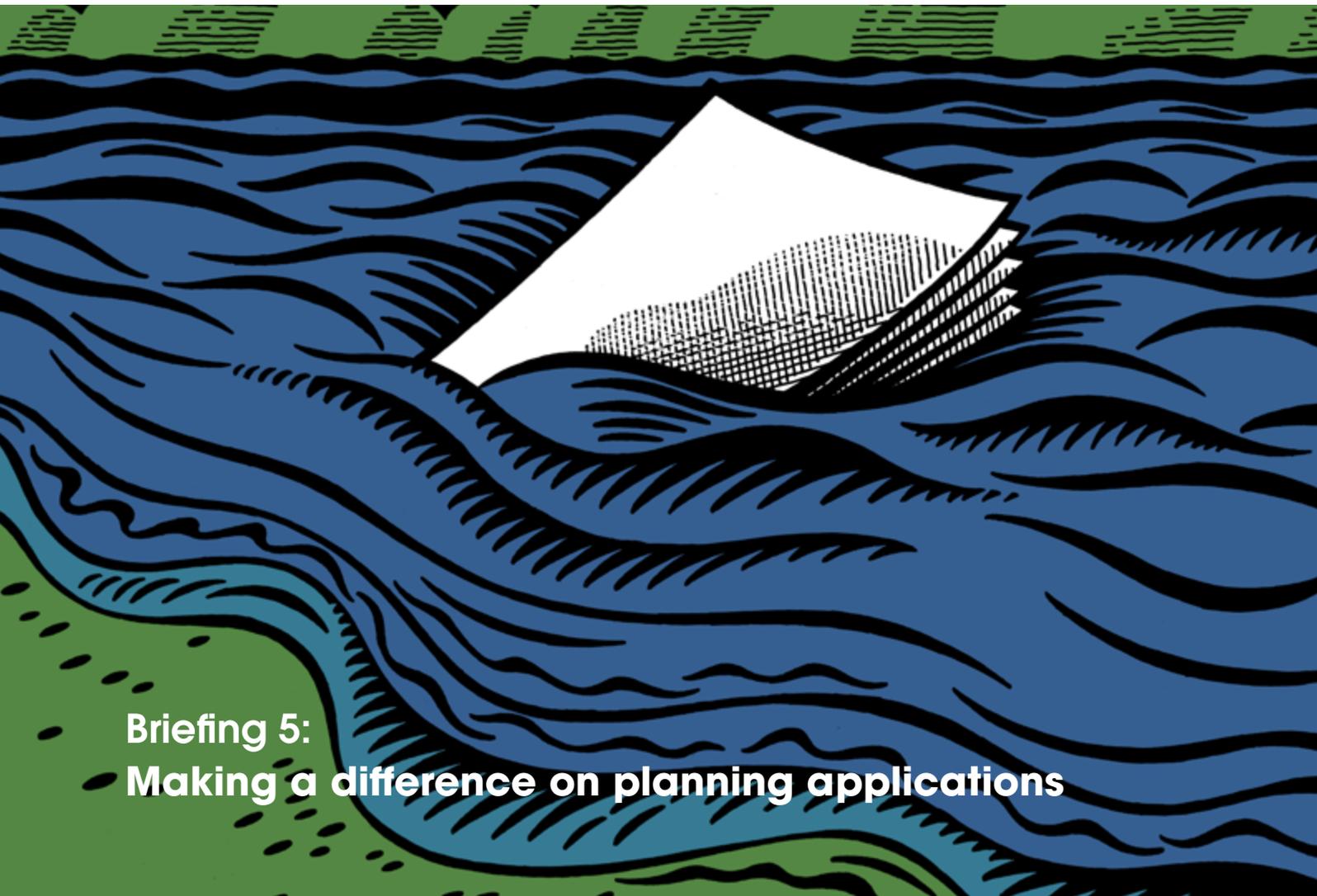


building a safer future

a guide for communities on navigating the planning system in england to tackle flood risk



**Briefing 5:
Making a difference on planning applications**



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Introduction

You are probably reading this because you have experienced flooding at first hand or are worried about flood risk where you live. The risk of flooding is going to increase over the coming decades as a result of climate change, and you certainly do not want any changes made to your local area that could make flooding worse. The planning system in England has a major role in making decisions about where new development will go, and these decisions are crucial to reducing the risk of flooding, both now and in the future.

