

# Planning Bulletin April 2026

This monthly note highlights some of the recent and forthcoming developments in the world of planning, from a heritage perspective. Please note that this is not necessarily a complete review of matters and is not intended to provide any legal advice on the issues raised. Unless otherwise stated, it does not comprise the formal position of Historic England on these matters.

## Contents

In this edition you will find:

### Government Updates

- [Legislation](#), including Royal Assent for the devolution bill, and data standard regulations.
- [Committees](#), including updates to marine and New Town inquiries.
- [Letters](#), including the Chief Planner's Newsletter.

### Policy Areas

- [Natural Environment](#), including government consultations on Biodiversity Net Gain.
- [Plan-Making](#), including guidance on local and neighbourhood plans.
- [Energy Planning](#), including government consultation on energy infrastructure.
- [New Towns](#), including publication of an inquiry report into creating communities.
- [Marine Planning](#), including inquiry proposals for marine spatial planning.
- [Digital Planning](#), including AI in decisions, and publication of data standards.
- [Other](#), including grants for places or worship, and guidance on appeals.

### Historic England Updates

- [Consultations](#), including spatial development strategy geographies.
- [Research](#), including Biodiversity Net Gain and the historic environment.
- [Useful links](#): links to Historic England resources.

### Other Information

- [Calendar](#): key upcoming dates.
- [Appendix I](#): a list of Historic England Planning Advice.

## Abbreviations

- DCMS: [Department for Culture, Media & Sport](#)
- DEFRA: [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#)
- DESNZ: [Department for Energy Security & Net Zero](#)
- MHCLG: [Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government](#)
- NSIPs: [Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects](#)

## Legislation and Matters Arising

### New Legislation

- Devolution: The [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026](#) became law on 29 April. A supplementary edition of Planning Bulletin will be issued in May, providing more information on the Act and its coverage from a heritage perspective.

### Regulations

- Data Standards in Plan making: on 16 April, the government laid [The Planning Data \(England\) Regulations 2026](#) establishing data standards for certain local plan information (commencing 7 May) (See [Digital Planning](#)).
- Referral to the Secretary to State: In March, the government laid regulations stating that local planning authorities must consult the Secretary of State if they are minded to refuse applications for 150 homes or more. In April, MHCLG issued the [Town and Country Planning \(Consultation\) \(England\) Direction 2026](#), which enables this referral procedurally, affecting applications which have not been determined before 11 May 2026. The [Determining a Planning Application section of the Planning Practice Guidance](#) was concurrently updated to reflect this change.

## Parliamentary Committees

- Marine Planning: The [Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee inquiry into Fisheries and the marine environment](#) has published a report ([‘Resetting the relationship with fishing communities’](#)), which includes recommendations to address conflicts in spatial planning for marine uses through publication of a Sea Use Framework.
- New Towns: In late March the [Built Environment Committee inquiry into New Towns](#) published a report as part of the second module in their New Towns inquiry ([‘New Towns: Creating Communities’](#)) focused on key issues including placemaking, design and local heritage (see [New Towns](#)).

## Government Planning Letters

- Chief Planner’s Newsletter: The [Chief Planner’s Newsletter \(27 March\)](#) includes reference to publication of Historic England’s guidance ‘Heritage Works for Creative Businesses’, as well as announcement of a new **Housing Design Quality Audit** assessing at the quality of homes built between 2019 and 2025.

## Natural Environment

- Biodiversity Net Gain: Defra has responded to two BNG consultation, taking forward:
  - [Implementing BNG requirements for NSIPs](#) in November 2026, with statutory instruments and biodiversity statements to be published in May.
  - A range of measures targeted at [BNG requirements for minor, medium and brownfield development](#), including an area-based exemption for sites of 0.2 hectares or below (except where priority habitats are present) as well as exemptions for development primarily focused on conserving or enhancing biodiversity and targeted development that enhances parks, playing fields and public gardens.
- Alongside this, DEFRA also launched a further [consultation on potential exemption from BNG requirements for some brownfield residential development](#). Submissions can be made until 10 June.
- Historic England has published a [research report into how the historic environment can improve Biodiversity Net Gain and nature recovery outcomes](#).

