Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

PLANNING NEWSLETTER

By Email Only

Message from Chief Planner

20 November 2026

The Chief Planner Newsletter gives an update 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 in England. Please see overleaf for the list of contents.

In relation to planning decision making, this newsletter contains important updates and where action is required on permitted development rights, the national scheme of delegation, planning fees and Natural England's new approach. Natural England also introduces the new evidence-based approach to air quality screening. There is also a reminder for LPAs to publish the Infrastructure Funding Statements by 31 December.

PINS have published guidance regarding local plan preparation as part of the ongoing work on the new local plan system. There are also useful tools and resources published including SuDS templates, Safer Streets and ALIGN (the geo-spatial digital tool that gives access to the latest data).

Local authorities are also encouraged to engage with the consultation on the NPS for data centres and other policy, training, funding and recruitment opportunities.

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

Update: permitted development rights for electrical substations, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, schools affected by RAAC

MHCLG is making changes to permitted development rights (PDRs) to support electricity network upgrades, expand access to electric vehicle (EV) charging and allow schools affected by reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) additional time to undertake remediation works.

Following separate consultations, a Statutory Instrument was laid on 30 September 2026 bringing forward the below changes to Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015:

- Increasing the volume threshold for electricity substations that can be built under Class B of Part 15 from 29 cubic metres to 45 cubic metres, with additional limitations and conditions for substations that exceed 29 cubic metres.
- Introducing a new PDR for operations necessary to install a cross-pavement EV charging solution. Works must be undertaken by, or on behalf of, or authorised by the relevant highway authority. The right is subject to limitations and conditions.
- Extending Classes D and E of Part 2 so that a householder without off-street parking may install a charge point in any area within the curtilage of a house or block of flats, including on a wall immediately adjoining the highway. The amended rights are subject to limitations and conditions.
- Amending Class E of Part 2 to allow multiple units of equipment housing to support non-domestic, off-street upstand charge points up to a cumulative volume threshold of 45 cubic metres. Where the cumulative volume exceeds 29 cubic metres, additional limitations and conditions apply.
- Extending Class CB of Part 4, which provides for temporary buildings on school land where the school has a building affected by RAAC, by two years to 11.59 p.m. on 24 October 2028. Existing limitations and conditions continue to apply.

The changes came into force on **21 October 2026**. Further details on the changes can be found here.

National Scheme of Delegation

On 31 October 2026 The Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026 came into force. All local planning authorities will need to comply with the regulations. This includes decisions being determined in accordance with the national scheme of delegation, and planning committees being capped at 13 members. There is published guidance to support the implementation of these powers: Planning Committees and the National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions: Guidance for local planning authorities in England - GOV.UK

Planning Fees

From 8 December 2026, new national planning application fees will apply in England, following approval of the regulations by both Houses of Parliament. The changes will increase national fees by varying amounts to an estimated 90% cost recovery for each application type, significantly reducing the current funding shortfall facing local planning services.

Alongside the new fee levels, the regulations simplify a number of fee categories, introduce a default flat fee for all prior approval applications that do not currently attract a fee, and ensure that all fee categories are increased annually in line with inflation.

Local planning authorities should ensure that their websites and other published information are updated to reflect the new fees from 8 December 2026.

This new national fee schedule is the first step in the Government's wider planning fee reforms and will provide the baseline from which the local fee-setting model will operate. Further guidance and regulations on local fee setting will be published in due course. The regulations can be viewed here: The Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) (Amendment and Transitional Provision) Regulations 2026

Infrastructure Funding Statements publication deadline

Developer contributions play a vital role in ensuring that new development provides necessary affordable homes and infrastructure. Infrastructure Funding Statements (IFSs) are a key statutory requirement under the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended), and enable communities, developers and other stakeholders to understand how developer contributions are being used.

The regulations require any local authority that has received developer contributions (section 106 planning obligations or Community Infrastructure Levy) to publish an IFS online by 31 December each year. Guidance is available on the Planning Advisory Service website: guidance on producing an IFS. MHCLG would like to remind all local planning authorities of their statutory duty to publish an IFS where applicable. Local planning authorities are also invited to email their IFS (either as an attachment or a link to the published report) to: developercontributions@communities.gov.uk.