The future of your community depends on people like you and your neighbours getting involved in the decision-making process, as local communities have unique knowledge of the flood risk in their area, as well as the drive to tackle climate change in order to create a positive future for the next generation.

We hope that this guidance will be a useful starting point to help you get your voice heard when planning decisions that will have an impact on the level of flood risk in your community are made. The guidance takes the reader on a journey through the processes and language used to make decisions within the planning system about flood risk. Both the language and the processes are often not easy to understand, as the system is complex and frequently confusing, but we hope to shed some light on exactly how you can make a real difference in your local area.

The guidance consists of six briefings:

Briefing 1: Future flood risk, and how planning can help

- Introducing flood risk, and planning's role in addressing it
- How communities can influence planning
- Practical solutions to ask for

Briefing 2: Who does what in planning for flood risk?

- Organisations involved and their responsibilities
- When to contact each of these organisations
- Working with your community and local council

Briefing 3: Understanding national law and policy on flood risk

- Flood risk and planning law
- National planning policy on flood risk
- Applying the law and policy to make a difference

Briefing 4: Making a difference to your Local Plan

- The Local Plan-making process
- Influencing your Local Plan
- Other ways to influence planning policy

Briefing 5: Making a difference on planning applications

- The planning application process
- Influencing planning decisions
- Challenging a planning decision

Briefing 6: Where to get help – further information and glossary

- Key resources and contacts for further information
- Forming partnerships and building contacts
- Glossary of technical terms

A glossary of the technical terms used in this guide is appended to this Briefing. The first use of a glossary term in each briefing appears in bold green text. Clicking on this text will take you to the corresponding entry in the glossary. Clickable links to external sources of information are set in bold dark red type.

Briefing 5

Making a difference on planning applications

'The latest planning application at New Monks Farm proposes 600 new homes to be built on a Zone 3a floodplain with a 75% risk of groundwater flooding. In spite of our extremely prolonged and strong opposition to the scheme (along with CPRE, Friends of the Earth, and many residents associations), the Local Planning Authority and the Planning inspectorate granted planning permission. However, we have recently had some success engaging with the developers to try to mitigate as much of the flood risk to surrounding areas as possible. Our extensive knowledge of the local area has been vital in making sure that the developer realises the full extent of the impact that the proposed development will have, demonstrating just how important it is for community groups like us to get involved. Even though planning permission was granted, being part of the Flood Action Group has been critical for achieving the recent discussions and constructive dialogue with the developers that we have had, as we have been able to co-ordinate effort and speak as one, more powerful, voice.'

Geoff Patmore
Vice Chair, West Beach Residents Association

Before any new building can start, **developers** need to secure **planning permission** from the **Local Planning Authority**. The process of so doing can be daunting and complex.

The decision will mainly be based on what is written in the **Local Plan**, but planners can also consider 'any other **material considerations**' – which can mean any other issue related to planning that has not been covered by the Local Plan, including new data on **flood risk**.

What kind of planning application is it?

There are six main kinds of **planning application**, which vary according to the type of permission sought:

- **Full planning permission** – this includes all the details on location and design.
- **Outline planning permission** – in which the principle of **development** in a particular location is agreed. Flood risk is considered, including the impact that it will have on site layout, but further details are left to be decided upon in a later application.
- **Reserved matters** – in which agreement is made on those details not considered in an outline planning permission.
- **Prior approval** – some types of development are allowed without full planning permission (for **permitted development**), for example converting commercial space into housing. However, '**prior approval**' is still required, and flood risk is one of the few issues that can be considered and could result in an application being rejected.
- **Change of use** – as it says on the tin, **change of use** permission is for a change in the use of a building from one use to another. However, it can be a little more complicated than it seems, because some changes of use do not require full planning permission as they are allowed through **permitted development rights**.
- **Permission in principle** – there are some forms of land on which planning permission is granted automatically, for example land that has been developed before (often known as brownfield land), which is included in a register held by the Local Planning Authority. In these cases, called **permission in principle**, the principle of development on the site is pre-approved but the details are not yet confirmed. Before starting to build on this land, developers have to submit to the Local Planning Authority limited details of what they intend to do.

