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Policy paper

# Nationally Significant Infrastructure: action plan for reforms to the planning process

Published 23 February 2023

## Applies to England and Wales

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# Ministerial foreword

## Better, faster, greener, fairer, and more resilient

Improving energy security, achieving net zero and delivering the transport connectivity, water and waste management facilities this country needs demands investment in infrastructure. We must have a planning system fit to deliver it, while keeping communities and the environment at the heart of decision-making.

The Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) consenting process has served the UK well for more than a decade. However, the demands on the system are changing, and its speed has slowed. The number and complexity of cases coming into the system is increasing. Policy changes are more frequent in response to a changing world.

Cumulative impacts, particularly in the offshore wind and electricity networks sector, require strategic solutions outside the remit of individual projects. International developments have underlined how crucial it is for the UK to build its own infrastructure to meet energy security, resilience and net zero objectives.

The government set out its ambition in the [National Infrastructure Strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-infrastructure-strategy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-infrastructure-strategy>) in 2020 to make the infrastructure consenting process better, faster and greener and these ambitions were reinforced in the [British Energy Security Strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-energy-security-strategy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-energy-security-strategy>) (April 2022).

The Planning Act 2008 sets out the statutory timescales for certain aspects of the NSIP process and based on these timescales, the government expects that decisions should be delivered within 17 months of an application being submitted. Our priority is to get back to decision-making within the statutory timescales as a minimum and make improvements wherever possible.

We need to ensure the effectiveness and resilience of the planning regime for the growing pipeline of critical infrastructure projects. The government will be reviewing National Policy Statements regularly, piloting a new fast track consenting opportunity, streamlining the system to ensure that requirements on developers and consultees are proportionate, focussed and supported, and ensuring that the system is fair and transparent for communities and delivers for the environment.

The NSIP regime needs to be:

- 1. better** at delivering as robust as possible decisions within the statutory timescales, giving both developers and communities certainty in the process
- 2. faster** at handling all applications, through streamlined and strengthened processes, a proportionate approach, and a new fast-track timeframe for suitable applications
- 3. greener** by delivering positive outcomes for the environment and following the mitigation hierarchy with proactive plans for environmental protection and

enhancement

**4. fairer** to communities by emphasising benefits to local people that come with major infrastructure investment

**5. and more resilient** in its resourcing to enable all stakeholders to engage meaningfully and proactively in the process with the right skills at the right time

We will not achieve this through legislation and policy statements alone. We are asking everyone involved in this process to engage proactively with our reforms. By working together, we can support the delivery of nationally significant infrastructure, incentivise more investment into the UK and ensure we are able to meet our infrastructure, energy and environmental challenges. We are grateful for all of you who have contributed to achieving this aim so far, and now invite you to support the delivery of this action plan.

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

**Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP

**Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero**

The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP

**Secretary of State for Transport**

The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP

**Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**

# 1. Introduction

## The issues we need to address

1.1 The Planning Act 2008 introduced a new bespoke consenting route for major infrastructure projects in the fields of energy, transport, water, waste and wastewater. Since its introduction in 2010, over 110 Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) have been consented. In 2011, amendments through the Localism Act brought democratic accountability, with decisions made by Secretaries of State. The regime was extended in 2013 to include large scale business and commercial schemes and again in 2016 to allow related housing development to be consented as part of a Development Consent Order (DCO).

1.2 The NSIP process has successfully reduced the time taken for major infrastructure projects to achieve development consent to an average of around 4 years, compared to the 8 years it took to consent Heathrow Terminal 5 via a conventional planning inquiry. However, the system does not always move with the focus and speed we need. This is particularly important as we face ever more urgent challenges on transport, energy security, water and wastewater and climate change. A resilient planning system which is ready for the future should support growth, deliver environmental objectives and work for local communities.

1.3 The increasing number of projects seeking consent, their complexity, and the need for greater focus, certainty and speed is challenging everyone with a role to play in effective consenting. As the system adjusts to these pressures, there are signs that the level of certainty it offers investors and infrastructure developers is declining, for example:

- **We have seen an increase in the average length of time it takes for a case to reach decision.** The timespan for Development Consent Orders (DCO) increased by 65% between 2012 and 2021 from 2.6 to 4.2 years<sup>[footnote 1]</sup>. Deadline extensions to statutory stages of the NSIP process are most prominent in offshore wind and highway related developments<sup>[footnote 2]</sup>.
- **More projects are requiring multiple extensions of time at the decision stage.** Out of a total of 118 decided projects, 12 have involved multiple extensions at decision stage, with 5 of those being for NSIPs decided in 2020/21. This is generally due to complex issues related to the project remaining unresolved following examination and requiring detailed consideration at the decision stage.
- **There has been an increase in the volume of documentation created during the NSIP process** (some applications have generated in excess of 90,000 pages of documentation published on the Planning Inspectorate website). This can slow down the decision-making process making it less accessible to those seeking to engage and does not guarantee better outcomes.
- **The number of projects that are subject to successful legal challenge is increasing.** Since 2021 there have been 4 successful challenges out of a total 15 legal challenges to date. There have been 4 Development Consent Orders (DCO) quashed in the system overall, all of which occurred in 2021.

## The evidence base for system reform

1.4 In November 2020, the National Infrastructure Strategy established a National Infrastructure Planning Reform Programme, as part of Project Speed, to make the NSIP system more effective and deliver more certainty in the process and better, greener and faster outcomes.

1.5 As part of the review of the NSIP regime, we undertook an [Operational Review of the system \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects-regime-operational-review\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nationally-significant-infrastructure-projects-regime-operational-review), seeking views on the process through our ‘call for evidence’ that ran from August to December 2021. We received over 130 responses to our survey from local authorities, community groups, infrastructure developers, statutory consultees, environmental non-governmental organisations, and professional bodies and practitioners with a range of expertise. Respondents shared specific suggestions on ways to improve the regime and its performance. We have heard a range of views about where the NSIP process works well, where it doesn’t and where there are issues beyond the regime that impact on performance.

1.6 The National Infrastructure Planning Association’s (NIPA) long-running ‘Insights’ programme has created a framework for practitioners to maintain and

improve best practice approaches to preparing a DCO so that consented infrastructure projects are developed with the on-going involvement of local authorities and communities, and able to adapt to the realities of infrastructure delivery. The government's NSIP reform programme recognises the full end-to-end nature of infrastructure planning and delivery, and the importance of constructive and collaborative working to build trust in both the consenting process and between all parties.

