

Planning Committees Consultation
Planning Development Management
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Planning Directorate
3rd Floor, North East
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

By email only: planningcommittees@communities.gov.uk

23 July 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Reform of planning committees: technical consultation

I am writing on behalf of the London Property Alliance CPA/WPA (“LPA”) to respond to the technical consultation on the reform of planning committees. We previously responded to the Government’s working paper on the same topic.

The LPA is a not-for-profit membership body and advocacy group representing more than 300 of the leading owners, investors, professional advisors and developers of real estate operating in the Cities of London and Westminster, via our respective associations City Property Association (“CPA”) and Westminster Property Association (“WPA”). The LPA provides a unified voice for the real estate sector across London’s Central Activities Zone (“CAZ”). You can see a full list of our members for our respective bodies [here](#) and [here](#).

Our comments to the consultation questions have been included at Appendix 1. Our overarching points are as follows and should be read alongside Appendix 1:

1. **The LPA supports Government aspirations to provide greater clarity in the planning system and to speed up decision making.** Our *Plan For Growth (2024)*¹ sets out four key areas for the Government to implement policies to grow the economic and social prosperity of London’s Central Activities Zone (CAZ) in the interests of the capital and country. One of these key areas is to grow the economy, with greater clarity and certainty in planning key to driving investor confidence.

The LPA supports the principle of a national scheme of delegation, which, if implemented with the appropriate degree of flexibility, should provide greater clarity and certainty in planning to help achieve growth.

2. **The LPA urges the Government to engage with the property industry to help streamline the planning system and reduce regulatory burden.** Delays within the planning system resulting from a cumbersome and complex planning and policy environment cause unnecessary costs for investors, undermine confidence in the process and ultimately restrict development coming forward.

Our research by Arup, *Good Growth in Central London (2024)* advocates for a ‘balanced growth’ scenario for central London whereby flexible planning policies are key to delivering homes, jobs and economic growth. Whilst the LPA strongly supports the Government’s aspirations to boost housing development and economic growth, the list of requirements placed on development is long and is increasing. This not only increases costs for developers bringing forward development; it also adds greater complexity to the planning process for applicants and for LPAs, further contributing to delays. The proliferation of complex issues being layered upon the planning system should be halted and reversed.

We urge the Government to engage with the industry on these wider issues, which we consider are essential to address in order to deliver homes and growth.

¹ [Plan for Growth](#), 2024, London Property Alliance

3. **Care is needed to ensure that quicker decision making is not prioritised above good decision making.** Decision via committee for appropriate applications is a foundation of the planning system and in many instances (even for smaller applications) it is entirely appropriate to ensure that fair and justified decisions are made giving due regard to the development plan and statutory duties.

In central London even smaller applications can become complicated and require a complex planning balance judgment, which in some instances is better considered by a planning committee. For instance, in Westminster there are 13,000 listed buildings and each year numerous listed building consent applications coming forward. On smaller applications, these can be determined by a heritage officer, rather than a planning officer. Where any heritage 'harm' is identified, this needs to be appropriately weighted in the planning balance and our concern is that on these smaller applications there may be a tendency by officers to refuse permission. These small applications can have an effect on delivery of growth and jobs in the capital – for example, through permitting the construction of plant machinery which would enable a retail unit to operate, or adding small amounts of space, which, whilst incremental, can be an important part of the supply of accommodation.

Without appropriate flexibility in any national scheme of delegation, there is a greater risk of increased refusals, and increased planning appeals, particularly on smaller applications falling within Tier A. These risks would be counterproductive to the Government's aspirations. It should be possible for applications in Tier A to be considered by committee at the applicant's request when they are otherwise to be refused under delegated powers and the Chief Planner agrees they raise matters of potential economic, social or environmental significance to the local area.

4. **The development plan is the cornerstone of the planning system, but compliance with such policies often requires a complex balanced judgement, taking into account material considerations where relevant.** The consultation's objectives refer to encouraging developers to submit "*good quality applications which are compliant with plan policies*" and empowering "*planning professionals to make sound planning decisions on those cases aligned with the development plan*" (our emphasis).

In developing plans for the national scheme of delegation, we urge the Government to bear in mind that particularly in densely built-up urban areas, such as central London, it is very rare that proposals will comply with all policies in the development plan. This is why 'compliance' is generally considered against the development plan as a whole.

Planning committees can be valuable in bringing in wider planning considerations and political judgement, in appropriate instances. For example, the appropriate weighting between heritage and public benefits, the compliance with the development plan as a whole and any material considerations. There has to remain a place, within the determination of all planning applications, for this balance to be properly considered and applied.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation on behalf of our members and would welcome any further opportunity to engage with the Government on the wider planning barriers blocking development coming forward. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this letter and our representations further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,



Charles Begley
Chief Executive, London Property Alliance

Enc. Appendix 1 – London Property Alliance – Representations on Reform of planning committees: technical consultation – Response to consultation questions

Appendix 1 – London Property Alliance – Representations on Reform of planning committees: technical consultation

Q1: Do you agree with the principle of having a two tier structure for the national scheme of delegation?

Yes, the LPA agrees with the principle of having a two tier structure for the national scheme of delegation, but there must be flexibility enshrined to enable Tier A applications in appropriate circumstances to be heard at planning committee.

Page | 3

Q2: Do you agree the following application types should fall within Tier A?

