



BY EMAIL ONLY

18 August 2026

Message from the Chief Planner

PUBLICATION OF THE NEW NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK AND WIDER PLANNING ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dear Chief Planning Officer,

I am writing to draw your attention to a number of important planning announcements and updates, including the new **National Planning Policy Framework** and the government's response to the consultation launched in December 2025.

This letter covers:

- **the publication of the new National Planning Policy Framework**, including the main changes following consultation as well as the government's response to the consultation;
- **reforms to the statutory consultee system**, including changes to the roles and requirements of statutory consultees;
- **publication of the 2024 and 2025 Housing Delivery Test results**, alongside an updated Rule Book;
- **a consultation launched by DESNZ on permitted development rights**, relating to ground investigations for electricity network infrastructure;
- **new digital planning tools and guidance**, including the rollout of Extract to all local planning authorities and new guidance on using digital tools for site identification and assessment;
- **new PropTech Innovation Fund pilots**, testing digital solutions to persistent planning challenges including plan-making and Section 106 negotiations;
- **new Sustainable Drainage Systems resources**, including national SuDS Strategy Templates and new training for planners; and
- **upcoming Green Infrastructure webinars**, covering new evidence, mapping tools and practical support for planners and other practitioners.



National Planning Policy Framework

The new Framework represents a significant restructuring of national planning policy, providing a clearer distinction between policies for plan-making and those which apply to decision-making. The new decision-making policies are intended to provide greater certainty and consistency, standardise policies which apply across England and reduce unnecessary duplication or unjustified local variation.

The new decision-making policies in the Framework took effect on 17 August 2026.

The Framework maintains many of the reforms proposed in the consultation published last December, while making a number of changes in response to consultation feedback. These include:

- **Well-connected stations** – the new ‘default yes’ approach to development around well-connected stations has been expanded to apply within the top 80 Travel to Work Areas by Gross Value Added, rather than the top 60 proposed at consultation.
- **Density** – policies have been refined to support more intensive use of land, including a wider range of development within the curtilage of residential properties and increases in floorspace as well as additional units. The approach to minimum densities around rail stations has also been adjusted to ensure that densities are maximised where they can appropriately be supported.
- **Strategic sites** – the Framework introduces a consistent and distinct category for strategic sites of around 1,500 homes or more, with policies tailored to support their delivery where relevant.
- **Local standards** – the Framework confirms that quantitative standards in development plans should generally be limited to matters where local variation is justified, while providing greater clarity on the circumstances in which local energy efficiency and internal space standards may be appropriate.
- **Retail and regeneration** – greater flexibility is expected when applying parking standards to the redevelopment of large retail and similar sites, helping support their regeneration.
- **Telecommunications** – clearer support is provided for telecommunications infrastructure in appropriate locations, including development which can improve connectivity for rail users.



- **Community facilities** – policies protecting valued facilities have been strengthened, including ensuring that public houses are not lost where this can reasonably be avoided.
- **Protected Landscapes** – the Framework makes clear that major development in Protected Landscapes should be refused other than in exceptional circumstances, alongside the existing statutory protection for their landscape and scenic beauty.

The Framework also provides greater clarity across a number of other areas of decision-making, including the consideration of transport impacts, pollution, heritage, Protected Landscapes and the safety of women and girls.

Following consultation feedback, the proposed specific reference to fast food outlets has not been taken forward. The government will instead consider whether other land-use planning approaches, including potential changes to the Use Classes Order, could help address the issues raised.

The new **National Planning Policy Framework** and the **government response to the consultation** are available to view here: [National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK](#)

Wider planning announcements

A number of related measures have also been published as part of the government's wider programme to create a clearer, rules-based planning system.

Reforms to the statutory consultee system

The government has published its **response to the consultation on reform of the statutory consultee system** (available here: [Reforms to the statutory consultee system - GOV.UK](#)). This confirms a package of changes intended to make consultation requirements more proportionate and reduce delays, including reforms affecting Active Travel England, National Highways, Historic England and the Mining Remediation Authority. Sport England will remain a statutory consultee, with its remit focused more closely on applications where its input adds most value. The statutory consultee status of The Gardens Trust and Theatres Trust will be removed, alongside a new notification requirement. Regulations to implement these reforms will follow in due course.



Housing Delivery Test

The **2024 and 2025 Housing Delivery Test results** have been published, together with an updated Housing Delivery Test Rule Book. The 2025 Housing Delivery Test results should be used for the purposes of decision-making and are available to view here: [Housing Delivery Test - GOV.UK](#).