### **A systems thinking approach to NSIP reform**

Systems thinking is a structured approach used to solve problems in complex, dynamic, systems. It supports understanding of how different actors, and processes, inter-relate and influence one another. This is a critical tool to seek to minimise any adverse consequences that reform solutions may cause.

The NSIP consenting process is a good example of a complex system with many actors and processes involved and lends itself to this approach. It is critical that the wider knock-on impacts of any identified issues and proposed solutions are fully considered, to ensure efficiency gains from an end-to-end perspective are realised. A key goal with using this approach is to avoid shifting process around, or inadvertently creating problems elsewhere. Through a systems approach, it is possible to be more confident that solutions will genuinely streamline and focus the process through gathering intelligence from key experts, whilst other performance metrics are maintained.

The systems thinking approach to this work has drawn upon many evidence sources including: overall system performance data and case studies to build a detailed system map of the processes, issues and points of delay and inefficiency in the system; our Operational Review and a call for evidence which received 130 responses from users including local authorities, community groups, infrastructure developers, statutory consultees, environmental non-governmental organisations, and professional bodies and practitioners active in the system; a series of workshops involving key system experts to iterate and evolve the system understanding of issues and solutions in relation to the detailed process map; and acceleration projects, with the Planning Inspectorate and applicants trialling new ways of working.

1.7 We have also used direct testing and learning to inform our reform programme, principally through the proposed A66 National Highways DCO (see case study box below) and through the Planning Inspectorate's continuous improvement programme.

### **A66 Northern Trans-Pennine Project case study**

In 2020, National Highways in collaboration with government departments and agencies targeted a 50% saving on a 10 year construction period to upgrade and dual parts of the A66. The DCO consenting process is a small but critical part of this programme. We wanted to test whether enhanced support for project promoters at the pre-application stage would lead to greater certainty of

outcome and more effective use of resource, in support of an accelerated programme. Our findings relate to pre-application work and the impact to date.

The Inspectorate contributed to an enhanced pre-application stage carried out by National Highways providing more assertive 'without prejudice' planning advice on the preparation of the application and exploring ways to address potential examination issues. This also included a higher intensity of engagement, and closer involvement from the Planning Inspectorate in the Evidence Plan process for habitats regulations assessments.

The government found that the quality of the project programme and strength of the promoter's commitment in driving engagement and problem solving is central to achieving an accelerated programme. This needed to be matched by expertise at the Planning Inspectorate, statutory consultees and local authorities capable of resolving potential examination and implementation challenges innovatively.

We are supporting the A66 authorities through the Innovation & Capacity Fund to drive and test innovations on how they engage with the DCO process, and to prepare a 'guide book' to share the innovative, focused approach to planning and environmental enhancement opportunities of the A66 with other local authorities.

The application is currently in examination and there will be further evaluation through this stage.

## Taking action

1.8 This Action Plan sets out the reforms to the NSIP regime that we will implement to ensure the system can support our future infrastructure needs. Some of this work is already underway, and amongst other things:

- We have established an Innovation and Capacity Fund to better address the challenges councils face in engaging with NSIPs. The 'Improving performance of the NSIP planning process and supporting local authorities' policy statement on 30 August 2022 announced the funding awarded to 10 successful local authorities.
- We have worked with the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to set up a Local Authority Working Group to explore how using resources more efficiently and/or supplying additional resources to key users of the regime can improve our programme outcomes.
- The government has proposed amendments to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill to take legal powers to make a number of improvements to the NSIP system. This includes powers to enable the Secretary of State to set shorter statutory timeframes for examination, as well as the ability for the Secretary of State to set regulations for the decision making on non-material change applications. The amendments also include a power to introduce,

through regulations, a cost-recovery mechanism for statutory consultees inputting into NSIP applications.

- The Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister for Local Government and Building Safety have asked the National Infrastructure Commission to conduct a study looking into the role of National Policy Statements in the NSIP consenting process to support these reforms.

1.9 To meet our objectives of ensuring the NSIP consenting process is better at meeting statutory timescales, faster where environmental and community concerns can be addressed before examination, greener for the environment, fairer for communities, and more resilient in resourcing. We have 5 reform areas:

**1. Setting a clear strategic direction**, where National Policy Statements and wider government policy reduce the policy ambiguity faced by individual projects.

**2. Bringing forward operational reforms to support faster consenting** with an emphasis on delivering proportionate examinations for all projects, strengthening pre-application advice and introducing a fast-track consenting timeframe for projects that meet quality criteria.

**3. Realising better outcomes for the environment** replacing the cumbersome environmental assessment processes with new Environmental Outcomes Reports; reviewing the protected sites and species policy framework (including Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)), and introducing biodiversity net gain and developing principles for marine net gain for NSIPs.

**4. Recognising the role of local authorities and strengthening community engagement with NSIPs**, with greater support and measures to embed community input and benefits much earlier in the process.

**5. Improving system-wide capacity and capability**, including through developing skills and training and extending proportionate cost recovery by the Planning Inspectorate and key statutory consultees to support effective preparation and examination of NSIPs and build resilience into the system.

## **When will our reforms have an impact?**

1.10 We want to see real benefits to the consenting process being delivered as quickly as possible. Departments are progressing with reviews of the Energy and National Networks National Policy Statements which will be published for consultation soon. Furthermore, the government intends to designate and publish a new National Policy Statement on water resources in 2023.

1.11 For the reform programme overall, the government is working toward the following timescales (further detail on timescales is set out in [Annex A](#)):

**Spring 2023** – we will consult on some the key aspects of our reforms including measures to streamline and improve the examination process, a new fast track consenting timeframe and the quality standards that NSIPs will be required to meet

to be eligible for this, and proposals to move towards full cost recovery across the NSIP system.

**September 2023** – from September onwards, we will pilot key aspects of the reforms on several projects from different sectors, including a new fast track consenting timeframe. We will begin work to identify suitable projects through our ‘early adopter and pilots’ programme from spring 2023.

**By Spring 2024** – we aim to have brought forward the key regulatory and guidance changes needed to deliver the action plan, including to build more capacity and capability into the system by enabling the Planning Inspectorate and statutory consultees to recover proportionate costs from infrastructure developers.

