



By Email Only

## **Message from Chief Planner**

**27 March 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.

This week, Mathew Pennycook MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning, issued two Written Ministerial Statements setting out proposals for large-scale new communities, further measures to support housebuilding and infrastructure delivery. They include consultations on New Towns locations, locally set planning fees, alongside wider reforms to planning decision making, compulsory purchase powers, the NSIP regime, local plans guidance, emergency measures for London, future homes and building control standards and new funding to support housing delivery.

In addition, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have published the first Land Use Framework for England, establishing a long-term vision to support more joined up and effective use of land across government.

MHCLG has now also launched its consultation on the draft regulations for the National Scheme of Delegation, proposing a clearer and more consistent framework for delegating planning decisions.

Finally, this newsletter includes reminders of updates circulated earlier this month, including an updated appeals process from 1 April, signing up to the Planning Skills and Capacity Survey and design codes research.

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

### Have your say on a National Scheme of Delegation

Planning committees are central to transparent, consistent, and high-quality decision-making. It is vital that they operate as effectively as possible and focus their attention on the development proposals which matter most to their local communities. That is why the government is modernising the way committees operate in England through our flagship Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025.

MHCLG have published a consultation on the draft regulations and guidance setting out the details of the national scheme of delegation and the proposed cap on members sitting on committee.

Please respond to the consultation by 11:59 on **23 April 2026** using this link: [Planning committee reform: statutory consultation on draft Regulations and guidance - GOV.UK](#)

MHCLG have also published the government response to the summer 2025 consultation on planning committee reform: [Reform of planning committees: technical consultation - government response - GOV.UK](#)

### New Town consultation launched

The government has [announced](#) a public consultation that invites views on how the new towns programme will operate, how new towns will be delivered and planned, and the proposed approach to design, placemaking and planning policy. It seeks views on the government's offer to locations and a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) report. The locations are outlined in a [Written Ministerial Statement on Large-Scale New Communities](#).

The consultation on the proposed locations and draft planning policy closes at on **18 May 2026**. Respond here: [New Towns Draft Programme - GOV.UK](#)

The proposed locations are: Tempsford, Bedfordshire; Crews Hill and Chase Park, Enfield; Leeds South Bank, West Yorkshire; Manchester Victoria North, Greater



Manchester; Thamesmead, Greenwich; Brabazon and the West Innovation Arc, South Gloucestershire; and Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire.

The government also assessed six further New Town locations — Adlington, Heyford Park, Marcombe (East Devon), Plymouth, South Barking and Wychavon Town — which are deemed to be credible development opportunities and may continue to be supported through existing housing programmes.

As set out in the proposed placemaking principles, these new towns will create affordable and balanced communities with the schools, health facilities and community infrastructure neighbourhoods need, supported by high quality public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure.

## **Emergency measures to support London housebuilding**

On Wednesday 25 March, the Greater London Authority and Government published consultation responses to Support for Housebuilding in London, following the consultation period which ran from November 2025 - January 2026, alongside a policy note summarising the changes to the measures.

The package confirms targeted, time-limited support for housebuilders to improve the viability of housing schemes and get quicker approvals across every borough. This includes:

- A new time-limited planning route, enabling developers to secure permission without a viability assessment on private land where they commit to at least 20 per cent social and affordable housing, with providers able to apply for GLA grant to support social and affordable homes above the first 10 per cent of the total homes on the site.
- Temporary and targeted partial relief from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for eligible schemes, with higher levels of relief for schemes providing more than 20 per cent social and affordable housing.
- The removal of elements of London Plan Guidance that, as currently applied, can constrain density – including standards relating to dual aspect and units around the core, and amendments to cycle storage requirements.



- An allocation of £324 million to establish a City Hall Developer Investment Fund, which will prioritise interventions on stalled sites that can deliver housing completions as soon as possible.

In addition, the Mayor's powers to call in and review planning applications for 50 homes or more where a borough is minded to refuse will come into force in May. This builds on the progress already made in the English Devolution Bill which includes a faster representation process will cut up to six months off some planning decisions.

