

NEWSLETTER

April 2026

Planning and Politics



National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system:

This newsletter summarises key reforms across planning, infrastructure, water management, and development management, including the continued implementation of the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, the Water White Paper, and upcoming development reforms.



Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025

The Planning and Infrastructure Act received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025 and represents a major planning reform to support the delivery of 1.5 million homes and national infrastructure.

Key Elements of the Act

The Act is built around four main pillars:

- Streamline development decisions through new national infrastructure and planning provisions.
- Launch a developer-funded Nature Restoration Levy via Natural England to support environmental recovery.
- Update development corporation powers and compulsory land purchase processes to enable growth.
- Require Environmental Outcomes Reports to track development against specific environmental targets.

Infrastructure and NSIP Reforms

The Act overhauls the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) regime:

- National Policy Statements to be updated every five years.
- Streamlined pre-application processes.
- Removal of some legacy parliamentary procedures.
- Tightened judicial review for meritless cases.
- Option to bypass DCO regime where appropriate.

Local and Strategic Planning

- Mandatory Spatial Development Strategies for strategic authorities.
- Mandatory planning committee training.
- Local fee-setting within national cap.
- Expanded role for development corporations.
- Statutory extensions for legal delays.

Environment and Nature Recovery

- Central Nature Restoration Fund for mitigation.
- Environmental Delivery Plans for issues like nutrient neutrality.
- Reduced low-risk consultations for Natural England.
- Faster decisions for renewable energy projects.
- Mandate to ensure EV charging infrastructure is widely distributed.

Implementation Timeline

The rollout of the Act's provisions was phased, with several measures already underway:

- Legal challenge extensions: already in force.
- Committee training: imminent rollout.
- Biodiversity Net Gain (NSIPs): expected to be rolled out in May.
- Environmental Delivery Plans: expected summer rollout.



@KEWPlanning



info@kewplanning.co.uk



02921 690 034

National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system:

This newsletter summarises key reforms across planning, infrastructure, water management, and development management, including the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, the Water White Paper, and upcoming development reforms.

Water Infrastructure and Capacity White Paper

Published January 2026, the White Paper sets out long-term reforms to integrate water infrastructure planning. Its core objectives are as follows:

- Create a long-term integrated water planning system aligned with development needs.
- Improve accountability of water companies in infrastructure delivery.
- Align water infrastructure planning with housing and economic growth (“pipes and bricks together”).

Structural Reform

- Consolidation into two main frameworks for water supply and environmental management.
- Statutory duty for water companies to support plan-making.
- Single regulator replacing Ofwat, DWI, EA functions and parts of Natural England.

Infrastructure Coordination

- Water companies retain the ability to object to connections where capacity is constrained.
- A National Infrastructure Spatial Tool (NIST) will integrate water, energy, and environmental data to support joined-up planning.

Accelerating Delivery

- Expansion of Permitted Development Rights for minor water infrastructure works.
- Creation of the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) to standardise delivery and reduce costs.

Pre-Pipe and Nature-Based Solutions

- Shift toward upstream prevention over end-of-pipe treatment,
- Catchment-based measures to reduce agricultural runoff, especially in sensitive areas such as chalk streams.

Development Management Reforms

The final reforms focus on simplifying decision-making, increasing automation, and improving efficiency within the planning system.

Development Management Reforms

- Urban and brownfield development is “acceptable by default” if it meets national design and safety standards.
- Strong presumption in favour of development within 800m of rail and tram stations.
- Density expectations of 40–50 dwellings per hectare in accessible locations.

Delegation and Decision-Making

- Tier A (minor, householder, policy compliant medium schemes) determined by officers.
- Tier B (major/sensitive) only goes to committee via gateway test.

SME Support

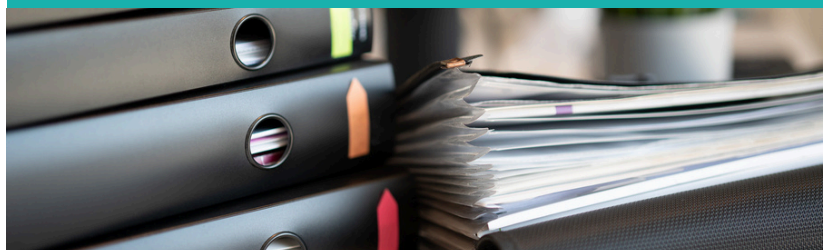
- “Medium Site” category (10–49 homes / up to 2.5 hectares).
- Creates a simpler, more proportionate route for SME developers.

Validation Reform

- National Necessity Test replaces local validation lists.
- Deemed validation after 10 working days if requirements met.

Digital Consultation Reform

- Digital notifications starting to replace site notices.
- AI to sort consultation responses into material/non-material issues.



The Planning World is Changing

WE ARE A DEDICATED PROFESSIONAL TOWN PLANNING PRACTICE



@KEWPlanning



info@kewplanning.co.uk



02921 690 034