**From 2025** – we will see further improvements in performance, supported by: a more digital and agile Planning Inspectorate; the introduction of Environmental Outcome Reports; and updated National Policy Statements which are streamlined and regularly reviewed.

## 2. Reform Area 1: Setting a clear strategic direction for infrastructure planning

The government is responsible for producing National Policy Statements (NPSs) that set out the need case for the infrastructure that will be delivered through the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project regime. It is vital that the policy position in NPSs is clear and up-to-date in order to set the strategic direction for future infrastructure schemes.

Reviews of some of the existing NPSs are already underway and our reforms will ensure that NPSs are prepared, reviewed and updated more regularly to reduce the scope for ambiguity and ensure that the strategic direction set out in NPSs reflects changing circumstances and wider government priorities.

### Issues with the current system

2.1 National Policy Statements (NPSs) are a cornerstone of the NSIP regime, setting out the need for infrastructure in advance and removing this debate from the consideration of individual applications. They also set out the clear policy tests to be met by NSIPs, ensuring environmental, community and safety impacts are properly considered and that the national need for infrastructure is fully established. NPSs undergo public consultation and parliamentary scrutiny before being designated. They are key to ensuring that government policy is implemented effectively through the planning system in the public interest. They should set out a clear and unambiguous needs case, and direction on where balance is needed, assessment requirements and policy tests to be met and what weight to give to various aspects of the NPS in decision making.

2.2 Responses from the call for evidence suggested that updating existing NPSs to provide clear, focused, and up-to-date strategic direction and clear assessment requirements and policy tests would give more certainty to investors, infrastructure developers and communities. This is imperative to ensuring applications can be considered within the statutory timescales.

2.3 NPSs should be concise, proportionate and in plain English. They should provide clarity for infrastructure developers preparing application documents, those engaging in the process, as well as Inspectors conducting examinations. This should focus and inform the process and can reduce the amount of time taken on difficult negotiations or compromises needing to be reached during the examination process and/or decision stage, which in turn can result in changes to the scheme with consequential delays to planned timescales. NPSs also set a clear framework for Secretary of State decisions and give clarity to developers and everyone affected by a scheme, on government's objectives for infrastructure in a particular sector and state.

## **Actions**

2.4 The actions in this reform area aim to ensure government sets out and maintains a robust and up-to-date policy framework across the suite of NPSs. Secretaries of State will review the existing NPSs, where appropriate, to provide a clear and up-to-date need case for infrastructure. Government departments will continue to work to deliver comprehensive policy coverage and to closely monitor the relevance, effectiveness in practice and currency of their NPSs. This will be used to inform decisions on whether to review such NPSs, made at the discretion of the relevant Secretary of State in due course.

2.5 The Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister for Local Government and Building Safety have asked the National Infrastructure Commission to carry out a study to look at the role of NPSs and make recommendations on how these important documents can support our reforms, including what action the government can take to ensure NPSs are reviewed more regularly and how the process could be improved. This may include considering the benefits of consolidating the existing NPSs, making them more consistent and agile whilst seeking to reduce the burden on departments of producing policy which is cross-cutting across all fields of infrastructure.

### **National Policy Statements**

#### **Water, waste water and hazardous waste (Defra)**

- Waste water NPS, designated 2012
- Hazardous Waste NPS, designated 2013
- New NPS for Water Resources to be designated by Q1 2023

#### **Energy (DESNZ)**

A review of the following NPSs is currently underway and updated NPSs will be designated by Q2 2023:

- EN-1: Overarching NPS for Energy
- EN-2: NPS for Natural Gas Electricity Generating Infrastructure
- EN-3: NPS for Renewable Energy Infrastructure
- EN-4: NPS for Gas Supply Infrastructure and Gas and Oil Pipelines
- EN-5: NPS for Electricity Networks Infrastructure

The original NPS for Nuclear Power Generation (EN-6) was designated in 2011, and was not included in the above review. Instead, a new NPS for Nuclear Power Generation (EN-7) which will also cover smaller reactors is being developed, aiming for designation by early 2025, and a separate NPS for nuclear fusion is also planned. A Geological Disposal Infrastructure NPS for nuclear was designated in 2019.

### **Transport (DfT)**

- Ports NPS, designated 2012
- National Networks NPS (2015) – review is currently underway, updated NPS to be designated during 2023
- Airports NPS, designated 2018

2.6 We will therefore review existing guidance to make the process for preparing, reviewing and keeping NPSs up-to-date clearer and simpler. DLUHC guidance will be updated to improve and strengthen advice on when and how to prepare NPSs and undertake NPS reviews to ensure an effective and more timely updating and transition process for NPS reviews.

## **3. Reform Area 2: Operational reform to support a faster consenting process**

The Planning Inspectorate's role is at the heart of the consenting process. The certainty that the pre-application, examination, recommendation and decision timetable provides is one of the key strengths of the NSIP regime for infrastructure developers, communities and all those involved in the process. Recently, we have seen increasing delays to decisions due to issues not being resolved during examinations or statutory decision periods.

Our reforms are designed to address the underlying causes of delays, by ensuring project issues are effectively addressed earlier on in the process. Our reforms will seek to improve the pre-application process to resolve issues ahead of examination and speed up the consenting process.

## Issues with the current system

3.1 Infrastructure developers are responsible for preparing applications before submitting these to the Inspectorate (on behalf of the Secretary of State) for acceptance and examination. Following its impartial scrutiny of the application during the examination, the Examining Authority of one or more Appointed Persons makes a recommendation to the relevant Secretary of State who makes the final decision on whether to grant development consent for a project. This system works well overall, and already effectively handles complex applications and significant amounts of information within statutory timescales.

3.2 However, feedback from the call for evidence indicated that the examination process is increasingly difficult to navigate. In particular, the examination has become the point of the consenting process at which the Examining Authority asks an increasingly large number of questions in order to address uncertainties, for example around new technologies. Examinations are having to handle significant amounts of information, and this problem is exacerbated when changes to the application are requested during examination. This has knock on effects to both examination and decision stages particularly where issues remain unresolved. This can lead to delays which can be costly for all those involved in the process and in turn undermines confidence in the regime.