## Plan-Making

- Local Plan Guidance: MHCLG maintain a guidance collection entitled '[Create or update a local plan using the new system](#)'. In April, guidance was added for [publishing plan data](#) and [publishing housing requirement data](#) which support regulations that established data standards for local plans (see [digital planning](#)). Guidance was also published on [engaging the public in plan preparation](#) and [issuing a requirement to assist notice](#) as part of the new 30-month plan making system.
- Neighbourhood Plan Guidance: MHCLG has published a new guidance collection providing a [toolkit for neighbourhood planning](#). Pages include guidance on:
  - [How to create a plan](#)
  - [Writing plan policies](#)
  - [Assessing sites for development](#)
  - [Screening plans for Strategic Environmental Assessments](#)
  - [Preparing memoranda of understanding](#)
  - [Implementation, monitoring and review](#)

## Energy Planning

- **Electricity Infrastructure:** DESNZ has responded to a consultation into [electricity network infrastructure consents, land access and rights](#), stating they will take forward proposals including increasing the size of substations allowed under permitted development rights (proposal 7).

## New Towns

- **Creating Communities:** In late March the [Built Environment Committee](#) published a report as part of the second module in their ongoing inquiry into delivering New Towns ([‘New Towns: Creating Communities’](#)). Module one focused on delivery, this module focuses on ‘on human issues’ such as placemaking, design, and creating accessible age-friendly and safe environments.
- One of the key themes is the importance of enabling ‘people-centred, nature-rich and locally distinctive placemaking’. Local heritage is identified as a key part of this (paragraphs 59-66), with recommendations that ‘delivery bodies must seek to capture and leverage the local heritage in their placemaking principles (paragraph 65)’ and retain and refurbish existing structures where possible, to ‘imbue the new towns with an identity connected to a sense of place’ (paragraph 66).

## Marine Planning

- **Marine uses:** The [Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has an open inquiry into fisheries and the marine environment](#). In April, the committee published a report, [‘Resetting the relationship with fishing communities’](#). The report explores, amongst other topics, the ‘growing spatial conflict between fisheries, offshore energy, conservation and other marine uses’, and recommends addressing this through publication of a ‘Sea Use Framework’ (following publication of [the Land Use Framework](#) by Defra in March 2026).

## Digital Planning

- **AI in planning decisions:** the [March Chief Planner’s newsletter](#) reiterated that the government are working with Google Cloud to deliver an AI-planning tool for **householder applications** (to be scaled to other application types, such as listed building consent, in the future). Alpha testing began in April with two local authorities, with the intention to scale out to ten authorities before wider rollout.

## Historic England

- **Data Standards:** on 16 April, the government laid [The Planning Data \(England\) Regulations 2026](#). Commencing on 7 May, the regulations set a **data standard** against which authorities **must publish their local plan and mineral and waste plan timetables** as well as **housing requirements** at key stages in the plan making process. The regulations were accompanied by [statutory guidance on publishing plan data](#).

## Other

- **Places of Worship:** DCMS has published guidance following the end of [The Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme](#) and [The Memorial Grant Scheme](#), including identifying alternative sources of funding such as the [Places of Worship Renewal Fund](#). The House of Commons Library has also published a [research briefing on funding for places of worship](#).
- **Appeals:** the [appeals section of the Planning Practice Guidance](#) was updated to reflect the expansion of the Part 1 (expedited) written representations procedure. This commenced April 1, with most appeals now to be determined under this route and with limited opportunity to submit information beyond that within the initial application.

## Historic England Consultations

[Historic England responses to governmental consultations](#) can be found online. In April, responses included

- **Spatial Development Strategies:** [Historic England response to an MHCLG consultation into proposed geographies for Spatial Development Strategies](#).

## Historic England Research

- **Biodiversity Net Gain and the Historic Environment:** Historic England has published a [research report into how the historic environment can improve Biodiversity Net Gain and nature recovery outcomes](#).