The process of approving a planning application

For full planning permission, there are a number of steps that must be completed:

- **Pre-application:** An applicant can seek advice from the Local Planning Authority to ensure that, when made, the application will be valid. This is also a chance to clarify both how planning **policies** may affect the proposal and any relevant conditions or requirements. There may or may not be **public consultation** at this stage.
- **Submission:** Most planning applications should be submitted to the relevant Local Planning Authority.
- **Statutory consultees:** For certain types of application in certain areas, Local Planning Authorities must seek the advice of the **Environment Agency** and the **Lead Local Flood Authority**, who are **statutory consultees**.
- **Consulting the public:** The process of formal public consultation normally lasts 21 days. The publicity requirements vary, depending on the type of planning application. Anyone may comment on an application. Written comments will be taken into account when the Local Planning Authority makes a decision on the application, as long as the points raised are relevant to the proposal and 'material' to planning.
- **Officer reports:** Most smaller and less controversial planning applications (around 90% of those received by most Local Planning Authorities) will be decided by Local Planning Authority staff members (**officers**). For larger and more controversial developments, planning officers produce a report of recommendations which is passed on to the **planning committee**, who make the final decision.
- **Planning committee:** The planning committee (made up of elected **councillors**) assess the various benefits and impacts of an application, and weigh these up against national policy and the Local Plan before making a decision.
- **Decision:** A Local Planning Authority usually has up to eight weeks to make a decision on applications for **minor development**, which include most householder cases and proposals for fewer than 10 new homes; and up to 13 weeks to make a decisions on **major development**, such as large housing or business sites. Development requiring an **Environmental Impact Assessment** should be determined within 16 weeks.
- **Appeal:** If a Local Planning Authority refuses to give planning permission, the applicant has a right to appeal to the **Secretary of State** via the **Planning Inspectorate**. An independent

Planning Inspector considers each appeal and makes a decision in line with the Local Plan unless there are significant reasons that justify taking a different view. The Inspector may decide that planning permission should, after all, be granted.

What is an Environmental Impact Assessment?

An Environmental Impact Assessment must be undertaken for large-scale projects, which are more likely to have a significant impact on the environment. These assessments should give the Local Planning Authority an understanding of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project, and they will be a factor in whether planning permission is granted.

The Environmental Statements produced by Environmental Impact Assessments can be long and complicated, but they are important. They are prepared by the developer, so it is worth going through them to see if they are accurate and include local knowledge on flooding.

Should there be a flood risk assessment?

The **National Planning Policy Framework** explains when a flood risk assessment might be required for a planning application. For flooding from rivers, this usually depends on what **Flood Zone** the site is in.

A flood risk assessment is needed for:

- all projects in Flood Zones 2 and 3;
- large projects (over 1 hectare in area) in Flood Zone 1;
- projects in Flood Zone 1 where the site has been identified in the **Strategic Flood Risk Assessment** as being at future risk;
- projects in areas identified in the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment as being at risk of flooding from other sources, such as **groundwater flooding** and **surface water flooding**; and
- projects in areas with critical drainage problems.

A **site-specific flood risk assessment** will also be needed in these circumstances for projects being brought forward through permitted development rights.

Planning Practice Guidance says that flood risk assessments should, among other things, show how the flood risk to the development will be managed so that it remains safe through its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere.

Getting involved in a planning decision

When an individual or organisation is seeking planning permission for something in your local area, you have a right to comment on the proposal, and your comments will then be considered by the officers and elected councillors at your Local Planning Authority who are making the decision on whether permission will be granted.

The simplest way to find out about ongoing local planning applications is to visit your Local Planning Authority's website, where there will be a public register of planning applications. This is where you will also find all the other accompanying documents, including the flood risk assessment. The Local Planning Authority must decide if it has sufficient information from the developer and make this publicly available.

If you believe that more information is needed, the best thing to do is contact the Local Planning Authority. If the relevant documents are not made available to you, then you can submit a formal request to your Local Planning Authority under the Freedom of Information Act (further information on this is available [here](#)).

