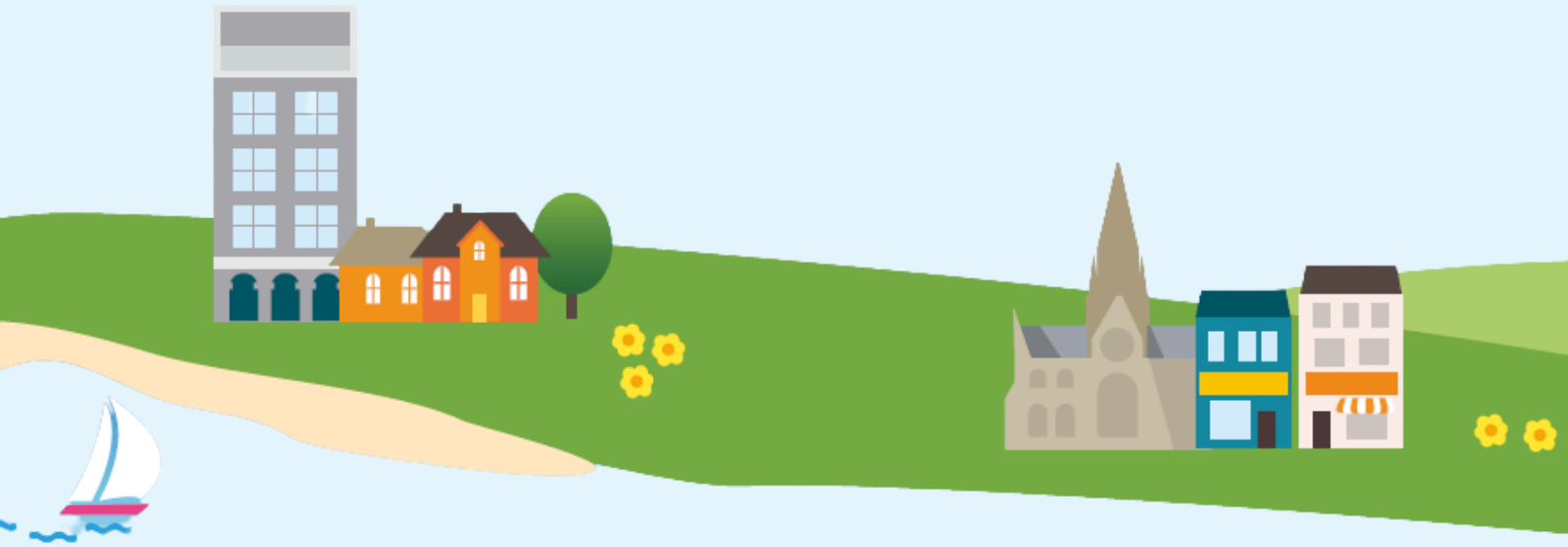
Understanding the Government's Planning Committee reforms

A guide to the National Scheme of Delegation 2026



Introduction

The Government's latest planning reforms represent one of the most significant changes to England's planning system in decades. At the centre of these changes is a shift in how decisions are made locally - aimed at speeding up development, improving consistency, and supporting delivery of new homes and infrastructure.

For local authorities, the implications are substantial. From how planning applications are determined to the role of elected councillors, the reforms will reshape both processes and powers from **31 October 2026.** This information pack aims to give you an overview of the changes and what this means to councillors, parish councils and applicants.

Why are planning reforms being introduced?

Planning committees play a vital role in maintaining local democratic oversight of development proposals. However, the Government has identified considerable variation across local planning authorities in how decisions are made. This inconsistency, it argues, contributes to delays, uncertainty, and inefficiencies in the system.

In response, they say that the reforms are designed to:

- **improve the speed and efficiency of decision-making.**
- **provide greater clarity on which applications go to committee.**
- **ensure committees focus on the most significant proposals.**
- **introduce greater consistency across England.**

The central mechanism for achieving this is a new national scheme of delegation which came into force from **31 October 2026.**



What will this mean?

A national approach to delegation

At the core of the reforms is a two-tier system that standardises how planning applications are handled nationwide.

