



By Email Only

## Message from Chief Planner

**13 September 2024**

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

On 30 July 2024, Minister of State Matthew Pennycook sent a letter to the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate which sets out an updated approach to 'pragmatism' in local plan examinations. Further details and a link to the letter can be found below.

The New Homes Accelerator was first announced by the Chancellor on 8 July 2024 including a call for sites through which you are encouraged to provide information regarding major housing sites coming through planning and into development.

This newsletter also contains an update from Historic England with new advice on adapting historic buildings for energy and carbon efficiency. There is a new online learning facility as well as online and in-person training sessions being rolled out to help understand how to implement this new advice.

Office for Place has also provided an update and you can join the Office for Place conference to find out more about their work.

All previous Chief Planner Letters and Newsletters are available on GOV.UK [here](#).

With kind regards

**Joanna Averley**  
Chief Planner



## Newsletter Contents

Updated approach to 'Pragmatism' in Local Plan Examination.....	3
Transitional Arrangements for Local Plans .....	3
New Homes Accelerator Programme Call for Sites .....	4
New Statistic Published on Access to Green Space in England.....	5
Historic England - New Advice on Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency .....	5
Biodiversity Net Gain .....	6
Office for Place Update .....	6
Planning Casework Unit (PCU) contact details .....	6
Natural England Signals New Approach and Launches Improved SSSI Impact Risk Zones tool for Planners .....	7
Design Codes: New Resources to Give You a Head Start.....	7



## Policy and Delivery Updates

### Updated approach to 'Pragmatism' in Local Plan Examination

In his [letter to the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate](#), Minister of State Matthew Pennycook has set out an updated approach to 'pragmatism' in local plan examinations. A 'pragmatic' approach should be used only where it is likely that plans are capable of being found sound and any pauses for additional work should usually take no more than six months overall. Deficient plans that are unlikely to be found sound without significant additional work at examination should be sent back to allow the local authority to bring forward a new plan in partnership with their communities.

The letter also reminds local authorities that they should not be submitting deficient plans for examination in the belief that the Inspector will use significant time and resource during the examination to 'fix' it. However, the Planning Inspectorate should continue to support local authorities through Advisory Visits to ensure effective preparation for the examination process.

### Transitional Arrangements for Local Plans

On 30 July MHCLG launched a consultation on reforms to the NPPF. This was accompanied by a Written Ministerial Statement which made clear the Government's goal for universal coverage of ambitious local plans as quickly as possible.

In recognition that local authorities across England will have plans at various stages of development, transitional arrangements have been proposed in the consultation document. The transitional arrangements seek to balance keeping plans progressing to adoption with making sure they provide for sufficient new housing.

The proposed transitional arrangements will vary according to the stage the plan has reached within one month of publication of the revised version of the NPPF.

Plans at examination will be allowed to continue (and will be examined under the same version of the NPPF they were prepared under). However, where there is a significant gap of more than 200 dwellings between the plan's housing requirement and the new local housing need figure, authorities will be expected to begin a new plan at the earliest opportunity in the new system.

Plans at an advanced stage of preparation (Regulation 19) will also be allowed to continue to examination under the version of the NPPF that they have been prepared under, unless there is a significant gap of more than 200 dwellings between the plan's housing requirement and the new local housing need figure, in which case authorities will be asked to rework their plans to take account of the



higher figure and will be examined under the revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Authorities at an earlier stage of plan preparation should prepare plans against the revised version of the National Planning Policy Framework and progress them as quickly as possible.

We will be providing financial support for authorities who are at Regulation 19 when the updated NPPF is published (plus 1 month) and need to do additional work. Please contact [sarah.hunt@communities.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.hunt@communities.gov.uk) if you think you may fall into this group and therefore be eligible for funding.

The consultation is open until 24 September 2024 and responses can be submitted [here](#).

## **New Homes Accelerator Programme Call for Sites**

The New Homes Accelerator was first announced by the Chancellor on 8 July 2024 and is a key component of the government's commitment to deliver 1.5 million new homes by the end of this Parliament. The New Homes Accelerator will focus on selected large-scale housing developments that are encountering significant delays or obstacles.

Following the launch of the New Homes Accelerator on 29 August 2024, you are invited to identify large-scale housing developments that are delayed or stuck so MHCLG can better understand the scale of the challenge and evaluate what support can be provided to help overcome barriers to development and accelerate delivery.

### **How to submit a site**

Submissions can be made through an [online application form](#) on Citizen Space. This form is designed to capture all the necessary information to assess the site's current status and the potential for government intervention. Please ensure that your submission meets the following criteria:

- The site must be a large-scale housing development with significant delays or obstacles preventing progression.
- There is particular interest in developments with a capacity over 1,500 units and at all stages of the planning process, but information about smaller sites over 500 units would also be welcome to help us boost our evidence base.
- Priority will be given to sites that are viable without requiring substantial additional government funding or infrastructure investment.
- Support may come in various forms, such as strategic advice, planning assistance or facilitation with stakeholders, depending on the issues that sites are experiencing. Submitting a site does not guarantee any follow up or government support.



The application window closes at 11.59pm on **Thursday 31 October 2024**. Any information received after this date will be forwarded to the New Homes Accelerator Team.

## **New Statistic Published on Access to Green Space in England**

The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs is developing a new statistic exploring household [access to green space in England and would like your feedback](#). The statistic builds on previous work produced by Natural England (Accessible Greenspace Standards). The new approach uses a network analysis approach to calculate the distance to green space for every household in England measured along a network of walkable streets and paths rather than straight line distances used in previous analyses.