For further details on the consultation responses and the finalised proposed package, please see:

- A summary of the overall package in this joint policy note here: [Support for housebuilding in London: package of support - GOV.UK](#)
- The GLA London Plan Guidance and consultation response here: [Support for Housebuilding LPG | London City Hal](#)
- The Government consultation response here: [Support for housebuilding in London - GOV.UK](#)

## **Local Authority Planning Fees Public Consultation launched**

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 introduced new powers for local fee setting which will enable LPAs to set their own planning application fees through a local variation model. Under this approach, a national default fee will remain in place and apply to all LPAs, unless an LPA chooses to vary from the default fee for any or all application fee categories to reflect their own costs recovery needs.

Flexibility will allow LPAs to secure the funding necessary to strengthen their capacity, invest in skilled staff, and deliver a more efficient, high-quality planning service. It will create a system that supports efficiency and innovation, helping LPAs to reduce costs over time.



MHCLG is seeking views on the proposed national default fees schedule. Please respond to the consultation by 11.59pm on **18 May 2026** using this link: [Fees for planning applications - GOV.UK](#)

## **New Consultation Direction for Housing, Commercial and other developments**

The Housing Minister, Matthew Pennycook, has confirmed a new Consultation Direction will be made this by the end of the month specifying that - where a local planning authority ("LPA") intends to refuse planning permission for a housing scheme of 150 dwellings or more – the Secretary of State must be consulted to decide whether to call in that planning application. This will enable Ministers to decide whether to use their existing powers to call in that planning application.

The measure was announced on 23 March in a [Written Ministerial Statement on Further Measures to Support Housebuilding and Infrastructure Delivery](#) alongside a consultation which sets out further proposals which require LPAs to consult the Secretary of State on certain other applications, in addition to those contained in the imminent Direction.

Key proposals detailed in the consultation document relate to a requirement to consult the Secretary of state on the following planning applications to consider use of call-in powers:

- Commercial development with a floorspace of 15,000m<sup>2</sup> or more where an LPA intends to refuse planning permission. This would ensure decisions relating to large scale and strategic developments, including data centres, are further considered, to reflect the Government's priority of promoting economic growth.
- Certain development relating to development at nuclear facilities where LPAs are minded to refuse planning permission; and
- Residential development within a Detailed Emergency Planning Zone for an Atomic Weapons Establishment where certain LPAs are minded to grant permission.



The consultation closes at 11.59pm on **4 May 2026**: [Consulting the Secretary of State on planning decisions - GOV.UK](#).

Please be aware that the [Town and Country Planning \(Consultation\) \(England\) Direction 2024](#) remains in force and will be unchanged by these measures. Any changes resulting from the consultation will be made through publication of additional Direction(s).

## Local Plans guidance update and 'Joint Running' period begins

Last month it was announced that the regulations to implement the new plan-making system for England had been laid in Parliament. These regulations came into force on 25 March, this means a period of 'joint' running for local plans and minerals and waste plans. The legacy plan-making system will remain in place for authorities to adopt plans submitted no later than 31 December 2026, while the new system will be available for other authorities.

New guidance on 'Creating a plan timetable' has been released on Create or Update a Local Plan (CULP). Local planning authorities and minerals and waste planning authorities must create, publish and keep a plan timetable up to date. Find out more here: [Creating a plan timetable - GOV.UK](#)

The government encourages users of this and other CULP guidance to provide feedback using a new form which is now present in this collections page, alongside templates, services and resources to assist plan-makers: [Create or update a local plan using the new system - GOV.UK](#)

## New process for making an appeal

As mentioned in the [last](#) newsletter, regulations to expand the expedited written representations appeal procedure to all s78(1) planning appeals were laid on 12st February. The changes will apply to applications made on or after **1 April 2026**.

Further guidance on the expanded expedited appeals process can be viewed on the Inspectorate website here: [Planning appeals: procedural guide. For appeals relating to applications dated on or after 1 April 2026. - GOV.UK](#)



## **Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) Implementation Plan**

To facilitate the more effective delivery of critical infrastructure, the government has published an implementation plan that sets to reform the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) system as contained in the Planning and Infrastructure Act.

The actions that will be taken forward supplement changes already underway to test more efficient and streamlined approaches to determining Development Consent Order (DCO) applications, including smoother and faster Planning Inspectorate examinations where appropriate and pilots for key projects like East West Rail.

Find out more here: [Streamlining infrastructure planning: implementation plan - GOV.UK](#)

## **Land Use Framework published**

The government has published the Land Use Framework for England. It sets out how to use land more effectively to increase the resilience of homes, communities, infrastructure, and food systems, while speeding up development and restoring nature.