3.3 Some respondents noted that projects at examination and decision stage were not necessarily seeing the benefits initially envisaged through the focus on 'front-loading' engagement and project development in the pre-application stage. Respondents pointed to the importance of enabling transfer of knowledge across the entire NSIP planning process, and of agreements from pre-application carrying into post-submission stages and implementation and operational delivery.

## Actions

3.4 We want to ensure that project issues are identified collaboratively and addressed early on when changes are easier to make. We want to incentivize and create the conditions for early, meaningful engagement between infrastructure developers and those with an interest in their projects – communities, those with land and property interests, local authorities, statutory bodies, and others.

3.5 We will streamline the application process, and strengthen the support available to applicants by bringing forward regulations, guidance and practice changes where necessary, in order to:

- Promote a more proportionate examination process for all projects by reviewing and streamlining the process for statutory consultees engagement in the consenting process and ensuring that the right statutory consultees are proportionately involved with the right projects at the right time.
- Enable more proportionate examinations especially for less complex projects, by reviewing the examination procedure rules including the role of relevant and written representations, and through digitisation of the examination process.

- Speed up the implementation of a DCO post consent by reviewing the process of material and non-material change applications and digitalising the certification of documents.
- Resource and provide more expert support during the pre-application process to support the quality of applications and enable key project issues to be identified early in the process. The Planning Inspectorate will enhance their pre-application service (see text box below) including through a stronger project management approach, authoritative planning advice, and the tracking of project issues. Updated DLUHC guidance will provide greater clarity on the standard of application required to comply with the 'acceptance' tests (section 55 of the Planning Act 2008).

### **Establishing an enhanced pre-application service for the NSIP process**

The Planning Inspectorate currently provides a pre-application advisory service for NSIP applicants to support the preparation of good quality applications. Our call for evidence, and analysis of system performance, indicated the Planning Inspectorate's role is well respected. It could be enhanced to support early meaningful engagement and potential resolution of differences between key parties.

We want to build on that potential and are developing options for an enhanced service that can benefit applicants and all consultees. Drawing on user feedback, there are four aspects to pre-application that, if strengthened, we consider will enhance the process. These are:

- A clear and transparent programme of work to submission of an application, to enable stakeholders to know what to expect and when input will likely be required
- Relevant service level agreements (as appropriate) between applicants and consultees, linked to the programme
- A focus on identifying and addressing potential principal examination issues, tracked as the project develops to inform programme
- Planning advice from the Planning Inspectorate, without prejudice to any future examination or decision

The service is intended to provide:

- Support for applicants to deliver a robust and realistic programme to submission
- Facilitation to bring together parties including statutory consultees, local authorities and communities, to address potential examination issues early
- Early advice on adequacy of consultation to reduce the risk to both applicants and consultees of parties or issues being missed that could affect the process later on
- Assertive NSIP planning and procedural advice drawing on the full expertise of the Inspectorate

The service should enable applicants to benefit from greater certainty post-submission that projects can be determined within statutory timescales.

To realise the full benefits of enhanced pre-application, applicants will need to commit to a transparent and collaborative approach and a programme that targets achievement of the fast-track quality standards to be set by guidance.

Options for this enhanced pre-application service will be subject to detailed development by the Planning Inspectorate in 2023. The intention is to charge for this service. This work will be informed by consultation to shape, and understand likely demand for, this service.

3.6 We intend to establish a fast-track consenting timeframe which will be available for certain projects, where defined quality standards are met. For these, the Secretary of State needs to be confident that the application is of a standard that will enable a robust examination in a shorter application to decision timeframe (a 'fast track examination timeframe') – see box below. This fast-track opportunity will be supported by new primary legislation enabling the Secretary of State to set shorter statutory timeframes for examinations where defined quality standards are met. These standards are being designed to enable an assessment to be made of whether an application is capable of being robustly examined in a shorter timeframe. To be eligible, we intend for applicants to set out a transparent programme to submission, and to sign up to an enhanced pre-application service with the Planning Inspectorate, and to relevant agreements with statutory consultees and local planning authorities to support the delivery of that programme. We will consult on our proposals for fast-track consenting, including proposed quality standards in spring 2023.

3.7 The Planning Inspectorate will introduce a new application service portal. This action is already underway. Pilots have been held on a new relevant representations process. The roll out of functionality to cover the full process and its extension to all applications will gradually progress over 2023. Gradual update and improvement of the current National Infrastructure website will be undertaken based on user-centric design and Government Digital Service good practice standards. This will also enable a shift over time from documents to data, resulting in simpler and faster analysis and interrogation.

3.8 The Planning Inspectorate will also continue the digital transformation of the NSIP process to enable the utilisation of agreed data standards for making it easier to submit and assess applications, whilst improving transparency and wider stakeholder engagement. This action is already underway. The Planning Inspectorate is liaising with Government Digital, relevant public bodies and industry to agree appropriate data standards and sharing arrangements. Clear and consistent data standards will enable a streamlined, standardised process with increasing integration with wider digital planning, environmental assessment and monitoring systems.

**Developing a fast track consenting timeframe**

The government's proposals for a 'fast track' consenting timeframe comprise an intensive, transparent pre-application programme, aided by an Enhanced Pre-Application service from the Planning Inspectorate, to achieve quality standards and good outcomes. Meeting these standards will then enable a shorter post-acceptance timeframe to decision, including a new shorter maximum examination period.

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill includes a power for the Secretary of State to shorten the maximum examination timeframe.

Working with the Planning Inspectorate, we are developing a process to enable infrastructure developers to apply for a shorter examination timeframe, where projects meet quality standards following completion of the pre-application fast track process. The government will consult in spring 2023 on draft quality standards and set out its proposed framework for the pre-application stage.

To achieve a shorter examination timeframe without extending pre-application or decision timeframes, applicants will be asked to develop a clear programme to submission, and work to identify and resolve or reach positions on potential examination and decision issues through early, meaningful engagement from all parties. Quality standards will determine whether outstanding issues will be capable of being handled through a shorter examination. Shorter examination timeframes, and a shorter post-acceptance to decision process, will also be made possible by planned changes to secondary legislation, departmental guidance and practice at the Planning Inspectorate, intended to support all NSIP applications.

The fast track consenting timeframe will build on the Planning Act's emphasis on consultation, with greater expectation on applicants and consultees to engage meaningfully on potential examination and decision issues, underpinned by relevant working-level agreements, including planning performance agreements (PPAs). The Planning Inspectorate will play a central role in supporting all parties.

