



By Email Only

Message from Chief Planner

6 February 2026

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

On 21 January MHCLG published a consultation draft of the new Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance. We are keen to get your views on the new guidance to ensure it works for planners and other professionals. I would encourage you to respond to the consultation, which is open until 10 March. If you have yet to respond to the NPPF consultation, which was published in December, you also have until 10 March.

Also in this newsletter, on 28 January, the Housing Minister announced important changes to make the Section 106 system more transparent and resilient, and to resolve the problem of unsold and uncontracted S106 units. In addition, the 2026 Housing Design Awards are now open for entry. There are two new categories this year – for creative re-use and planting, nature, and health. As chair of the judging panel, I'm looking forward to discovering more of the thoughtfully designed and innovative schemes coming forward across the country. There is also information about the support available from National Highways regarding vision-led transport planning, and much more.

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

Design and Placemaking PPG out now for consultation

On 21 January, MHCLG published a draft Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) for consultation. The new guidance aims to promote places of lasting value that are resilient to climate change. It will also support the application of policies in the draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2025 by providing clarity on design quality early in the process. The guidance will simplify and speed up planning decisions by consolidating four existing documents into one, making it simpler to understand what good design looks like. It outlines and illustrates the government's priorities for well-designed places, supporting robust decision making, as follows:

Part 1 – Seven features of well-designed places

- Sets out seven features of well-designed places and their intended design and placemaking outcomes.
- Explains how design principles for each feature should inform the preparation of plans, design policies, guidance, and proposals for new development.
- Informs planning decisions where relevant, including in the absence of local design policies, design guides or design codes, as set out in the NPPF.

Part 2 – Design quality in the planning process

- Explains how design quality can be integrated throughout the plan making process.
- Provides guidance on design tools and processes within the planning system, including masterplans, local design codes, and design guidance.
- Explains how design can be effectively integrated and considered in decision making.

Part 3 – Setting effective design codes

- Explains how local design codes can set technical requirements for different design issues to support the creation of liveable places.
- Provides guidance on applying design codes appropriately across different scales and contexts.



MHCLG also intends to publish a set of Model Design Codes. These will be template design codes for common development types such as large housebuilder led sites and small urban sites. This will save time and resources by avoiding the need to create local design codes for repeatable development types. The Design and Placemaking PPG should be read alongside the Model Design Codes once they are published. We intend to monitor their use and, if successful, create a catalogue of template design codes which you can apply or adapt to your local context.

MHCLG is seeking views on whether this consolidated approach to the guidance is accessible, improves usability, and supports preparation of effective design and placemaking policies, tools, and processes. Please respond to the consultation by 11:45pm on **10 March 2026** using this link:

[Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

Resetting the S106 system and roadmap for S106 delivery in England

Government are seeking to strengthen planning obligations to ensure new developments provide more affordable homes. Section 106 (S106) agreements are, and will remain, an essential mechanism for delivering social and affordable housing. They account for a significant proportion of affordable home completions and a significant share of total new home delivery.

To ensure the developer contributions system secures the supply and affordability, and to minimise negotiation friction, its complexity needs to be reduced. A range of factors has led to the sharp drop-off in demand for S106 units over recent years, with the result that thousands of constructed or consented S106 units are currently uncontracted, delaying the build-out of development sites and disrupting both affordable and wider housing supply.

To this end, on 28 January, the Government announced a comprehensive policy package, which will lay the foundations for a simpler, more transparent, and more resilient S106 system, and deal with the legacy problem of existing unsold and uncontracted S106 units. MHCLG expects local



planning authorities to register onto the Homes England Clearing Service to help understand and monitor the pipeline of uncontracted S106 units in their area.

Find out more in the [Written Ministerial Statement](#) and [accompanying policy statement](#).

Apply now for the 2026 Housing Design Awards

The 2026 Housing Design Awards are now open for entries, with new categories this year for creative re-use; planting, nature and health; and long-term stewardship of amenities. MHCLG sponsors the awards, which are the longest running in the sector. They were launched by Nye Bevan in 1948 to identify the best ideas among councils' post-war rebuilding efforts, before being opened to market sale homes in 1960.

The HDAs recognise the important role local planning authorities and planning consultants play in delivering high-quality schemes, alongside architects, surveyors, and landscape architects. They are the only awards that bring together the major built environment professions – RICS, RIBA, and RTPI – with MHCLG, GLA, Homes England, and major stakeholders such as NHBC.

This year, Historic England, the Landscape Institute, the Royal Horticultural Society, and Ebbsfleet Development Corporation are all supporting the awards, which are chaired by MHCLG's Chief Planner, Joanna Averley.

Historic England has launched a new Creative Re-use award to recognise buildings at least 20 years old which are reinvented as homes. In recent years, the HDAs have increasingly celebrated more high quality conversions of former industrial, commercial, civil, and military buildings. This new category is intended to encourage more exemplary projects for buildings dating from the second half of the 20th century.

The Royal Horticultural Society and the Landscape Institute are jointly promoting a new award focused on the role of planting, nature and health, and on the long-term stewardship of amenity in new communities. They are joined by Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, whose garden city vision provides an enduring model for landscape-led stewardship.



