



GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION:

REFORM OF PLANNING COMMITTEES TECHNICAL CONSULTATION

Planning Committee Date: 16 July 2025

Report to: Joint Development Management Committee

Report by:

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Ward/parishes affected: All

1. Executive summary

1.1 This report is to inform members of a Government Consultation Paper which seeks views on the reform of planning committees. The consultation seeks views on the implementation of three aspects of reform proposed to modernise planning committees, further to the introduction of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, focusing on the following:

- (i) A national scheme of delegation.
- (ii) The size and composition of planning committees.

(iii) Mandatory training for committee members.

1.2 Joint Development Management Committee (JDMC) approval is sought for the responses to a number of questions relating to the reform proposals, proposed by the consultation.

2. Recommendation

2.1 Officers recommend that the JDMC note the content of this report and authorise a formal response to be submitted on the basis of the suggested response contained in this report.

3. Background

3.1 The proposed changes aim to bring greater consistency, efficiency and professional rigour to the way planning committees operate. They follow the introduction of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, the government's 'delivery vehicle' for the 1.5 million new homes target during the 5-year parliamentary period, which is currently going through the House of Lords.

3.2 The key objectives of the consultation are to:

- (i) Improve efficiency and consistency in planning decisions.
- (ii) Focus committee resources on complex or contentious applications.
- (iii) Empower planning officers to handle routine decisions.
- (iv) Ensure committee members are well-trained and informed.

3.3 The consultation is open for 8 weeks from 28 May 2025 until 23 July 2025.

4. Summary of proposals

4.1 In summary, the measures proposed on which the Government are seeking views are as follows:

- National Scheme of Delegation

4.2 A national two-tier system is proposed, to reduce inconsistency across the country, categorising applications into two tiers:

Tier A: Applications that must always be delegated to officers. These include applications for planning permission for:

- Householder development.
- Minor residential development (up to 9 dwellings).
- Minor commercial development.
- Applications for reserved matters approvals.
- Applications for non-material amendments.
- Applications for the approval of conditions.
- Applications for approval of the BNG Plan.
- Applications for approval of prior approval (for permitted development rights).
- Applications for Lawful Development Certificates, and
- Applications for a Certificate of Appropriate Alternative Development.

Tier B: Applications that should be delegated to officers by default, unless the Chief Planning Officer and Committee Chair agree to refer them to committee based on a 'gateway test'. Tier B applications include:

- Applications for planning permission not covered by Tier A.
- Section 73 applications to vary conditions.
- Notwithstanding Tier A, applications involving the Local Planning Authority itself, councillors or officers; and
- Reviews of mineral planning conditions.

- Planning Committee Size and Composition

4.3 The technical consultation proposes regulating the size and composition of planning committees, with a maximum of 11 members to be specified in forthcoming regulations. It is anticipated that this will improve the efficiency of committee decision making and reduce associated administrative burdens.

4.4 Whilst the government will not mandate strategic development committees at this stage, it will encourage Local Planning Authorities, through future guidance, to adopt them where appropriate.

- Mandatory Training and Certification.

4.5 It is proposed that there is mandatory training for all planning committee members, with a requirement for a certification scheme which would either be administered nationally or locally. The government's preference is for a national scheme, to ensure impartiality and relieve pressure on local planning authorities. Members would be prohibited from taking part in committee decisions until properly trained. It is expected that the training would include both national and local planning content.

- 4.6 These proposals reflect recent research (including that conducted by the Planning Advisory Service) which has identified key concerns around a lack of consistent understanding among planning committee members, even after receiving training.
- Delegated Decision Making
- 4.7 Support for clearer local plans and national decision-making policies.
- 4.8 Proposals to tighten performance thresholds (including a proposed reduction in the appeal overturn threshold from 10% to 5%).

5. Questions and proposed responses to the Technical Consultation Document

5.1 Question 1: Do you agree with the principle of having a two-tier structure for the national scheme of delegation?

Yes. The principle of a two-tier structure for the national scheme of delegation is consistent with the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS) scheme of delegation for planning and related functions. However, this is subject to there being a 'call in' mechanism for Tier A applications.

GCSPS is a shared planning service comprising the local planning authorities of South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridge City Council. The Councils' have recently approved constitutional changes resulting in a single scheme of delegation for the three planning committees which GCSP serves. The single scheme of delegation is a model upon which a national scheme of delegation could be based.

