



Planning Development Management  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Floor 3  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

20 February 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Planning Reform Working Paper: Modernising Planning Committees**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed models for a national scheme of delegation.

We understand and support the Government's desire to facilitate better decision making in the planning system but on this particular issue, we believe there is a strong case to allow national park authorities to continue with bespoke delegation arrangements that reflect the special circumstances that apply in each of our national parks.

Members of the New Forest National Park Authority's (NFNPA) Planning Committee discussed the proposals at their meeting on 21 January 2025 and agreed this response.

### **Background**

Very few planning applications are reported to our Planning Committee, the committee will typically consider two to three planning applications each month. Our levels of delegation have been consistently high, the latest available set of figures show that 94% of decisions were made by officers.

Planning applications are only usually referred to our Planning Committee in circumstances where the local parish or town council has a contrary view to the planning officer and is not content for the application to be determined under delegated powers. Members also have the option to 'call in' an application to the Committee but that is an extremely rare event.

**New Forest National Park Authority**  
Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington, Hampshire SO41 9ZG  
**Telephone** 01590 646659 **Fax** 01590 646666 **Email** [steve.avery@newforestnpa.gov.uk](mailto:steve.avery@newforestnpa.gov.uk)  
**[www.newforestnpa.gov.uk](http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk)**

CHAIRMAN DAVID BENCE CHIEF EXECUTIVE ALISON BARNES

We routinely meet and often exceed government targets for the time taken to determine applications and our approval rate is consistently high, currently standing at around 93%.

### **Applying the proposed national scheme of delegation to the NFNPA**

Applying any of the three options set out in the working paper would mean that we would probably only convene one or two Planning Committees a year (this is because much of our caseload is made up of householder applications). With so few committee meetings it would be a challenge to keep Planning Committee members 'match fit' and engaged in the development management process.

Above all, we fear that a nationally imposed delegation scheme would be seen locally as highly undemocratic (in a national park context) and quickly alienate our local communities. This is because:

- Members of the NFNPA and its Planning Committee are not directly elected. Members are appointed by the constituent local authorities and the Secretary of State (which includes four parish council appointed members). In the very early days of the NFNPA we were often perceived as a Defra sponsored 'quango' that had taken planning powers away from the democratically elected district and borough councils.
- Our current scheme of delegation is alive to this sensitivity and empowers parish and town councils to effectively have a 'veto' on officer delegated powers. Thanks to a lot of time invested in training and supporting parish and town councils, the 'veto' is rarely exercised. But if taken away it would likely cause much more trouble than it's worth and risks driving a wedge between the NFNPA and its local communities. Our bespoke scheme of delegation is an important 'pressure valve' and valued safeguard in managing development pressures in a protected landscape.

National parks are not areas of high growth or where Government is looking to deliver significant levels of new housing. With this in mind and taking account of the unique make up of our Planning Committee, we believe an exception can be made for national parks and that they should be exempt from any national scheme of delegation.

### **Dedicated committees for strategic development and training for committee members**

We support these proposals, especially as we already provide training for committee members.

I hope these comments are helpful but please do let me know if I can assist with any further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Steve Avery', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Steve Avery**  
**Executive Director**