



HM Government

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Infrastructure planning

How will it work? How can I have my say?

The new planning process for key infrastructure

The 2008 Planning Act introduces a new simpler planning system for applications to build nationally significant infrastructure facilities in England and Wales.¹ The new system will cover applications for major energy generation, railways, ports, major roads, airports and water and waste infrastructure. Smaller infrastructure projects which fall below the thresholds set out in the Act, and other developments such as housing or retail, will continue to be dealt with under the existing planning systems.

The old planning process for considering these infrastructure applications was slow and complex with projects often needing multiple approvals. The new system will make the process faster, fairer and easier for people to get involved.

Under the new system, national policy will be set out in a series of new National Policy Statements (NPSs). These will be finalised by the Government after appraisal of their sustainability, followed by public consultation and Parliamentary scrutiny.

Once NPSs are in place a new independent body, the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), will examine and decide applications for new infrastructure development, using the criteria on national need, benefits and impacts set out in the NPSs, and consideration of evidence put forward on potential local effects.

¹ and cross-border oil and gas pipelines into Scotland. In Wales the new system will only apply to ports and energy applications.



Why is a new system needed?

The new regime that we are establishing will enable us to make decisions about nationally significant infrastructure in a way that is fairer and faster. This is vital to our economic, environmental and social wellbeing, including meeting the challenge of climate change, strengthening the voice of communities and creating the conditions for future economic success.

Over the next 20 years we need to replace around a third of our existing electricity generation capacity. Unless we make much greater use of renewable energy we will struggle to reduce carbon emissions, which we have committed to doing as part of tackling climate change.

At the same time we need to improve our transport facilities – railways, ports, roads and airports – and water and waste facilities. We need to do this in a way which takes account of the interests of local communities and the importance of protecting and enhancing the environment.

Currently it can take far too long to reach decisions on planning applications for nationally significant infrastructure developments. Under the new process we expect the time taken from application to decision to be under a year in the majority of cases. This is expected to save the UK up to £300m a year.

How will it work?

The IPC will operate a one-stop development consent process for nationally significant infrastructure projects.

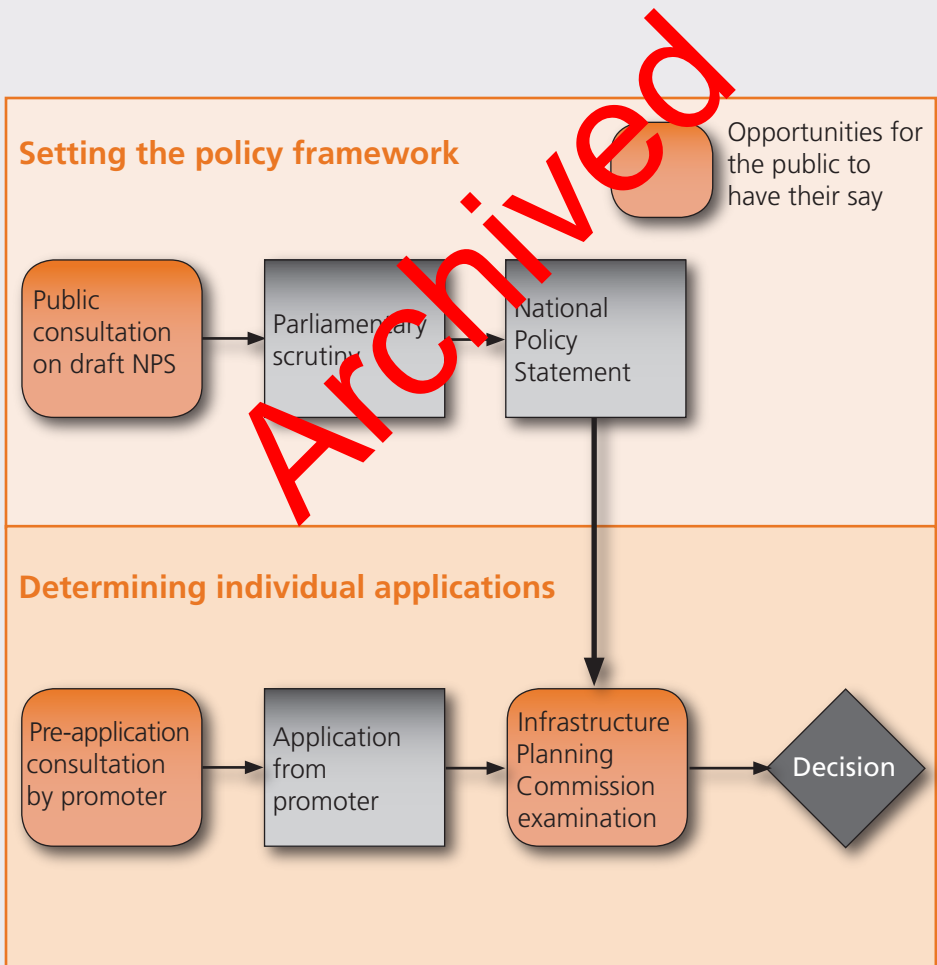
The IPC will decide whether to grant consent on the basis of the policies set out in the NPSs, taking into account domestic and European law, reports from affected local authorities, and evidence put forward by local communities and other interested parties during examination. In making its decision the IPC will weigh up the benefits and adverse impacts of the application. The IPC will have to give detailed reasons for its decisions and can be challenged in the courts if people think it has acted unreasonably.

