



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

PLANNING NEWSLETTER

By Email Only

Message from Chief Planner

8 July 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.

This edition includes an update on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which cleared its Commons stages on 25 June. There is also news of a new, free digital tool through which the transport connectivity of locations can be understood, as launched by the Department for Transport (DfT) and MHCLG. The tool will enable plan-makers and decision-takers to locate development in the most sustainable locations and plan for the transport infrastructure required to support it.

You will also find information about a new round of the MHCLG Digital Planning Improvement Fund which is open now for applications, and an opportunity to share your views on Natural England's Ancient Woodland Standing Advice.

I hope you find this monthly newsletter useful. Please do forward it on to local authority colleagues and invite 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:

Planning and Infrastructure Bill progresses to Lords stage

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill completed its second reading in the House of Commons on 25 June and has now progressed to the Lords. The Bill aims to speed up and streamline the delivery of new homes and critical infrastructure. It will also support delivery of the government's Clean Power 2030 target by ensuring that key clean energy projects are built as quickly as possible. Amendments made at Commons stages include:

- Removing the statutory requirement to consult as part of the pre-application stage for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects. This is expected to reduce the time spent in pre-app by up to 12 months.
- Measures to reform queues for grid connections, shifting from a 'first come, first served' to a 'first ready and needed, first connected' approach.
- A new funding mechanism for statutory consultees that will help address capacity issues and speed up advice.
- Targeted improvements to the proposed Nature Restoration Fund, the aim of which is to support biodiversity and promote sustainable land management.

The Bill has had constructive engagement in the House of Lords. Topics of discussion included the role of local democracy, the Nature Restoration Fund, the powers of Natural England, affordable housing provision and local government resourcing and reorganisation. Peers have so far tabled 105 amendments for the Committee Stage. Further details on all of the Bill's measures can be found in our [Guide to the Bill](#), and a set of factsheets here at [GOV.UK](#).

DfT launches new Connectivity Tool for transport and local authority planners

Have you ever wondered what being 'well-connected' really means or how it could be measured? The role of the planning system is to support sustainable development, which includes improving connectivity to the services communities need and want to access and maximising the use of sustainable transport modes across the country. But until now there has not been a consistent national measure of what constitutes a sustainable



location in transport terms, or how to create a system which best connects people to opportunity and catalyses growth.

On 26th June DfT and MHCLG launched the first nationally agreed measure of connectivity covering the whole of England and Wales. The Connectivity Tool, which was developed by DfT, combines transport and land use data to generate a connectivity score that measures people's ability to get where they want to go, using walking, cycling and public transport to reach jobs, shops, schools, healthcare and other essential services. It enables plan-makers and decision-takers to locate development in the most sustainable locations and plan for the transport infrastructure required to support it. It also indicates which new sustainable transport schemes could prove most useful in raising a location's connectivity.

DfT will be scheduling roadshows and drop-in sessions for local authorities in the coming weeks. The tool is available free of charge to all public sector bodies across England and Wales [here](#). If you need technical support or wish to provide feedback, please contact DfT at connectivity@dft.gov.uk.

PM announces AI technology to assist local authority planners

Last month at London Tech Week, the Prime Minister Keir Starmer officially launched Extract – an innovative AI-powered tool which can convert complex geospatial information from static documents into digital formats significantly faster, more consistently and at lower cost than traditional manual methods.

Extract represents a crucial step towards a planning system that is fast, data-driven and transparent. By making it easier, faster and cheaper for councils to digitise their historic documents and maps, Extract will help local authorities unlock the value in their planning data. The tool is currently in its alpha testing phase, with the team making iterative improvements based on initial feedback. The focus is on refining the functionality and user experience to ensure Extract meets the needs of local authorities nationwide.

The team is planning to begin both wider testing phases later this year when they'll be seeking additional partners to help further develop and test the tool. They will share information at a later stage about how local authorities can get involved. Following successful testing, Government is committed to



rolling out Extract across England in Spring 2026. To find out more, see [this blog post on MHCLG Digital](#).

Shortlisting now underway for PropTech Innovation Challenge

Last month, MHCLG and Geovation launched the PropTech Innovation Challenge, which aims to find new digital and scalable solutions to help accelerate the delivery of 1.5 million homes. MHCLG has since received 84 applications from a total of 225 partners.

The applications range from artificial intelligence-powered platforms transforming land data accessibility and automating planning processes, to digital tools that de-risk investments for SME developers. Some solutions focus on leveraging data to identify viable sites quickly, while others promote the benefits of having the right infrastructure data to support early-stage feasibility studies and provide developers with greater certainty. The vast range of innovative ideas demonstrates the sector's readiness to embrace new tools and ways of working.

Shortlisted teams will be invited to take part in a pitch-style bootcamp in mid-July with selected solutions announced in September. See further information [here](#).

A faster, more efficient planning appeals process

Government is progressing implementation of reforms to streamline planning appeal processes. Simplified procedures for planning appeals decided via written representations will start rolling out from the end of 2025. Under the new process the majority of written representation appeals will accept only the evidence put before the local planning authority during application. The simplified appeals process will support:

- A faster, more efficient planning appeals process that benefits everyone
- Keeping planning decisions local and reducing unnecessary bureaucracy.
- Submit once, submit right – providing the complete picture at application stage



Government expects the regulatory changes to be in place by the end of 2025. More detail on the changes is available [here](#).

