



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

PLANNING NEWSLETTER

By Email Only

Message from Chief Planner

19 August 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.

You will be aware that government is preparing to roll out a new, faster local plan system. Local Planning Authorities with plans already underway will be working at pace to adopt these under the existing system by December 2026. But there is also much that local authorities with adopted plans can do to prepare to for the new system when it comes into effect, and MHCLG is encouraging them to take action now.

In March, the Housing Minister signalled government's intention to reform the statutory consultee system. MHCLG has now provided more detail on the steps it will take, including introducing a national planning fee surcharge to fund the planning function of statutory consultees via the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. There will also be a consultation on proposed reforms to the scope of statutory consultees including removing statutory consultee status from Sport England, the Theatres Trust, and the Gardens Trust, to which responses are invited.

Also in this newsletter, views are also sought on digital design codes and on planning fees and there is an update on Public Practice's popular Associate Programme, which now has experienced built environment professionals available to recruit year-round, rather than fixed points in the year.

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 [here](#).



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Policy and Guidance Update

Get Ready for the New Plan-Making System

MHCLG has reminded local planning authorities that it wants full coverage of up-to-date local plans as soon as possible, and that local government re-organisation or emerging strategic planning reforms should not delay plan-making. Currently some local authorities are progressing a plan to adoption under the existing plan-making legal framework, in line with the December 2026 submission deadline. Meanwhile, authorities with recently adopted plans are undertaking early work in advance of progressing a plan under the new plan-making legal framework provided by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which MHCLG expects to commence later this year.

The new plan-making system will be underpinned by new primary and secondary legislation. Plans prepared under the new system will need to comply with the new legal requirements from start to finish. LPAs will not, for example, be able to carry out an early statutory consultation under the existing system and a pre-submission statutory consultation under the new system.

For those authorities undertaking early work in advance of progressing a plan under the new system, a range of non-statutory activities can be progressed now, including:

- 1) **Getting ready and early scoping** through consideration of locally specific matters the plan could address. This could include work on baseline data to establish existing information about the local authority area and its needs.
- 2) **Developing the evidence base for the plan**, which will depend on local circumstances and could include initial scoping work on the need for development and the opportunities and constraints on land availability in the area, and reviews of existing evidence to identify gaps. When commencing evidence work to underpin the new plan, the focus should be on non-abortion areas of the evidence base until further guidance is provided.



- 3) **Considering the approach and preparing for engagement** including preparatory work for setting up digital engagement and identifying preferred methods of informal and formal engagement with residents and stakeholders.
- 4) **Developing effective project management, resourcing and governance arrangements** including early consideration of logistical arrangements to plan making to progress quickly and smoothly once it commences.
- 5) **Establishing risk monitoring, management and mitigation processes** for example, reviewing existing approval and delegation arrangements in light of the 30 months timetable for plan preparation and adoption, the new requirements for Gateway Assessments and the changes to primary legislation that will mean that Full Council approval will no longer be needed for plan preparation timetable information.

MHCLG Responds to Concerns about Statutory Consultee System

Statutory consultees play an important part in the planning application process by providing expert advice on significant environmental, transport, safety, and heritage issues. However, LPAs and developers report that the statutory consultee system is not working effectively. In March, the Housing Minister made a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) announcing government's plans to reform the statutory consultee system in the planning system and outlining the steps LPAs can take where they do not receive timely advice from statutory consultees. As part of these reforms, MHCLG will shortly take the following actions:

- Consulting on the impacts of removing statutory consultee status from Sport England, the Theatres Trust and the Gardens Trust, and on reforms to the scope of other statutory consultees.
- Establishing a new performance framework for statutory consultees.
- Ensuring the system is appropriately funded.



Additionally, the Planning and Infrastructure Bill will introduce a national planning fee surcharge to provide a sustainable funding mechanism for the planning function of statutory consultees.

Shape the Future of Planning Fees: PAS Summer Survey is here

PAS has launched a national survey about planning fees to help MHCLG better understand how fee income aligns with the real costs of delivering services. The survey is open to all local planning authorities as part of a [PAS project](#) that aims to:

- Understand where national fees are most out of step with actual costs
- Gather data and evidence for the costs that are borne by local authorities
- Develop a methodology for setting managing localised fees.

The survey will help build the evidence needed to shape the future of localised fee-setting. MHCLG is encouraging all LPAs to share their insights. The PAS Summer Survey is now live and has been sent to all heads of planning with a deadline for completion of **12 September 2025**. To find out more, please contact martin.hutchings@local.gov.uk

Join the Push to Standardise Planning Data

Exciting progress is being made towards creating a more consistent, data-rich planning system which everyone will be able to navigate more easily. So far, the Digital Planning team and MHCLG advisory group on planning data standards have conducted a thorough analysis of all 24 planning application forms on GOV.UK and identified the core components. Feedback is being sought on working draft specifications and there are plans to expand beyond applications to cover the entire planning permission process.

The Digital Planning team at MHCLG is keen to engage with anyone interested in shaping this important work. Learn more about the progress being made and find out how to join the data standards community in this [MHCLG Digital blog post](#). The next online meeting is at **10.30am on 20 August 2025**.



Compulsory Purchase Thresholds Maintained

Home loss payments are payable under the terms of the Land Compensation Act 1973 to owner-occupiers and tenants of dwellings displaced by compulsory purchase or public redevelopment. The Act provides flexibility to amend the maximum and minimum thresholds and the flat rate and these thresholds are reviewed annually.

For the second consecutive year, government has decided to maintain the maximum and minimum compulsory purchase payment thresholds for owner-occupiers at current levels: £81,000 and £8,100 respectively. The flat rate paid to tenants will remain at £8,100.

