

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING – 21 APRIL 2026

GOVERNMENT CONSULTATIONS ON PLANNING COMMITTEES & THE NATIONAL SCHEME OF DELEGATION; AND PLANNING APPLICATION FEES

Report by: David Illsley, Interim Head of Planning & Place

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- (a) Endorse the response set out in the box after paragraph 2.6 of this report as the Authority’s consultation response to the Government’s proposed reforms to Planning Committees; and delegate authority to the Interim Head of Planning & Place to submit by the deadline of 23 April 2026; and**
- (b) Endorse the responses set out in the boxes after paragraphs 3.7, 3.10 and 3.12 as the Authority’s consultation response to the Government’s proposed reforms to planning application fees; and delegate authority to the Interim Head of Planning & Place to submit by the deadline of 18 May 2026.**

1. Introduction

1.1 In late March 2026 the Government launch public consultations on: (a) Planning Committees and the national scheme of delegation; and (b) fees for planning applications. This report summarises the main elements of the consultations; the implications for the delivery of the New Forest National Park Authority’s statutory planning functions; and the Authority’s recommended consultation response.

2. Consultation on Planning Committee Reform

2.1 The Government is seeking to modernise the way Planning Committees operate in England through the Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025. It is important to emphasise that this is enabling legislation requiring detailed provisions to be set out in subsequent regulations. On 26 March 2026 the Government published a consultation on the draft regulations and guidance setting out the details of the national scheme of delegation and the proposed cap on members sitting on planning committees. The consultation runs for 4 weeks to 23 April 2026 and further details are available at [Planning committee reform: statutory consultation on draft Regulations and guidance - GOV.UK](#).

2.2 The main elements of the consultation are (a) greater delegation to planning officers for decisions; and (b) amendments to the size and composition of local authority planning committees. The consultation recognises the importance of planning committees as a fundamental part of local democratic accountability. However, the Government has also highlighted the significant variation in how committees currently operate across England, which they believe can create inconsistency, delay, and inefficiencies.

2.3 In May 2025 the Government consulted on proposed reforms to planning committees and the National Park Authority's consultation response was endorsed by members through report **PC 492/25**. The Authority's response was as follows:

'The proposed exemptions for national park authorities to both the national scheme of delegation and the prescribed size of planning committees are supported. The consultation rightly recognises National Parks as areas with different membership models and committee structures; and also a different profile of planning applications. The imposition of national thresholds for delegation within National Parks would mean that very few developments were considered at Committee. Given the level of protection afforded to National Parks through national policy and primary legislation, it is appropriate that national park authorities can continue to set their own local scheme of delegation.'

2.4 The draft regulations and accompanying draft guidance have now been published and the Government proposes to introduce the national scheme of delegation and restrictions on the size of planning committees by the end of September 2026. Under the proposals the following criteria would apply:

- All householder development, minor commercial development and minor residential development (up to 9 dwellings) must be delegated to planning officers in all cases (rather than being considered at committee).
- An overriding presumption that applications for listed building consent will also be delegated to planning officers.
- The number of members on a planning committee or sub-committee should be no more than 13. This is a maximum figure to accommodate local planning authorities where members are from multiple political parties.

2.5 Section 319ZZC of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 gives the Secretary of State the power to set out which functions of a local planning authority should delegate to planning officers and which should instead go to a planning committee. Importantly for the work of the New Forest National Park Authority, the draft regulations – [The Town and Country Planning \(Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#) – and accompanying draft guidance confirm, "Sections 319ZZC – 319ZZE of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 apply to all local planning authorities except development corporations, Homes and Communities Agency, National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority. They also apply to mineral planning authorities where they exist (excluding those which are National Park Authorities)." (our emphasis).

2.6 Consequently the Government's proposed National Scheme of Delegation – which would mean that all householder applications and all minor residential developments of up to 9 dwellings would automatically be delegated to officers - and the proposed restriction on the size of Planning Committees to a maximum of 13 members will not apply to the New Forest National Park Authority (or the other English national park authorities and the Broads Authority). This position is in line with the Authority's previous consultation response, endorsed by the Planning Committee in July 2025 through report PC 492/25, and is therefore welcomed. As this is still a draft proposal, it is recommended that the Authority explicitly supports this exemption for national park authorities in our consultation response.

NFNPA recommended response to the proposed Planning Committee Reform

Q1: The New Forest National Park Authority supports the position in the draft Regulations and accompanying guidance that the National Scheme of Delegation does not apply to national park authorities due to the structure of their committees and the types of applications they deal with. The proposed thresholds under which proposals would automatically be delegated to planning officers would mean that national park authority planning committees would consider very few applications. Even small-scale development can have a cumulative impact on the character of national parks and we welcome the fact that national park authorities are not due to be covered by the national scheme of delegation.

Similarly, we support the position that national park authorities will not be covered by the limit on the size of planning committees. The membership of national park authorities is unique among planning authorities in England in that it comprises members elected by local town & parish councils; members appointed by the constituent local authorities (district, borough, city, unitary and county); and 'national' members appointed by the Secretary of State due to their knowledge and expertise. Placing a specific limit on the size of national park authority planning committees could risk losing this local and national balance.