The deadline for entry is Friday **6 March** – click [here](#) to enter.
<https://hdawards.org/> Winners will be announced in autumn 2026.

PAS launches new guidance and tools to improve Infrastructure Delivery Plans

PAS have published a new set of practical tools and guidance to help councils produce more strategic, consistent, and deliverable Infrastructure Delivery Plans (IDPs). The guidance includes advice on structure and content of IDP reports, alongside a project schedule template, and a prioritisation tool to support clearer, data-informed decisions about infrastructure investment. It reflects a stronger emphasis on maintaining live and up-to-date IDPs, with greater use of digital tools, better data practices, and more proactive engagement with infrastructure providers.

These resources are designed to help councils align infrastructure planning with Local Plan delivery and ensure funding strategies such as CIL are fit for purpose. Find out more here: www.local.gov.uk/pas/infrastructure-IDPs

Working with National Highways to deliver a vision-led approach to Local Plans

National Highways manages England's Strategic Road Network (SRN) and is a statutory consultee. To help planning authorities take a vision-led approach to plan making, National Highways has published a new [Local Plan brochure](#) bringing together its key policies and priorities, along with useful resources - including a [Planning for the Future guide](#) and a [short explainer video](#).

Early engagement with National Highways can help strengthen transport evidence, identify potential impacts on the SRN sooner, and gives access to shared data and expertise. Its regional spatial planning teams are ready to support you throughout the process. [Your regional contact is listed here.](#)



Funding Opportunities, Research and Events

Access planning, design and placemaking skills through Public Practice

Public Practice supports local authorities in accessing the planning, design, and placemaking skills they need to deliver high-quality homes and places. With support from MHCLG, Public Practice has helped over 100 Authorities strengthen their teams by placing more than 400 experienced built environment professionals through its Associate Programme, bringing in additional capacity where it's most needed. For example, [Suki Sehmbi](#), is an architect turned planner who joined Derby City Council's urban design team. From day one, Suki has helped build a shared language, strengthen design capability, and develop innovative new planning tools.

This month, Public Practice is recruiting a new cohort of mid-career planners and placemaking professionals, making now an ideal time for local authorities to bring in an Associate. Public sector employers can access a diverse pool of over 180 highly skilled professionals with experience in planning, urban design, regeneration, and project management.

Find out more by contacting daniel.davis@publicpractice.org.uk or [book a quick call](#)

Register for MHCLG's 2026 Planning Skills and Capacity Survey

MHCLG's 2026 Planning Skills and Capacity Survey will launch in early 2026 and will now be delivered via DELTA, making it simpler and quicker for local authorities to participate. The initial survey will retain the same core questions used in 2025 to provide an annual update, with future surveys tailored to include questions on emerging priorities across the planning system.

MHCLG has contacted all authorities to request a nominated survey lead contact, and a back-up contact to support onboarding and completion of the survey. If your authority has not yet responded, or if your contact details need updating, please email LPA.SkillsSurvey@communities.gov.uk.



Participation will be supported through a new burdens grant, helping to compensate authorities for the time required to complete the survey. Inputs from every local authority in England is vital to building a robust national evidence base on planning capacity and capability. This will ensure that workforce support, investment, and wider planning reform policies are targeted effectively at current and emerging challenges, including recruitment, retention and skills gaps.

Taking part will also give LPAs valuable insight into how their workforce capacity and skills gaps compare to national averages, to support authorities in reviewing their priorities for future development and support. The 2025 final report, published in December, has already been shared with LPAs, helping to inform workforce support and capability planning across the sector.

Ever wondered about how to plan for Electric Vehicles?

The Department for Transport and leading Chargepoint Operators are running a virtual teach-in session for Local Authority Planners to come along and hear about all things Electric Vehicle Infrastructure: What it is? Why is it important? And how can the planning system support Electric Vehicle rollout? With insights from industry experts, the teach-in will bring together the planning and electric charging sectors for a smoother transition to zero emission vehicles.

The virtual teach-in is taking place on **10th March 2026 from 11am-12.30pm**. Sign up here: [Teach in session for LA planning officers | Meeting-Join | Microsoft Teams](#)

Online training workshops with DESNZ

Local authority planning officers are invited to join online training workshops delivered by Regen, in partnership with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ), in spring 2026. The workshops will support local authority planning officers assessing solar, battery storage, onshore wind, and network infrastructure planning applications.



These workshops will be delivered through Local Net Zero Hubs, and planning officers can [register directly through the Regen website](#).

Regen has also produced guidance documents **More information** - <https://www.regen.co.uk/content-hub/planning-for-clean-energy>

Book now for Urban Design Spring School

Urban Design Learning is running a three-day, in-person Urban Design Spring School in London 23-25 March for local authority officers to improve their place-making skills. The school will include; lectures, exercises, quizzes, discussions, and site visits. It is an ideal 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 why it is important. The course will reflect the latest national policies and guidance on design.

The Spring School will be in-person, with limited numbers, so that everyone attending gets the best possible opportunity to learn. Find out more at <https://www.urbandesignlearning.com/urban-design-school-2026> and contact info@urbandesignlearning.com for prices and to book.