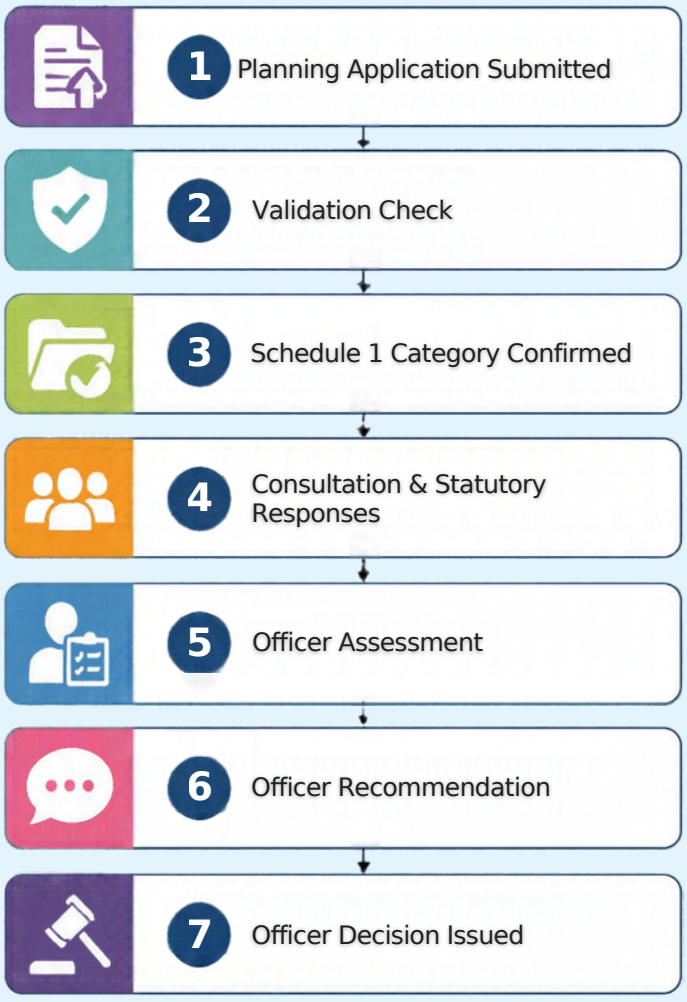
Schedule 1 - mandatory officer decisions

Under Schedule 1 applications (also known as Tier A), certain categories of applications must be determined by planning officers and cannot be referred to committee.

These are typically smaller, more technical proposals, and reserved matters proposals, including:

- **householder developments, such as extensions and alterations.**
- **minor residential developments (under 10 homes).**
- **minor commercial applications.**
- **non material amendments and lawful development certificates.**
- **certain reserved matters applications.**

Applications submitted by the council, councillors and some staff (depending on their role) may be determined by planning committee.





Schedule 2 - officer-led by default

Schedule 2 applications (also known as Tier B) will also be determined by officers in most cases but can be referred to committee under defined circumstances.

Referral will only occur through the Gateway Test where there are:

- **one or more issues of economic, social or environmental significance to the local area.**
- **one or more significant planning matters having regard to the development plan and any other material considerations.**

Crucially, committee involvement is no longer the norm. Instead, it becomes the exception rather than the rule.

Schedule 2 Planning applications potential committee decisions



Examples include:

- **major residential developments (over 9 homes).**
- **certain commercial developments.**
- **reserved matters for large developments.**
- **applications submitted by the local authority, councillors and certain council officers (depending on their role).**

Under the new rules, councils can decide which Schedule 2 applications may be considered by the Planning Committee through their local Scheme of Delegation, which forms part of the council's Constitution.

The council has chosen to align the new arrangements as closely as possible with its existing Scheme of Delegation. As a result, some Schedule 2 applications will continue to be determined by planning officers. These include:

- **applications for listed building consent;**
- **tree works;**
- **variations to Section 106 agreements;**
- **retrospective applications (unless they relate to major development); and**
- **applications submitted by certain members of staff.**

These applications will follow the same process as Schedule 1 applications.

All other Schedule 2 applications will be subject to the Gateway Test, which will determine whether they should be decided by officers or referred to the Planning Committee.

Lists showing which application types will always be delegated to officers and which will proceed to the Gateway Test can be found at the end of this information pack.



Schedule 2 Gateway Test

The Schedule 2 Gateway Test acts as a screening process for certain Schedule 2 applications, unless the council's Constitution delegates the decisions to officers. It decides whether an application should be considered by the Planning Committee or determined by planning officers.

Under the new national system, there is a presumption in favour of officer determination. A Schedule 2 application only goes to committee if at least one of the Gateway Tests is satisfied and if it is considered that a committee decision is necessary.

How is the Gateway Test carried out?