The government wants to incentivise statutory consultees and infrastructure developers to address often complex issues before an application is submitted. The fast track consenting process will aim to ensure a sustainable, targeted, timely, proportionate and issues-focused approach to pre-application engagement.

The government will shortly be developing a 'pilots and early adopter programme' to trial aspects of our reforms, including the fast track proposals. We would like to work in partnership with infrastructure developers to include a small number of projects which are at an early enough stage of pre-application for enhanced pre-application measures to have an impact.

The government will continue to work with sectors who face complex and strategic challenges that might otherwise limit opportunities to consider a fast track consenting timeframe. This will include offshore wind and transmission network developers, where the ability to meet quality criteria and apply for a

fast track timeframe is also dependent on NPS reviews and wider strategic work.

## 4. Reform Area 3: Realising better outcomes for the natural environment

Nationally significant infrastructure will play a critical role in delivering the government's environmental commitments and supporting our journey to net zero. In bringing forward the infrastructure the country needs, we want to secure the best possible outcomes for the environment so we can live up to our ambition to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

Consideration of environmental impacts needs to be at the heart of early stages of project design, and decision-making, but the current system is too often delivering process rather than helping deliver better environmental outcomes. Our reforms will ensure the NSIP system is better placed to meet our strategic environmental goals and actively address the environmental impacts of development.

### Issues with the current system

4.1 Formal environmental assessment encompassing both the natural and historic environment, has been required in the UK since the 1980s. But there remain questions over the effectiveness of the processes in managing environmental issues and ensuring positive environmental outcomes. While recognising the important role environmental assessment plays, we wish to address a number of issues associated with the current system, namely that assessment can be:

- too long and technical – the sheer volume of material makes assessments impenetrable, preventing them from being properly considered in the decision-making process, which is the benchmark of their effectiveness.
- prone to legal challenge – lack of clarity on key elements of the assessment process has fuelled the fear of legal challenge amongst users and resulted in unnecessary elements being assessed, which has seen assessments swell over the years, without adding value.
- repetitive – evidence is collected on a case-by-case basis without effective join-up between strategic and project-based regimes. Duplication with other planning and legal processes adds to the volume of material and increases delays and costs, adding to the burden of assessment.
- ineffective – environmental concerns are buried under multiple layers of assessment and uncertainties in the assessments are ignored. Key safeguards such as monitoring the accuracy of the predictions in the assessment and the effectiveness of the measures proposed to mitigate the harm are often not

carried out as proposed. The new system will allow us to strengthen monitoring and data collection requirements, allow us to collect the data we really need on the effects of major infrastructure projects on the environment, and reducing the burden of assessment going forwards.

4.2 The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will secure the powers to reform the processes of environmental assessment through the introduction of Environmental Outcomes Reports. This new approach, will include bespoke environmental outcomes that will have the Environmental Improvement Plan and Environment Act 2021 targets at its core. This will allow us to address the common issues across environmental assessment but also meet the specific challenges facing the NSIP regime. These include the inter-action between assessments of environmental impacts at a strategic level, strategic mitigation options and consideration of alternatives at an early stage. The new system will allow us to strengthen monitoring and data collection requirements, collect the data we need on the effects of major infrastructure projects on the environment and reduce the burden of assessment going forwards.

## **Actions**

4.3 Our reforms will create the necessary framework to support the delivery of infrastructure in a way that best supports our environmental ambitions and marine planning reforms.

4.4 We will deliver a new system of Environmental Outcome Reports to introduce an outcomes-based approach to environmental assessment and project delivery. This will streamline the assessment processes and maximise its potential as a means of delivering our environmental commitments, drawing on the statutory Environmental Improvement Plan and the provisions and intended legacy of the Environment Act 2021. Primary powers are contained in the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill. There will be consultation and ongoing user research during the passage of the Bill to inform content of and necessary approach to secondary legislation. We will consult on secondary legislation following Royal Assent. Detailed guidance will be prepared alongside regulations for both TCPA and NSIP systems to assist with implementation once regulations are passed. Where overlap with TCPA and NSIP systems is common e.g., in the marine and intertidal zone, departments are working closely together to determine options for consistency in the regulations going forward.

4.5 Under the new framework, relevant plans and projects will use the assessment process to demonstrate delivery towards the government's environmental outcomes. These outcomes will draw on the extensive commitments across government and will ensure the ambitions of the Environment Act 2021, and the [25 Year Environment Plan \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan) are reflected in and delivered through the planning process. The targets from the Environment Act 2021 and the Environment Improvement Plan (of which the 25 Year Plan is the first iteration) will be used as a baseline to develop the outcomes that a project or plan will be assessed on.

4.6 Defra is reviewing the protected sites and species policy framework (including for Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA)) for terrestrial and marine environments. We published the [Nature Recovery Green Paper](https://consult.defra.gov.uk/nature-recovery-green-paper/nature-recovery-green-paper/) (<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/nature-recovery-green-paper/nature-recovery-green-paper/>) in March 2022, setting out proposals to reform the existing system of site and species protections. The Nature Recovery Green Paper consultation closed in May 2022. We will continue to explore options for making improvements to the existing legislative framework governing protected sites and species, working with our partners and arms length bodies.

4.7 We will incorporate biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements for all (terrestrial) NSIP projects from November 2025 and develop an approach for marine net gain (MNG). The biodiversity net gain requirement for NSIPs is to achieve at least 10% measurable net gain on all terrestrial and intertidal development, which is to be secured for at least 30 years. Defra is developing a draft biodiversity gain statement, which will set out the detail of the biodiversity net gain requirement for NSIPs. Defra plans to consult on this draft statement in early 2023.

4.8 A complementary marine net gain system is under development and Defra has consulted on the principles of marine net gain in English waters. Defra will publish a formal government response to the consultation in due course and will develop the detail of the policy in light of its responses. The next planned phase of work will focus on implementation and delivery of marine net gain.