5.2 Question 2: Do you agree the following application types should fall within Tier A?

Applications for planning permission for:

- **Householder development**
- **Minor commercial development**
- **Minor residential development**
- **Applications for reserved matter approvals**
- **Applications for non-material amendments to planning permissions**
- **Applications for the approval of conditions including Schedule 5 mineral planning conditions**
- **Applications for approval of the BNG Plan**

- **Applications for approval of prior approval (for permitted development rights)**
- **Applications for lawful development certificates**
- **Applications for a Certificate of Appropriate Alternative Development**

Yes. This is subject to the following:

1. Reserved Matters applications for larger sites (for example 100 or more residential units) excluded from Tier A.
2. A mechanism for call-in where material planning issues are identified by objectors.
3. A mechanism for officers to call-in an application where they feel it would benefit from public scrutiny.

5.3 Question 3: Do you think, further to the working paper on revising development thresholds, we should consider including some applications for medium residential development (10-50 dwellings) within Tier A? If so, what types of application?

No. 10 – 50 dwellings can have potentially significant material impacts, in the context of both village and urban environments. This type of application should not be considered within Tier A.

5.4 Question 4: Are there further types of application which should fall within Tier A?

Yes. To align with the GCSP single scheme of delegation for planning and related functions, the following application types should also be included within Tier A:

- Telecommunications.
- Advertisement consent.
- Permission in principle.
- Tree works S19 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

5.5 Question 5: Do you think there should be a mechanism to bring a Tier A application to committee in exceptional circumstances? If so, what would those circumstances be and how would the mechanism operate?

Yes. It is important that there is a mechanism to bring a Tier A application to committee in exceptional circumstances. This is to ensure that planning

continues to be seen as part of the democratic process, and to ensure residents and communities have the opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process. This also ensures that officers are not left exposed to make difficult contentious decisions, by ensuring that member accountability protects officers.

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS) is a shared planning service comprising the local planning authorities of South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) and Cambridge City Council (CCC). The Councils' have recently approved constitutional changes resulting in a single scheme of delegation for the three planning committees which GCSP serves. The single scheme of delegation is a model upon which a national scheme of delegation could be based.

As with the GCSP scheme of delegation for planning and related functions, the following circumstances should trigger a Tier A application to committee:

1. Where a local member or Parish / Town Council writes, or emails, a request for a particular Application to be considered by Planning Committee, sound material planning reasons are given for why this is considered necessary, and the request is accepted by the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development at Delegation Panel, after consultation with the Chair and / or Vice Chair of Planning Committee subject to: the request having been made within twenty-one days of the date of validation of the Application, or within fourteen days of receipt by the relevant Council of any subsequent significant amendment to the Application. Any call-in request must be accompanied by a written statement giving the relevant material planning considerations and why in the opinion of the Parish/ Town Council or Ward Member it is appropriate for the Application to be determined by the Planning Committee.
2. Where five or more Third-party Representations on material planning grounds to an Application¹ (that cannot be resolved by way of a condition(s)) are received and following consideration by the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development at Delegation Panel, having consulted with the Chair and / or Vice Chair of Planning Committee, the Application is decided to be referred to Planning Committee for its determination, subject to: the Third-party Representations having been made within twenty-one days of the date of validation of the Application, or within fourteen days of receipt by the relevant Council of any subsequent significant amendment to the Application;

3. Where five or more Third-party Representations on material grounds (that cannot be resolved by way of a condition(s)) to an Application related to the making of a tree preservation order are received which are contrary to the officer recommendation, subject to: the Third-party Representations having been made within twenty-one days of the date of validation of the Application, or within fourteen days of receipt by the Council of any subsequent significant amendment to the Application.
4. Where the applicant is an elected Member or an Officer of the relevant Council, or close relative or family member of either of such persons or where an Application is made on their behalf.
5. Where an Application is one which in the opinion of Officers' should be determined by the Planning Committee because of special planning policy considerations or the complexity of the application or it is of significant and / or of strategic importance

For context:

SCDC Planning Committee - In 2024 38 applications were referred to planning committee for determination. Of which 3 were special control applications (Tree Works), 12 were Tier A applications and 23 were tier B applications (1 was a s73 application).

CCC Planning Committee – In 2024 there were 87 planning applications referred to city committee for determination. Of which 6 were special control applications (Tree Works), 39 were Tier A applications and 42 were tier B applications.

5.6 Question 6: Do you think the gateway test which requires agreement between the chief planner and the chair of the planning committee is suitable? If not, what other mechanism would you suggest?

