



By Email Only

## Message from the Chief Planner

### October 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.

The return from summer holidays has been a busy one. In September, we welcomed a new ministerial team to MHCLG, including a new Secretary of State, Steve Reed MP. He immediately made clear his commitment to delivering 1.5 million homes, calling on the sector to "Build, baby, build". One of the first things on the Secretary of State's agenda was the report from the New Towns Taskforce, which was published on 28 September alongside the Government's initial response.

Earlier in September, I had the pleasure of hosting the Housing Design Awards, as the chair of judges. The awards, which are supported by MHCLG, were established in 1948 to identify the best in council housing. This year's eleven winners are all fantastic examples of where architects, planners and their clients – many of them councils and housing associations – are delivering homes and neighbourhoods of lasting quality.

Also in this newsletter, an opportunity to give your views on proposed reforms to infrastructure planning and a new checklist for local plan examinations.

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](mailto: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 Updates

### New Towns Taskforce names 12 recommended locations

On 28 September, the Government confirmed it will progress work on the next generation of new towns across England, following publication of the independent New Towns Taskforce report that recommends 12 locations for potential new towns.

The Government is determined to begin building at least three new towns in this Parliament and has signalled that it is prepared to progress work on more if possible.

The Government's initial response to the report welcomes all 12 recommended locations and some of the Taskforce's wider recommendations on delivery and implementation. The Government response also states that, at this stage, sites at Tempsford, Crews Hill and Leeds South Bank look most promising.

A New Towns Unit will be established by the government to progress development. The Unit will work with all departments and their agencies to ensure new towns are a test bed for innovation and to unblock barriers to delivery.

The government will publish draft proposals and a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for consultation in Spring 2026. No final decisions on locations will be made until this assessment concludes and preferred locations could change as a result of the process.

The New Towns Taskforce report and the government's initial response can be read [here](#).



## **The 2025 Housing Design Awards – showcasing brilliant new homes across England**

On 4 September, eleven housing schemes across England were named as winners of the 2025 Housing Design Awards. MHCLG has a special relationship with the awards, which were established by Nye Bevan in 1948 to identify the best in council housing, and this year they were presented by Joanna Averley as the chair of judges. The range of projects submitting for awards is much wider these days and the winning schemes are great examples of how to deliver much needed homes and neighbourhoods of lasting quality.

This year there were over 100 entries. The winners in each category, and the overall winner, Hazelmead (a co-housing scheme in Dorset), were chosen by a cross disciplinary panel of judges. The Housing Design Awards website has hundreds of case studies of shortlisted schemes and is the largest archive of its kind in England – find out more [here](#).

## **MHCLG opens consultation on infrastructure planning reforms**

MHCLG has been preparing amendments to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill to make it quicker and easier to deliver critical infrastructure projects. The proposed measures include streamlining NSIP consultation requirements, ensuring National Policy Statements are kept up to date and reducing opportunities for judicial review. The Bill is still making its way through the Houses of Parliament and is subject to Royal Assent. Alongside the Bill, MHCLG has published a consultation document which considers other implementation measures including secondary legislation and the updating of government guidance.

Local authorities are invited to share their views on the proposed measures in an online consultation. MHCLG is also keen to hear from other stakeholders, including developers, landowners, statutory bodies and local communities, so that government guidance can be informed by the experience of all those affected by the NSIP process. The consultation can be accessed [here](#) until 27 October 2025.



## **PINS introduces new checklist for local plan examinations**

The Planning Inspectorate introduced a pre-examination checklist for local plans on 6 October 2025. The checklist is designed to ensure plans are ready for examination, resulting in a more efficient process for both local planning authorities and the Inspectorate while maintaining examination quality. Local planning authorities will be requested to complete the checklist and send it to the Planning Inspectorate before their plan is submitted. The information provided will help the Planning Inspectorate assess if:

- all necessary practical arrangements are in place,
- essential evidence and other documents are ready for submission, and
- the rationale for the plan content is clear.

The Inspectorate will aim to respond within 10 working days of receiving a completed checklist. If deemed ready for examination, the local planning authority will be invited to submit its plan immediately. If the Planning Inspectorate's assessment of the checklist suggests the plan may not be ready for examination, it will provide the local planning authority with recommended actions to address identified shortcomings. Find out more [here](#).

## **EA publishes flood risk assessment template and main river consultation tool**

The Environment Agency is continually improving how it provides flood risk data and guidance to enable sustainable growth and improve the quality and timeliness of its responses to planning consultations as a statutory consultee. This includes launching two new products for developers and planners:

- A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) [template](#) and [guidance](#), developed with the [Planning Portal](#), to help improve the quality and consistency of flood risk assessments submitted with planning applications.