4.9 The government will implement a new Offshore Wind Environmental Improvement Package to accelerate the delivery of new offshore wind infrastructure whilst ensuring appropriate consideration of environmental impacts. Offshore Wind infrastructure is known to have a significant impact on the marine environment and consideration of appropriate environmental mitigation and compensation can lead to delays in the consenting process. Defra is developing a library of strategic compensation measures where impacts on Marine Protected Areas cannot be avoided, reduced or mitigated and imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI)<sup>[footnote 3]</sup> considerations apply. Defra is seeking powers through the Energy Bill to make changes to the HRA process specifically for offshore wind developments. Powers to establish a Marine Recovery Fund and implement strategic compensation are also included in the Energy Bill. Non legislative measures such as introducing Offshore Wind Environmental Standards and implementing strategic monitoring are also being taken forward.

4.10 The marine space is facing increasing demands from multiple sectors. There is also the need to conserve and enhance our marine environment. Put together, this is creating a spatial challenge and causing 'the spatial squeeze'. While there is a marine planning system in place, attempting to balance needs is no longer sufficient when delivering ambitious policy targets such as net zero. A more holistic and strategic approach to marine management is needed. Through Defra's Marine Spatial Prioritisation Programme, we will seek to develop opportunities for more effective co-location and use of the marine space. We will work with Defra to implement the Marine Spatial Prioritisation Programme and ongoing marine

planning reform projects to ensure opportunities to improve the NSIP process are maximised.

## **5. Reform Area 4: Recognising the role of local communities and strengthening engagement**

Nationally significant infrastructure projects are large scale projects that take place in, and impact on, local places and communities. Impacts can be mitigated through good design which requires a comprehensive approach to siting and integration with place. Early engagement between infrastructure developers and communities (working with local authorities and statutory environment bodies), is essential to understanding these impacts, and to securing appropriate mitigation where impacts cannot be avoided.

Engagement is also key to securing wider community benefits from projects related to their impacts, such as training and skills development so that local people can benefit from the jobs created. Our reforms focus on supporting local authority engagement in the DCO process through a newly established local authority support network and the Innovation and Capacity fund.

### **Issues with the current system**

5.1 Local authorities are key to representing community interests and helping negotiate community benefits with infrastructure developers. Their ability to do so is not only dependant on strategic negotiation, but also on whether infrastructure developers are willing to engage at an early and formative stage of the process. We know that many infrastructure developers are already investing and innovating in community engagement. Alongside this, through our Innovation and Capacity fund, we have invited local authorities to help us learn about the approaches that work best.

5.2 Our user feedback showed a desire from communities, local authorities, and interest groups to influence the strategic planning of infrastructure to avoid potential impacts on communities and to maximise the potential benefits. Where impacts cannot be avoided, communities wanted to be able to influence so impacts could be reduced, mitigated or compensated against. However, we have heard that people and organisations often find it challenging to gain a meaningful understanding of projects early in their development, so that they can properly engage and influence them. The complexity of projects and volume of information means communities and local authorities face challenges in resourcing and keeping up with the consenting process, particularly at the examination stage.

### **Actions**

5.3 Our reforms focus on incentivising early, constructive engagement on NSIPs, to address impacts early and reduce the burden on infrastructure developers and communities at the later stages of the consenting process, notably the examination.

5.4 We will increase the funding available to local authorities to support NSIP work, by continuing to work through our recently established Local Authority Innovation and Capacity fund (I&C) to provide tangible improvements to securing benefits for local areas from community engagement and outcomes and infrastructure. The aim of this fund is to explore if and how using resources more efficiently or supplying additional resources for key users of the regime can improve programme outcomes through provision of expertise or innovative work. We are [currently funding 10 projects in local authorities](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-performance-of-the-nsip-planning-process-and-supporting-local-authorities>) which will be particularly affected by applications for major transport, energy and water schemes over the coming year. These range from projects that support more effective information-sharing between authorities and applicants, to the development of a 'guide book' that will support authorities to build better environmental outcomes from the early stages of a project, and the development of a workflow management system to support effective engagement.

5.5 We will provide further funding for projects that support local authorities to engage earlier and more effectively with the NSIP process. This will support better outcomes for communities whilst ensuring the engagement can happen in a timely fashion. We are also putting in place measures to support the more effective use of planning performance agreements (this is covered in Reform Area 5).

5.6 We are building upon our previous work with the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), and learning through our Innovation and Capacity Fund to establish a Local Authority Support Network to build capability and capacity across authorities, share learning, and encourage more efficient and effective local engagement with NSIP projects. This network has its foundation in a working group initially established to support the development of government's NSIP reform proposals. Local authorities from this working group, along with Innovation and Capacity fund bidders and local authorities who are likely to engage extensively with NSIPs over the coming year, have been invited to join the network. There is scope to expand this Network, for example through the engagement with local authorities that may want to develop knowledge to plan for future NSIPs. Local authorities interested in PAS's work on NSIPs can [contact PAS](#) (<https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/topics/nsips>) or keep up to date through [PAS's regular bulletins](#) (<https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/our-work/keep-touch>).

5.7 We will work to develop guidance on community engagement expectations to ensure that infrastructure developers consider at the outset of their programmes how their projects can address the legitimate concerns of affected communities, regularly engaging with them throughout the pre-application phase and beyond. Infrastructure developers will be expected to demonstrate how the views of the affected communities have been considered and which measures have been taken as a result, as part of the DCO application.

5.8 There are a number of areas where the government is exploring how communities engage in and benefit from hosting infrastructure for which there is a national need. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero will shortly consult on measures to ensure communities are benefiting appropriately from hosting electricity transmission network infrastructure. These measures will be separate to the planning process and will not constitute an ‘important and relevant matter’ in relation to DCO decision making.

## **6. Reform area 5: System capability – building a more diverse and resilient resourcing model**

A sustainably resourced consenting system is essential to support the effective preparation and examination of NSIPs, so that it is resilient and capable of delivering the government’s infrastructure ambitions. Through our proposed reforms we will bolster capacity and capability in the system, supported by a move towards full cost recovery to ensure it is sustainable and scalable into the future.

### **Issues with the current system**

6.1 In response to our call for evidence, users highlighted lack of capacity and capability in the system as one of the major barriers to faster and better consenting. Effective engagement between applicants, the Planning Inspectorate, statutory consultees and local authorities is essential to support the identification and resolution of issues at earlier stages of the planning process, and thus support faster planning decisions. However, applicants struggle to get sufficient, quality engagement at the right time. The expected increase in the number of NSIP projects in development, to meet the government’s objectives including on energy security, water and wastewater and transport connectivity, together with the increasing likelihood of more complex, integrated and novel projects, means parts of the system are under resourced to meet both existing and future demand.

