



# SQUIRES PLANNING

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# **Changes to the planning system...**

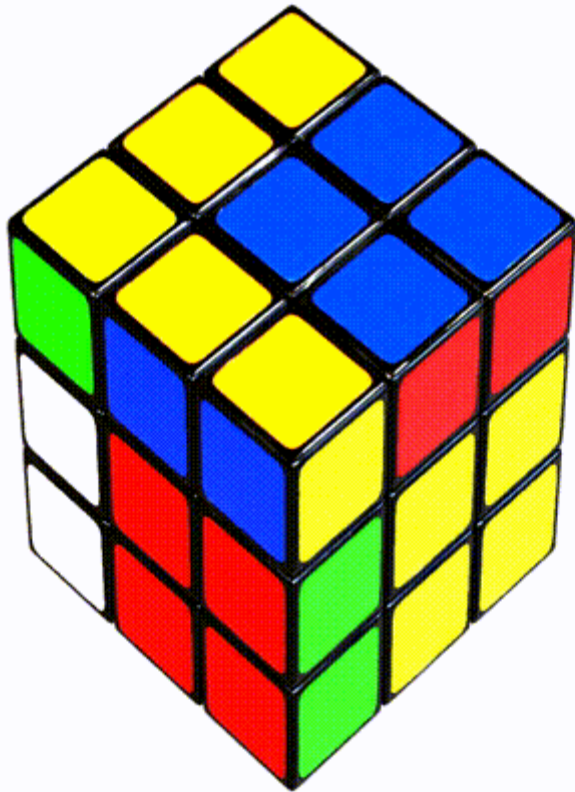
**1. Background**

**2. What happened in 2025**

**3. What's coming in 2026**

**4. Implications for Town/Parish Councils**

# Background



- The planning system is always changing because governments can reshape national policy quickly.
- Politicians have direct control of the system.
  - Conservative Localism
  - Labour Centralism / Regionalism
  - Reform ?????ism

# What happened in 2025 ?

- **Revised NPPF (12 December 2024)**
  - Introduced the grey belt concept and increased emphasis on Green Belt review, alongside a stronger push for higher housing targets.
- **Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025(18 December 2025)**
  - New legislation designed to speed up delivery of housing, infrastructure and related consents.
  - Includes enabling powers for a non-exhaustive list of reforms, including:
    - for planning committee reform and national scheme of delegation.
    - a new system of Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs) across England, intended to improve planning across council boundaries.
    - Nature Restoration Fund: a strategic 'pay-in' route intended to address impacts on protected sites and species. It is not intended to replace BNG.
    - provisions to give councils flexibility to set planning fees locally.
- **Consultation on revisions to NPPF (December 2025)**
- **Numerous other papers/proposals.....**

# What's coming in 2026 ?

- New NPPF
  - Planning Committees Reform
  - National Scheme of Delegation
  - Return of Regional Planning
  - Neighbourhood Plans
  - What else?
- 
- Implications for Town/Parish Councils

# New/Draft NPPF

- **New structure**, reads more like a Local Plan – we think a good thing. Clearer separation between plan-making and decision-making policies.
- Permanent presumption in favour of suitably located development.
- Strong emphasis and default yes to schemes by railway stations. Minimum housing densities (40 dph around stations, 50 dph around well-connected stations).
- Measures to support SME developers - a new “medium development” category. Further push for small sites to come forward. In local plans, at least 10% of the housing requirement on sites no larger than 1 ha, plus a further 10% on 1 to 2.5 ha sites
- Firm clarification that the planning system should not duplicate other legislative regimes.
- Changes to protected sites and landscapes, and heritage assets

**Consultation closes at 11:45pm on 10 March 2026**

# Planning Committees Reform

- **Compulsory Training**

- for committee members. National/ Local certification tbc.
- Training would likely cover National content (NPPF, statutory guidance, regulations), and Local content (your local plan and local context).
- If these regulations come in as envisaged, councillors would effectively need to be trained (and certified) before voting on planning decisions at committee.

- **Committee Size**

- Maximum of 11 Councillors on a planning committee. It has been suggested 8 to 11 is optimal.

**Powers created through Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 Part 2 Chapter 1 Section 53  
...but we are awaiting secondary legislation**

# National Scheme of Delegation

**Aim:** to reduce committee workloads, improve consistency across different local authorities, and speed up decisions on smaller, non-contentious developments.