NERC amendment and Natural England's new Operational Statement

Following changes introduced through the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, including amendments to Natural England's duties under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, Natural England has published an Operational Statement setting out how it will respond to planning advice requests under the Town and Country Planning Act. The Operational Statement was published on 1st October 2026.

The Operational Statement provides greater clarity and transparency about how Natural England prioritises planning casework and the types of responses LPAs can expect when seeking planning advice. It supports a more targeted and strategic use of Natural England's expertise, enabling them to focus bespoke advice on proposals that are likely to have significant effects on nationally and internationally important nature sites, protected landscapes, and other cases involving significant environmental risk or opportunity. For lower-risk, less complex or routine cases, Natural England will increasingly support decision-making through standing advice, guidance and strategic solutions where appropriate.

A phased transition period will follow publication. During this period, Natural England will continue to develop additional standing advice and updated guidance, while testing and refining elements of the approach through ongoing engagement with LPAs and operational learning. LPAs will be updated as this work progresses.

Importantly, the Operational Statement does not change existing statutory consultation requirements. LPAs should continue to consult Natural England where required under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, environmental assessment legislation and other relevant statutory requirements.

Natural England Chief Executive Neil Hornby has also shared his reflections on the opportunities presented by this approach in a blog published alongside the Operational Statement.

Introducing STAIR: A Smarter, Evidence-Based Approach to Air Quality Screening

Air quality impacts on protected sites are an important consideration in planning and environmental assessment. Effective screening helps ensure detailed assessment is focused where it is most needed, supporting proportionate decision-making while protecting sensitive habitats.

Recent research by JNCC and AECOM has improved understanding of how road traffic emissions can affect protected sites and highlighted that the long-standing 1,000 Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) screening threshold was designed as a proxy for Nitrogen Oxides only. Evidence shows that this threshold is not a reliable proxy for assessing ammonia concentrations and nitrogen deposition impacts at protected sites close to roads.

To address this, Natural England has supported the development of STAIR (Screening Tool for Air quality Impacts from Roads) which provides a practical, evidence-based approach to screening road-related air quality impacts on designated sites.

STAIR offers a consistent and transparent way to identify when further assessment may be required and helps reduce the need for organisations to develop their own screening methods and promotes consistency across planning applications. It does not change environmental standards or Habitats Regulations requirements. Instead, it streamlines assessment.

STAIR will initially be available through the Institute of Air Quality Management (IAQM) website and will later be added to Natural England's Access to Evidence catalogue. For further information, please contact LPA-AQStandingAdvicequeries@naturalengland.org.uk.

New Sustainable Urban Drainage (SuDS) Strategy Templates published

The Environment Agency, working with CIRIA, the Association of SuDS Authorities, Arup and practitioners, has produced new SuDS Strategy Templates to help planning applicants submit the right information on SuDS first time. The templates should also help make it easier for LPAs (local planning authority) and LLFAs (Lead Local Flood Authority) to check whether drainage systems, proposed as part of new development, have been designed in accordance with Defra's National standards for sustainable drainage systems.

To reflect the proportional approach advocated in the National Planning Policy Framework, two templates have been produced:

- SuDS Strategy Template for Major Development
- SuDS Strategy Template for Non-major Development

Users should select the template that best fits the scale of their proposed development. The templates can be accessed from the Planning Portal or from the CIRIA website. Users should always access these versions to ensure the latest iteration is used.

The Environment Agency encourages LPAs and LLFAs to adopt these national templates to improve consistency across the country and negate the need for local versions to be produced. If you would like to provide feedback on how the templates could be improved, please use fratemplatefeedback@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Local plans: guidance and support from the Planning Inspectorate

Over the summer, The Planning Inspectorate published a first edition procedure guide for local plan examinations under the new local plan system, offering practical guidance for LPAs and others involved in plan preparation and examination. It sets out how the gateway stages will work in practice, what LPAs need to provide at each stage, and how the subsequent examination process will be run, including hearing sessions, main modifications and the Inspector's final report. This is a first edition, with further detail to follow as the system beds-in.

To support this, the Planning Inspectorate also hosted a well-attended webinar and live Q&A session on 6 July, *Plan, Prepare, Progress: A practical guide to the new local plan system*, giving LPAs and other parties a chance to hear directly from the teams working on gateways, examinations and the digital services in development, and to ask questions about how the process will work in practice. Available to watch here.