A new route for Crown Development

On 1 May 2025 the Government introduced a new route for Crown Developments, and updated the existing route, which was introduced in the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023. The routes allow Crown bodies to submit planning applications for Crown Developments deemed by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, and Local Government to be 'nationally important' or 'nationally important and urgent'. When determining whether a proposed development is of national importance the Secretary of State will consider the [Written Ministerial Statement](#) published on 13 February.

Under the new route, 'nationally important' Crown Development applications will be submitted to and determined by the Planning Inspectorate unless 'recovered' by the Secretary of State for her own determination. Once the Crown Development application has been accepted by the Secretary of State, the Planning Inspectorate may ask the relevant local planning authority to provide information to assist in determining the application. The local planning authority will also be consulted and may be required to publicise the application. Crown bodies bringing forward development are encouraged to engage with the relevant local planning authority wherever possible prior to submitting the application.

The previously existing Urgent Crown Development route has been simplified. Applications under this route will be submitted to, and directly dealt with, by the Secretary of State. The local planning authority will be consulted as part of this process, and its assistance may be required through information requests or the need to publicise.

Further information on both routes and the role of the local planning authority is detailed in updated Planning Practice Guidance: [Crown Development and Urgent Crown Development - GOV.UK](#)

If you have any questions, please contact the Crown Casework team:
crowncasework@communities.gov.uk



Defra launches two consultations on Biodiversity Net Gain

Defra is inviting local planning authorities to engage with two consultations on biodiversity net gain (BNG), published on 28 May. The consultations are:

- [BNG for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects](#) (NSIPs) which primarily focuses on how BNG should be applied to major developments like roads, rail, power stations, reservoirs and airports.
- [BNG for minor, medium and brownfield development](#) to make it more practical and proportionate, particularly for smaller-scale projects.

Both consultations are open until 24 July.

Share your views on Ancient Woodland Standing Advice

The Forestry Commission and Natural England are undertaking their biennial review of the [ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees standing advice](#) to ensure it remains fit for purpose. This standing advice is a material planning consideration for local planning authorities and prevents them needing to consult Natural England and the Forestry Commission on individual planning applications impacting on ancient woodland, ancient or veteran trees.

Local planning authorities are invited to send their feedback on the advice and the associated assessment guide, and suggestions on how they might be improved, to planningandinfrastructure@naturalengland.org.uk by 5pm on 18 July 2025.

Defra publishes new National Standards for SuDS

Defra has announced the publication of new National Standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). Used alongside the changes the Government made to the NPPF in December 2024, this will improve outcomes for SuDS in England.

The revised standards go further than the previous iteration not only in their focus on reducing the volume of run off, but also in promoting water quality, amenity and biodiversity benefits, and setting out requirements for the



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information needed as part of maintenance arrangements. Standard 1 also introduces a run-off hierarchy, with water reuse at the top.

The standards are non-statutory and support the existing SuDS implementation mechanism, via paragraphs 181 and 182 of the [NPPF](#). The revised standards are available to view [here](#).



Funding Opportunities, Research and Events:

MHCLG awards Public Practice £500,000 to boost access to Associate Programme

MHCLG has awarded Public Practice £500,000 to help boost local authority planning capacity, supporting the government's target of hiring 300 new planning and placemaking professionals into the public sector by the end of 2026. Public Practice works with local authorities to place talented, mid-career built environment professionals, known as Associates, into placemaking and planning roles for a minimum of a year, supporting their transition through a learning and development programme and professional network.

Since launching in 2018, Public Practice has recruited to over 350 roles in almost 100 local authority teams across England, with 74% of Associates remaining in the public sector two years after completing the programme.

The funding boost will build on this positive legacy, enabling Public Practice to reduce the fee for its Associate Programme by 50% to £3,000. Additional funding will also be used to support qualifying local authorities with salary contributions. Local planning authorities can find out more about recruiting to their team through the Associate Programme at publicpractice.org.uk/hire-for-public-sector.

Digital Planning Improvement Fund: Open now for applications

Do you want to make digital improvements, enhance your data capabilities and make your planning data available on the national Planning Data Platform? A new round of the [MHCLG Digital Planning Improvement Fund](#) is now open for applications from local planning authorities.

The Fund provides a £50,000 grant for local planning authorities to:

- understand your organisation's digital planning maturity to baseline a starting point
- co-create an action plan to help improve your maturity
- access training and improvement opportunities
- identify, clean and publish datasets to the [Planning Data Platform](#)
- join the [Open Digital Planning](#) (ODP) community



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MHCLG will be accepting applications continuously and formally reviewing them in batches. Submit your application by midday on 29 July 2025 to be considered for the first cohort, with onboarding starting in September 2025. Applications submitted after the July deadline, will automatically be considered for the next cohort.

For more information, to find out about the experiences of other local planning authorities that have benefitted from the funding, and to apply, visit the [Digital Planning Improvement Fund webpage](#) or join the [Q&A session on 9 July](#).