Additionally, if you do not think that the information in the documents is accurate, it may be necessary to fundraise to pay for a planning expert to check the technical planning documents that have been submitted, including the flood risk and **viability** assessments.

How long do I have to comment?

Most planning applications have to be processed within eight weeks, but for major projects this period is extended to 13 weeks. But, regardless of this, there is only a limited window for members of the public to provide comments – 21 calendar days from the date that the application is advertised. Planning applications are notified on the Local Planning Authority's website and by site notices. This gives only a very short period of time for communities to make a response. Local Planning Authorities can decide to consider late responses too, but you should not rely on this.

Top tip

The window in which you are able to comment on a planning application is short and will fly by. It is useful to have your evidence ready beforehand so that you have plenty of time to feed it into your response.

Generally, the earlier you make your submission, the more likely it is to have some impact. And make sure that you keep track of the consultation dates so that you do not miss the deadline.

Can I speak at a planning committee meeting?

Planning applications for things such as household extensions will usually be decided by the council's planning officers, but applications for large housing schemes will be decided by councillors at a planning committee meeting. In most Local Planning Authorities you will have a right to speak at the meeting considering the application. Your input is normally limited to three minutes, so make sure that you rehearse your key arguments.

How do I write a good objection letter?

Here are three top tips in writing a good planning objection letter:

- 1** Make sure that your letter is properly referenced with the right planning application number. You will find this number on the Local Planning Authority's website.
- 2** Keep it short. It can be tempting to throw the kitchen sink at letters of objection, but it is much better to be focused on the top three key planning arguments. It doesn't always help to 'out-jargon' the planners, but using some of the language set out in the glossary in Briefing 6 can be useful in making your point.
- 3** Make sure that you reference Local Plan policy and national government policy to support your arguments.

Don't forget to campaign!

You can make your action more effective by having a good grasp of the technical planning arguments, but ultimately planning applications are decided by politicians. Although they must take these decisions based on sound reasoning, strong campaigning can highlight the strength of feeling of local communities.

Permitted development

In England, there are certain extensions, alterations and changes of use to and of a building that are allowed without going through the full planning permission process – this is called **permitted development**. It includes being able to convert offices and commercial and industrial premises into flats or houses. There is much less scrutiny during this process than within the full planning



You have a right to comment on local planning applications

application process, and therefore less opportunity to get your opinion across. However, permitted development applications still need to meet certain conditions in the prior approval process, and one of those concerns flood risk.

Once a planning decision has been made

Challenging a decision

Frustratingly, you may be in the situation in which it is obvious that your input into a planning decision has been ignored or misinterpreted. If this is the case, there are three possible actions you can take:

- **Secretary of State call-in:** For a particularly controversial planning application, you can request that the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (to find out who currently is in this role click [here](#)) 'calls-in' the application for their own personal consideration by sending them a letter. However, it is extremely rare for this to happen. One recent example has related to the relaxation of occupancy limitations for static caravans at very high risk of **coastal flooding**.

- **Judicial review:** If you think that your Local Planning Authority has made an unreasonable decision on a planning application, you can seek to have the decision judicially reviewed. This takes time and money and requires expert legal advice.
- **Complaint to the Ombudsman:** If you believe that your Local Planning Authority has behaved in an unreasonable way over a planning decision, you can make a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care **Ombudsman** (further information is available [here](#)). The Ombudsman can investigate and report on the complaint, but does not have the power to overturn the decision that has been made.

Dealing with appeals

When developers are refused planning permission they can **appeal** against the decision. This appeal is heard by the Planning Inspectorate. This can be through a **public hearing** or through written representations, and it is important that you sustain your objections throughout this process. The arguments will be the same as those you made in response to the planning application, but you will need to submit them separately to the Planning Inspector. Advice on being involved in planning appeals is available [here](#).

It is really frustrating that communities do not have a right of appeal if a development is approved against Local Plan or **Neighbourhood Plan** policy.

Enforcement

Developers should build what they have promised to build, and Local Planning Authorities should monitor this. However, resources for monitoring are usually very limited, and Local Planning Authorities rely on members of the community to inform them when what has been delivered varies from what was approved in the planning application. The Local Planning Authority has a range of powers to make sure that developers deliver on their commitments.