Tier A (Mandatory Delegation)	Tier B (presumed delegated to officers*)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• householder applications</li><li>• minor commercial development</li><li>• Residential development of up to 9 units</li><li>• reserved matters</li><li>• non-material amendments</li><li>• discharge of conditions</li><li>• BNG plan approvals</li><li>• prior approvals</li><li>• lawful development certificates</li><li>• certificates of appropriate alternative development.</li></ul>	<p>Residential development of 10+ units expected to be in Tier B Anything not in Tier A</p> <p>A new gateway test is proposed. It only goes to committee if the <b>Chief Planner (or equivalent)</b> and the <b>Chair of Planning Committee both agree</b> it should, based on the gateway criteria. This is to be confirmed but it is likely to include an economic, social or environmental issue of significance to the local area.</p> <p>Other criteria likely to apply such as where the applicant is the local authority.</p>

**Powers created through Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 Part 2 Chapter 1 Section 54  
...but we are awaiting secondary legislation**

# Return of Regional Planning

- Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs) created by combined authorities, combined county authorities, upper-tier county councils and unitary authorities.
- SDS to cover
  - housing need
  - strategic infrastructure
  - economic growth
  - climate resilience
  - nature recovery,
- Sit above Local Plans (LP's need to be in general conformity with SDS)
- New broad policy structure
  - ↓ National Planning Policy Framework & National Development Management Policies
  - ↓ Spatial Development Strategies
  - ↓ Local Plan (incl. minerals and waste where relevant)
  - ↓ Neighbourhood Plan

## Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 Part 2 Chapter 2 Section 58

# Neighbourhood Plans

## PM5: Neighbourhood plans

1. Neighbourhood plans allow local communities to plan positively for their areas by identifying and addressing community priorities that can be met or supported through the planning system. They should do this by:
  - a. Allocating land to meet the development needs of their designated area, where it is appropriate to do so; and
  - b. Setting out policies which address particular local issues, these should relate to site-specific matters or, where appropriate, may cover wider issues such as the provision of infrastructure and community facilities, regeneration opportunities, design requirements (including design codes), local environmental improvements and the conservation of local heritage assets.
2. Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than provided for in other parts of the development plan for the area.

- They have survived when some thought Labour may seek to abolish them.
- Arguably a tighter scope than before.
- Greater emphasis on local issues, and not straying into “wider” issues.
  
- Current para 14 protection proposed to remain, Policy NPPF S6.
  - Plan less than five years old.
  - Allocates land to meet its identified housing requirement.

**Draft NPPF out to consultation. See** [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/697b71c52ff8d10a830d5d4a/Draft\\_NPPF\\_December\\_2025.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/697b71c52ff8d10a830d5d4a/Draft_NPPF_December_2025.pdf)

# What else?

- New PINS procedures from 1 April 2026 increase front-loading. For many appeals, evidence not before the LPA at determination will be much harder to introduce later
- Site thresholds reform
  - **Thresholds**
    - **Minor:** <10 homes (or <0.5 ha if units unknown)
    - **Medium (new):** 10 to 49 homes and <1 ha (or 0.5 to 1 ha if units unknown)
    - **Major (re-set):** 50+ homes or >1 ha
  - **What changes in practice**
    - **Lighter-touch requirements:** simplified BNG approach and reduced information / validation expectations.
    - **Process easements:** potential exemption from the Building Safety Levy, proportionate statutory consultee engagement, and broader use of Permission in Principle.
    - **Faster, simpler obligations:** standardised s106 templates for medium sites and a more consistent approach to contributions.

# Implications for Town/Parish Councils

- The **role of Neighbourhood Plans**. How will they fare in a more strategic first system?
- **More decisions by officers**. Potentially less political sway at determination phase, and less scope for visibly standing up for local people for/against proposals.
- Greater pressure for more housing from above. Densification and development in “sustainable” locations. Less scope to object in a meaningful way if local opinion is so inclined.
- Likely outcome is fewer schemes going to appeal.

***So where is this all going?***

# Implications for Town/Parish Councils

- Less power at the decision-making stage.
- Greater support for development.
- To have a voice, Town/Parish Councils need to be organised and act on what they have the power to do. This means:
  - Ensuring staff and Councillors are well trained.
  - Clear communication with local people to ensure the remit / scope of what can be done is known.
  - Acting on matters within their control. Such as preparing and then maintaining an effective and up to date Neighbourhood Plan – that is the real place of influence in the planning system.



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If you have any questions following this brief overview, please feel free to get in touch.