## Useful Links

- Historic England Planning Advice: the list of [Historic England published planning advice](#) can be found online, and is summarised in [Appendix I](#).
- Planning research: Historic England commissions and undertakes research to understand how the planning system works in practice. A list of [published Historic England planning research](#) can be found online.
- Heritage Counts: Historic England maintains [Heritage Counts](#), a compendium of evidence and insights to support making the case for heritage.

## Calendar

### May

4 May – [consultation on requirements to consult the Secretary of State for refusals](#) closes

18 May – [consultation on a national planning fee schedule](#) closes

19 May – [consultation on the New Towns Draft programme](#) closes

19 May – [Culture, Media and Sport committee 'State of Play' call](#) closes

### June

10 June - [consultation on permitted development rights for onshore wind turbines](#) closes

10 June – [consultation on Biodiversity Net Gain – considering a targeted exemption for residential brownfield development](#) closes

## Planning Bulletin Notifications

If you did not receive this edition of Planning Bulletin directly from Historic England, you can sign up for notifications when a new edition is issued by emailing: [governmentadvice@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:governmentadvice@HistoricEngland.org.uk).

If you no longer wish to receive Planning Bulletin, or have received this in error, please email [governmentadvice@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:governmentadvice@HistoricEngland.org.uk) and we will remove you from the mailing list.

## Appendix I: Historic England Planning Advice

All [Historic England planning advice](#) is available on our website. Below is a list of all **Good Practice Advice notes (GPAs)** and **Historic England Advice Notes (HEANs)**. These are amended from time to time to reflect changes in legislation, policy, case law interpretation etc.

### Good Practice Advice Notes (GPAs)

The GPAs provide information on good practice, particularly looking at the principles of how national planning policy and guidance can be applied. They are the result of collaborative working with the heritage and property sectors in the [Historic Environment Forum](#), and have been prepared following public consultation:

- [GPA1: The Historic Environment in Local Plans \(March 2015\)](#)
- [GPA2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment \(March 2015\)](#)
- [GPA3: The Setting of Heritage Assets \(December 2017\)](#)
- [GPA4: Enabling Development and Heritage Assets \(June 2020\)](#)

### Historic England Advice Notes (HEANs)

The HEANs include detailed, practical advice on how to implement national planning policy and guidance. They have been prepared by Historic England following public consultation:

- [HEAN 1: Conservation Areas: Designation, Appraisal and Review \(Second Edition\) \(February 2019\)](#)
- [HEAN 2: Making Changes to Heritage Assets \(December 2025\)](#)
- [HEAN 3: The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans \(October 2015\)](#)
- [HEAN 4: Tall Buildings \(Second Edition\) \(March 2022\)](#)
- [HEAN 5: Setting up a Listed Building Heritage Partnership Agreement \(December 2025\)](#)
- [HEAN 6: Drawing up a Local Listed Building Consent Order \(November 2015\)](#)
- [HEAN 7: Local Heritage Listing \(Second edition\) \(January 2021\)](#)
- [HEAN 8: Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment \(December 2016\)](#)
- [HEAN 9: The Adaptive Reuse of Traditional Farm Buildings \(October 2017\)](#)
- [HEAN 10: Listed Buildings and Curtilage \(June 2025\)](#)



# Historic England

- [HEAN 11: Neighbourhood Planning and the Historic Environment \(Second Edition\) \(April 2022\)](#)
- [HEAN 12: Statements of Heritage Significance \(October 2019\)](#)
- [HEAN 13: Minerals Extraction and Archaeology \(January 2020\)](#)
- HEAN 14 has been superseded by HEAN 18 and has been withdrawn
- [HEAN 15: Commercial Renewable Energy Development and the Historic Environment \(February 2021\)](#)
- [HEAN 16: Listed Building Consent \(June 2021\)](#)
- [HEAN 17: Planning and Archaeology \(November 2022\)](#)
- [HEAN 18: Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency \(February 2026\)](#)