Yes. The principle of a gateway test is consistent with the 'delegation panel' approach within the GCSP scheme of delegation for planning and related functions. GCSPS is a shared planning service comprising the local planning authorities of South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridge City Council. The Councils' have recently approved constitutional changes resulting in a single scheme of delegation for the three planning committees which GCSP serves. The single scheme of delegation is a model upon which a national scheme of delegation could be based.

5.7 Question 7: Do you agree that the following types of application should fall within Tier B?

a) Applications for planning permission aside from:

- **Householder applications**
- **Minor commercial applications**
- **Minor residential development applications**

Yes. These types of applications should be determined under delegation authority and not referred to planning committee for determination. This would align with the GSCPS scheme of delegation for planning.

However, the following should also be included in the exemption list:

- Applications for reserved matter approvals for larger sites (for example 100 or more residential units).
- Applications for non-material amendments to planning permissions.
- Applications for a Certificate of Appropriate Alternative Development.
- Telecommunications.
- Advertisement consent.
- Permission in principle.
- S19 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

b) notwithstanding a), any application for planning permission where the applicant is the local authority, a councillor or officer

Agreed. This would align with the GSCPS scheme of delegation for planning.

c) applications for s73 applications to vary conditions/s73B applications to vary permissions

Not agreed. A s73 application for a minor residential scheme, which would not have been a committee decision for example, should not be included in Tier B and therefore would suggest S73 applications for larger sites (for example 10 or more residential units) IF the original application was determined by committee.

5.8 Question 8: Are there further types of application which should fall within Tier B?

Yes. Reserved Matters applications for larger sites (for example 100 or more residential units) should be included in Tier B.

5.9 Question 9: Do you consider that special control applications should be included in:

- **Tier A or**
- **Tier B?**

The principle of including special control applications within Tier A is consistent with the GCSP scheme of delegation for planning and related functions.

To fully align with the GCSP single scheme of delegation for planning and related functions, the following application types should also be included within Tier A:

- Advertisement consent
- Tree works
- S19 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

5.10 **Question 10: Do you think that all section 106 decisions should follow the treatment of the associated planning applications? For section 106 decisions not linked to a planning application should they be in Tier A or Tier B, or treated in some other way?**

Yes. The determination of the requirements of planning obligations contained within a section 106 legal agreement should follow the treatment of the associated planning application. If there is delegated authority for a planning application, then the requirement of the s106 should also be delegated. Likewise, for those applications referred to planning committee, then the s106 should also be determined by committee.

5.11 **Question 11: Do you think that enforcement decisions should be in Tier A or Tier B, or treated in some other way?**

Tier A. This is in accordance with the approach within the GCSP scheme of delegation for planning and related function. This delegates the investigation and discharge of all enforcement functions and capabilities contained within the Town and Country Planning Act, Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act and The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 Act and The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 to the Director of Planning.

5.12 **Question 12: Do you agree that the regulations should set a maximum for planning committees of 11 members?**

No. Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCPS) serves three planning committees, including a joint committee. From experience, an even number of members, and a maximum of 12, is supported.

Having political representation from as many groups as possible is important to ensure that the planning process remains consistent across changes of control. It is no longer appropriate to assume that there will only be two large parties on a Council, and as such an option is needed to that political balance is maintained and all groups are represented –

otherwise planning could end up being politicised by those groups not on the committee.

5.13 **Question 13: If you do not agree, what if any alternative size restrictions should be placed on committees?**

An even number and a maximum of 12 members.

5.14 **Question 14: Do you think the regulations should additionally set a minimum size requirement**

Yes. GCSP serves three planning committees, including a joint committee. From experience of our joint planning committee, the quorum of the meeting of six works well. This allows knowledge and experience of the planning committee to be built up and maintained.

A minimum size requirement of six would also allow for cross part representation of at least 3 parties (ruling, larger opposition, smaller opposition) thus ensuring that planning includes all groups and remains non-political.

5.15 **Question 15: Do you agree that certification of planning committee members, and of other relevant decision makers, should be administered at a national level?**

Yes. Training and certification of planning committee members is supported in principle at a national level, and with a national set training syllabus.

However, this is subject to:

1. There being a reliable and accountable process for managing certifications at a national level.
2. The ability for local areas to provide their own mandatory locality specific training.

In order to avoid excluding those planning committee members who work, the national training should be available on more than one date – for example offered online at various times.

