



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Government's Reforms of the Planning System

NCALC Briefing

03 April 2025



Planning Reforms - General

- 1 - Changes to the NPPF published in December 2024 (Alan)
- 2 - Implications of the reforms for the local plan, including changes to how local housing need is calculated (Richard)
- 3 - Further reforms through Planning and Infrastructure Bill – introduced to Parliament recently (Richard)
- 4 - Changes to other aspects of planning system including Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) regime, planning fee changes, Changes to Planning Committee arrangements and the role of statutory consultees in planning decisions (Simon)
- 5 - Neighbourhood Planning and other updates (Alan)

Planning Reforms - General

WNC response to 'main' consultation was agreed at PPC on 18th September (106 questions)

A response to proposals for the reform of Planning Committees was agreed at PPC on 26th February

1 - Planning Reforms – NPPF

Changes to the NPPF brought in on December 2024. Key points include:

- Directing that strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment conducted using the government’s standard method. The changes remove reference to the method being ‘an advisory starting point’, as well as removing reference to the ability of councils to use ‘exceptional circumstances’ to argue for the use of alternative approaches to assess need.
- Local planning authorities should “meet an area’s identified housing need”. This is in comparison with the previous wording which instructed councils to “meet as much of an area’s identified housing need as possible”.
- Government’s manifesto commitment of 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament; places;

1 - Planning Reforms – NPPF

- Changes to 5 year housing land supply calculations (Richard to discuss)
- Reverse other changes to the NPPF made in December 2023 which are considered detrimental to housing supply;

1 - Planning Reforms – NPPF

- In an update to the presumption in favour of sustainable development, the NPPF says that for decision-taking, schemes should be granted permission unless policies in the framework provide a “strong” reason for refusal. The previous version stated that such policies should provide a “clear” reason for refusal.
- The new version of the presumption also adds explicit reference to the need to consider key policies. These are listed as those for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes.

1 - Planning Reforms – NPPF

- Housing needs assessments should explicitly consider the needs of those requiring social rent. The NPPF states that authorities specify their expectations on social rent delivery as part of broader affordable housing policies. Reference is also added in the new document to assessing the needs of ‘looked after children’, which a footnote says can be evidenced in the relevant LPA’s Children’s Social Care Sufficiency Strategy.
- The requirement to deliver at least ten per cent of the total number of homes on major sites as affordable home ownership, as set out in the previous NPPF, is removed.

1 - Planning Reforms – NPPF

- Support clean energy and the environment, including through support for onshore wind and renewables.
- Decision-makers should give “significant weight” to the benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation, and proposals contributing to meeting a net zero future.
- Authorities should consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon development when producing plans, where it is likely that in allocating a site, it would help secure development.
- The need to mitigate and adapt to climate change should also be considered in preparing and assessing planning applications, taking into account the full range of potential climate change impacts, new paragraph 163

1 - Planning Reforms – NPPF

- Support economic growth in key sectors, aligned with the Government's industrial strategy and future local growth plans, including laboratories, gigafactories, datacentres, digital economies and freight and logistics – given their importance to our economic future;
- The framework, at paragraph 87, says storage and distribution operations should be provided for “that allow for the efficient and reliable handling of goods, especially where this is needed to support the supply chain, transport innovation and decarbonisation”.

1 - Planning Reforms – NPPF

- The definition of previously developed land in the glossary now includes “large areas of fixed surface infrastructure such as large areas of hardstanding which have been lawfully developed.” But glasshouses are not included in the definition.
- Brownfield developments should be viewed positively. Wording in the document to emphasise this point has, however, been tweaked from the suggestion in the draft framework that such proposals “should be regarded as acceptable in principle.” The new wording in the final document is that proposals should be approved “unless substantial harm would be caused” (within settlements).
- "The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist". (Supporting a prosperous rural economy)

1 - Planning Reforms – NPPF

- Transitional arrangements
 - For plan-making, the new NPPF applies from 12 March 2025.
 - Exceptions, but not relevant to WNC
 - Local Plans currently being produced under the current system need to be submitted by the end of 2026

2 - Planning Reforms – LHN/Local Plan

Government's manifesto commitment of 1.5 million new homes in this Parliament

Reversed changes to the NPPF made in December 2023 which were considered detrimental to housing supply (e.g. four year supply);

Change to Local Housing Need (LHN):

- Previously household projections with affordability uplift (2,124)
- Now proportion of housing stock with affordability uplift (2,515 - 69 less than figure consulted on)

2 - Planning Reforms – LHN/Local Plan

Housing Need and Supply

- Regulation 18 Plan (April 2024):
Total need 2023-41: 40,100
Total supply: circa 41,300
Surplus: circa 1,200
- Next Regulation 18 plan:
Total need 2024-43: 50,200
Total supply: circa 40,100
Residual need: circa 10,100

