

# Planning Bulletin March 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.

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## Historic England Updates

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## **Abbreviations**

- DEFRA: [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#)
- DSIT: [Department for Science, Innovation & Technology](#)
- MHCLG: [Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](#)
- NSIP: [Nationally significant infrastructure project](#)
- PINS: [Planning Inspectorate](#)
- RICS: [Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors](#)

## Legislation and Matters Arising

This section provides a summary of updates to legislation in the last month. Further information on what emerging legislation covers can be found in [Appendix I](#).

- **Devolution:** The [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#) entered report stage in the House of Lords. Proposed amendments include **removing permitted development rights for demolishing Assets of Community Value** and **increasing the length assets stay on local registers from five to ten years** in support of Community Right to Buy, as well as **giving give Mayoral Combined Authorities a competency for culture**.
- In March, regulations were laid to:
  - **Plan-making:** Commence the new 30-month plan-making system (see [‘Plan-Making’](#)).
  - **Permitted Development:** Introduce Permitted Development Rights for ‘reverse vending machines’ (see [‘Permitted Development’](#)).
  - **Secretary of State referral:** [Enable the Secretary of State to direct local planning authorities to inform them when they intend to refuse applications for 150 homes or more](#) (in force 26 March).
  - **Development Corporations:** Enabling the Secretary of State to [make an Urban Development Corporation and New Town Development Corporation the local planning authority](#) (in force 14 April).

## Parliamentary Committees

This section summarises updates to parliamentary inquiries in the last month.

- **New inquiries** include the [Culture, Media and Sport Committee ‘State of Play’ inquiry](#), an open call for suggestions of topics for the committee to explore (closes 19 May).
- Updates to existing inquiries include:
  - **Protecting Built Heritage:** publication of a [follow-up letter from Baroness Twycross, Heritage Minister, to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee Inquiry into Protecting Built Heritage](#), including information on **financial incentives for reuse, heritage skills, and valuation for Assets of Community Value**.
  - **Coastal Erosion:** [Publication of an Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee report into coastal erosion](#), including recommendations on **the role of Shoreline Management Plans within Local Plans**.

## Government Research

- Design Codes: [MHCLG is seeking input from local authorities and applicants to build a longer-term evidence base for the impact of design codes](#) on the speed and quality of decision making, closing 10 April.

## Government Consultations

Government consultations launched in March include:

- Referral to the Secretary of State: [Consultation on proposed requirements for Local Planning Authorities to consult the Secretary of State when they are minded to refuse certain development](#), closing 4 May.
- Planning Fees: [Consultation on a national fee schedule for planning applications, and the principle of local fee setting](#), closing 18 May.
- New Towns: [Consultation on the New Towns draft programme, and its environmental implications](#), closing 19 May (see '[New Towns](#)').
- Permitted Development: [Consultation on proposed creation of permitted development rights for onshore wind turbines](#), closing 10 June (see '[Permitted Development](#)').
- Planning Committees: following consultation on reform to planning committees in 2025, the government has published [a consultation on draft regulations and guidance surrounding planning committees and a national scheme of delegation](#) (closes 23 April).

## Government Letters

- The regular [Chief Planner Newsletter was published on 5 March](#), making reference to revisions to Historic England Advice Note 18 Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency.

## Plan-Making

- The government has laid regulations commencing the new plan-making system (in force from **25 March**) outlined in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. The process is structured around **gateways**, requiring plans to be prepared within a **30-month timeframe**. Changes include:
  - **Scoping Consultation:** there is a preliminary stage prior to gateway 1 in which stakeholders, including Historic England, will be consulted to seek views on plan content and operation of future engagement.
  - **Requirements to Assist (RtA):** The RtA gives local planning authorities the power to require specific bodies, such as Historic England and other statutory consultees, to provide support during plan preparation.
  - **Supplementary Plans:** Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) will be replaced with Supplementary Plans, which are limited to setting specific design standards or addressing site-specific development. Independently examined, they will form part of the Development Plan.
  - **Duty to Cooperate (DtC):** The DtC has been abolished for both new and legacy system plans, with emphasis shifting to the new strategic tier of planning across boundaries provided by the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025.
- For more information, including **transitional periods for existing plans and supplementary planning documents**, the government has published a [New local plan-making system roadmap](#), guidance on [creating a plan timetable](#) and a [landing page for plans being prepared under the new system which signposts further guidance](#).

## Good Design

- [Historic England has published a response to the draft Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance](#) consultation. The [draft Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance](#) can be found online. Underlying changes include:
  - **Features of well-designed places:** Shifting from 10 characteristics of well-designed places to 7 features, introducing climate and liveability. ‘Context’ has been removed as a distinct consideration and weaved throughout as a golden thread underpinning all aspects of design.
  - **Design Frameworks:** A greater emphasis on the range of design tools, including masterplans, guides and codes, and how they can work in tandem with each other. Coding is focused on **three spatial levels** - type (authority-wide, e.g. small sites), area (e.g. areas of regeneration or growth), and site-specific codes.

## Historic England

- **Reuse and Retrofit:** Repeated references to the importance of reuse and adaptation, including heritage assets, and the role of coding in enabling improvements to the energy efficiency of existing buildings.
- Historic England welcomed these changes. In the response, however, recommendations included **ensuring the visibility of context was not lost** through integration across the document and expanding areas such as **planning for natural local stone supply**.

## New Towns

- MHCLG has launched an [open consultation on a draft New Towns Programme and its environmental implications](#). The consultation, closing 19 May, identifies seven proposed locations and invites views on how the programme can be delivered, draft policy, and the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) report.