The Land Use Framework sets out a long-term vision for land use, look across many factors and provides information and guidance that will help spatial planners look across many issues. While the land use principles in the framework will inform spatial planning at the national government level, the Land Use Framework is not a material consideration in planning decisions and plans.

Find out more here: [Land Use Framework - GOV.UK](#)

## **The Future Homes and Building Standards published**

This week The Government has [published a response](#) to the consultation on changes to Parts L and F of the Building Regulations and to the Part O Call for Evidence that ran from December 2023 to March 2024. A [circular and circular letter](#) has provided official notice to set out how the amendments to the Building



Regulations following the publication of the Future Homes and Buildings Standards will be implemented.

The Regulations make amendments to the Building Regulations 2010 (the 2010 Regulations) to implement the Future Homes and Buildings Standards. The Future Homes and Buildings Standards will ensure that new homes and non-domestic buildings are built with low carbon heating and high levels of energy efficiency, so that buildings constructed to these standards will not require retrofitting to become zero carbon in use as the electricity grid decarbonises.

[The Building Regulations etc. \(Amendment\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#) and the publication of new statutory guidance can be found in:

- [Approved Document L \(Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions\) Volume 1: Dwellings](#)
- [Approved Document L \(Energy and Greenhouse Gas Emissions\) Volume 2: Buildings other than Dwellings](#)
- [Approved Document F \(Ventilation\) Volume 1: Dwellings](#)

## **Conditional Confirmation of Compulsory Purchase Orders take effect**

To support local authorities to have confidence to achieve positive outcomes in using compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) new powers to allow the conditional confirmation of CPOs commenced in February 2026. [The Compulsory Purchase of Land \(Conditional Confirmation\) Regulations 2026](#) allow the case for use of CPOs to be established earlier in the land assembly process on sites, where alternative proposals have been put forward.

To ensure the new power operates fully and as intended, new regulations have been laid to establish the procedure which must be followed to discharge conditions imposed when a CPO is conditionally confirmed. The regulations will come into force on **11 April 2026**.



## Local Government Reorganisation Update

The Secretary of State, Steve Reed, has issued a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) announcing the decision to implement new unitary councils creating 16 new unitary authorities across in: Essex, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock; Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton; Norfolk; and Suffolk. The statement also provides an update on local government reorganisation in East Sussex and Brighton and Hove and West Sussex.

Updates and supporting documents relating to the government's programme of local government reorganisation in England can be found on this page: [Local government reorganisation: Policy and programme updates - GOV.UK](#)

## AI tools to Process Household Applications being Developed

The Government are intending to work with Google Cloud to deliver an AI-powered planning tool. The new digital tool will be designed and built by Google DeepMind in collaboration with Faculty and aims to halve the processing time for household applications.

Subject to contract signature, a 3-month Alpha testing phase will begin in April with two local planning authorities. If that goes well, the tool will then be tested with a further 10 local planning authorities, before wider rollout.

## Permitted Development Rights for Reverse Vending Machines commences

From 1 October 2027, under the [Deposit Return Scheme](#) (DRS), customers will pay a refundable deposit at the point of sale for certain single-use drink containers. All grocery retailers that sell drinks in the scheme must—under the provisions of the [Deposit Scheme for Drinks Containers \(England and Northern Ireland\) Regulations 2025](#)—host a return point for drinks containers, unless they qualify for an exemption. The return point can be manual or automated using a reverse vending machine (RVM).

To support the roll out of the DRS, and following consultation, a [Statutory Instrument](#) was laid on 19 March 2026 bringing forward the new PDR under Class CA of Part 7



of the [Town and Country Planning \(General Permitted Development\) \(England\) Order 2015](#). Class CA of Part 7 will support the rollout of the DRS and help grocery retailers meet their legal obligations under the scheme. The PDR allows for the installation of RVMs (and any associated structures, enclosures and canopies) in the wall of, or within the curtilage of, a shop without the need to submit a planning application. To manage impacts and protect local amenity, the right is subject to limitations and conditions, including on the maximum floorspace and height of RVMs and proximity to residential buildings and highways. The right does not apply in [article 2\(3\) land](#).

