



By Email Only

Message from Chief Planner

21 December 2023

This Newsletter provides updates on the latest announcements from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and other government departments and agencies relating to planning practices and policy. Please see overleaf for the list of contents.

On 19 December, the [NPPF update](#), which is effective immediately, was published following the consultation in December 2022. The update was announced during the Secretary of State's [speech](#) about the government's ambitions for housing and infrastructure, and the role of planning in helping achieve them. Further details about what was announced can be found in the [Written Ministerial Statement](#) and we encourage you to read it in full and make yourself familiar with the changes. Minister Rowley also made an oral statement to the House.

This Newsletter highlights the key announcements made, including the latest update on planning performance, the Statutory Consultee Review, the announcement of the 180 local authorities to receive funding as part of the Planning Skills Delivery Fund and the results of the 2022 Housing Delivery Test.

Tuesday was an important day for planners across the country and I want to echo the Secretary of State's words when he said that *'the role of planners in local government matters so much'*.

As always, the Newsletter also outlines some wider opportunities to get involved in research and events being organised across government, this time in the form of beta testing for DfT's connectivity tool and the Forestry Commissions workshops on Project WIDGET.

All previous Chief Planner Letters and Newsletters are available on GOV.UK [here](#).

Finally, thank you for all the work and care you show as planners and others who work to evolve and manage our built and natural environment for the better. I wish you the very best for the festive season and the start of 2024.

Joanna Averley
Chief Planner



Newsletter Contents

NPPF Update	3
Secretary of State announcements beyond NPPF update.....	4
Call for participants: Government Connectivity Tool Beta Testing.....	5
Event: Project WIDGET Workshops	6



Policy and Delivery Updates

NPPF Update

DLUHC published an [updated National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) on 19 December 2023 following a consultation in December 2022, to which a [response](#) has now been published. The update, which is **effective immediately**, builds on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, which entered the statute book on 26 October.

A high-level description of the key changes is provided below, and was set out by the Levelling Up Secretary in his speech and accompanying WMS, but for the full detail and understanding of the policy please refer to the text of the NPPF itself.

In headline terms, the new NPPF:

- facilitates flexibility for local authorities in relation to **local housing need**, clarifying that the outcome of the standard method is an advisory starting point, noting any assessment will be subject to examination as usual;
- sets out that there is no requirement on a local authority to review or alter its **Green Belt** boundaries unless it chooses to do so;
- clarifies that there may be situations where **higher densities** would be wholly out of character with the existing urban area, and that this could be a strong reason why significantly uplifting densities would be inappropriate – applying where character is evidenced through a design code which is adopted or will be adopted as part of the local plan;
- removes the requirement for authorities to demonstrate a **five-year housing land supply** on an annual basis, where an up to date (less than five years old) local plan is in place that contained a deliverable five-year supply of land at its examination - creating a powerful incentive to get a local plan in place by granting additional protection from the presumption in favour of sustainable development, noting that this protection applies to applications made from the date of publication of the new NPPF;
- removes the 5% and 10% buffers that could be applied to five-year housing land supply, and maintains the 20% **buffer** only for those authorities that do not have an up-to-date plan in place and score below 85% on the Housing Delivery Test;
- increases the level of protection from the presumption afforded by **neighbourhood plans** from two to five years post adoption, provided they identify at least one housing site;
- gives additional support to the delivery of **self-build, custom-build and community-led housing** and encourages the delivery of **older people's housing**, including retirement housing, housing-with-care and care homes;



- emphasises the **role of beauty and placemaking** in strategic policies;
- gives greater protection to **agricultural land** through additional reference to the need to address food production, maintaining the emphasis on best and most versatile (BMV) land; and
- provides greater support for **energy efficiency measures** through requiring decisions on planning applications to place significant weight on the need to support energy efficiency improvements to existing buildings.

Secretary of State announcements beyond NPPF update

Alongside the new NPPF, the Secretary of State set out his ambitions for planning performance, namely that planning decisions must be taken on time and should be robust in their reasoning, and all authorities must have an up-to-date local plan.

In order to support authorities in meeting those expectations, the Secretary of State made a number of announcements, grouped around four themes:

Greater transparency

- **Developing a new planning performance dashboard** that will provide greater transparency and accountability for local authority performance, including exposing performance absent Extension of Time agreements.
- **Reviewing the use of Extension of Time agreements in managing performance issues**, considering proposals to limit their use on minor and householder applications. DLUHC intend to consult on this in early 2024.