For those authorities aiming to submit under the legacy local plan system by the 31 December deadline, a dedicated webinar titled *The Final Countdown* is available to watch.

ALIGN - a new national infrastructure spatial tool for evidence-based planning and growth decisions

Do you want to find out more about ALIGN, a new infrastructure spatial tool to support evidence-based planning?

MHCLG's Digital Planning programme is hosting a webinar at 1.30pm on 23 November to share more details about how the tool brings together data, models and AI to help planners understand how growth and infrastructure interact.

MHCLG is developing the tool with the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA).

At the webinar, they will explain:

- how ALIGN works and the data it uses

- how it can provide spatial infrastructure evidence for Spatial Development Strategies and Local Plans
- how and when local government users will be able to access it

Find out more about ALIGN in this MHCLG Digital blog post.

Register for the webinar.

Consultation launched on England's first mandatory planning application data standard

Local planning authorities (LPAs) receive more than 500,000 planning applications a year. They are still recorded in different formats, in systems that cannot share information. This creates unnecessary work for councils and holds back technology that could modernise the planning system.

MHCLG have launched a consultation on the first mandatory planning application data standard in England. Using powers in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, regulations are proposed requiring applications to be submitted and shared as consistent, structured, machine-readable data.

For LPAs, the standard should:

- reduce manual work, including automatic reporting of planning application metrics to central government
- help check that applications are complete and valid when submitted
- allow different back-office systems to share information
- lay the groundwork for new digital tools, including AI

It would also give developers of digital tools, including artificial intelligence (AI), a reliable foundation for new services that help LPAs, applicants and communities.

MHCLG have developed the standard in the open with planning authorities, software suppliers and technology companies. It has been tested through five pilot projects with the main back-office system providers.

The Department are seeking views from planning officers and teams so that those most affected can help shape how the standard works in practice. The consultation closes on 30 December 2026.

Find out more in the MHCLG Digital blog post.

Respond to the consultation.

Active Travel England's Tools for Safer Streets

On 6 October, Active Travel England (ATE) published a suite of tools and guidance to help councils and partners design safer, child-friendly streets and places. The Streets for Schools tool can be used to assess and improve active travel provision around schools, colleges and universities, while accompanying visualisations provide ideas and inspiration for scheme design and case studies showcase real-world examples of what good looks like. The new planning guidance, Designing for Active School Journeys sets out best practice for creating environments that enable children, young people and accompanying adults to travel to and from school actively and safely. This is particularly important in the context of the commitment from England's Mayors to work together to improve the school run.

Active Travel England's women and girls programme aims to improve understanding of the barriers women and girls face when walking, wheeling and cycling, and how local authorities and delivery partners can be supported to create places that feel safer and more inviting. On 28 September ATE launched a digital hub to aid the design of safer streets and places for women and girls. The hub responds to a strong demand from stakeholders and delivery partners for practical guidance on incorporating the needs of women and girls into active travel scheme design and brings together a range of resources and case studies, including new introductory guidance on considering active travel through the lens of gender, developed with In Her Place.

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 third 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.

Funding Opportunities, Research and Events

Help test the new 'Submit a site for a local plan' tool

MHCLG is looking for a small number of local planning authorities (LPAs) to test the new Submit a site for a local plan tool. LPAs can spend months handling inconsistent site submissions for their local plan. The department has built a free tool to standardise how site information is submitted, helping authorities save time making their assessments, and contributing to faster plan-making.

For more information, read the MHCLG Digital blog post and if you are interested in learning more and joining the cohort of LPAs involved, email planmakingteam@communities.gov.uk.

Call out to Local Authorities who need experienced built environment professionals, including planners

Councils across England (district councils, county councils, unitary authorities and mayoral strategic authorities) and statutory consultees need the right people to deliver the homes, infrastructure and places our communities need. That's why MHCLG fund Public Practice to increase the pool of skilled professionals available NOW to work in local authority planning, place and regeneration teams. Through their expert and careful recruitment programme Public Practice have a cadre of people ready to join your teams and make a difference, many choosing to move from the private into the public sector.

The Public Practice new scheme makes it easier for councils to grow their teams. Recruit an Associate through Public Practice this year, and you can unlock government funding for a second role from April 2027, covering a year's salary (up to £40,000) with Public Practice's fee waived.

