The availability of standing advice ensures that bespoke advice is focused where it adds the most value.

Further details, including responses to key questions that planning officers may have, were shared in a letter to LPA chief executives and leaders on 23 October. Natural England sees benefits for LPAs, including clearer expectations, quicker decision-making, and enhanced support on complex issues.

Natural England refreshes its approach to air quality consultations

Natural England has published new standing advice on air pollution on GOV.UK. The aim is to make Natural England's advice more consistent, higher quality and more readily available. Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) will be able to rely on this formal statutory advice, reducing the need to consult Natural England on individual planning applications.

What's changing?
Advice will now be delivered primarily through two mechanisms:

- **Standing Advice:** This is formal statutory advice on specific air quality issues. It is a material consideration in the planning process and must be taken into account by decision makers when assessing applications. Standing advice is published on www.gov.uk.
- **Standard Advice:** This advice will be sent out by Natural England on a case-by-case basis in response to consultations on Local Plans and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs).

To support this transition, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) hosted a webinar on 20th October for LPAs, outlining Natural England's updated air pollution casework advice process. You can access the webinar recording here: https://youtu.be/jSGKioteRaY. To contact Natural England with questions email LPA-AQStandingAdvicequeries@naturalengland.org.uk.

Research, training and events

Tackling the recruitment challenge in local government

Last month, Public Practice launched its Recruitment and Skills Report 2025. With responses from 238 planning and placemaking officers across local authorities, the report highlighted the everyday challenges that they face in recruitment, resourcing and retention.

The results show that half of local authorities have no recruitment budget. More than a third of roles take four months or longer to fill. And one in ten recruitment attempts fails completely. Supported by Government funding and to help address these challenges, Public Practice has launched a new, free recruitment training service - designed specifically for HR officers and hiring managers in local government.

Building on their experience recruiting built environment professionals into the public sector, this course shares practical tools and insights to help teams grow their capacity and strengthen the future of placemaking, including:

- How a skills-led approach can widen the candidate pipeline, using case studies and real-life examples
- Examples of effective job descriptions and templates
- Funding insights and practical advice for teams
- The next session is on 27 November. Book your place here.

EA and TCPA launch new coastal planning training

Planning is a vital tool for promoting resilience to climate change and extreme weather events. This includes the increasing risk posed to coastal communities from rising sea levels, tidal flooding and coastal erosion.

The Environment Agency and the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) have developed two new e-learning modules on coastal planning for planners, coastal practitioners and flood risk professionals working in the public sector.

These are:

- An introduction to coastal planning in England
- Using planning to manage coastal change in England

The courses are interactive, free of charge, and can be completed at your own pace. Time spent on these courses can be used to contribute to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements for professional memberships. They are all available from the e-learning hub developed by the TCPA with support from the Environment Agency.
Register now to access these courses.