Top tip

If you are concerned that the flood alleviation measures on a site have been misinstalled or are not being maintained properly, you can raise your concerns with your Local Planning Authority. It is very important to have strong evidence (photographs work particularly well) to support your case.

Glossary

25 Year Environment Plan

Strategy document, published in 2018, setting out the UK government's plan for improving the natural environment over a 25-year period – available [here](#). It includes actions aimed at creating better habitats for wildlife, improving air and water quality, and reducing the amount of plastic in the ocean.

Canalisation

The straightening, deepening and widening of a natural river channel to increase flow capacity so that flood water is carried away more quickly. However, it may increase **flood risk** further downstream and can also have a negative impact on river ecosystems.

Change of use

The conversion of a building from one type of use to another, for example from a commercial use to residential use. Until very recently, change of use usually required **planning permission**.

Climate change

The long-term change in weather due to human activity. Global temperatures are continuing to increase, and extreme weather events are becoming more common.

Climate Change Act 2008

UK legislation that includes a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050.

Climate change allowances

Predictions of anticipated change in peak river flow, peak rainfall intensity and sea level rise caused by future **climate change**. **Local Planning Authorities** must consider local climate change allowances when preparing **Strategic Flood Risk Assessments**. Climate change allowances are also known as flood risk allowances.

Climate Change Committee

Independent organisation that advises the UK government on how the nation should reduce greenhouse emissions and cope with the impacts of **climate change** – see [here](#).

Coastal erosion

The loss of land along the coast due to the action of waves, tides, currents, and wind-driven sea water over time. Over a long period it is possible that homes and even whole villages will fall into the sea as the land retreats.

Coastal flooding

Seawater flooding of an area of land on the coast, often caused by a severe storm which forces excessive quantities of sea water onto the land.

Coastal Protection Authority

District and **Unitary Authorities** in coastal areas are designated as Coastal Protection Authorities. They have the responsibility of co-ordinating **coastal erosion** risk management activities in their area, including drawing up a **Shoreline Management Plan**.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

A charge that local authorities can require **developers** to pay as part of granting **planning permission** for new development. It is used to pay for the improvements to local infrastructure needed to support the increase in population and other impacts of new development. Further information is available [here](#).

Consultation (or Public consultation)

The process through which a public body, such as the government or a local authority, invites members of the public to give their opinion on proposals that are likely to affect their lives – such as a draft **Local Plan**.

Councillor

An elected member of a council.

County Council

A form of elected local government for a county area, responsible for functions such as education, but also minerals and waste planning.

Culvert

A man-made structure that allows water to flow underneath a road, footpath, or railway line. Culverts can become blocked by debris, which may cause flooding.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

The UK government department responsible for housing, communities and local government in England (formerly known as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government).

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

The UK government department responsible for safeguarding the natural environment, supporting the food and farming industry, and supporting the rural economy.

Design code

A set of rules dictating what a new **development** should look like.

Developer/property developer

A company that purchases land to be used for new development, such as housing and, usually, undertakes the building of (for example) houses and the development of other infrastructure.

Development

Building on or carrying out other industrial activities on an area of land. In the **planning system**, it most often refers to the building of new homes.

Development control (or Development management)

The process of approving or rejecting applications for **planning permission**.

District Council

A form of elected local government for a rural or urban district, with local planning among its responsibilities (some district-level councils are formally named borough councils or city councils).

Environment Agency

Public body with oversight of the management of all sources of flooding and **coastal erosion** – although it is directly responsible only for managing the risk of flooding from **main rivers**, reservoirs, estuaries, and the sea. It advises on **Strategic Flood Risk Assessments** and **site-specific flood risk assessments**, and on the appropriateness of a proposed **development**.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

The process of collecting information about the impact a proposed **development** on the environment. The results are considered by the **Local Planning Authority** when deciding whether to grant **planning permission**.

Examination (or Public Examination)

Meeting held to assess whether a **Local Plan** follows national law, **policy**, and procedure. It is run by the **Planning Inspectorate** and provides an opportunity for members of the public to voice concerns about draft planning policies and suggest amendments, based on evidence.