Register for the information session https://lnkd.in/eUH2sf7p

Submit your Expression of Interest https://lnkd.in/eFdPbiHc

Feedback requested on Natural England's Protected Species Standing Advice

Natural England is carrying out a light-touch review of its Protected Species Standing Advice and is inviting feedback from local planning authorities and other users of the advice. The standing advice supports planning decision-making by providing advice on protected species issues and should be taken into account when determining planning applications. By making advice available through GOV.UK, Natural England can focus bespoke engagement on cases where it adds the greatest value.

As part of the review, Natural England is seeking views on how the advice is working in practice. Feedback is welcome on user experience, clarity, accuracy and completeness, including any suggested improvements, corrections or areas where further explanation would be helpful.

Please send any comments to planningandinfrastructure@naturalengland.org.uk by **5pm on Thursday 10 December 2026**. Following the review, Natural England expects to publish a revised version of the Protected Species Standing Advice in April 2027.

New Training for planners on Sustainable Drainage Systems

SuDS are an increasingly important aspect of the design of urban areas and new developments. It is critical that planners, and flood risk practitioners working with the planning system, understand policy and best practice to support the

implementation of SuDS through planning. The Environment Agency and the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) have teamed up with leading experts from the Association of SuDS Authorities (ASA), to develop an e-learning module covering key principles and practical advice for securing high-quality SuDS through planning.

The course is interactive, free of charge, and can be completed at your own pace. Register now to complete the course: An introduction to Sustainable Drainage Systems for planners. Further support and input has also been provided by CIRIA and CIWEM.

Pathways achievements

The Pathways to Planning programme continues to strategically expand and serve local councils with future built environment professionals. Q1 has been a strong quarter for Pathways to Planning, with significant progress across recruitment, programme delivery and future growth. For Cohort 4 Intake 1, almost 200 graduates have accepted roles across councils in both Planning and Surveying and are due to onboard in the Autumn, while a highly successful marketing campaign for Intake 2 generated over 2,200 applications and attracted a strong, geographically diverse talent pool. The programme has also begun shaping the alumni offer ahead of the first cohort completing the programme, ensuring continued support and engagement beyond graduation. Looking ahead, Q2 will focus on delivering £8.1m in grant funding, progressing recruitment for Intake 2, and laying the foundations for the launch of Cohort 5, leaving the programme well positioned for continued success and expansion.

Innovation and Capacity Fund for NSIPs

The outcome of Round 3 of the Innovation and Capacity Fund has now been released, and all applicants have been informed of the outcome. The £1 million fund was targeted at authorities preparing to introduce statutory cost recovery following commencement of regulations which enable host local authorities to recover costs from applicants for relevant services provided in relation to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP)s.

Data tool to support local planning authorities to identify sites suitable for onshore wind

Delivering clean power is central to the Government's mission to make Britain a clean energy superpower, strengthening the its energy security and supporting economic growth. Onshore wind has a key role to play as one of the most efficient and cost-effective renewable technologies. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) committed to scoping a data tool to support local planning authorities to identify suitable sites for onshore wind development within the Onshore Wind Strategy.

Before deciding whether to proceed with development, DESNZ is seeking feedback from local planning authorities on the value of the tool and the functionality it should provide. The survey gives you the opportunity to provide views on the proposal and whether access to a site selection tool would support proactive planning and application assessment in your local authority.

The proposal is a tool combining an interactive Geographic Information System map with planning policy, spatial constraints and suitability criteria to identify suitable locations for different types of renewable energy development. Users will be able to understand how each assessment has been reached by examining the underlying evidence and assumptions, supporting skills development and informed decision-making. Additional functionality could include an AI assistant and the ability to assess submitted planning applications, flagging risks, opportunities and information gaps to support, rather than automate, planning decisions. The tool is intended to sit beneath the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan (SSEP) and Regional Energy Strategic Plans (RESPs), helping local authorities understand what these could mean for land use and renewable opportunities within their area.

To participate in the online survey, please follow the link provided - Would you find a tool to support onshore wind site selection helpful? – Fill in form

The survey is open now and closes on **16 December 2026**.

The survey consists of seven questions and should take no longer than three minutes to complete.

If you prefer to complete the survey via a phone call, please notify maddie.jewitt@energysecurity.gov.uk and you will be contacted to complete the survey via phone. Please also contact Maddie if you have any other questions.