5.16 **Question 16: Do you think we should consider reviewing the thresholds for quality of decision making in the performance regime to ensure the highest standards of decision making are maintained?**

No. Unconvinced that a review of planning committees and delegated officer decision making would contribute to better decision making. The consequences of missing targets may lead to quicker decisions which do not deliver the outcomes which communities want.

Consideration should be given to alternative ways by which high quality decision making can be measured, rather than relying on indicators of total decision over-turns at appeal and speed of decision making.

5.17 **Question 17: For quality of decision making the current threshold is 10% for major and non-major applications. We are proposing that in the future the threshold could be lowered to 5% for both. Do you agree?**

No, do not agree to a proposed threshold of 5% for both major and non-major development. Targets do not reflect good decision making. At present a poor performing authority, in respect of the quality of decision making, is one that has 10% or more of either its major or non-major decisions overturned at appeal. Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service, representing the local planning authorities of Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils, is supportive of this change for non-major applications, but does not support the proposed change for major decisions.

Planning decisions for major applications require balancing a complex range of often competing issues and it is not considered that local planning authorities should be penalised for taking a different view on a matter (to an Inspector on appeal) as long as it is within the realms of reasonableness. The threshold for the quality of major decision making should therefore remain at 10%.

The LPA determines far fewer applications for major development compared to total applications received overall, and therefore if the Council loses a very small number of appeals it would be at risk of designation. The LPA has worked hard to improve its quality of decision making to avoid the risk of designation.

A smaller number of major applications are received each year, therefore a fewer number of decisions would need to be overturned at appeal to reach the proposed new threshold. At Greater Cambridge, the figure is currently 5.65% for South Cambridgeshire (6 appeals being allowed out of 114 refusals) and 3.23% for Cambridge City (1 appeal being allowed out of 63 refusals).

Given the number of non-major applications received each year, a significant number would need to be overturned at appeal to reach the 5% threshold. At Greater Cambridge, the figure is currently 1.06% for south Cambridgeshire and 0.67% for Cambridge City.

At South Cambridgeshire 1.06% is based on 32 appeals being allowed from the 2472 refusal decisions made in the 2 year period ending in June 2025.

At Cambridge City 0.67% is based on 11 appeals being allowed from the 1698 refusal decisions made in the 2 year period ending in June 2025.

- 5.18 **Question 18: Do you have any views on the implications of the proposals in this consultation for you, or the group or business you represent, and on anyone with a relevant protected characteristic? If so, please explain who, which groups, including those with protected characteristics, or which businesses may be impacted and how.**

Yes. Information must be publicly available both online but also in hard copy format.

With regard to national member training, this must be available at least twice per year in the day and evening to allow all members to attend around work or care commitments.

It will be important to ensure the ability for any planning application to be called into committee, to ensure transparent and open debate for all.

- 5.19 **Question 19: Is there anything that could be done to mitigate any impact identified?**

Yes. It will be important to ensure that the ability for any planning application in to be called into committee, to ensure transparent and open debate for all

- 5.20 **Question 20: Do you have any views on the implications of these proposals for the considerations of the 5 environmental principles identified in the Environment Act 2021?**

Yes. If Tier A has no call in rights, and reserved matters applications are not included as call-ins, this will be to the detriment of these environmental principles.

Local residents and ward members are often best placed to highlight damage to local environmental assets, and call ins give Applicants an incentive to be more aspirational. If no Tier A or REM can be called in, this is likely to lead to a reduction in standards and a bare minimum compliance approach to protections and remediation.

6. Implications

Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no additional financial implications arising from this report.

Staffing Implications

- 6.2 There are direct staffing implications arising from this report. Officers from across the Shared Planning Service are involved with work arising with responding to government consultations. This resource has been considered in the programming of other work across the Shared Planning Service and is monitored on a regular basis.

Equality and Poverty Implications

- 6.3 None.

Environmental Implications

- 6.4 None.

Procurement Implications

- 6.5 None.

Community Safety Implications

- 6.6 None.

Consultation and Communication Considerations

- 6.7 All members of the three planning committees served by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service were notified in respect of this technical consultation and invited to provide comment which would be incorporated into this response. 5 responses were received.

7. Background Papers

The web link to the consultation document is as follows:

[Reform of planning committees: technical consultation - GOV.UK](#)

8. Inspection of Papers

If you have a query on the report please contact Rebecca Smith or Philippa Kelly:

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