



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

PLANNING NEWSLETTER

By Email Only

Message from Chief Planner

11 February 2025

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

MHCLG has published the results of its first annual survey of planning capacity and skills in local authorities in England, commissioned under the last government. The findings of the 2023 survey show the importance of supporting town planners and related professionals to deliver for their communities. They will allow us to target support in the areas it is needed most and monitor how our investment in planning and planners is making a difference. We will be in touch shortly about a follow up pulse survey. I urge all local authorities to make sure their voice is heard before the deadline of **Friday 14 February**.

This edition also includes information about the consultations on compulsory purchase process and compensation, and the 2025 Housing Design Awards.

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

Local Authority Planning Capacity and Capability Survey Update

MHCLG has published the findings of its first annual survey of planning capacity and skills in local authorities in England – [click here to read](#).

The survey was conducted between July and September 2023 and presents the most detailed picture available of local planning authority capacity at that time, with data on the extent of the challenges faced by local authorities and national parks. The survey was sent to 327 local authorities in July 2023, of whom 118 responded.

At the time of the survey, 91 per cent of planning authorities reported difficulty with recruitment and 72 per cent reported difficulty with retaining staff. Around three quarters of planning authorities reported significant barriers to resourcing, including competing for talent (78%), difficulty attracting appropriately qualified candidates (77%), and a lack of qualified candidates (77%). Almost all (97%) reported some planning skills gaps. Departments were most likely to address problems with skills gaps by using agency staff (60%), with half (51%) saying they procured external consultants. We encourage you to read the full report, which contains much more data on recruitment, retention and skills gaps.

These findings are the first from what will become an annual survey, providing MHCLG with a baseline for tracking improvement in planning capacity and capability, and enabling government to target support where it is needed most. To ensure our evidence base remains up to date, we have launched the next iteration of the survey this January. Invitations to participate have been sent to all local authorities and national parks, including those who receive this newsletter. We ask that you nominate a representative to complete the survey on behalf of your organisation.

If you have not been contacted with the survey link, email laplanningskillssurvey@veriangroup.com. Please make sure that your voice is



heard by responding to the survey before the closing date of **Friday 14 February**.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Corrections

Following the announcement of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 12 December, we have been made aware of a small number of minor corrections needed. The NPPF has been amended to correct cross-references from footnotes 7 and 8 and amend the end of the first sentence of paragraph 155 to make its intent clear. For the avoidance of doubt, the amendment to paragraph 155 is not intended to constitute a change to the policy set out in the Framework as published on 12 December 2024.

Transitional Arrangements for Plans: Joint Local Plans

On 12 December 2024, we published the revised NPPF, which included transitional arrangements for plans in progress at Annex 1. Following publication, we received enquiries seeking clarity over the approach when calculating whether 80% of local housing need has been met for joint plans.

For joint local plans, the percentage referred to in paras 234, 236 and 237 should be applied in aggregate across the joint local plan area. For example, if one or more of the partners is below the 80% set out in paragraph 234 a) but taken in aggregate, the difference remains above the 80%, then paragraph 234 a) will have been met.

Government Launches Land Use Framework Consultation

On 31 January 2025, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) launched a consultation on a new strategic approach to managing land use in England. Using sophisticated land data, the Land Use Framework will provide the principles and tools to support decision-making by local government, landowners, businesses, farmers, and nature groups. This will help deliver key government objectives for our finite land, including growing food, restoring nature, and building 1.5 million homes this parliament.



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The consultation seeks views on the type and scale of land use changes that might be needed, as well as the actions government could take to support this. Government will also consult on how data can be used in some planning decisions to improve the resilience of our food system to flooding risk.

You can read more about the consultation [here](#). Please submit your views [here](#) before the closing date on **25 April**. The final Land Use Framework will be published later this year.

Updated National Planning Policy: Health

The number of fast-food outlets has increased in nearly all local authorities over the last five years. Research has consistently shown that deprived neighbourhoods in England have more fast-food outlets than the least deprived neighbourhoods, and that the density of fast-food outlets is linked to prevalence of childhood obesity.

In response, as part of the 2024 NPPF consultation, MHCLG asked how national planning policy could better support local authorities in promoting healthy communities and tackling childhood obesity. The updated NPPF includes:

- strengthened policy to promote good health and reduce health inequalities between the most and least deprived communities; and
- a new policy stating that local planning authorities should refuse applications for hot food takeaways and fast-food outlets within walking distance of schools and other locations where children and young people congregate, unless the location is within a designated town centre.