Additional financial support

- **Emphasising the increase in planning fees**, which have risen by 35% for major applications and 25% for other applications – and reminding local authorities that they must spend these fees on planning services, with an expectation of no decrease in authorities' spend on planning from their general fund.
- **Confirming the 180 successful local authorities for the first year of the £29 million [Planning Skills Delivery Fund \(PSDF\)](#)**. Local authorities were invited to apply for up to £100,000 to help clear backlogs of planning applications and to develop specialist skills and expertise in preparation for implementing the reforms in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. The 180 successful authorities will collectively receive £14.3 million from the fund. For the list of local authorities that received funding, see [here](#).
- **Updating on the establishment of the Planning Super Squad**, a new team of leading planners and specialists whose talents will be used to unblock major developments, with £13.5 million to fund their work.
- **[Allocating up-to £57 million to the eight successful bids in the first round of the Local Nutrient Mitigation Fund](#)**, and confirming that the second round will open for bids in January 2024.



Faster processes

- **Establishing Accelerated Planning Services**, improving on the patchwork approach of Planning Performance Agreements by regularising arrangements so that they're offered across England, that clear milestones have to be agreed, that fees are set at an appropriate level, and that those fees have to be refunded where milestones are missed.
- **Reviewing Statutory Consultees**, which will scope and examine the operation of statutory consultees in the planning application process, in particular their role in providing advice to local planning authorities. This will not cover the role of statutory bodies in plan-making or the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Planning regimes.
- **Focusing on planning committee decisions**, with the Planning Inspectorate being asked to start reporting to the department about cases where a successful appeal is made against a planning committee decision, and the final decision is the same as the original officer's recommendation.

Direction action

- **Intervening in the seven local authorities** that have failed to get a local plan to examination since the 2004 Act, requiring a plan timetable within 12 weeks.
- **Designating** two local authorities in relation to quality of decision making.
- **Publishing the [results of the 2022 Housing Delivery Test](#)**, with 20 new authorities falling into the presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- **Reviewing the London Plan**, asking four specialists to identify where changes to policy could speed up the delivery of much needed homes in urban city sites in the heart of the Capital.

Research & Events

Call for participants: Government Connectivity Tool Beta Testing

The Department for Transport is developing a web-based app that generates a national measure of any place's connectivity. Using a combination of land use and transport data, the tool establishes a metric that can be used by policymakers and decision-takers to better understand what connectivity gaps exist and how new transport schemes improve connectivity. It could be used to prioritise well-connected areas for development, as well as helping to work out which new transport schemes could prove most useful in raising people's connectivity to vital jobs and services.

We are looking for a range of local authorities to volunteer to test the tool and assess its utility for planning practice. If you are keen to join the beta tests and are:



- Developing a new policy or funding plan (such as a Local plan, Design code, Supplementary planning document, Infrastructure delivery strategy, Local transport plan, Local cycling and walking infrastructure plan or Bus service improvement plan); or
- Are interested in how the tool could support decisions (by analysing interventions needed for a site, assessing the suitability of a site, negotiating developer contributions, or providing advice as a statutory consultee)

Then please write to us by **19 Jan 2024**, outlining what you'd like to use the tool to test in a few sentences and what organisation you're from: connectivity@dft.gov.uk. The test will run between February and May 2024.

Event: Project WIDGET Workshops

The Forestry Commission's Project WIDGET (Woodland Impacts of Development: Guidance, Evidence and Tools) identifies opportunities for evidence, guidance and tools to help improve the consideration of trees and woodlands (including ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees) in development design and decision making. The aim is to improve clarity and consistency as well as deliver better outcomes for trees and woodlands.

Project WIDGET is running two face to face workshops to seek the views of a wide range of stakeholders involved with all aspects of the planning process. Crucial to this work is the engagement of a wide range of local planning officers and other local authority staff who are involved in decision making on woodland and trees at both the planning policy and development management level.

Workshop events:

Leeds - Wednesday 24 January 2023

Bristol – Tuesday 30 January 2024

To book a free space and have your say, please register via Eventbrite by **8 January 2024** for [Leeds](#) or [Bristol](#). Or e-mail with your comments projectwidget@forestrycommission.gov.uk.

The project is seeking views on:

- Current challenges, gaps and opportunities in the planning process when considering impacts of development on trees and woodlands.
- Options for improving guidance, evidence and tools to aid decision making in the planning process in relation to trees and woodlands.
- Requirements for guidance on mitigation and compensation for ancient woodland and veteran trees affected by different types of development.