Source	Position with base date at 1st April 23	Position with base date at 1st April 2024 with: (a) increased LHN requirement (b) 5% buffer	Position with base date at 1st April 2024 with: (a) increased LHN requirement (b) 5% buffer (c) 2 years added to plan period
Requirement	39,100 (2023-41)	42,800 (2024-2041)	47,800 (2024-43)
Contingency / 5% buffer	1,000	2,100	2,400
Total	40,100	44,900	50,200
Existing Provision	36,400	33,600	34,600
Housing allocations in emerging Local Plan at Northampton	3,500	3,500	4,100
Regeneration Allocations in emerging local plan at Northampton and Daventry	1,400	1,400	1,400
Total Provision	41,300	38,500	40,100
Surplus	1,200		
Deficit		6,400	10,100

2 - Planning Reforms – LHN/Local Plan

Recent Activity:

- Report on Reg 18 consultation – 20th November PPC
 - Workshops with members
 - Evidence base updates/ revisions
 - Reviewing policies in light of NPPF changes/new evidence/responses to consultation
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- Revised Local Development Scheme – agreed at PPC 26th February 2025
 - Further Regulation 18 consultation – October 2025
 - Submission October 2026
 - Examination Spring 2027
 - Adoption November 2027

2 - Planning Reforms – LHN/Local Plan

Housing Land Supply and Housing Delivery Test (HDT):

Likely that we will move to a single HLA calculation from 1st April 2025
(approx 5.4 year supply based on 1/4/24 data)

Passed the HDT in December 2024 (117%). Will get more challenging when LHN figures increase.

3 - Planning Reforms - General

Further reforms through Planning and Infrastructure Bill – introduced to Parliament recently

- Planning Committees
- Nature Restoration Fund
- Compulsory Purchase
- Development Corporations
- Strategic Planning
- National Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP)
- Clean Energy
- Bill Discounts

4 - Planning Reforms – NSIP

- National Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP);
- Development Consent Orders (DCOs) - determined by Planning Inspectorate – LPAs consultees only in the process and the Secretary of State issues the consent order – e.g. airport expansion, rail freight distribution centres;
- Government confirmed on 12 December in response to consultation that it will in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill (Spring 2025):
- Set threshold for on-shore wind projects at 100MW electricity generation and increase threshold for solar farms from 50MW to 100MW (not 150MW in consultation document);
- Also plan to make Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) mandatory for NSIP projects from November 2025. Have been for planning applications since February 12 2024 for majors and April 6 2024 for non-majors.

4 - Planning Reforms – Fees

- Householder planning application fees will increase from 1 April 2025 to change from the current £258 to £528 (100% increase);
- £1,043 for two or more dwellings (alterations to), then £588 per dwelling up to 10 then £635 per dwelling between 10 and 50 then a further £189 per dwelling for 50+ up to a maximum of £411,888 (approx. 2000 homes)
- Non residential buildings fees set at £298 for first 40 sqm then £588 for each 75 sqm up to 1000 sqm then £635 for each 75 sqm up to 3,750 sqm then £189 per 75 sqm thereafter up to maximum £411,888;
- Lower rates for agricultural development with higher floor space allowance;
- Removing, discharging or varying conditions £89 for householder, £586 for non-major and £2,000 for majors (big boost in income) ;
- No locally set fees or any updates on S73B applications

4 – Planning Committee Changes

- 9 December 2024 – Planning Reform Working Paper – Planning Committees – paper went to Planning Policy Committee on 26 February 2024;
- Planning and Infrastructure Bill likely to embed changes to Planning Committee arrangements;
- Looking to set a Nationally set delegated thresholds of between 10 and 100 dwellings;
- Reserved matters applications to be delegated;
- May look at compliance with the development plan as a threshold;
- Number of objections;
- Mandatory training and strategic committees;
- Planning Policy Committee response not opposed to national threshold but must be clear criteria;
- No mention of Call-In Arrangements

4 – Changes Statutory Consultees

- 10 March 2025 announcement – Bureaucratic burden lifting
- Review the role and speed of response to planning applications from statutory consultee;
- There are currently 25 statutory consultees;
- Removing Sport England, Theatre Trust and Gardens Trust and others from the list of statutory consultees;
- Looking at the role of statutory consultees as the Government considers they fail to engage pro-actively in planning decisions, keep submitting 'holding objections' and submit advice that seeks 'gold plated' outcomes;
- Looking outside the role of planning departments;
- National Highways significant delay in schemes in WNC (M1/A5/A43), e.g. AL sites;
- Sport England role – loss of playing fields.

5 — Neighbourhood Planning and other updates

- **Neighbourhood Plan Housing need.**

The team are working to understand the implications of the new NPPF housing numbers for neighbourhood plans and as yet are unable to provide specific need figures for Plans in preparation. Please bear with us.

- **Community Governance Review**

Changes to Parish boundaries may have consequences for Neighbourhood Plans. Please contact us if you are affected.

- **Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)**

Consultation Summer 2025.

- **Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document**

Consultation Summer 2025.

Questions