For further information and guidance, please refer to the Planning Practice Guidance on [How can planning create a healthier food environment?](#), [healthy weight environments guidance](#) and [fast food outlets density data](#) from the Department of Health and Social Care.



Compulsory Purchase Process and Compensation: Reforms and Legislation Consultations

On 19 December 2024, MHCLG published a [consultation](#) setting out proposals for further reforms to the compulsory purchase process and land compensation rules. The proposals build on the measures in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, which allow hope value to be removed from the assessment of compulsory purchase compensation. The new reforms propose to make the compulsory process quicker, lower the cost of the process, and ensure compensation rules are fairer. The deadline to respond to the consultation is **13 February 2025**.

In 2022, we commissioned the Law Commission to undertake a review of the law on compulsory purchase procedure and land compensation. The aim of the review is to make the legislation easier to access and understand by bringing it together in one Act. As part of this review, the Law Commission has now published a [consultation](#) to find out more about how the compulsory purchase system works in practice, as well as inviting views on the Commission's provisional proposals. The deadline for responses is **31 March 2025**.

Defra: Protected Landscapes Duty Guidance

Defra has published guidance on the duty for relevant authorities to seek to further the statutory purposes of Protected Landscapes, brought in by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. The duty aims to facilitate better outcomes for England's Protected Landscapes which are in line with their statutory purposes. The duty is an active duty, meaning:

- relevant authorities should take reasonable steps to explore measures which further the landscape's statutory purposes;
- relevant authorities should seek to avoid harm and contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty, special qualities, and key characteristics of the area; and
- relevant authorities should be able to demonstrate with evidence the measures which have been considered when seeking to further the landscape's statutory purposes.



The full guidance can be found here: [The Protected Landscapes duty - GOV.UK](#)

Defra Funding Available for Section 115 of the Environment Act 2021

Defra will soon issue grant determinations to support local highway authorities to carry out section 115 of the Environment Act 2021. This is the legal duty placed on local authorities to consult members of the public before felling a tree on an urban road. To receive the funding, local authorities must respond to Defra with a signed grant determination. If your local authority has not contacted Defra in relation to the duty to consult on felling of street trees, please contact NCF.TreeProgramme@defra.gov.uk.

Free-to-Use Digital Planning Directory Now Live

Local planning authorities can now make use of a new [Digital Planning Directory](#), a comprehensive and user-friendly online resource for listing digital planning service providers. It shows the digital services available to support and enhance planning, development management and engagement processes, with entries showing how councils or the private sector have used these tools to improve processes and outcomes. The listing has been launched by Dr Wei Yang's Digital Task Force for Planning and seed-funded by MHCLG's Digital Planning Programme.

Department for Transport: Submit Views on Aviation Noise

In collaboration with MHCLG, the Department for Transport (DfT) recently wrote to a targeted group of LPAs to seek views on existing guidance in relation to aviation noise and its consideration in planning decisions. They sought views on topics including:

- Policies in place in local plans which mitigate and minimise potential adverse impacts of noise from new development. For example, how were these policies decided upon and how did they factor in noise exposure levels.
- Examples of residential development which was permitted with or without mitigation in areas of high noise exposure, where policy relating



to aviation noise was not believed to be sufficiently explicit to inform a planning decision.

- Any policies which require house builders to provide information on aviation noise exposure to potential buyers.
- Suggestions for ways in which government planning policy could be improved in this area.

If your LPA did not receive the letter but you feel that you could contribute, DfT would welcome your views. The department seek responses by **Friday 14 March 2025** to this email address: ANEGSecretariat@dft.gov.uk

Housing Design Awards: 2025 Submissions Open

The Housing Design Awards, established alongside the NHS in 1948, are in their 77th year of recognising excellence in residential developments. From 2025 to 2029, the Chief Planner at MHCLG, Joanna Averley, will chair the awards. This commitment supports the government's ambitions to improve design quality, create well-designed places and build the homes this country needs.

The awards recognise planners, surveyors, and architects through the RTPI, RICS and RIBA. They address a broad range of vital design issues, from quality and sustainability to replicability. The judging process is supported by Homes England, the Greater London Authority, Home Builders Federation, the National House Building Council and Future Homes Hub.

The 2025 awards are now open for submissions. The deadline for entry is **Thursday 12 March** – [click here](#) to enter. Winners will be announced in autumn of this year.