Since March 2024, the Department has published a register of decisions on all compulsory purchase orders in England submitted to the Department for confirmation since 2019. The intention behind publishing the register is to increase transparency around how decisions are taken, and to improve knowledge and awareness of the purposes for which compulsory purchase powers may be used. The register is updated quarterly and the latest version, which was published in July, can be found at [Compulsory purchase orders: Register of decisions](#).

Have your say on Electricity Network Infrastructure

DESNZ is inviting all stakeholders with an interest in electricity networks and connections to engage with a [Consultation on Consents, Land Access and Rights for Electricity Networks](#), published on 8 July 2025. This consultation sets out proposals for reforms to the various processes and permissions which enable network operators to access private land for the purposes of building and maintaining electricity infrastructure.

The consultation includes a proposal to increase the threshold for the permitted development of electricity substations in England from 29 cubic metres to 45 cubic metres. The consultation is open until **2 September 2025** and may be of particular interest to network companies, landowners, land agents, LPAs and connection customers.



Funding Opportunities, Research and Events

Public Practice Launches Year-Round Recruitment for Built Environment Professionals

With support from MHCLG, Public Practice has evolved its popular Associate Programme to meet the changing needs of public sector teams, and is now offering:

- **A candidate pool:** with assessed candidates who are ready to be matched to roles.
- **Rolling recruitment:** find an associate at precisely the point you need one not at fixed points in the year.
- **A reduced recruitment fee:** halved to £3,000.

[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. These changes mean local authorities can use Public Practice more like a typical recruitment support service, while continuing to benefit from their rigorous assessment process, access to exceptional candidates, and six-month leadership and development programme for all Associates.

Public Practice is in the process of growing its candidate pool (currently over 80 built environment professionals) and is assessing a fresh intake of talent across [eight eligible disciplines](#) (including engineering, surveying and ecology) not just design and planning this summer, to support the varying needs of local authorities and further specialisms. If you have recruitment plans, visit their website to learn more about [how to hire an Associate](#).

LPAs to Welcome more than 120 Graduates this September, through Pathways to Planning

Pathways to Planning is a MHCLG funded graduate recruitment programme that expands and diversifies the talent pipeline of planners, surveyors and construction project managers working within local authorities and, now, statutory consultees. The programme has supported the recruitment of more than 200 graduate planners to date. This September, the programme will see its largest ever cohort starting work in local authorities across the country.



Local authorities and statutory consultees can now express interest in the next cohort, which will see graduates starting work in September 2026. Formal sign-up and bursary allocation processes will begin in October 2025. Funding for the next cohort offer will likely include:

- Salary bursaries for councils who otherwise may not be able to take part in the programme.
- A education bursary that covers fees for every role on the programme, covering part-time master's fees, given the withdrawal of funding to the Level 7 apprenticeship.
- The launch of two new streams, recruiting graduates to roles in surveying and construction project management, working closely with sector partners such as the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and the Association of Chief Estate Surveyors and Property Manager in the Public Sector (ACES).

Councils will be welcome to take part in all three strands of the programme. For more information, visit [Pathways to Planning: information for councils](#) or email pathways.planning@local.gov.uk.

Share your views on Digital Design Codes

Since last year, MHCLG's Design and Placemaking team has been undertaking research into how digital technologies can speed up, simplify and standardise the way that LPAs prepare design codes and end users access them. To support digital innovation, MHCLG is now working with LPA officers, developer and consultants in the planning sector to understand how design codes, design guidance and local plans are used day-to-day and the challenges of engaging with the paper-based and PDF elements of planning policy and procedures.

MHCLG has created a short survey to support this work and would encourage responses from individuals working with design codes and other policy documents in a decision-making capacity. The [survey](#) should take between 5 and 10 minutes to complete.



PAS's Best Practice Self-Assessment Toolkit Out Now

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has produced a toolkit to help councils review their planning committees. The self-assessment toolkit will enable councils to either review their planning committees themselves or to do so with the support of other organisations, including PAS itself.

The toolkit is supported by evidence from the PAS Modernising Planning Committees National Survey, which was published earlier this year. It contains best practice from councils and experts, including PAS's own planning committee review programme. Councils are encouraged to use the [Toolkit](#) to conduct reviews of their existing planning processes, engage stakeholders in assessment processes, develop an action plan and implement changes and monitor progress over time.

Green Infrastructure support for LPAs with Nature Towns and Cities

Nature Towns and Cities is a new coalition of organisations united by the ambition to enable everybody to experience nature in their daily lives, particularly those places and communities currently lacking access to quality green space. It recently announced that an initial [40 towns and cities](#) across 19 partnerships have received grants to improve the provision, quality and connectivity of green spaces and nature locally. As part of the announcement, Birmingham was declared the UK's first official Nature City, with Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole collectively named the first Nature Towns. The designation recognises the commitment of local authorities and their partners to transforming urban communities by providing more and better access to nature and green spaces.

The coalition is looking to work with over 100 UK towns and cities over the next decade. As well as being able to apply for official Nature Town or City status, local authorities can attend a programme of free events, find inspiration and learning through a library of resources, and access specialist support and collaboration opportunities. Find out more at [Nature Towns and Cities](#).



The Urban Design Learning Summer School

Local authority officers are invited to participate in a three-day, in-person Urban Design Summer School in London from 22-24 September. It is run independently from MHCLG by Urban Design Learning. It will include lectures, exercises, quizzes, discussions and site visits. It provides an opportunity for built environment practitioners to understand the key qualities of place design, gaining the skills, knowledge and confidence to assess, discuss and negotiate good place design and articulate why it is important.

The school will be in person with limited numbers to improve the learning experience. The agenda for each day and other details can be found at: [Urban Design Summer School, September 22-24](#).

Please contact info@urbandesignlearning.com for prices and to book.