- A new [Main River consultation area](#) data layer to help planners and developers identify if a proposed development is within 20m of a main river – a trigger for statutory consultation.

The EA is asking LPAs to promote the FRA template and guidance with local developers, and to add the new layer to their systems for use when applying the [national flood risk standing advice](#) for local planning authorities.

## **MHCLG launches compulsory purchase consultation response**

On 19 December 2024, MHCLG published a consultation [setting out](#) proposals for further reforms to the compulsory purchase process and land compensation rules. The department has now published its [response](#) to the consultation.

MHCLG has also published a [factsheet](#) explaining the compulsory purchase reforms which have been included in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. The measures in the Bill will make the compulsory purchase process faster and more efficient so authorities are incentivised to make use of it where appropriate to deliver benefits for communities. There is also a reduction in the administrative costs of the process and a reinforcement of the principle that landowners should receive fair compensation.

## **LPAs urged to submit 2024/25 Neighbourhood Planning claims**

MHCLG has received enquiries from several Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) regarding the availability of funding to support neighbourhood planning costs. Ministers have publicly reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring that LPAs continue to receive appropriate funding for their neighbourhood planning function, including costs associated with plan examinations and referendums. MHCLG anticipates making a formal announcement on future funding arrangements in due course.

In the meantime, MHCLG would like to emphasise that claims for the 2025/26 financial year cannot be processed until all outstanding claims for 2024/25 have been completed. Several LPAs have yet to submit their 2024/25 claims or respond to related queries. LPAs with an outstanding claim are urged to



engage with MHCLG as a matter of urgency to ensure their claim is finalised and paid. **The final deadline for submission is 31 October 2025.**

## Access support with self-build and community-led housing through Homes England

The Self Commissioned Homes Unit at Homes England was established in 2021 to enable all forms of self-commissioned homes, including self and custom builds as well as community led housing. The Unit also works on projects to support percentage policies on sites across England where a specific proportion of self and custom build homes is required. The Unit's work plays an important role in delivering Homes England's objective of supporting housing diversification. The Unit can help with:

- Clarifying what defines a self or custom build under the current legislation.
- Supporting with best practice for percentage policies, including where to locate and how to manage the self/custom build component.
- Engaging a network of self and custom build developers at an early stage to ensure smooth development of plots.
- Providing advice and case studies on successful design codes where self, custom build and community led housing has worked well.
- Working alongside a network of community led co-ops, CLTs and housing cooperatives to engage local communities.
- Providing guidance at all stages of a project for authorities, SMEs, developers and project managers.

To learn more about the Unit's work and the support it offers LPAs please email [SCHU@homesengland.gov.uk](mailto:SCHU@homesengland.gov.uk) The Unit would also like to encourage any queries around custom, self-build and community led housing to be directed to them via the above email so please do forward it to your colleagues.



## Funding Opportunities, Research and Events

### Apply now for the Digital Planning Improvement Fund

Local planning authorities across England are invited to apply for [MHCLGs Digital Planning Improvement Fund](#). This £50,000 grant offers a unique opportunity to accelerate digital transformation within planning services.

The fund provides support to assess planning maturity, develop a tailored action plan to guide improvements, prepare and publish planning datasets to the Planning Data platform, and become part of Open Digital Planning - a collaborative network of forward-thinking planning authorities. Officers will also gain access to bespoke training to develop highly valued digital skills.

Applications are open now and will **close at midday on 30 October 2025**. Selected authorities will begin their funded work in February 2026. [A question and answer session is taking place](#) on **20 October at 11.30am** to help potential applicants. For more information visit the [Digital Planning Improvement Fund webpage](#).

### Coming soon – the Digital Planning Training Directory

A digital planning education and training directory will launch in 2026, building on the success of the [Digital Planning Directory](#). The Digital Task Force for Planning is developing this free resource to help planning professionals find relevant programmes to support their development. The directory was seed-funded by MHCLG. Training providers are invited to list their current and upcoming courses on the platform to help create this additional feature. [Find out more](#).

### Discover how other local authorities are implementing digital planning

Two upcoming show and tell sessions will provide valuable insights into how local authorities are implementing digital planning solutions. Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service will share their digital planning journey on **Tuesday 7 October 2025, from 1 - 2pm** and Milton Keynes City Council will present their journey on **Thursday 13 November 2025, from 1 - 2pm**.





Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

# PLANNING NEWSLETTER

Both sessions are part of the [Digital Planning Directory's](#) ongoing programme of knowledge sharing events. Registration links will be available on the Directory resources page in the coming weeks, so keep an eye out for updates.