Permitted development rights for electricity network ground investigations

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero is inviting local planning authorities to engage with a consultation, published on 6 August, on proposed changes to **permitted development rights (PDRs) for ground investigations** and surveys to support the delivery of electricity network infrastructure projects in England.

The consultation is seeking views on the introduction of a new PDR for certain temporary, low-impact ground investigations and surveys by electricity network developers (distribution and transmission network operators that are licensed to undertake works relating to electricity networks). The consultation is open until **4 September 2026** and is available to view here: [Permitted development rights for electricity network ground investigations - GOV.UK](#).

Extract – now live for all local planning authorities

Extract, an AI-powered tool developed by MHCLG's Digital Planning programme in partnership with the [Incubator for AI \(i.AI\)](#), is now live and free for every local planning authority to use. Visit <https://provide.planning.data.gov.uk/extract>

The tool converts planning documents, including Conservation Areas, Article 4 Directions and Tree Preservation Orders, into structured, standardised data, cutting a process that can take up to 2 hours down to as little as 2 minutes for some document types. Users review and correct all outputs before exporting them into standardised formats for their own systems and the national Planning Data Platform.

To get started, visit the platform and log in with your GOV.UK email address. Guidance and an introductory video are available to help you begin digitising your documents, and the team is on hand at extract@communities.gov.uk for any questions. There are also regular online drop-in sessions. [For more information read our MHCLG Digital blog post](#).



Government have also started work with i.AI on a new AI prototype, in partnership with Google DeepMind and delivery partner Faculty, which aims to halve the time it takes to process householder planning applications.. [For more information read our MHCLG Digital blog post.](#)

Using digital tools to support site identification and assessment

[New guidance on using digital tools to support site identification and assessment](#) has been published. The guidance, which includes nine case studies, draws on the experiences of local planning authorities across the country, sharing practical advice on how digital tools can help identify potential development sites, improve assessment processes and make better use of planning data.

Tackling planning delays

A series of pilots have been selected to find digital solutions to some of the persistent challenges facing the planning system including cross-boundary and cross-tier plan-making and Section 106 negotiations. 11 consortia of technology companies working with local planning and combined authorities and other partners have been selected to take part in Round 6 of the Digital Planning programme's PropTech Innovation Fund, sharing £2.4 million in funding. MHCLG is co-delivering Round 6 with PUBLIC. [For more information read our MHCLG Digital blog post.](#)

New Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) Strategy templates published

The Environment Agency, working with CIRIA, the Association of SuDS Authorities, Arup and a working group of SuDS practitioners, has produced new SuDS Strategy Templates to help planning applicants submit the right information on SuDS first time. The templates should also make it easier for LPAs and LLFAs 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.

New training for planners on SuDS

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.

Further support and input has also been provided by [CIRIA](#) and [CIWEM](#).

The course is interactive, free of charge, and can be completed at your own pace. Register now to complete the course: <https://learning.tcpa.org.uk/courses/intro-suds-for-planners>

Green Infrastructure webinars: new tools, evidence and mapping

Natural England, the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission are hosting two upcoming webinars to support the use of new green infrastructure evidence and mapping tools.

Webinar | Better Evidence, Better Tools, Better Outcomes: Green Infrastructure Webinar at 10:00-11:30am on 29 September.

Join Natural England and partners from the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission for an update on a powerful new suite of green infrastructure tools designed to help planners, local authorities and policymakers deliver quality green infrastructure where it's needed most.



Whether you are a planner, ecologist, public health professional, local authority officer, developer or have a wider interest in creating greener and healthier places, the webinar will provide an opportunity to explore the new tools and evidence available. **For more information and to register, please click [here](#).**

Webinar | Deep Dive into IMED, EEI Green Infrastructure Mapping Tools at 2:00-3:15pm on 6 October.

Want to get more from the new environmental mapping tools? Join us on 6 October for a practical deep dive covering the latest improvements to the Green Infrastructure Mapping Tool, a walkthrough of Indices of Multiple Environmental Deprivation (IMED), and the Environmental Equity Index (EEI). Whether you're new to the tools or already exploring them, this is your opportunity to build confidence and ask questions. **Click [here](#) to find out more and register.**

Closing remarks

Further work will follow over the coming months to support implementation of the planning reforms set out above, including updates to relevant Planning Practice Guidance and implementation of provisions in the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025.

I recognise that publication of a substantially restructured Framework represents an important change for planning authorities and practitioners. I would encourage authorities to familiarise themselves with the new Framework, and in particular the decision-making policies which have applied since 17 August 2026.

This letter, along with all previous Chief Planner Letters and Newsletters, is available on GOV.UK [here](#).

Yours faithfully,

Joanna Averley

Chief Planner