6.2 Capacity and capability shortages are not unique to the NSIP consenting process – they form a constraint across a range of planning work<sup>[\[footnote 4\]](#)</sup>. These constraints impact local authorities, the Planning Inspectorate and statutory consultees that play a key role in enabling infrastructure to be consented in a way that supports wider objectives, including enhancing and protecting the environment. User feedback has also highlighted that local authorities find it challenging to recruit people from a limited pool of professionals who are already working in a competitive market for a range of infrastructure clients. They therefore can vary hugely in their capacity and expertise to engage constructively and meaningfully in the NSIP process. This can lead to delay and risks local communities not benefiting fully from the new infrastructure coming to their area.

6.3 Both local authorities and developers tell us that time is currently wasted negotiating developer funding for planning services (planning performance agreements) rather than getting on with working together constructively. The challenge of balancing resource need with demand in local and central government is compounded by a pipeline of projects that can be difficult to predict and service. However, building capacity and capability in the planning system will take targeted interventions, time, and further funding to deliver effective workforce strategies that support bolstered teams with improved knowledge, skills and efficiency.

## **Actions**

6.4 We will develop workforce strategies targeted at addressing NSIP skills and capabilities gaps in government agencies, and take steps to improve the NSIP system's ability to predict demand and build capacity to meet it. The Planning Inspectorate has already started recruiting inspectors to service the growing number and complexities of NSIP projects. Workforce planning, improved online guidance, ongoing staff training and a new risk and opportunity approach to cases and further digitisation are among a range of measures underway across statutory environment bodies.

6.5 These measures will secure a better resourced and improved service for both applicants and the environment. This work will be supported by improvements to, and better sharing of, the pipeline of future NSIP projects to support agencies in resource planning. In combination, these actions will enhance our ability to monitor demand and supply for consenting services, and therefore manage the system so that they are matched.

6.6 Building capacity will require infrastructure developers that benefit from the advice of the Planning Inspectorate and statutory consultees to contribute towards the cost of providing that advice. We will also support the Planning Inspectorate and statutory consultees to move towards full and proportionate cost recovery for the NSIP consenting system. This will lead to changes in fees for infrastructure developers. This will help expert bodies invest in building up the services needed to provide better, more reliable, and higher quality advice on applications that is targeted and responsive to the developer's programme. It should also ensure the issues are identified and addressed in a way that delivers a more sustainable funding model while ensuring better value for taxpayers.

6.7 Our legislative changes will establish new mechanisms to introduce proportionate cost recovery in a consistent way for the work of the Planning Inspectorate in pre-application engagement, and for key statutory consultees engaging meaningfully in the consenting process. They will also enable the Marine Management Organisation to ensure they can build adequate resourcing on post-consent work on marine licences to support the government's energy ambition. These mechanisms will enable statutory consultees to engage proactively with NSIP applications, and play a key role in accelerating the delivery of quality infrastructure and provide more transparency to infrastructure developers, whilst also supporting other national objectives including those around enhancing the natural environment, public safety, and protecting historic assets.

6.8 Cost recovery will be accompanied by performance monitoring arrangements such as key performance indicators (KPIs) so that it encourages continuous improvement in the quality of services. Where developers engage with statutory consultee services, they can expect trusted, proactive and timely advice on how to address potential issues in their development consent order applications to enable good quality applications, with the Planning Inspectorate supporting all parties. Infrastructure developers will be encouraged to adopt these services on all applications and will be required to adopt them to meet quality standards for fast track applications.

6.9 As set out under Reform Area 4, we are supporting capacity and capability in local authorities through the Innovation and Capacity fund and shared learning through a network of authorities, clearer expectations on funding, and wider work to build skills and capacity in the planning profession. Local authorities will need funding and expertise to enable them to represent local communities in the consenting process, work with developers to deliver local benefits, ensure integration with local infrastructure and monitor compliance with consent requirements. A more sustainable and consistent approach to funding and expertise is needed for the longer term to enable local authorities to play their crucial role. Some authorities already make effective use of planning performance agreements to secure funding for resource in return for an agreed level of service.

6.10 We would like to get to a position where there is a clear expectation of how much funding local authorities can expect from the developer for their work in supporting the NSIP process, and of the service that local authorities are expected to provide. This will enable local authorities to plan ahead and invest in capacity and developers can build this into their costings and engagement expectations. We will continue to work with PAS and the network of authorities to support councils to make best use of performance agreements to provide a more sustainable funding approach for quality services to applicants, but also to share and extend knowledge.

6.11 More broadly, concerted efforts between the public and private sector, as well as with representative bodies and the education sector, will be needed to support capability for both the NSIP consenting system and wider planning reforms. To ensure that local planning authorities are well equipped and supported to deliver development now as well as the changes set out in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill, we have already started to work alongside the sector to design targeted interventions to support the development of critical skills and to build capacity across local planning authorities. Our aim is to attract, retain and develop, skilled and diverse professionals of all backgrounds into infrastructure planning to help build a more sustainable planning system.

## **7. Next steps**

7.1 This action plan sets out the measures that the government is already taking and the next steps it will take to improve how the planning system delivers nationally significant infrastructure. The actions have been informed by those who

operate, use, and are impacted by the consenting process. We are grateful to everyone who has contributed to the reform programme so far.

7.2 We will consult in the coming months:

- Measures to streamline the application process and strengthen the support to applicants in the consenting process including:
  - streamlining the process for statutory consultee engagement in the consenting process, ensuring that the right statutory consultees are proportionately involved with the right projects at the right time
  - improving the quality of applications and enabling the key issues to be identified early in the process by introducing an enhanced Planning Inspectorate pre-application service and updating planning guidance to provide greater clarity on the standard of application required to comply with the 'Acceptance' tests (section 55 of the Planning Act 2008)
  - reviewing the Examination Procedure Rules to enable a shorter examination process especially for less complex projects, for example by reviewing the role of relevant and written representations, procedural steps and enabling increased digitisation of the process
  - speeding up the implementation of a DCO post consent by reviewing the process of material and non-material change applications and supporting faster certification of documents
- The new fast track consenting timeframe we are establishing, and the quality standards that NSIPs will be required to meet to be considered eligible
- Proposals to move towards full proportionate cost recovery in the NSIP regime

7.3 We will continue to engage with stakeholders as we develop and deliver these reforms. This will include hosting a number of events (online and in person) for stakeholders, to enable those affected by the reforms outlined in this action plan to share their views with us. Alongside this, we will continue to work closely with the Planning Inspectorate, Statutory Environment Bodies and regulators, and the wider sector. We will also work closely with the Planning Advisory Service and its emerging local authority network to integrate learning from Innovation Fund projects into our work.