Exception Test

A test undertaken as part of the process of granting **planning permission** in an area at risk of flooding. If the **Sequential Test** shows that it is not possible to develop in a lower-risk area, the Exception Test is used to assess whether the wider benefits of building in a location with higher risk outweigh the disbenefits from the **flood risk**.

Flash flooding

Rapid flooding of low-lying areas. It may be caused by heavy rainfall or by meltwater from heavy snow or ice. The impact is usually worse in built-up areas, where there are fewer permeable surfaces for the flood water to drain away.

Flood Action Group (FAG)

A group formed by people living within a community threatened by the risk of flooding. Flood Action Groups act as a representative voice for their wider community when working with their **Local Planning Authority** and in influencing the **planning system** on matters concerning local **flood risk**.

Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England

A document (issued in 2020) setting out what needs to be done by all Risk Management Authorities involved in flood and coastal erosion risk management in England – see [here](#).

Flood and Water Management Act 2010

UK legislation introduced to improve the nation's approach to the management of **flood risk** and **coastal erosion**. Further information is available [here](#).

Flood defences

Structures designed to prevent flooding or control flood water in order to minimise the harm to people and property.

Floodplain

A flat, low-lying area next to a body or bodies of water prone to flooding.

Flood risk

The combination of the likelihood of a flood event occurring and the impact that the flood would have if it did occur.

Flood Risk Management Strategy

A document produced by the **Lead Local Flood Authority** which assesses **flood risk** for the whole area, sets objectives for the management of flood risk, outlines the responsibilities of **Risk Management Authorities**, lists the costs and benefits of measures proposed to meet the objectives, and sets out how these measures will be funded.

Flood Zone

A system of four Flood Zones – called 1, 2, 3a, and 3b – is used to indicate the probability of **flood risk**, ignoring the presence of any flood defence. Areas in Flood Zone 1 are least likely to flood, with areas in Flood Zone 3 most likely. A map on the **Environment Agency's** website indicates the Flood Zone in which a property is located – available [here](#). Flood Zones do not take into account flood risk from sewers, ground or surface water, or reservoirs.

Fluvial flooding

Flooding caused when the water level in a river, ditch or stream overflows.

Groundwater flooding

Flooding caused by a rise in the level of underground water (known as the water table) to above ground level, as a result of prolonged or heavy rainfall. Groundwater flooding tends to happen gradually and can last much longer than other types of flooding as the water cannot drain into the saturated ground.

Internal Drainage Board

An authority established in areas of special drainage need in England and Wales, with powers to improve water level management in their particular area, known as an internal drainage district.

Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)

An area's Lead Local Flood Authority is either the **County Council** or the **Unitary Authority**. Lead Local Flood Authorities are responsible for providing advice on how **developments** manage surface water drainage and use **sustainable drainage systems**, and on the management of **flood risk** from **groundwater** and **surface water**. They are required to comment on all major **planning applications** with regard to flood risk from 'local' sources of flooding, such as surface water, groundwater, and **ordinary watercourses**.

Local Plan

The plan for future development in your local area, prepared by the **Local Planning Authority**. It includes maps of where new housing, other **development** and infrastructure are to go, and also contains **policies** prescribing the sort of things that can and cannot be built and rules on the quality of anything that is built. A **planning application** will be accepted much more easily if it is in line with the Local Plan. But **planning permission** can be given to proposals in areas not allocated in the plan if a substantial case is made. Further information is available **here**.

Local Planning Authority (LPA)

The council (or National Park Authority in some cases) that carries out planning functions for your local area. In areas where there is both a **County Council** and a **District Council**, it is the District Council that prepares the **Local Plan**.

London Borough Council

The Local Planning Authority for the London boroughs.

Main river

Main rivers are the main watercourses shown on the statutory main river maps drawn up by the **Environment Agency** and the **Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**.

Major development

For residential development, any **development** consisting of ten or more residential units.

Material consideration

A planning term for something that should be taken into account when deciding whether to grant **planning permission** – such as the risk of flooding. Almost anything that relates to **development** or the use of land is capable of being a material consideration, but it will need to relate to the **National Planning Policy Framework** or **Planning Practice Guidance** to be taken seriously.