The new process will provide clearer and better opportunities for the public and local communities to get involved from an early stage in decisions that will affect them (for more information see the website address at the end of this leaflet). There will now be three opportunities for individuals and groups to have their say. They are:

- during the public consultations on the draft NPSs
- when applications are being prepared for submission to the IPC – at this stage developers are required to consult with local communities about what they plan to do, and
- during the IPC's examination of applications – when individuals and groups can submit evidence in writing as well as in person at open-floor hearings held by the IPC.

What is in a National Policy Statement? What makes them so important?

Public consultations on draft NPSs will provide an opportunity for debate on the national need for the various types of infrastructure – rather than repeating this when each large infrastructure application is considered by the IPC. Once a finalised NPS is in place, the IPC will focus on the issues related to that particular planning application rather than the wider issues of need.



There will be NPSs for the following types of infrastructure:

Energy

- Nuclear power stations
- Renewables – electricity generation (e.g. wind farms)
- Electricity networks (i.e. power lines etc.)
- Fossil fuel – electricity generation (e.g. gas and coal power stations)
- Oil and gas infrastructure (e.g. pipelines and storage)

Transport

- Ports
- National networks (i.e. strategic roads and railways, including strategic rail freight interchanges)
- Airports

Water and waste

- Waste water (e.g. sewage treatment infrastructure)
- Hazardous waste (e.g. high temperature incineration)
- Water supply (e.g. reservoirs)

NPSs will establish the national need and set out policy for infrastructure; explain how they take account of the Government's relevant social, economic and environmental policies; and show how they contribute to tackling climate change. Each draft NPS will be subject to an appraisal of its sustainability, there will be the opportunity for members of the public to have their say, and Parliament will scrutinise them before they are finalised.

NPSs that cover new nuclear power stations and airport development will include more specific direction for the IPC on where those developments might be built. Where potential locations for these developments are named in NPSs, there will be local consultation with the communities that may be affected.

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How can I get involved?

Your first chance to get involved is when the draft National Policy Statements are published – it is important to take this opportunity to think about what national infrastructure we need and make your views known. Once the NPS is finalised it will provide the framework in which the IPC will take decisions on individual applications.

The activities involved for each consultation will vary depending on the subject of the NPS but all consultations will include appropriate opportunities for public involvement.

The various NPS consultations will be taking place in stages during 2009–10. To find out more details on when they are taking place and how to comment please visit www.direct.gov.uk/infrastructureplanning

If you require further independent advice please contact Planning Aid – an organisation which provides free, independent professional planning advice for individuals and groups that cannot afford to pay professional fees – on (0121) 214 2915 or www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk



Engaging Communities in Planning

To contact Planning Aid for London please visit www.planningaidforlondon.org.uk or call (020) 7247 4900

