



Housing First, Planning and Infrastructure Commission

Date: 22 January 2026

Subject: Planning Reforms

Report of: Clare Taylor-Russell, Interim Deputy Director, Place (Planning)

Purpose of Report

To update the Commission on recent publications in relation to changes to the planning system being proposed by the Government

Recommendations:

The Commission is requested to:

1. Note the content of this report

Contact Officers

Clare Taylor-Russell

clare.taylor-russell@greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk

Background Papers

Government proposed reforms to the planning system:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/create-or-update-a-local-plan-using-the-new-system>

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 The government published a new version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 16 December 2025. The document is out for consultation until 10 March 2026, the draft document increases the length of the current NPPF, from 69 pages to 100, with a further 25 pages of annexes.

1.2 It also entirely restructures the current document around a series of policies within thematic chapters. Most chapters are split between plan-making policies and “decision-making policies”. With the introduction of the latter the government is not currently

proposing a separate set “national development management policies” (NDMPs), although these have not been completely ruled out.

1.3 Instead of listing the text in consecutively numbered paragraphs (as the current NPPF does), the draft presents plan-making and decision-making policies as numbered policies, similar to how local plans are presented. The consultation says this presentational change is being made for ease of reference.

1.4 In total there are 225 questions associated with the consultation draft NPPF. The consultation is open to all and responses are encouraged via:

- An online portal:

[Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system - Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government - Citizen Space](#)

- Email to:

PlanningPolicyConsultation@communities.gov.uk

- Post to:

Planning Policy Consultation Team, Planning Directorate – Planning Policy Division, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Floor 3, Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF

1.5 In addition to publishing the consultation draft NPPF, the government published guidance and resources for local planning authorities (LPAs) preparing a local plan under the new plan-making system, which is expected to come into effect with new regulations in early 2026. Although not a formal consultation, the Government is seeking feedback, by 15 March 2026, on the guidance, to help shape and inform the final version. Comments can be submitted by email to:

digitalplanningteam@communities.gov.uk

1.6 Neither the new NPPF nor the new plan making system will apply to Councils, such as those in Greater Manchester, who are submitting plans by December 31, 2026, as they will continue to do so under the existing system. However, it will apply to the production of the new Greater Manchester Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan (GMJMWLP) which has not formally commenced as yet.

2. NPPF General Principles

2.1 NPPF states that “all plan-makers” should not “duplicate, substantively restate or modify” what is contained in the NPPF’s decision-making policies. Policies should only be included local plans which are “necessary and relevant to the plan being prepared”.

2.2 The proposed NPPF includes a series of new annexes that hold key technical reference information, including the methodologies by which to calculate housing need and the housing delivery test, and to conduct green belt reviews. The consultation issued alongside the draft also proposes moving new planning practice guidance on viability into a further NPPF annexe. Previously these matters have been dealt with Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) alone.

2.3 NPPF retains the principle that development plans should seek to meet the development needs of their area as a minimum. It makes it clear that where a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) is in place, local plans within the SDS geographical area, should plan for the level of development provided for in the SDS for that local plan's area.

3. Twelve Key Policy Changes in NPPF

3.1 In addition to introducing key changes to support the new plan-making system, which is expected to come into effect in 2026, the new NPPF introduces some other significant policy changes. The consultation document, produced alongside the NPPF document, summarises what the Government see as the 12 key changes:

- Creating a more “rules-based” approach to development, making it clearer what forms of development are acceptable in principle in different locations
- Establishing in principle support for the development of land around rail stations within existing settlements, and around ‘well-connected’ train stations outside settlements, including on Green Belt land
- Setting clear expectations that authorities should set minimum densities in well-connected locations, including around train stations and town centres, and supporting an overall increase in density within settlements
- Setting expectations around supporting the needs of different groups through the planning system, including setting clearer expectations for accessible housing to meet the needs of older and disabled people
- Introduction of a new category of ‘medium development’ housing sites, including a range of policy and regulatory easements, to support a more streamlined and proportionate planning system
- Promoting certainty for applicants and to speed up local plan production by limiting quantitative standards in development plans to only those specific issues where local variation is justified
- Encourage greater economic growth by giving substantial weight to the benefits of supporting business growth and to particular areas and sectors - including

those named in the Industrial Strategy, AI Growth Zones, logistics and town centres

- Ensure that adequate provision is made for the extraction of critical and growth minerals, recognising their economic importance
- Further embedding the move away from a ‘predict and provide’, to one of a vision led approach to transport planning
- Provide clear policy as to how decisions can take a proactive approach to both mitigation and adaptation in relation to climate change
- Introducing changes to reflect Local Nature Recovery Strategies, to recognise landscape character and conserve and enhance existing natural features
- Replacing current policies on heritage-related development, to provide a clearer and more positive approach to their use

4. Guidance for the new plan-making system

4.1 The Government has published this guidance now so that LPAs can see the direction of travel for the new plan making system. They have however, said it will remain under review, as the new system is implemented, and related regulations and policy are confirmed, and necessary revisions and updates will be made to the guidance.

4.2 The guidance covers the first steps in preparing a plan under the new system, along with other parts of the plan-making process. It will eventually cover the full process of the new plan-making system. In so doing the Government hope that local planning authorities (LPAs) will be able to begin new local plans shortly after the new Regulations etc are in place.

4.3 In summary, the new system involves a 30-month process, which begins with the first of three “gateway” checks, two formal consultations and an examination stage, with adoption in the final (30th) month. However, prior to formally commencing the 30-month period, there are a number of tasks to be undertaken, which the guidance refers to as “getting ready”:

- Give notice of intention to start plan-making at least 4 months before formal commencement through gateway 1
- Publish a local plan timetable for a minimum of four months before formal commencement through gateway 1
- Complete preparatory tasks, including an initial scoping consultation on plan content and stakeholder engagement

5. Conclusion

5.1 In consultation with the ten local authorities and Transport for Greater Manchester, consideration is currently being given to the proposed content of the revised NPPF and the scope of the consultation. An update will be shared with this group at a future meeting.

5.2 Similarly, consideration is being given to the recently published guidance on local plan preparation and the implications for the preparation of the GMJMWLP. Updates in relation to the preparation of that plan will be shared with this group at future meetings.