

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK: PROPOSED REFORMS AND OTHER CHANGES TO THE PLANNING SYSTEM

Head of Service:	Ian Mawer, Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development
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Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision	Yes
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	This a response to a Central Government consultation and the deadline to submit is 11.45pm on the 10 March 2026.
Appendices (attached):	Appendix 1 – Draft Response to government consultation Appendix 2 – National Planning Policy Framework: draft text for consultation – December 2025

Summary

The Government launched a consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on the 16 December 2026. The proposals are a substantive update to the NPPF which includes comprehensive changes to the document structure and format with most chapters being split between ‘plan making policies’ and ‘decision making policies’ and the inclusion of a series of new annexes providing detail on the standard method for housing and grey belt assessment.

There are a significant number of changes proposed, these include:

- Stating that where local plan policies are inconsistent with national decision-making policies they should be given limited weight.
- Providing national policy to guide the content of spatial development strategies (SDSs); a new tier of strategic planning.
- That housing and mixed-use development around train stations defined as ‘well- connected’ will not be considered inappropriate.
- Proposing that plots around train stations should be built out at a density of at least 40 dwellings per hectare, rising to 50 where the station is “well-connected”.

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- Introducing a medium-size site category into the planning system, which will cover developments of between 10-49 homes, with an area of up to 2.5ha in size.
- Proposing a revision of the weight given to the consideration of the potential effect of a development proposal on a designated heritage asset from “great” to “substantial”.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Note the contents of the consultation.**
- (2) Approve the draft response (Appendix 1) or;**
- (3) Agree amendments and authorise the Head of Planning Policy and Economic Development in consultation with the Chair of this Committee, to finalise and submit the response.**

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 The consultation is only open until 11:45pm Tuesday 10 March 2025.
- 1.2 If reforms are implemented as per the consultation, the proposed changes to the NPPF will have implications for planning decisions and future Local Plans. It is therefore important that the Council make its views known to the Government on these matters, by submitting a formal response to the consultation.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Government launched a consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 16 December 2025. It is open for responses, from anyone (individuals and groups) until 11:45pm on Tuesday 10 March 2026.
- 2.2 The consultation follows amendments made to the NPPF in December 2024 which introduced several policy revisions, including the introduction of Grey Belt and changes to the standard method for calculating housing needs and changes to affordable housing mix.
- 2.3 The consultation document proposes a comprehensive restructure of the NPPF document and format with most chapters being split between ‘plan making policies’ and ‘decision making policies’. We are broadly supportive of this change which we consider provides greater clarity to all users.

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- 2.4 There are 20 Chapters to the consultation document, posing 225 questions. There are several changes that will impact the Borough if introduced, including:
- The weight that can be given to Local Plan policies where there is conflict with National Decision-Making policies following the publication of the revised NPPF.
 - Spatial Development Strategies (once adopted) will set the housing requirements for Local Plans.
 - Development around stations defined as ‘well- connected’ will not be considered inappropriate, provided it is of an appropriate scale, does not prejudice long-term development proposals, and for sites in the Green Belt they comply with the Golden Rules.
 - Minimum densities for plots around train stations, at least 40 dwellings per hectare, rising to 50 where the station is “well-connected”.
 - Introducing a medium-size site category into the planning system, which will cover developments of between 10-49 homes, with an area of up to 2.5ha in size. The consultation seeks views on whether for sites meeting this definition rather than on site affordable housing delivery, provision should be made for “a cash payment in lieu”.
 - Effective use of land calls for “substantial weight” to be given to various types of proposals that re-use existing sites.
- 2.5 A response to this consultation has been prepared and is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. Alongside the consultation document a consultation version of the NPPF has been published (attached as Appendix 2 to this report).

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

3.1.1 Whilst the reforms to the NPPF will have wide ranging impact, there are no EIA issues in relation to this response exercise.

3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 None

3.3 Safeguarding

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3.3.1 None

3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 None

3.5 Other

3.5.1 None

4 Financial Implications

4.1 Once the consultation outcome and final National Planning Policy Framework is known, any material financial implications will need to be quantified and reported back to this committee.

4.2 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** None at the current time.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 No legal implications are anticipated to arise from this report as it is seeking approval to submit a response to the Government consultation

5.2 **Legal Officer's comments:** None for the purposes of the report.

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** Not applicable

6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** The proposals could limit the council's ability to secure buildings that exceed building regulations requirements for energy efficiency.

6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** None

6.5 **Partnerships:** None

6.6 **Local Government Reorganisation Implications:** The proposed changes will impact the content of Local Plans prepared by the East Surrey Unitary Authority.

7 Background papers

7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Other papers:

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- National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system (updated 2 February 2026) - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system#public-sector-equality-duty>
- Draft National Planning Policy Framework (December 2025) - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/697b71c52ff8d10a830d5d4a/Draft_NPPF_December_2025.pdf