



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

PLANNING NEWSLETTER

By Email Only

Message from Chief Planner

30 April 2025

The Chief Planner 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 policy and practice. Please see overleaf for the list of contents.

On 31 March, MHCLG and Geovation announced the launch of a new £1.2 million PropTech Innovation Challenge. The challenge aims to find new digital and scalable solutions to help accelerate the delivery of 1.5 million new homes. Local planning authorities (LPAs) will be invited to test the solutions as they are developed by digital partners. Further details are enclosed.

This edition also contains information about Historic England's updated guidance on roof thatching, Natural England's updated protected species standing advice, and an exciting secondment opportunity in MHCLG.

I hope you find this monthly newsletter useful. Please do forward it on to local authority colleagues and encourage them to subscribe at chiefplannernewsletter@communities.gov.uk.

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

PropTech Innovation Fund Launches New Challenge

MHCLG launched the PropTech Innovation Fund in August 2021 to support the development and adoption of innovative technologies that drive efficiencies within built environment processes. The Digital Planning team at MHCLG are now working in collaboration with Geovation, an Ordnance Survey initiative, to launch a new [PropTech Innovation Challenge](#).

The Challenge aims to find new digital and scalable solutions to help accelerate the delivery of 1.5 million new homes. It will focus on up to five priority problem statements, which are currently in development, and provide up to 12 PropTech projects with a share of £1.2 million in funding.

Local government will play a key role in testing the solutions as they are developed. Please share this opportunity with your technology partners and colleagues and encourage them to register their interest [here](#). Further information about successful pilots and opportunities for involvement will be shared in due course.

Supporting Nature in Development

In December 2024, additional text was added to paragraph 187(d) in Chapter 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework to support local authorities and developers to protect priority and threatened species. The text adds that that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures **and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs**

Government provides a range of resources to support developers to design nature-friendly elements in their proposals. These include the [National Design](#)



[Guide](#) and [National Model Design Code](#). They illustrate how well-designed places can support rich and varied biodiversity by facilitating habitats and routes for wildlife.

Natural England's [Green Infrastructure Framework](#), launched in 2023 alongside the [Natural England Planning and Design Guide](#), sets out how good design can integrate green infrastructure. For members of the Future Homes Hub, advice is also available in the Homes for Nature Guidance Document on the [Future Homes Hub website](#).

Natural England Updates Protected Species Standing Advice

On 7 April 2024, Natural England updated its [protected species standing advice](#). This will enable LPAs to make decisions that better protect England's protected species without needing to consult Natural England. From 7 April 2024, bespoke advice on protected species will only be provided in exceptional circumstances.

LPAs should still consult Natural England on development proposals that impact the interests outlined in [Natural England's Standard: Responding to consultations on development \(NESTND037\)](#). This latest update includes new advice on beavers and factual updates for all other species.

Natural England would like to encourage LPAs to provide feedback on the updated standing advice by emailing planningandinfrastructure@naturalengland.org.uk.

Natural England and National Trust Launch Nature Towns and Cities Programme

Natural England is working in partnership with the National Trust and the National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver the [Nature Towns and Cities Programme](#), launched in October 2024.

Within this work, the coalition launched the [Nature Towns and Cities Accreditation Scheme](#) on 1 April 2025. The scheme was co-designed with



local authorities, voluntary organisations, independent experts and government agencies. It recognises towns and cities whose local authorities are collaborating with communities and partners to create greener, healthier places. Place-based partnerships, including the relevant local authority, can apply for accreditation. Click [here](#) to read more and [here](#) to watch the accreditation criteria launch webinar.

Nature Towns and Cities coalition is also hosting an **online conference on 5 June 2025**, including practical workshops on how you can adapt and adopt strategies in your town or city, and virtual networking opportunities with people leading change. The conference is for leaders at all levels of local government, public sector, voluntary and community organisations, and businesses. [Book your place here](#).

Historic England Shares Updated Re-Thatching Guidance

There is increased pressure on thatching straw supplies following poor harvests in 2023 and 2024. In recognition of uncertainty around obtaining listed building consent for the use of replacement materials, Historic England has issued updated guidance on conservation issues when considering a change of thatch material. [The guidance](#) clarifies the decision-making process for applicants and local authorities.

Historic England has circulated this advice to thatching organisations and will offer support to local authorities dealing with applications for a change of thatching material.

Historic England: Support for LPAs

Historic England would like to remind LPAs that it provides a range of support for heritage teams, including:

- **Expert Guidance** to support local authorities considering proposed changes to heritage assets, including technical guidance and advice notes. [Click here](#) to read more about heritage in the planning system and sign up for the Historic England Planning Bulletin [here](#).



- **Training**, including self-guided e-learning and webinars. This month, Historic England announced a **carbon literacy course for Conservation Officers** which will run in June. For details, contact Sarah.Rousseau@historicengland.org.uk. Find more courses and sign up for the Historic England training mailing list [here](#).

- **Information sharing and practical support** via the online [Local Authority Heritage Community Knowledge Hub](#). The Hub is home to over 200 practitioners in local authority heritage teams. It provides a forum for discussion, asking questions and sharing resources and good practice. This month, there are new resources on Listed Building Consent Orders and apprenticeships.

Research, Opportunities and Events

Participate in Flood Risk Research for the Environment Agency

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) is conducting research for the Environment Agency on the use of the flood risk standing advice (FRSA). This is to understand how the FRSA is applied in practice, identify any challenges it presents, and explore ways of improving it for local authorities.

The TCPA is seeking local authority planning officers involved in validating applications, assigning consultees and determining cases in Flood Zone 2 to participate in 45 minute interviews to discuss their experiences with the FRSA. These insights will play an important role in shaping improvements to the guidance. If you are interested in participating, please contact clemence.dye@tcpa.org.uk

Coastal Change and Management Webinars

The Environment Agency is working with the TCPA to host a series of webinars between 20 and 22 May 2025. The webinars will focus on coastal change and management, including information on Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) and the new National Coastal Erosion Risk Map (NCERM). They are



aimed at planners and elected members in coastal authorities. The webinars are free to attend. [Click here](#) to find out more and register for a place.

Secondment Opportunity at MHCLG: Minerals and Waste Team Leader

Minerals and waste planning will continue to play a crucial role in maintaining an adequate supply of minerals and ensuring the sustainable management of waste within a reformed planning system. The MHCLG team is seeking a candidate with significant experience of minerals and waste planning to: provide stewardship of existing minerals and waste planning policy; lead on planning policy reform for minerals and waste; manage critical cross-government and sectoral relationships; and oversee the management of MHCLG-funded contracts related to aggregate minerals. Essential criteria for this role are as follows:

- Significant experience of planning policy for minerals and waste and a strong understanding of both the strategic and operational elements of these policy areas.
- Track record of developing and delivering evidence-based policy. This should include the ability to clearly communicate technical planning issues and solutions to non-planners.
- Strong political awareness and understanding of central/local government and Parliament.
- An excellent ability to communicate clearly in writing, verbally, and through visual means, tailoring communication appropriately depending on the audience.
- Excellent stakeholder management skills, including the ability to work with a range of key stakeholders on complex issues to deliver results.
- Strong leadership and management skills, with a focus on continuous learning and development for self and others.

If you are interested in this role, please confirm with your local authority that they would, in principle, support a secondment. MHCLG would take on salary costs for the period of the secondment. Applicants should submit their CV and a 500-word statement of suitability by Friday 9 May 2025. To submit an



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application or request more information, please email
christina.davey@communities.gov.uk