The planning officer overseeing the application will explain the proposal and key planning considerations to the Chair of the Planning Committee and the Divisional Manager for Development Management. Local councillors will also be invited to the meeting to share their views. The Chair of Planning Committee and the Divisional Manager for Development Management will decide jointly, using the two Gateway Tests, whether the application will be determined by officers or by the planning committee. The outcome from the meeting will be published on the application file.

Shifting to delegation by default

A key theme of the reforms is the move towards delegation by default, where officer decision-making becomes the standard approach. Although over 97% of our applications are determined by officers following changes to our constitution in May 2025, this marks a cultural shift in the planning system. Planning committees will focus only on:

- **strategic developments.**
- **large-scale proposals.**
- **schemes with long-term and significant impact.**

Changes to how applications reach committee

One of the most noticeable changes for district councillors is the change to call-in powers, known at Chichester as 'red cards', which have traditionally allowed applications to be referred to the Planning Committee for consideration. Previously, district councillors could use a red card to require a planning application to be considered by the planning committee, rather than it be decided by officers. This is typically used where proposals are contentious or attract significant public interest. Under the new system, they will no longer be able to insist that an application goes to committee.

We recognise the important role that local councillors play in representing their communities and raising local concerns about planning applications. To support this, we are introducing a new e-flag process that will allow district councillors to highlight applications of particular concern to local residents.

Councillors will be able to complete an online form to set out any concerns raised by their community to the officers dealing with the application. The form will also provide an opportunity to request a meeting, Microsoft Teams call, or telephone discussion with planning officers.



What are the key changes for the applicant

Applicants will still apply for planning permission in the same way that they always have done. The key differences are:

- **more applications will be decided by officers.**
- **there will be fewer opportunities for a decision to be made by a committee.**
- **objections from parish councils will not trigger committee consideration.**
- **there will be more predictability.**

Applicants are still encouraged to engage with parish councils and discuss their proposals before submitting an application. This helps ensure that any local concerns are identified and considered at an early stage of the planning process.

What are the key changes for district councillors

Loss of red-card call-in

The most significant change is that existing local call-in arrangements will no longer operate where they conflict with the national scheme. Councillors will no longer be able to refer applications to committee simply because they have concerns or matters to raise in debate at committee.

What this means:

- **Fewer applications will come before committee.**
- **Councillor concerns alone will not automatically trigger committee consideration.**
- **Councillors will need to focus on whether an application meets planning policy and the gateway test criteria.**
- **Councillors will need to engage with officers early in the application process and 'flag' an application using the eform if there is a matter of local significance to raise.**

More decisions made by officers

A larger proportion of applications will be determined by planning officers. This includes:

- **householder applications.**
- **minor residential development.**
- **minor commercial development.**
- **technical applications.**

Planning Committees will concentrate on significant cases

Planning committees are intended to concentrate on:

- **major developments.**
- **strategic planning issues.**
- **applications with significant local economic, social or environmental implications.**

The Government's aim is to allow committees to focus on proposals that genuinely matter to an area rather than routine applications.



Understanding the Gateway test

It is important that district councillors understand how the Gateway Test operates, as it represents a significant change to the way planning applications are considered. The purpose of the test is to ensure that applications are referred to the Planning Committee only in exceptional circumstances.

An application that goes through the Gateway Test may be considered for committee if it raises:

- **a significant planning matter; or**
- **a significant economic, social or environmental issue for the local area.**

Councillors will need to think in terms of:

- **planning significance;**
- **strategic impacts; and**
- **development plan considerations**

rather than simply levels of public support or opposition.

An application may be determined by officers even if it meets the gateway tests. The guidance from the Government is clear that applications should only be referred to committee in exceptional circumstances, even where the tests are met.

What does not change

Councillors remain community advocates

The reforms do not remove the councillor's representative role. They will still serve on planning committees and raise planning concerns with officers – including through our new 'Flag' system.

Councillors will still:

- **represent residents.**
- **engage with applicants and communities.**
- **help shape local plans and planning policy.**
- **serve on planning committees.**
- **raise planning concerns with officers.**

The reforms change the decision-making process rather than democratic accountability.

Committee membership will become more specialist

Committees will hear fewer but more significant applications and so:

- **councillors may require more training.**
- **reports may focus more heavily on strategic planning issues.**
- **committee meetings may become less frequent but more consequential.**



What are the changes for parish councils

- Parish councils will no longer be able to ask a district councillor to ‘red card’ an application for consideration by the Planning Committee.
- Under the new arrangements, an objection from a parish council to a major planning application will not automatically result in the application being referred to the Planning Committee.