Minor development

For residential development, any **development** consisting of nine or fewer residential units.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Document setting out the government's planning policies in England, and outlining how they should be applied. The NPPF must be taken into account by the **Local Planning Authority** when drawing up a **Local Plan** and in making decisions on **planning applications**. The NPPF is available **here**.

Natural flood management

The use of natural processes to minimise the impact of flood events. Examples include restoring bends in rivers to allow more water to be carried, and changing the way that land is managed so that the soil can absorb more water.

Neighbourhood Forum

A body formed either by a **Town Council** or a **Parish Council** (where one exists) or by local people for the purpose of producing a **Neighbourhood Plan**.

Neighbourhood Plan

A document produced by the local community, as represented by a **Neighbourhood Forum**, which sets out planning **policies** for a local area and is used by the **Local Planning Authority** when deciding whether to approve or deny a **planning application**.

Ombudsman

An independent official appointed to investigate complaints by members of the public against a company or an organisation.

Ordinary watercourse

Any watercourse not designated as a **main river**.

Parish Council

A form of local government – not present in all locations – based on civil parishes and with varying but limited powers. Parish Councils and **Town Councils** form the lowest tier of local government in the UK.

Permission in principle

Certain types of land (such as brownfield land) can be granted **planning permission** in principle, where the concept of **development** on that site is pre-approved but the details are not confirmed. Before starting to build on this land, **developers** have to submit to the **Local Planning Authority** limited details of what they intend to do.

Permitted development rights (PDR)

Certain changes to a building can be made without the need to apply for **planning permission**, under what are termed permitted development rights, although, in most cases, the risk of flooding must still be taken into account.

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

A key piece of UK legislation within the planning system and on the compulsory purchase of land. It is of particular relevance as it places a legal duty on local authorities to address climate change.

Planning appeal

The process through which a **developer** or individual making a **planning application** can appeal against a planning decision, including the decision by a **Local Planning Authority** to reject the application. In England, appeals are processed and decided by the **Planning Inspectorate**.

Planning application

A document (physical or electronic) completed by a person, a group of people or an organisation to request permission from the **Local Planning Authority** to build something new or make a change to an existing building or structure.

Planning committee

A panel of local **councillors** at a **Local Planning Authority** who consider each **planning application** and vote on whether to grant **planning permission**.

Planning condition

Rather than refusing a **planning application**, a **Local Planning Authority** can grant **planning permission**, but with conditions that must be met by the **developer**.

Planning Inspector

A planning expert employed by the **Planning Inspectorate** to provide independent scrutiny of plans (such as **Local Plans**) before they can be adopted. Planning Inspectors also preside over **Examinations** of plans and decisions, and **planning appeals** on and inquiries into decisions that have been made.

Planning Inspectorate (PINS)

The national government agency responsible for **planning appeals**, national infrastructure **planning applications** and the **examination** and approval of **Local Plans**.

Planning officer

A planning professional employed by a **Local Planning Authority** to process (and for certain types of application decide on the outcomes of) **planning applications** and develop planning **policy** and **Local Plans**.

Planning permission

Formal permission from a **Local Planning Authority** for either a new **development** or a change to an existing building.

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

National guidance on various topics of relevance to the **planning system**, including **climate change** and **flood risk**. It is intended to be read alongside the **National Planning Policy Framework** and must be considered by planners when preparing the **Local Plan** and in decision-making on **planning applications**. The full Planning Practice Guidance set is available **here**.

Planning system

The set of processes which together are intended to ensure that **development** happens in the right place and at the right time, to the benefit of people, the economy, and the environment. These processes are multiple, complex, and carried out by a number of different organisations – mostly public bodies.

Policy

A set of ideas or a plan of what to do in particular situations that have/has been officially established by national or local government.

Prior approval

A condition of certain types of **permitted development** is the submission of a **planning application** to the **Local Planning Authority** for its 'prior approval'. This process allows the Local Planning Authority to consider the proposal with regard to certain, pre-defined factors.

Public hearing

A formal meeting to hear community viewpoints, held as part of the process of drawing up a **Local Plan**.

Regional Flood and Coastal Committee

There are 12 Regional Flood and Coastal Committees in England. They work with the **Environment Agency** and other partners to understand local issues better.