The amendments come into force on **9 April 2026**. Further details on the changes can be found at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/id/uksi/2026/313>.

## Permitted Development Rights for Onshore Wind Turbines Consultation

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) has proposed changes to permitted development rights (PDRs) to support small-scale onshore wind deployment in England.

To further support the deployment of small-scale renewable energy infrastructure, local planning authorities are invited to share views on the introduction of a new PDR for small-scale, non-domestic wind turbines. The proposed PDR aims to support a range of non-domestic settings including businesses, farms, and public sector organisations to reduce their bills, become more energy independent and decarbonise their operations.

Please respond to the consultation by at 11:59pm on **10 June** using this link: [Permitted development rights for onshore wind turbines in England - GOV.UK](#)

## Housing Design Quality Audit

MHCLG has commissioned a new Housing Design Quality Audit to assess the design quality of new homes built between 2019 and 2025. The audit will review the design quality of up to 200 housing developments across England. Sites will be selected from all regions and will reflect different contexts and tenures.



Findings from the research will show whether design quality has improved since the last audit by the Place Alliance, which was published in 2020. It will highlight regional differences and inform future action to improve the design of new housing across the country.

Housing design audits are a structured way of assessing the design quality of new homes and neighbourhoods. Regional audits were conducted by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) between 2001 and 2006. The first national housing design audit was completed and published in 2020 by the Place Alliance at UCL, supported by the CPRE. The research will be run in collaboration between UCL, Verian and Jacobs.

## **Heritage Works for Creative Businesses publication**

Historic England has published [Heritage Works for Creative Businesses](#), which aims to enable and facilitate the reuse and redevelopment of unused or underused historic buildings to provide space for cultural industries to thrive, supporting the longevity of places. The guidance addresses key factors, specific to cultural industries, to consider including phased development strategies, funding sources, user needs, as well as planning and heritage requirements.

The guidance forms part of a wider Heritage Works toolkit including [Heritage Works for Housing \(2024\)](#).

## **Funding Opportunities, Research and Events**

### **Planning Capacity and Capability Funding awarded**

The government has awarded circa £50 million in direct grant funding to authorities in 2025-26 to support its planning reforms. This includes:

- £9 million in development management funding to support LPAs with high economic growth potential and the highest volumes of major residential schemes at the post-outline stage. This includes £3 million for the Greater London Authority (GLA) to support London boroughs with development management and to help them implement the measures in the emergency



package announced on 23 October 2025. Find out more here: [Funding to support local authorities with development management – successful local authorities - GOV.UK](#)

- £15.8 million in local plan implementation funding to help LPAs that are preparing plans in both the legacy and new plan-making system get ambitious plans in place as soon as possible.
- £26 million of initial funding to support the preparation of spatial development strategies.

## Planning Skills and Capacity Survey Live

**Do you need more resource in your planning teams, want to access more training opportunities or are missing expertise?**

The 2026 Planning Skills and Capacity Survey is now live on DELTA and will remain open until **Wednesday 15 April**.

**Participation from every local authority in England is essential** to create a robust, credible picture of planning capacity and capability. Inputs will directly inform how workforce support, investment, and wider planning reform policies are targeted to address both current and emerging challenges.

This year's survey builds on the same core question set used in 2025, enabling a consistent annual update of the national evidence base. Future surveys will evolve to reflect emerging priorities across the planning system, ensuring the data remains relevant and forward-looking. Participation can also provide local authorities with valuable insight into your organisations workforce capacity and skills gaps compare with national averages, helping identify priorities for future development and support.

It is not too late to sign up. To access and complete the survey, you must ensure a representative from your authority is registered on the DELTA system. Please register as soon as possible by emailing MHCLG via [LPA.SkillsSurvey@communities.gov.uk](mailto:LPA.SkillsSurvey@communities.gov.uk).



## LPA and applicant volunteers sought for research on design codes

As mentioned in the [last](#) newsletter, MHCLG are conducting research on how local planning authority-led design codes are being adopted and working in practice. Participants are sought for a short online survey to understand user experience and perceptions of LPA-led design codes and you can express your interest in this form: [MHCLG design codes survey volunteer registration](#). Please do circulate the form to others within planning teams (policy and development management), as well as with any developer or agent networks to capture applicants too. The call for volunteers is expected to close on **10 April**.