We call for the final version of the guidance and regulations to make it explicitly clear that national park authorities are not included within the National Scheme of Delegation or the provisions on the size of planning committees. Currently this clarification is provided in the [Planning Committees and the National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions: Draft guidance for Local Planning Authorities in England - GOV.UK](#) and could be made clearer in the Regulations themselves.

3. Local Authority Planning Fees

3.1 This Government consultation – see [Fees for planning applications - GOV.UK](#) - seeks views on proposals to establish a new National Default Fee Schedule for planning applications; and on the principles of local fee setting. The consultation runs to 18 May 2026 and key proposals on which views are sought include:

- The establishment of a new national default fee schedule, based on 90% of estimated costs, to bring planning fees to a level closer to cost recovery and act as a baseline from which a new local fee setting model will operate;
- The introduction of new fees and restructure existing fee categories in order to reduce complexity for users;
- The establishment of the key principles behind local fee setting, as well as seeking views on the potential to implement a cap on locally set fees; and
- A review of the future role of discretionary services such as Planning Performance Agreements and pre-application advice in light of proposed increases to default fees and the introduction of the local variation model.

3.2 Planning application fees are currently set nationally in England by central Government to help local planning authorities meet the costs of determining applications. These national fees are increased annually in line with inflation, with

the most recent increase occurring on 1 April 2026. However, even with this adjustment and earlier uplifts there remains a substantial gap between planning application fee income and service costs. In 2024/25, the annual shortfall across England was estimated to be around £330 million. The planning application fees received by the New Forest National Park Authority do not get close to covering the costs of assessing applications, which can be particularly complex within a nationally protected landscape with such a high proportion of designated sites.

- 3.3 The Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025 introduced new powers for local fee setting which enable local planning authorities (including national park authorities) to set their own planning application fees through a local variation model. Under this approach, a national default fee will remain in place and apply to all local planning authorities, unless an authority chooses to vary from the default fee for any or all application fee categories to reflect their own costs recovery needs.
- 3.4 The Government's Chief Planner has stated, "...flexibility will allow local planning authorities to secure the funding necessary to strengthen their capacity, invest in skilled staff, and deliver a more efficient, high-quality planning service. It will create a system that supports efficiency and innovation, helping local planning authorities to reduce costs over time."¹
- 3.5 The consultation emphasises that local fee-setting is not about increasing fees without change. The Government's objective is to create a system that supports efficiency, helping planning authorities to reduce costs over time. Authorities will be expected to provide a faster and more reliable local planning service and the performance of authorities will be scrutinised more closely to ensure that all planning applications are determined quickly and to the required standard.
- 3.6 The Government is proposing a new National Default Fee Schedule which would increase all current planning fees to 90% of the estimated full cost of processing each application type. The proposed increases vary according to the current shortfall for each application type. The national default fee would continue to be uplifted annually in line with inflation to maintain its real value over time. The Government are not proposing to introduce national fees for applications for listed building consent or works to protected trees. These special control consents have historically been exempt from fees in order to encourage owners to engage proactively with local planning authorities, reduce the risk of unauthorised works to listed buildings or protected trees, and recognise that the conservation of historic buildings and the natural environment is a public good.
- 3.7 The consultation states, "...setting the national default fee at 90% of the full estimated cost provides a strong contribution towards the actual costs that local planning authorities face when determining applications and will provide an immediate boost to resourcing. This approach should mean that many authorities will be able to adequately meet their costs through the new national default fee rates."

¹ [Planning update newsletter \(27 March 2026\)](#)

NFPA recommended response on the proposed National Default Fee Schedule

Q1: In principle, the New Forest National Park Authority supports the proposed new National Default Fee Schedule, which would ensure the planning application fee better reflects the actual costs and resources required for local planning authorities to determine applications. The current nationally-set fees fall significantly short and the move closer to full costs recovery (90%) is welcomed.

Q10: The New Forest National Park Authority considers that a national fee for applications to discharge planning conditions should be set; and this should be charged per condition that is to be discharged, rather than per application for the discharge of conditions. A per-condition approach offers a more realistic reflection of the work involved for local planning authorities.

Q13: The National Park Authority also agrees that a flat national fee should be introduced for all existing Prior Approval applications that are currently free of charge. Through reforms to national planning, successive governments have increased the amount of development that comes forwards through the Prior Approval route and these proposals require a significant level of officer resource to process. A fee for all Prior Approvals would help resource planning authorities.