7.4 If you are interested in being invited to events to discuss these reforms, including as part of future consultations, please send your contact details to: [infrastructureplanning@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:infrastructureplanning@levellingup.gov.uk).

## **Annex A: NSIP reform actions**

### **Action 1**

Review the existing NPSs, where appropriate, to provide a clear and up-to-date need case for infrastructure and to take into account the emerging Environmental Outcomes process.

**Lead:** Defra, DESNZ, DfT.

**Target timeline:** Water Resources – designation in Q1 2023; Energy (EN1-5) – designation in Q2 2023; National Networks NPS – designation during 2023.

## **Action 2**

Update planning guidance to make the process for determining when and how to carry out NPS reviews clearer and simpler.

**Lead:** DLUHC.

**Target timeline:** Spring 2024

## **Action 3**

Bring forward legislative changes to streamline and strengthen the application process.

**Lead:** DLUHC and Planning Inspectorate.

**Target timeline:** Spring 2024 (subject to parliamentary time).

## **Action 4**

Establish a new 'fast-track' consenting timeframe option for projects that meet quality standards.

**Lead:** DLUHC and Planning Inspectorate.

**Target timeline:** From September 2023, start piloting the process.

## **Action 5**

Introduce a new application service portal.

**Lead:** Planning Inspectorate.

**Target timeline:** Implementation by summer 2023.

## **Action 6**

Bring forward digital transformation of NSIP services and rationalise information requirements.

**Lead:** DLUHC and Planning Inspectorate.

**Target timeline:** Initial external trials 2022, agree full data standards by 2024, ongoing gradual implementation.

## **Action 7**

Establish a new Environmental Outcomes Reports process that will replace SEA/EIA.

**Lead:** DLUHC lead but works closely with Defra and the other process departments on policy and approach to regulations. We will work with stakeholders, end users, statutory consultees and the Planning Inspectorate to develop the approach.

**Target timeline:** LURB Royal Assent expected in 2023. Implementation will be phased in following Royal Assent and further consultation.

## **Action 8**

Review protected sites and species policy framework (including HRA) for terrestrial and marine environments.

**Lead:** Defra.

**Target timeline:** Nature Recovery Green Paper consultation closed on 11 May 2022.

## **Action 9**

Incorporate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements for all (terrestrial) NSIP projects from November 2025 and develop an approach for Marine Net Gain.

**Lead:** Defra, working closely with DLUHC

**Target timeline:** Draft biodiversity statement expected to be published for consultation in early 2023. Commencement of BNG for NSIPs planned for November 2025.

## **Action 10**

Implement a new Offshore Wind (OFW) Environmental Improvement Package.

**Lead:** Defra / DESNZ working closely with stakeholders.

**Target timeline:** To be brought forwards through the Energy Bill.

## **Action 11**

Implement the Marine Spatial Prioritisation Programme and ongoing marine planning reform projects.

**Lead:** Defra, working closely with DLUHC, DESNZ and other interested bodies.

**Target timeline:** The programme will conclude early 2024.

## **Action 12**

Continue to support local authority engagement through the Local Authority Innovation and Capacity fund (I&C).

**Lead:** DLUHC and Planning Advisory Service.

**Target timeline:** Ongoing.

## **Action 13**

Build upon our newly established Local Authority Support Network.

**Lead:** Planning Advisory Service.

**Target timeline:** Ongoing.

## **Action 14**

Develop guidance on community engagement expectations.

**Lead:** DLUHC, DESNZ and departments owning National Policy Statements.

**Target timeline:** Secondary legislation (if required) spring 2024 (subject to parliamentary time).

## **Action 15**

Consult on measures to ensure communities are benefiting appropriately from hosting electricity transmission network infrastructure.

**Lead:** DESNZ.

**Target timeline:** Early 2023.

## **Action 16**

Develop workforce strategies targeted at addressing NSIP skills and capabilities gaps in government agencies.

**Lead:** DLUHC with the Planning Inspectorate, Defra and Defra agencies.

**Target timeline:** To be developed from end 2022 onwards.

## **Action 17**

Move towards full cost recovery for the NSIP consenting system.

**Lead:** DLUHC with the Planning Inspectorate, Defra and other relevant departments and their relevant arm's length bodies, and the Planning Advisory

Service.

**Target timeline:** For financial year 2024/25.

## Action 18

Support capacity and capability, including in local authorities, through the Innovation and Capacity fund, shared learning through a network of authorities, and wider work to build skills and capacity in the planning profession.

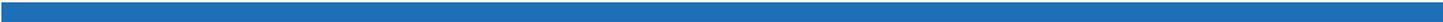
**Lead:** DLUHC.

**Target timeline:** Ongoing.

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1. The time counts the following phases of the planning process: pre-application (from the point of project inception) the part of the process associated with statutory timescales, and any legal process where the decision has been challenged.
  2. The COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed in part to a decline in performance.
  3. Where a plan or project would have an adverse effect on the integrity of a protected habitats site, it may be approved provided 3 tests are met: (1) There are no feasible alternative solutions to the plan or project which are less damaging. (2) There are “imperative reasons of overriding public interest” (IROPI) for the plan or project to proceed. (3) Compensatory measures are secured to ensure that the overall coherence of the network of European sites is maintained. See [Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 \(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/1012/part/6\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/1012/part/6) and [Part 2 of the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 \(https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/1013/part/2\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2017/1013/part/2).
  4. Evidence from the RTPPI shows that the proportion of planners working in the public sector has fallen steadily from 70% in 2006 to 56% in 2018. The Planning Inspectorate has seen a 13% fall in staff numbers from 2010 to 2018, a similar decline as reported by the National Audit Office for local authority planning departments between 2010 and 2016.

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