As the statistic is in development the team is seeking views to refine the output. You can provide feedback via the [enviro.statistics@defra.gov.uk](mailto:enviro.statistics@defra.gov.uk) email address, and the team will be going out more formally to consult with different stakeholder groups in due course

## **Historic England - New Advice on Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency**

Historic England's new Advice Note aims to provide clarity and to support consistent decision-making for proposals to reduce carbon emissions and improve the energy efficiency of historic buildings, while conserving their significance and ensuring they remain viable places to live in the future. Historic England Advice Note 18: [Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency](#) is primarily aimed at local planning authorities, heritage consultants and those involved in the planning process, and reflects current national planning policy.

To help teams understand the practical application of the Advice Note, Historic England has launched further sources of help and advice.

- The [Local Authority Heritage Community](#) is a new online learning community for those working in, or with, local authority heritage teams, to start discussions, share resources, and ask questions about planning decisions related to climate change adaptation. Join the discussion at [www.khub.net/group/laheritage](http://www.khub.net/group/laheritage)
- Our [Climate Change and the Historic Environment](#) online training programme delivers training that will deepen understanding of the role that the historic environment can play in climate action and aid the deployment of existing and emerging government policies, legislation and good practice on climate change. Details and links to take the courses are at



<https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/training-skills/training/training-courses/climate-change-and-heritage/>

Here you will also find details of new e-learning, available now, and in-person and online workshops running from October. There is also a bi-monthly Training and Skills Newsletter for alerts to course releases – subscribe at

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/HistoricEnglandTrainingMailingList/>

## Biodiversity Net Gain

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has developed a set of sample templates to support local planning authorities to meet their biodiversity net gain requirements. The templates are designed to be modified by local authority planners and legal teams according to their Council's standards and the specific requirements of the individual development.

The templates are available [here](#) and cover the following scenarios:

1. **BNG Condition:** Securing biodiversity net gain on-site via a condition.
2. **S106: Habitat Bank:** Securing biodiversity gains as part of a wider habitat bank
3. **S106: On-Site:** Includes monitoring contributions and secures on-site biodiversity net gain by condition.
4. **S106: Off-Site:** Includes monitoring contributions and a habitat management and monitoring plan for off-site elements.

## Office for Place Update

In July, OfP launched a [Getting Started with Design Codes micro-site](#) to help local councils get started on creating their own local design codes. The site includes a series of video interviews on the benefits of creating design codes, a research report on international examples of design codes and their use, and an infographic on the benefits of coding. OfP is also running online design code masterclasses, starting in October – sign up for the series is via [this link](#).

On September 18<sup>th</sup> OfP is hosting Places at Pace, an online mini conference. This event will look at how urban design and placemaking can contribute to improving economic and social outcomes, and how different organisations can work together to deliver better outcomes. This event is free to attend and open to all, sign up is via [this link](#).

## Planning Casework Unit (PCU) contact details

Following the recent change to the Department's name, the correct email address for referrals and casework correspondence to the Secretary of State is



[pcu@communities.gov.uk](mailto:pcu@communities.gov.uk) . Anything sent to the previous email address will still (for a short time) be automatically forwarded on.

For hard copy items (such as sealed documents), please use the following address:  
Planning Casework Unit, 4th Floor, 23 Stephenson Street, Birmingham B2 4BH.

Please note that the Secretary of State is not a statutory consultee and therefore does not need to be consulted regularly on planning applications that are not being formally referred. All emailed referrals should clearly state the reasons for referral. Any email that appears to be a standard consultation notification will not be responded to.

## **Natural England Signals New Approach and Launches Improved SSSI Impact Risk Zones tool for Planners**

Natural England has published a letter outlining a series of improvements to their planning service for Local Planning Authorities (LPA) to maximise environmental outcomes and respond to the government's ambition for growth.

Natural England's advice will be focused on strategic development plans and high risk and high opportunity planning consultations, particularly at an early stage. To enable this shift and help speed up decision making, more standard responses for lower risk planning consultations will be used. For example, nearly 47% of the c.34,000 planning consultations Natural England receive annually are low risk cases where there is no statutory remit for our involvement. Natural England wants to work with Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to speed-up decision making in relation to casework where there is low risk to the natural environment. For several years the [Impact Risk Zones \(IRZs\)](#) tool has helped LPAs decide quickly and simply when to consult Natural England on development proposals that might affect a terrestrial Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

In July, NE released an upgraded IRZ tool to offering a simpler, quicker and faster service, providing automated planning advice to LPAs, and avoiding the need for a formal consultation for some lower risk consultations. LPAs are encouraged to use the new tool to decide when to consult Natural England and receive automated planning advice. NE is also looking to increase the future scope of IRZs to cover other types of casework. By reducing the demands of lower risk casework NE aims to invest more of its resources into priority cases and areas that offer more for nature recovery. More about the tool and how it was developed can be found [here](#).

## **Design Codes: New Resources to Give You a Head Start**

Local authority planners can now learn more from the experiences of 'pathfinder' organisations from 25 areas of England which have been developing design codes with the support of MHCLG and the Design Council. New, step-by-step materials to



# PLANNING NEWSLETTER

help you create design codes for your area are available on the [Design Council website](#).

Topics covered include how to prepare for implementation, making the most of your resources and how best to involve development management officers. The Design Council will follow this by running a series of free online seminars in the next couple of months, exploring the design coding process and including input from the pathfinders. Sign up will be via the [Design Council website](#). Recordings of the seminars will also be published alongside the materials once they conclude.