Resilience

The capacity to withstand or recover from a disaster or emergency such as flooding.

Resilience Forum

A local partnership consisting of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the **Environment Agency**, and others. Resilience forums plan and prepare for incidents and emergencies. They identify risks and produce emergency plans to either prevent or mitigate the impact of any incident on their local communities.

Risk Management Authorities (RMAs)

Public bodies, including the **Environment Agency** and **Lead Local Flood Authorities**, who work with communities to manage the risk of flooding from rivers, the sea, surface water, groundwater, and reservoirs.

Secretary of State

A senior Minister who is head of a UK government department.

Secretary of State call-in

The **Secretary of State** for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has the power 'call in' any **planning application** to decide the outcome on behalf of the **Local Planning Authority**. The Secretary of State can call in a planning application for any reason – however, such instances usually relate to applications considered to be of national significance.

Sequential Test

A planning test comparing a proposed **development** site with other available sites to determine which has the lowest **flood risk** and to explore whether development could be steered to lower-risk areas.

Sewer flooding

Flooding occurring when sewage or water leaks from a sewerage system or rises above ground level through drainage systems, toilets, sinks, or showers.

Shoreline Management Plan (SMP)

A document assessing the risks associated with coastal processes over a large area, and setting a framework to address these risks and manage the shoreline in ways that reduce the risks to people and the environment.

Site-specific flood risk assessment

An assessment of **flood risk** on and resulting from a **development** site, carried out either by or on behalf of a **developer** as part of a **planning application**. The **Local Planning Authority** receiving the planning application uses the assessment to help determine whether to grant or deny **planning permission**.

Statutory consultee

An organisation that must be consulted and provide a substantive response to a **Local Planning Authority** concerning a **planning application**, prior to a final decision being made.

Storm surge

A change in sea level caused by a storm. It can lead to extensive flooding and poses danger to people living in coastal areas. The main causes of a storm surge are low pressure and high winds – high winds push the seawater towards the coast, causing it to pile up there, and low pressure at the centre of the storm can also 'pull' the water up. Strong winds in the storm can also generate large waves on top of the surge, which can cause damage to sea defences or spill over their tops, adding to the **flood risk**.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

The process of collecting information about the environmental impact of the **policies** included in a draft **Local Plan**. It is undertaken at the plan-making stage.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)

The process of collecting information about the risk to an area from flooding from all sources, now and in the future, taking account of the impacts of **climate change**. It assesses the impact that land use changes and **development** in the area will have on **flood risk**. **Environment Agency** guidance on producing a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is available [here](#).

Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

A document produced by a **Local Planning Authority** providing further information for **developers** on how policies detailed in the **Local Plan** are to be implemented.

Surface water flooding

Surface water flooding occurs when water that has fallen onto the ground flows over impermeable surfaces, or accumulates in low spots, and the capacity of drainage systems is exceeded. It is very difficult to predict, as it is usually caused by very localised, intense storms which overwhelm surface water sewers and drainage systems. These **flash floods** typically occur and then disappear in a short space of time, but they can still be devastating if they get into our homes. The risk of surface water flooding can be exacerbated by sealing previously permeable surfaces (paving over gardens and other green spaces, for example), with the result that water can no longer soak away into the ground.

Sustainable drainage system (SuDS)

A drainage system in which water does not flow directly into the sewer network. Instead, water is stored locally, thus reducing the risk of **surface water flooding**. High-quality SuDS schemes include trees and/or other vegetation and provide other landscape and amenity benefits for local communities, but sometimes schemes referred to as a SuDS are just a concrete storage tank underneath a car park.

Town Council

A form of local government – not present in all locations – for small municipalities, operating with varying but limited powers. **Parish Councils** and Town Councils form the lowest tier of local government.

Unitary Authority

A form of elected local government responsible for providing all local government services for that area.

Viability test

A test carried out during the **planning application** process to determine whether it is viable for **developers** to deliver the other measures requested by the **Local Planning Authority** alongside the proposed **development**. It has been widely criticised for allowing landowners and developers to claim to be unable to contribute towards infrastructure costs and affordable housing, thus undermining **policy** requirements and maximising land value and profits at the expense of local communities.



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