



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

PLANNING NEWSLETTER

By Email Only

Message from Chief Planner

19 December 2024

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

On 15 December, MHCLG published a working paper setting out a new approach to development and nature recovery. We invite local planning authorities (LPAs) to review the paper and submit their views.

This issue also includes an updated Criteria Document for improving planning performance, as well as details on a new Regional Design and Place Advocates programme, and a survey on Natural England's Green Infrastructure Framework. We also have updates from MHCLG's Capacity and Capability programme, including a reminder about funding available to help local authorities implement policy changes in last week's NPPF announcement.

Further, I'd like to highlight a call for any LPAs who have not already done so to review and update their brownfield land registers. The deadline for this is **31 December**.

With kind regards,

Joanna Averley
Chief Planner

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



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Policy and Guidance Updates

Development and Nature Recovery Working Paper

MHCLG has published a working paper setting out a new approach to development and nature recovery. It proposes that developers pay into a 'Nature Restoration Fund' for improvements to nature as a quicker and simpler way of meeting their environmental obligations. We invite LPAs to review the working paper and share their views.

The aim of the new approach is to free up and accelerate development while driving nature recovery. The proposals will support more efficient and effective discharge of obligations arising from the Habitats Regulations and other legislation.

By pooling funding from development to deliver environmental improvements, a public delivery body will be empowered to take the necessary action to address environmental impacts strategically, rather than at the level of an individual projects. The 'site by site' approach required under the current system can make the delivery of vital housing and infrastructure slower and more expensive. It is also ineffective at reversing environmental decline.

Shifting to a strategic approach to nature recovery will support the Government's commitment to build 1.5 million homes and advance 150 major infrastructure project decisions, while helping to halt and reverse the decline of species and natural habitats. The measures are designed to be mutually beneficial for housing delivery, the economy and nature.

MHCLG are seeking views on this working paper. Feedback will inform the next stage of policy development, and any legislative changes required will be included in the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill. You can read the paper and send us your views here: [Planning Reform Working Paper: Development and Nature Recovery - GOV.UK](#)

Updated Criteria Document for Improving Planning Performance

On 4 December, the Government laid an updated Criteria Document for improving planning performance, following consultation earlier this year. It



sets out the designation thresholds for 2025 and 2026 for speed and quality of decision-making.

The assessment period for speed of decision-making has halved from 24 months to 12 months. This change has been made so designation decisions are made on more up-to-date data and are more responsive to changes in performance.

The updated Criteria Document can be found [here](#)

Update Your Brownfield Land Register

The Planning Data platform brings together data from every LPA in England to improve planning decision making. Providing this information helps to reduce delays in the housing system, support the development of new digital planning tools, and build stronger relationships between communities and developments.

To support this, MHCLG is asking LPAs to review and update their brownfield land registers on their local authority websites. If you have not yet reviewed your brownfield land register for 2024, please remember the deadline is **31 December**.

You can review and provide your register here: submit.planning.data.gov.uk.

Capacity and Capability Updates

Grant Funding Available for Implementing NPPF Policy Changes

As part of the publication of the updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 12 December 2024, the Government announced that grant funding will be provided to support local authorities to implement the required policy changes.

Over £14.8m has been set aside to support local authorities with local plan delivery and Green Belt reviews. Eligible local authorities are invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) form **by 17 January 2025** to request a share of



this funding for local plans [here](#) and Green Belt review funding [here](#). The eligibility criteria and further information is provided on GOV.UK [here](#). Local authorities must meet all criteria to be awarded a share of this funding. Local authorities may be eligible for both local plans and Green Belt review funding. The funding will be provided to successful authorities as a Section 31 grant for payment in February 2025.

MHCLG encourages all eligible LPAs to submit an EOI. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact the Planning Capacity and Capability Team at LocalPlansandGreenBeltFunding@communities.gov.uk.

Public Practice Offers Year-Round Recruitment Support

With funding from MHCLG, not-for-profit organisation Public Practice works to improve the quality, equality, and sustainability of places. Through its Associate Programme, it supports LPAs to recruit mid and senior level built environment professionals by matching candidates to vacancies in the public sector. Associates benefit from tailored training and ongoing support, while LPAs gain access to skilled candidates and sector expertise.

In November, Public Practice adjusted how LPAs can recruit through its Associate Programme. LPAs can now contact Public Practice at any time during the year when they have a suitable vacancy to fill. This change supports more flexible and responsive recruitment. To find out more, [click here](#).

Update on Annual Local Authority Planning Capacity Survey

In January 2025, MHCLG will publish the findings of its first annual survey of local authority planning departments. The report provides evidence of challenges across a range of areas, including recruitment, retention and skills. Fieldwork was conducted between July and September 2023. The survey was sent to 327 local authorities in July 2023, of whom 118 responded.

Government recently announced a [£46 million package of investment](#) into the planning system. This includes funding to recruit and train 300 graduate



and apprentice planners and two funds to support local authorities with [local plan delivery and Green Belt reviews](#) following the publication of the revised NPPF. These findings will help MHCLG's Capacity and Capability team to continue to target support where it is needed most.

The team will launch a second survey of local authority planning departments in January 2025. This will measure key metrics including vacancy rates and skills gaps, for comparison against the 2023 baseline. Invitations to complete the survey will be sent directly to recipients of this newsletter once launched. We urge all local authorities to make sure their voice is heard.

Research and Events

Digital Planning Directory Launch Event

The Digital Task Force for Planning is launching a Digital Planning Directory, supported by MHCLG. Planners and other built environment professionals will be able to use the directory to access innovative digital support for planning, development management, and engagement.

This online resource will include essential information on more than 90 digital planning service providers, including their areas of expertise, services, case studies and contact details. [Register to join](#) the product's online launch on **22 January 2025 at 10:00 -11:00**.

Green Infrastructure Framework Stakeholder Survey

Nature England invites local planning authorities to complete this [online survey](#) on the Green Infrastructure (GI) Framework. Feedback will be used to support Natural England's efforts to improve the effectiveness of the Framework. The deadline for completion is **31 December**.

Become a Regional Design and Place Advocate

MHCLG and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) are supporting best placemaking practice in local planning authorities (LPAs) through a new Regional Design Advocate Programme. We are creating nine regional local



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authority networks across England and inviting LPA urban designers and planners to act as 'Place Advocates' in their regions.

If a Place Advocate is successful in their application, their LPA will become a host for one of the nine networks. MHCLG and PAS will grant host LPAs £10,000 and offer ongoing practical support to administer the network.

The networks will strengthen awareness of the importance of urban design by sharing evidence, examples and knowledge; supporting local champions; and recognising different ways for local authorities to embed design and placemaking within their planning processes.

Place Advocates will be selected via expression of interest. The deadline for applying is **10 January**. To find out more, [click here](#) or contact Steve Barker at pas@local.gov.uk