What stays the same

Parish Councils will still:

- **be consulted on planning applications in accordance with statutory consultation procedures.**
- **be able to submit comments setting out their support or, objections to a proposal.**
- **represent local communities and provide local knowledge.**
- **participate in neighbourhood planning where applicable**

What Parish Councils should do:

✅ **Reference Local Plan policies.**

✅ **Explain specific planning harms.**

✅ **Highlight strategic impacts.**

✅ **Explain why an issue is significant to the community.**

✅ **Focus on material planning considerations.**



How planning applications are determined

Planning applications that will always be determined by officers because they are schedule 1 applications

- Certificates of Appropriate Alternative Development (CAAD).
- Certificates of Lawfulness for Proposed Works under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
- Householder applications.
- Minor commercial development applications.
- Minor residential development applications.
- Permission in Principle (PiP) applications.
- Section 73 applications to vary or remove conditions where the original application falls within Schedule 1.
- Section 96A applications for non-material amendments to a planning permission or Permission in Principle.
- Applications to modify or discharge a Section 106 agreement under Sections 106A(1)(a) and 106A(3) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, where the agreement relates to a Schedule 1 application.
- Lawful Development Certificates for Existing Use or Development (CLEUD).
- Lawful Development Certificates for Proposed Use or Development (CLOPUD).
- Applications for approval of a Biodiversity Gain Plan.
- Reserved matters applications submitted following an outline planning permission, other than a large outline permission.
- Applications made under Article 27(1) of the Development Management Procedure Order, including applications to approve details required by a planning condition (commonly known as Discharge of Conditions applications).
- Applications submitted under Schedule 2 of the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) for:
  - prior approval; or
  - a determination as to whether prior approval is required.



Planning applications that will always be determined by officers because the council's Constitution delegates them to officers

- Listed building consent applications.
- Applications to vary a condition attached to a listed building consent.
- Planning applications submitted in connection with a listed building consent application, or an application to vary a condition attached to a listed building consent.
- Section 73 applications to vary planning conditions, unless they relate to major development.
- Retrospective planning applications, unless they relate to major development.
- Applications under Section 106A(1)(a) or Section 106A(3) to modify or discharge a Section 106 agreement, where they are connected to a Schedule 2 application.
- Advertisement consent applications.
- Applications for works to trees.
- Applications submitted, either individually or jointly, by a district councillor or council officer, unless the officer works within the Planning and Environment Directorate, Strategic Leadership Team, or Corporate Management Team.

Planning applications that will be subject to the Gateway Test and may be determined by officers or committee

- Applications for planning permission that are not classified as householder, minor residential, or minor commercial applications.
- Section 73 applications to vary or remove conditions associated with a major development.
- Retrospective planning applications relating to major development.
- Reserved matters applications submitted following a large outline planning permission, where the outline consent permitted 500 or more dwellings.
- Applications submitted by the local planning authority, district councillors, or officers working within the Planning and Environment Directorate, Strategic Leadership Team, or Corporate Management Team.



Types of planning application

What is a minor residential development?

A minor residential development is development that consists only of homes and features associated with residential use, includes between one and nine dwellings, and is proposed on a site of less than 0.5 hectares in area.

For example, a minor residential development could include:

- **a single new house.**
- **a small development of 2 to 9 houses.**
- **associated works such as access roads, parking areas, gardens, landscaping, boundary treatments, and drainage.**

This category also includes:

- development of a building containing flats, or works within the grounds of a block of flats, where the proposal is connected to the use and enjoyment of the flats and does not involve changing the building's use or altering the number of flats.

- applications for consent, agreement, or approval required by an existing planning permission, development order, or local development order, such as applications to approve or discharge planning conditions.

What is a minor commercial development?

A minor commercial development is typically development to an existing commercial building that remains within its current use and does not involve creating additional units, changing the use of the premises, extending the building, or carrying out work above ground-floor level. This is outlined within Part A of the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 M5.

For example, this could include:

- **alterations to an existing shop.**
- **refurbishment of office space.**
- **changes to the layout of a ground-floor commercial unit.**

It does not include:

- **changes of use (for example, a shop becoming a café).**
- **subdividing a building into additional commercial units.**
- **extensions that increase the building's gross internal floor area.**
- **development that is not wholly at ground-floor level.**

It also includes applications for any consent, agreement, or approval required by an existing planning permission, development order, or local development order relating to this type of commercial development, such as applications to approve or discharge planning conditions.