## Infrastructure Planning

- **Reform timescales:** The [Streamlining Infrastructure Planning: implementation plan policy paper](#) outlines the timescales for implementing measures from the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025.
- **Fusion Energy:** The [A new energy revolution: the UK's plan for delivering fusion energy](#) policy paper outlines proposals for enabling fusion energy development, including designation of a Fusion National Policy Statement (EN-8) in 2027.

## Natural Environment

- **Strategic Policy Statements:** DEFRA has published [the Strategic Policy Statement for Natural England](#), outlining expectations as to how they should use discretion to ensure advice aligns with strategic priorities around nature recovery and economic growth.
- **Environmental Outcomes Reports:** The government has released a [roadmap outlining the implementation of Environmental Outcomes Reports](#) to replace Environmental Impact Assets and Strategic Environmental Assessments by the end of 2027.
- **Land Use Framework:** DEFRA has published the [Land Use Framework](#) setting a vision and principles for land use when balancing housing, infrastructure, energy, food and nature. Whilst not a material planning consideration, it will inform national decision-making (including national policy), as well as actions of individual landowners and managers.

## Digital Planning

- **Artificial Intelligence:** updates around AI in planning include:
  - MHCLG has launched a **new team**, [Local AI](#), focused on supporting local authorities use artificial intelligence responsibly.
  - DIST and MHCLG appointed a team to develop a [tool that enables ‘AI-augmented decision making for planning applications’](#).
  - [RICS published a professional standard for the responsible use of artificial intelligence in surveying practice](#) which has now come into effect.
- **PropTech Fund:** On 4 March applications opened for Round 6 of MHCLG’s [PropTech Innovation fund](#) focused on **scalable digital approaches to section 106 negotiations and aligning evidence and policies across plan-making boundaries and tiers** (closes 29 April).
- **Casework Management:** [Open Digital Planning](#), a community of local planning authorities guided by MHCLG, have released a [free and open walkthrough version of the Back Office Planning System \(BOPS\) casework management system](#).
- **Digital Planning Directory:** MHCLG and the [Digital Taskforce for Planning](#) have published an [impact report covering the first year of the Digital Planning Directory](#), a tool launched in 2025 to identify providers across a range of technologies and digital approaches. On 25 March, the [Directory also launched the first national list of training and education providers which includes Historic England training on heritage information and data as part of the Essentials series](#).

## Permitted Development

- **Onshore Wind Turbines:** the government has launched a [consultation on the introduction of permitted development rights for small-scale non-domestic wind turbines](#) closing 10 June. The proposal includes exemptions for a range of designated heritage assets and conditions around visual impacts on heritage sites and important landscapes.
- **Reverse Vending Machines:** [Regulations have been laid providing permitted development rights for ‘reverse vending machines’](#) (e.g. where consumers can return drinks containers) (In force 7 April) which cannot be withdrawn via Article 4 Direction. The right does not apply in Article 2(3) land, the curtilage of a listed building, or on a scheduled monument.

## Historic England Consultations

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

- **National Planning Policy Framework:** Historic England has submitted a response to the government's consultation on reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework. [A supplemental edition of Planning Bulletin was published earlier in March to provide more information on the Historic England response to the National Planning Policy framework draft.](#)
- **Design and placemaking:** Historic England has submitted a response to the government's consultation on the Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance (see ['Good Design'](#)).

## Historic England Advice

- **Heritage Works for Creative Businesses:** Historic England has published [Heritage Works for Creative Businesses](#), which aims to facilitate the reuse of historic buildings for cultural business. It makes the case for regeneration and provides a step-by-step guide to navigating the process. It follows the 2024 publication of [Heritage Works for Housing](#).
- **Accessing Protected Wreck Sites:** Historic England has published a new edition of the guidance notes for divers and archaeologists on [Accessing England's Protected Wreck Sites](#).

## Historic England Training

- **Design Codes:** The recording is now available for ['Design Codes in Action'](#), a Historic England webinar exploring recent developments in national design policy and lessons around coding for the historic environment from Historic England funded pilots.
- **Digital Planning:** Historic England has been added as a provider to the new [national list of training and education providers on the government's Digital Planning Directory](#) with content around the use of heritage information and data.

## Useful Links

- **Historic England Planning Advice:** the list of [Historic England published planning advice](#) can be found online, and is summarised in [Appendix II](#).
- **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

### April

10 April – [MHCLG research into the impact of design coding](#) closes

23 April – [consultation on planning committee regulations and guidance](#) closes

29 April – applications for the [MHCLG PropTech Innovation Fund Round 6](#) closes

### 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

## 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: Emerging Legislation

### English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill

The government states that the [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#) falls under three broad sections:

- **Devolution:** describing devolution structures, outlining and expanding powers for mayors and authorities through the new Devolution Framework and explaining routes to devolution for places that do not have it.
- **Local government:** ensuring the process for local government reorganisation supports the ambition in the [English Devolution White Paper](#), outlining changes to local authority governance, reforming accountability and introducing effective neighbourhood governance structures to amplify local voices.
- **Communities:** giving more power to local communities to purchase Assets of Community Value (ACV) and making reforms to commercial leases.
- More information can be found in the following:
  - [Explanatory notes to the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#).
  - [Guidance on the purpose of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#).
  - [Devolution Framework Explainers, setting out the statutory functions of Strategic Authorities](#).
  - [House of Commons Library Research briefing on the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#).
  - [House of Commons Library Research Briefing on Progress of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill \(20 November\)](#).

## Appendix II: 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 \(February 2026\)](#)