Planning committee reform[1]

Community Planning Alliance Response

Question 1

Do you have any comments on the draft Regulations?

Whilst we agree that devolving as many applications to a designated planning officer should accelerate the processing of planning applications, we are concerned about the potential restrictions proposed by paragraph 2(2), which states that "*the authority must not make arrangements that limit the officer's discretion as to how to determine that application*". Authorities are ultimately accountable to their electorate and must be able to propagate trust through transparency of decision-making and ensure the electorate are able to fully participate in the democratic processes related to planning. The regulations should not prevent Authorities from being able to introduce local variations that meet the needs of their residents or the specific spatial circumstances of their borough.

This approach is also not consistent with the government's Vision[2] for regulated bodies, which it states should be "*targeted and proportionate*", that space should be allowed for "*discretion and good behaviour*". It seems the government wants to loosen regulations for businesses but is not affording the same level of trust to planning committees.

Whilst we welcome the confirmation at paragraph 5(2) that the "*nominated member and nominated officer may agree to refer a proposal to determine a Schedule 2 application to a committee if in their view the proposal raises— (a) one or more issues of economic, social or environmental significance to the local area, or (b) one or more significant planning matters having regard to the development plan and any other material considerations*" and assume this includes applications that may impact a National Park, for example, or where the application does not comply with plan policy or national planning guidance, we believe there are other criteria that should require a planning application to be determined by the planning committee.

The government's own response on the Reform of Planning Committees[3] opens with the statement that ***"Planning is principally a local activity because decisions about what to build and where should be shaped by local communities and reflect the views of local residents".*** Paragraph 5(2) should include a sub-section (c) which enables a planning application to be determined by the planning committee if the development does not reflect the views of local residents.

Paragraph 5(2) should include a sub-section (d) which enables a proposal to be determined by the planning committee if the development is likely to result in increased costs to the public purse. Any development that could be considered unsustainable[4], should be explicitly recorded by the planning committee, along with the reasons for their ultimate decision, and reported on the Council's website.

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-committee-reform-draft-regulations-and-guidance

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-new-approach-to-ensure-regulators-and-regulation-support-growth/new-approach-to-ensure-regulators-and-regulation-support-growth-html

[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation/outcome/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation-government-response

[4] https://communityplanningalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/260319_CPA-Report-WHO-PAYS-FOR-UNSUSTAINABLE-DEVELOPMENT_Mar26.pdf

Linked-person applications which meet the criteria at paragraph 5(2), including the additional criteria 5(2)(c) and 5(2)(d), MUST be determined by the planning committee.

With reference to Schedule 1, clear definitions MUST be included. Confirmation of the height limits and distance from the nearest residential property of a 'minor commercial application' (3), examples of what constitutes a 'non-material change' (such as increases in the proposed height of a development).

Clarity on such issues will protect individual officers from any subsequent public outcry following a decision such as those set out in our recent report[5] (Besieged by B8s). It cannot be either productive or a good use of public money to have to defend such decisions either in the courts or in the media.

The guidance and regulations should be explicitly updated to ensure that developments that are more than 15m high and which are located within 500m of the nearest residential property are considered by the planning committee.

Question 2

Do you agree with our proposed approach to phased reserved matters applications? If not, do you think we should return to the original position of reserved matters on phased development being delegated in all circumstances or should we instead consider delegating certain types of phased reserved matters applications?

Yes, we agree that a reserved matters application would be presumed delegated unless any criteria in the gateway test at Regulation 5 (including our proposed additional criteria) is met, in which case, an application would be considered by the planning committee.

The additional criteria for Regulation 5 (which we set out in our response to question 1 above) is critical to achieving the balance needed in the planning system and to ensure decisions are made in the public interest.

Question 3

Do you have any comments on the draft guidance?

We completely disagree that the national scheme will not allow Authorities (which are ultimately accountable to their electorate) to determine local conditions that require a planning application to be considered by the planning committee (8).

The guidance (11) should surely mention that an application will fall within Schedule 2 if the criteria set out in Regulation 5 are met. As we mention above, the additional criteria for Regulation 5 (which we set out in our response to question 1 above) is critical to achieving the balance needed in the planning system and to ensure decisions are made in the public interest.

The guidance does not provide confidence that pertinent schemes will be referred to planning committees. Paragraph 13(b), for example, appears to suggest that the nominated officer and nominated member of the planning committee can refuse to refer a scheme at their total discretion. This is unacceptable and gives no certainty for communities that harmful schemes will be handled appropriately.

[5] https://communityplanningalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/251201_CPA-Report-BESIEGED-BY-B8-WAREHOUSES_Dec25.pdf

Furthermore, where agreement about whether to refer is not possible (17), the resolution is to delegate the case to an officer. This is unacceptable. If there is a difference in view, the scheme should be referred to the planning committee.

In relation to paragraphs 19 and 20, please refer to our additional criteria as set out in our response to question 1.

Significant planning matters should be those considered significant by communities. National, regional and local planning documents take a great deal of resource and public money to construct and publish. One of the reasons for the lack of trust in the planning system is because the policies set out in those documents are largely ignored, apart from the requirement to deliver housing numbers. There is currently a significant lack of balance and a huge level of bias within the planning system. Reducing access to planning committees for schemes that do not reflect the views of local residents will increase uncertainty, suspicion and distrust.

As mentioned above, where unsustainable development is likely to increase costs to the public purse (or for households), that should be considered a significant planning matter.

In relation to criterion B, residents should be able to identify issues including, for example, where an application may impact the health and wellbeing of local communities (including those that will result in a significant increase to air, noise, light, vibration or water pollution), applications that will result in hazardous substances being captured, stored, or transported (including those that put communities at risk from fire, toxic fumes and contamination), applications that may significantly affect irreplaceable habitats, conservation areas, water bodies, and other natural capital assets, and applications that could increase local flood risk.

We welcome the guidance on reporting (27). This guidance should be extended to any unsustainable development that is approved by either a planning officer or a planning committee.

Kind regards

Marj Powner

Vice Chair

Community Planning Alliance

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About the Community Planning Alliance

The Community Planning Alliance[6] is a national umbrella group for over 700 communities[7], all are campaigning against inappropriate development in their areas, and all disagree that decisions are being made in the 'public interest'. We have extensive knowledge and experience of the planning system, and our aims include seeking increased community participation, better environmental protections and the right homes and infrastructure in the right places.

[6] https://communityplanningalliance.org/

[7] https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?ll=52.97433203327261%2C-1.0471043976708527&z=7&mid=1nFg3i1Ft5-K4LadaEMCb0wr17-I33Kk