

# Implementation of Plan-Making Reforms

## INTRODUCTION

This note highlights some of the key changes to the Local Plan preparation process proposed through the [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: consultation on implementation of plan-making reforms](#), released 25 July 2023. The Consultation includes detailed proposals on a range of plan-making matters, including and not limited to the processes for plan preparation; preparation and engagement; digitalisation, streamlining and standardisation of processes; supplementary planning documents; examination and evidence.

The focus of this note is on matters of Local Plan process. DAC Planning will prepare a note with detailed analysis in due course.

## TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The 30 June 2025 deadline for the submission of current Local Plans for examination under the existing system is restated and confirmed, with limited flexibility for Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to adopt plans at a later date – only in the most exceptional circumstances. Please see our [blog post](#) on transitional arrangements for further information.

It is the aim of the Government to have the necessary regulations, policy, and guidance in place by Autumn 2024 to allow the preparation of “new-style plans” to commence.

The Government proposes a phased, ‘waved’ roll-out of new-style plan preparation, with ten local planning authorities (LPAs) initially being supported through the new process commencing in Autumn 2024, then, LPAs commencing preparation in ‘waves’ of 25 every six months from 30 June 2025 thereafter. LPAs will be able to start plan preparation earlier than this, with the waves acting as a latest date or final back stop for commencement of new Local Plan preparation.

To support this roll-out of new Local Plans, and protect LPAs against speculative development, the Government proposes to extend the period of the adopted Local Plan being considered up-to-date until 30 months after the point that the LPA is required to commence preparation of their new Local Plan.

## LOCAL PLAN FORM AND CONTENTS

The Consultation sets out a preference for digitalisation of new Local Plan documents, moving away from submission of PDFs. The Consultation proposes a number of principles for the content and form of plans under the new system:

- A strengthened role of locally distinct visions which will be regulatory required, as well as required by national policy to act as a “golden thread” through the Local Plan and tested.
- The use of digital Local Plan templates to ensure a consistent structuring, drafting and appearance.
- Streamlined Local Plan content through limiting local DM policies.

## 30-MONTH PLAN-MAKING PROCESS

Giving four months' notice, LPAs will need to prepare and adopt a Local Plan within 30 months. A diagram outlining the new proposed 30-month plan-making process is provided in Chapter 2 of the proposals. Key stages are as follows:

1. Scoping and early participation
2. Plan visioning and strategy development
3. Evidence gathering and drafting the plan
4. Engagement, proposing changes, submission
5. Examination
6. Finalisation and adoption

Stage 1 does not have a statutory time frame and will be carried out prior to when the 30-month period of plan-preparation formally commences. Stages 2, 3, and 4 are to be carried out during a 23-month period. Examination (Stage 5) is proposed to take six months, with one month subsequent to finalise and adopt the plan (Stage 6).

## SCOPING AND EARLY PARTICIPATION

The Consultation proposes a scoping stage to front-load engagement, to be completed prior to the formal commencement of the 30-month preparation of the Local Plan. As part of this, a templated Project Initiation Document (PID) will be prepared, which will define the scope of the Local Plan and contain information on the approach to project management, governance, engagement, and local issues.

It is proposed that the scoping stage and the outputs will need to be informed by early participation by "notified" and "invited" stakeholders, with the PID setting out the main messages of this to inform the development of the vision and strategy of the Local Plan.

## CONSULTATION

Similar to the current Regulation 18 and 19 stages of plan preparation, the Consultation proposes retaining two rounds of mandatory, formal public consultation while providing further regulatory definitions on their purpose in due course.

- The first stage, to last eight weeks at minimum, will focus on validating the vision and testing the spatial strategy and broad options.
- The second stage, to last six weeks at minimum, will seek focussed views on the draft Local Plan for submission. It is noted that there will be opportunity for LPAs to make changes modifications prior to submission following this consultation.

It is proposed that representations and responses will be made with templates produced by the Government, rather than through PDFs as is currently common.

## GATEWAYS

The Consultation details the use of three 'gateway assessments' throughout the preparation of the Local Plan to be conducted by independent advisors and Planning Inspectors, with each assessment lasting up to four weeks:

- Gateway 1 will be advisory and will take place after the scoping phase, on commencement of the Local Plan process, to review the initial scoping work and diagnose possible issues.
- Gateway 2 will also be advisory, taking place after the first round of consultation, to ensure ongoing compliance and supporting the early resolution of soundness issues.
- Gateway 3, a "Stop/Go" check, will take place after the second round of consultation and before submission, used to ensure the Local Plan is compliant and ready to proceed to examination.

## LOCAL PLAN TIMETABLE

The [Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill](#) replaces the requirement to produce a Local Development Scheme (LDS) with a Local Plan timetable, to be revised at least once every six months, or upon meeting a key milestone. The Consultation proposes that the timetable will need to be prepared and reported on consistent with the following milestones to be sequenced as shown below:

1. Commencement of Gateway 1
2. First mandatory consultation window (8 weeks)
3. Commencement of Gateway 2
4. Second mandatory consultation window (6 weeks)
5. Commencement of Gateway 3
6. Submission for Independent Examination
7. Anticipated adoption date

The Consultation proposes that the timetable should be prepared using digital templates and data standards, and to be published in both dataset and public-facing tabular formats.

## DUTY TO COOPERATE

The Consultation does not contain further information regarding Duty to Cooperate or the previously proposed 'alignment test'.