Local Fee Setting

- 3.8 While a national default fee, set at a level that recovers around 90% of estimated costs, represents a major improvement in resourcing for local planning authorities, the Government recognise that some local planning authorities may wish to go further. The new powers introduced in the Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025 allow planning authorities to set their own fees locally to meet their actual costs.
- 3.9 The consultation sets out several key principles that must be followed in local fee setting, which include (but are not limited to):
- Public consultation and notification requirements: Before setting their own planning fees, planning authorities will be expected to undertake a public consultation. Authorities must provide public notification at least 28 days before any new or adjusted fees, including annual inflation uplift, take effect.
 - Publishing local fee schedules and evidence: To ensure transparency for all users, planning authorities must publish a clear “local fee schedule” identifying which fees follow the national default fee and which have been locally varied. Authorities must also publish the evidence base used to justify any locally-set fees, demonstrating how the charge reflects the actual cost of the service.
 - Fees should reflect average cost estimates and not exceed cost recovery: Authorities should ensure that any locally-set fees are based on the average cost of determining the application type. Fees cannot be set above cost recovery for that category.

- It is a legal requirement that planning fee income must be ringfenced for the delivery of the statutory planning decision-making function. Planning fees must not fund wider planning services. Planning fees must not exceed cost recovery in order to fund other planning functions such as plan-making, enforcement, or Section 106 monitoring.

- 3.10 While the Government has not prescribed requirements for how any local fees should be calculated, it is recommended that planning authorities have regard to: (a) the salaries and associated costs for planning officers and administrative officers directly involved in processing and determining planning applications; (b) in-house specialist advice costs, including technical specialists in planning policy, design, building conservation and ecology; (c) external specialist advice (including expertise not available in-house on highways, flooding and environmental health for example); (d) indirect costs, such as IT systems and office accommodation; (e) legal costs; and (f) activity-based costs, such as validation, consultation and publicity, site visits and Planning Committee presentation.

NFNP recommended response on local planning application fee setting

Q18: The New Forest National Park Authority supports the principle of local planning authorities - including national park authorities – being enabled to set local application fees. This reflects the fact that the determination of planning applications engages different issues across the country, including in areas like the New Forest National Park where even small-scale householder applications often engage natural and built environmental considerations and where there is a strong emphasis on high quality design. The need for evidenced justification and consultation before local application fees are introduced is acknowledged and the list of factors to be considered in local fee set out in the Government’s consultation is considered reasonable. The National Park Authority also supports the fact that local planning fee income must be ringfenced for the statutory decision-making planning function. There is an expectation from applicants that the fee will be used to deliver the planning function within the Government’s performance standards and this ringfencing would help to secure this.

Planning Performance Agreement and local discretionary charging

- 3.11 Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) are designed to enable proactive and collaborative engagement between planning authorities and applicants on particularly complex planning proposals. They are useful where specialist resources are required and timescales beyond statutory determination periods are required. Through a PPA, applicants can agree a bespoke timetable and service level in return for an additional fee and they are used by many planning authorities across the country for large scale and technically complex applications.
- 3.12 With the planned introduction of a new National Default Fee Schedule and powers for planning authorities to set their own local fees, the Government believes it is an appropriate time to consider the role of PPAs in delivering and resourcing planning services. The Government’s intention is that planning fees, rather than PPAs, should be the primary mechanism for resourcing planning services.

NFNPA recommended response on Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs)

Q20: The New Forest National Park Authority's position is that Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) can continue to play a valuable role for larger and more complex schemes where bespoke arrangements are needed. An example would be Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, where local planning authorities do not receive a planning application fee (as they are not the determining planning authority), but are still required to positively engage in major proposals over a prolonged period of time. This requires significant resources and specialist technical input and the reforms to application fees should still enable planning authorities and applicants to enter into PPAs where appropriate.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1 The Government continues to reform the planning system through the enabling legislation of the Planning & Infrastructure Act 2025. The proposed reforms to planning committees through both the range of applications committees determine and the size of the committees follow on from the consultation held in Summer 2025. Importantly, national park authorities are not due to be covered by either of these measures and it is recommended that the New Forest National Park Authority supports this, which is consistent with our position expressed last year.
- 4.2 The principles set out in the Government's National Default Fee Schedule for planning applications are welcomed. Current fees – even with the incremental annual increase – fall far below the costs of processing, consulting on, assessing and ultimately determining a planning application. The national scheme would enable planning authorities to be better resourced, which is a goal local planning authorities and applicants alike share. The provisions that enable local fee setting where fully evidenced and consulted on are supported and it is recognised that the Government will continue to monitor the performance of planning authorities in relation to both speed and quality of decision making.

Recommendations

It is recommended that members:

- (a) **Endorse the response set out in the box after paragraph 2.6 of this report as the Authority's consultation response to the Government's proposed reforms to Planning Committees; and delegate authority to the Interim Head of Planning & Place to submit by the deadline of 23 April 2026; and**
- (b) **Endorse the responses set out in the boxes after paragraphs 3.7, 3.10 and 3.12 as the National Park Authority's consultation response to the Government's proposed reforms to planning application fees; and delegate authority to the Interim Head of Planning & Place to submit by the deadline of 18 May 2026**

Related Reports: PC 492/25: National Planning Consultations – Proposed NFNPA Responses

Equality and Diversity Implications:

The Government has undertaken an impact assessment through the passage of the parent Act which can be found online: [Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 publications - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](#).

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