Plain English planning terminology sheet

Adoption
When a planning document, such as a local plan, has been formally approved and becomes official planning policy.
In plain English: The council has signed it off and it is now the rulebook for planning decisions.

Brownfield Land
Land that has been previously developed, such as former factories, offices or disused sites.
In plain English: Land that has been used before, rather than open countryside.

Conservation Area
An area recognised for its special historic or architectural character that deserves protection.
In plain English: A neighbourhood with a unique look or history where changes are more carefully controlled.

Development Plan
The collection of planning policies used to guide decisions on planning applications.
In plain English: The main set of planning rules the council follows.

Green Belt
Land designated to prevent urban areas from spreading into the countryside.
In plain English: Protected land designed to stop towns and cities merging together.

Greenfield Land
Land that has not previously been developed, often agricultural land or open countryside.
In plain English: Undeveloped land that has never been built on.

Housing Need
The number of homes an area is assessed as requiring over a given period.
In plain English: An estimate of how many houses people are expected to need.

Infrastructure
Facilities and services needed to support development.
Examples include:
- roads
- schools
- GP surgeries
- public transport
- drainage systems

In plain English: The services and facilities that help communities function.

Local Plan
A document that sets out where development should happen and what type of development is appropriate.
In plain English: The council's long-term blueprint for future growth.

Material Planning Consideration
A factor that planners can legally consider when deciding an application.
Examples include:
- traffic impacts
- design
- noise
- loss of privacy
- flood risk

In plain English: Things planners are allowed to consider when making decisions.



Plain English planning terminology sheet

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
The Government's planning policy for England.
In plain English: The national planning rulebook that councils must follow.

Neighbourhood Plan
A planning document prepared by local communities that forms part of the development plan once adopted.
In plain English: A community-created plan that helps shape local development.

Outline planning permission
Permission that establishes whether development is acceptable in principle, while leaving some details to be agreed later.
In plain English: Approval for the basic idea before final designs are submitted.

Planning condition
A requirement attached to a planning permission.
Examples:
- landscaping must be completed.
- construction hours are restricted.

In plain English: Rules a developer must follow if permission is granted.

Planning obligation (Section 106 Agreement)
A legal agreement requiring developers to provide contributions or improvements related to a development.
Examples:
- affordable housing
- open space
- highway improvements

In plain English: Developer contributions to help support the local community.

Reserved Matters
The detailed aspects of a development approved after outline permission.
Examples:
- appearance
- landscaping
- layout
- scale

In plain English: The finer details agreed after approval of the principle of development.

Sustainability Appraisal
An assessment of the social, environmental and economic effects of a plan.
In plain English: A check to see whether proposals are good for people, places and the environment.

Viability
Whether a development can be delivered financially.
In plain English: Whether the numbers stack up for a developer to build the scheme.

Windfall Site
A site that becomes available for development unexpectedly and was not specifically allocated in the Local Plan.
In plain English: An unplanned opportunity for development.

Five-Year Housing Land Supply
A measure of whether a council has enough deliverable housing sites to meet expected housing needs over the next five years.
In plain English: A test of whether enough land is available to build homes in the near future.



Plain English planning terminology sheet

Call for Sites
A process where landowners and developers suggest land that could be considered for future development.
In plain English: The council asks people to put forward sites that might be suitable for building on.

Site Allocation
Land identified in a Local Plan as suitable for a particular type of development.
In plain English: Land specifically chosen for future development.

Planning Inspectorate
The body that examines Local Plans and hears planning appeals.
In plain English: An independent organisation that checks planning decisions and plans.

Duty to Cooperate
A requirement for councils and certain public bodies to work together on planning matters that cross boundaries.
In plain English: Councils must talk to neighbouring authorities about shared issues.

Strategic Development
Large-scale development that has significant impacts beyond a single site or community.
In plain English: Major development that affects a wider area.

Net Zero Development
Development designed to minimise carbon emissions and support climate goals.
In plain English: Building designed to produce little or no overall carbon emissions.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
A requirement for development to leave nature in a measurably better state than before.
In plain English: New development must improve wildlife habitats overall.

Planning Term	Plain English Meaning
Allocation	Land earmarked for development
Consultation	Asking people for their views
Deliverable	Realistically capable of being built
Density	Number of homes in an area
Policy	A planning rule
Submission Plan	Draft plan submitted for examination
Stakeholder	Individual or organisation affected
Sustainability	Meeting today's needs without harming future generations
Urban Extension	New development added to the edge of a town
Viable	Financially achievable





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