

Local Development Scheme Addendum

Local Plan Working Group 15 April 2025

Introduction

The Government consulted on reforms to the planning system as part of implementing the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. A response from the Government in relation to this consultation was released at the end of February 2025¹. As part of this, they have confirmed which proposals are being taken forward, not being taken forward and those which have been amended. The following Sections summarise each of these in turn².

Proposals being taken forward:

LOCAL PLAN TIMETABLE AND EXAMINATION

- 1. Local planning authorities (LPAs) should adopt their plan no later than 30 months after the plan preparation process begins.**
- 2. A six-month timeframe for local plan examination would be introduced.** This would be extended by a maximum of three months if a consultation is needed on proposed modifications to the plan.
- 3. LPAs would be required to revise their timetables “at set milestones and regular intervals”.** Authorities would also be required to revise timetables “at least” once every six months “if, upon reviewing it, the authority determines that it requires updating”.
- 4. The government would develop a “data standard for local plan timetables”.** This would “allow changes to be tracked and ensure that the position is always transparent”.

PLAN CONTENT

- 5. Guidance would set out further information on the “expectations of plan-makers”.** This would apply to the preparation and presentation of important plan “components”, such as the key diagram, spatial strategy or site allocations.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/plan-making-reforms-consultation-on-implementation/outcome/government-response-to-the-proposed-plan-making-reforms-consultation-on-implementation#introduction> (Published February 2025)

² Sourced from Planning Resource.

6. The reference to “beautiful places” would be replaced with “well designed places”. This would “more closely align” with revisions in December 2024’s National Planning Policy Framework.

7. The government would legislate to “require a vision to be included in plans”. Policy would set out “clear principles” on how authorities should prepare a vision, while guidance would incorporate a “flexible template” to support authorities with drafting visions. The requirement in regulations that visions are “supported by no more than ten measurable outcomes” would be strengthened. But guidance would make clear that “absolute conformity” with a vision is not essential to a sound plan.

8. A project initiation document (PID) should be prepared prior to the 30-month plan preparation period commencing. Through the PID, authorities would “define the scope of the plan”, “identify the time and resources needed to support its preparation” and “establish support” from elected members on the “main messages” in the plan.

9. New digital tools and approaches would be delivered “incrementally” to modernise the planning system. Guidance has already been published on how plan policies should be visualised through policies maps, for example.

EVIDENCE AND THE TESTS OF SOUNDNESS

10. Proposed changes would reduce the amount of evidence required to prepare a plan and defend it at examination. The changes would include clearer expectations for evidence preparation set out in national policy and guidance, plus increased standardisation of key evidence and data. The government is also exploring “freezing” certain types of evidence at particular stages of the process, to reduce “iteration and delay”.

GATEWAY ASSESSMENTS

11. Three mandatory “gateways assessments” involving inspectors would be introduced:

- i. At the beginning of the 30-month process, following work undertaken at the scoping stage.
- ii. Part-way through the plan preparation, between the two mandatory consultation windows.
- iii. Following the second mandatory consultation window when the planning authority intends to submit the plan for independent examination.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

12. Planning authorities should set out their overall approach to community engagement as part of their PID. Early engagement should inform the PID, but “in a way that does not create an undue burden for planning authorities”.

13. Planning authorities would be required to notify “relevant persons and/or bodies” and invite participation prior to commencement of the 30-month plan-making process. There would be no minimum or maximum timescale for this process, but the government wants it to begin before authorities give notice of their intention to commence plan-making.

14. Two mandatory consultation windows would be carried out as part of the 30-month plan-making process. The first would run for a minimum of six weeks and the second for a minimum of eight weeks, with secondary legislation used to identify the documents and information that authorities must publish for consultation during these windows. Guidance would set out a “strong preference” that comments be submitted in a digital or online format “by default”.

REQUIREMENT TO ASSIST

15. There would be a “requirement” for certain public bodies to “assist” local authorities with what the government calls “certain plan-making”. This would give plan-making authorities the power to legally require prescribed public bodies to provide assistance to develop or review plans. A revised list of bodies required to assist would be confirmed “in due course”.

MONITORING

16. Authorities would undertake annual monitoring of plans “against a nationally prescribed set of metrics”. The annual monitoring reports would also have to be published annually, by a fixed date.

17. There would be a more detailed four-yearly evaluation. This would act as a mechanism to “evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation” of local plan policies.

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANS

18. Supplementary plans would be prepared by LPAs to contain any subject matter in a local plan that is site-specific or related to two or more sites the authority considers to be “nearby” to each other. These plans would undergo formal consultation with communities and stakeholders, including statutory bodies and independent examination.

SAVING EXISTING PLANS AND PLANNING DOCUMENTS

19. Existing development plan documents and saved policies would “remain in force” until the LPA adopts a new-style plan.

Proposals that have been dropped:

20. Piloting community land auctions (CLAs). Under proposals introduced by the LURA, LPAs would have been able to partially base their land-allocation decisions on the option price of sites offered by developers. But the government considers CLAs to be “unworkable in practice” due to the “realities of the land market in England”, namely “small and substitutable land parcels with multiple landowners”.

21. Requirements for the first gateway to involve an “appointed assessor”. The change responds to concerns that the assessor-led gateways could conflict with plan-making timeframes. Instead, LPAs would be required to complete a “prescribed self-assessment form” to assess “readiness to start the plan-making process”. This would also represent “a reduction in cost compared to the original proposal” because there would be no fee paid to a third party.

22. Distinguishing between local plan “evidence submitted as ‘information only’ versus evidence submitted for the soundness test”. Making a “definitive definition” of “information only” would be “challenging” because the distinction would “vary depending on specific circumstances”.

23. Requiring LPAs to submit only supporting documents that are related to the soundness of the plan. The proposal was dropped due to “practical challenges” highlighted by consultation responses. Authorities would instead only submit the supporting documents they consider to be “relevant to the preparation of the plan”.

24. Requirements for LPAs to report on progress against plan-making activities in their local plan timetable through their annual monitoring reports. This was deemed “unnecessary” because local plan timetables would already be required to be kept up to date.

25. Identifying “frontrunner authorities” to support the phased rollout of the new system. Instead, the government said its “ambition” involves “achieving up-to-date universal plan coverage as soon as possible”.

Proposals that have been tweaked:

26. Prescribed public bodies would be under a “legal duty” to provide assistance where a plan-making authority notifies them that this is required. However, powers in the LURA do not currently include “bespoke compliance mechanisms” to meet the “requirements to assist”.

27. The regulations will “place a legal duty on planning authorities to adhere to the requirements” for monitoring obligations. But current provisions in the LURA do not impose consequences where LPAs fail to comply.

28. The “nationally prescribed set of metrics” used to undertake annual monitoring would be adjusted. This would include expanding housing metrics and introducing “more nuanced metrics on employment floorspace” to “ensure monitoring

activities are feasible, genuinely useful” and provide “a good understanding of how a local plan is performing”.

29. The first mandatory consultation window would run for a minimum of six weeks and the second for a minimum of eight weeks. This reverses the proposed eight-week first consultation window and second six-week window. The change seeks to ensure that LPAs have the “time and space to conduct meaningful engagement with communities and key stakeholders” before plans are submitted for examination.