



Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing & Communities

Minister for Intergovernmental Relations

2 Marsham Street

London

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All Council Leaders/Chief Executives and
other Local Planning Authorities in England

8 September 2023

Dear Colleagues,

LONG-TERM PLAN FOR HOUSING

In July, I set out the Government's long-term plan for housing. The role of local government cannot be overstated in delivering our plan – it is only through the continued effort of local leadership, the endeavour of your teams and the engagement you lead with your communities that we will unlock the homes we need. I therefore wanted to highlight the principal elements of our long-term plan that relate to your role.

Building more homes in the right places

First and foremost, this Government is unashamedly supportive of development and regeneration in and around existing town and city centres. This is how we will get homes built where it makes sense, support growth, and enable people to get on the property ladder.

And making it easier to progress such developments is front of mind as we finalise the update to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), following our consultation which attracted more than 26,000 responses. In that context, and ahead of the publication of the refreshed NPPF in the autumn, I wanted to make clear my expectation that:

- development should proceed on sites that are adopted in a local plan with full input from the local community unless there are strong reasons why it cannot;
- councils should be open and pragmatic in agreeing changes to developments where conditions mean that the original plan may no longer be viable, rather than losing the development wholesale or seeing development mothballed; and
- better use should be made of small pockets of brownfield land by being more permissive, so more homes can be built more quickly, where and how it makes sense, giving more confidence and certainty to SME builders.

Local plans

Second, we know that local plans are the best way to ensure the right homes are built in the right places, so we are introducing reforms to make plans simpler, shorter and faster to prepare.

My intention is for the regulations, policy and guidance necessary for the preparation of the first new-style local plans to be in place by Autumn 2024. In the new system, planning authorities will need to prepare, consult on and adopt plans within a 30-month timeframe - and follow the same process for each subsequent update of their plans, including examination by PINS.

In the interim, we want local authorities to continue adopting ambitious local plans, which is why we set out fair transitional arrangements in our current consultation on implementing the plan-making reforms¹. As part of these arrangements, we confirmed our intent that the last day to submit a plan under the current system will be 30 June 2025. I want to reiterate that local authorities without an up-to-date local plan are likely to be subject to the presumption in favour of sustainable development when facing applications.

As part of our consultation on the update to the NPPF, we have proposed removing the requirement for planning authorities with an up-to-date plan to demonstrate continually a deliverable 5-year housing land supply. This proposed change is intended to provide what I hope is welcome flexibility – but only where it is warranted by an authority having an up-to-date local plan, meaning one which is less than five years old. As a consequence, in the new system a planning authority wishing to benefit continuously from this new flexibility would need to start work on a new plan half-way through the five-year lifespan of an existing one.

We also consulted on a proposal to make clearer that Local Housing Need (LHN) is an advisory starting point for plan making, and that local authorities can take account of local circumstances when planning for the homes our communities need. Again, my intent in considering this change is to support more effective and responsive plan-making – and any housing number put forward by a local authority would still need to be both evidence based and tested by PINS at examination.

Planning capacity and capability

Finally, I have been conscious of the pressures on planning teams, and the backlogs that have built up as a consequence of the pandemic. To help address some of those pressures, I announced in July several initiatives aimed at bolstering capacity and capability.

- The Planning Skills Delivery Fund will provide £24m over two years to help clear backlogs of planning applications and prepare for the implementation planning reforms. Local authorities can apply for up to £100,000 of support, which can be used to source additional planning officers and other specialist resources – with the deadline for first year applications closing very soon on 11 September.
- A new “super squad” of experts, backed by £13.5m of new funding, will support the delivery of large-scale development projects, starting with supporting the Cambridge Delivery Group before looking at sites across England, including in our eight Investment Zones. The department is in the process of operationalising this work with Homes England.
- A comprehensive national survey of all local planning authorities will give us a fuller understanding of the skills challenges and shortages facing local government.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/plan-making-reforms-consultation-on-implementation>

- National planning fees will be increased by 35% for major applications and 25% for all other applications and be indexed to inflation.

I hope these measures will be welcome, and I look forward to continuing to work together with all of you to deliver the homes people need.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Gove". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M'.

RT HON MICHAEL GOVE MP

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