- applications for planning permission for:
 - **Householder development**
 - **Minor commercial development**
 - **Minor residential development**
- applications for reserved matter approvals
- applications for non-material amendments to planning permissions
- applications for the approval of conditions including Schedule 5 mineral planning conditions
- applications for approval of the BNG Plan
- applications for approval of prior approval (for permitted development rights)
- applications for lawful development certificates
- applications for a Certificate of Appropriate Alternative Development

The LPA agrees with the majority of these application types falling within Tier A, subject to there being a 'switch/lever' to enable a committee level decision in appropriate circumstances. We suggest that all special control applications (including listed building consent applications) are included within Tier A, again subject to there being flexibility for these to be heard at committee should circumstances require.

Q3: Do you think, further to the working paper on revising development thresholds, we should consider including some applications for medium residential development (10-50 dwellings) within Tier A? If so, what types of application?

Should the 'medium residential development' category (10-50 dwellings) be progressed, we consider that these applications within central London should fall under Tier B. There is a suggestion within the consultation (para 22) that the scale of development in London would warrant such applications falling within Tier A. Given the diverse and constrained built environment within central London, even a scheme of up to 50 dwellings can have considerable complex considerations which need to be balanced in decision-making. There should be an option for these applications to be considered at committee, where appropriate.

Q4: Are there further types of application which should fall within Tier A?

We suggest that special control applications including TPOs, listed building consent and advertisement consent fall under Tier A.

Q5: Do you think there should be a mechanism to bring a Tier A application to committee in exceptional circumstances? If so, what would those circumstances be and how would the mechanism operate?

Yes, we strongly consider that there should be such a mechanism.

Ideally, all Tier A applications would be straightforward and would be determined under delegated powers. This should be the default.

However, even smaller applications can sometimes raise complex matters. There may be instances where the balanced planning judgement requires committee level consideration, for example where local amenity impacts have to be balanced against the wider benefits of a scheme. This could be triggered by smaller ‘enabling’ applications, such as applications for plant, or highways works. Not having any route or flexibility for such applications to be determined at planning committee could result in more refusals, more planning appeals and less delivery of and investment in development, contrary to the Government’s aspirations.

We suggest that the circumstances in which a Tier A application could be heard at committee would be:

- Where an application is recommended for refusal; and
- Where the applicant has requested that the application be heard at planning committee; and
- Where, in the opinion of the chief planner, the application raises an economic, social or environmental issue of significance to the local area.

This would be a high bar for Tier A applications to be heard at planning committee, which would mean that the majority of such applications would be delegated. However, it would provide a procedural route to allow for committee consideration in certain instances, thereby helping to avoid poor decision-making and delays to development.

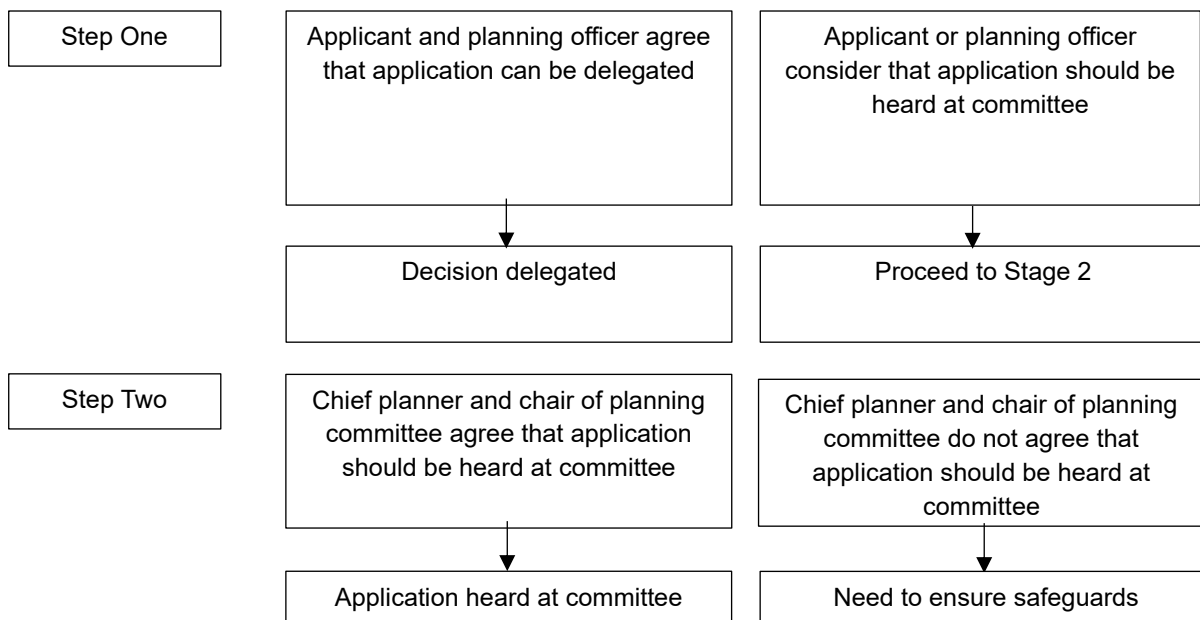
Where necessary, appropriate resourcing would need to be reflected in an appropriate determination Planning Performance Agreement.

Q6: Do you think the gateway test which requires agreement between the chief planner and the chair of the planning committee is suitable? If not, what other mechanism would you suggest?

No. Some Tier B applications will be clearly straightforward and will not require committee level consideration.

There should be a ‘first step’ to the gateway test whereby if the applicant and the planning officer agree that the decision can be delegated, then it is. If one/both parties consider that the application should be considered by the committee, then it can go to the ‘second step’ of the gateway test which would be a decision between the chief planner and the chair of the planning committee.

Suggested Gateway Test



The time of the chief planner and the chair of the planning committee is limited. Without such a ‘first step’ requiring every Tier B application to have to go through the gateway test could result in delays in decision-making, contrary to the Government’s aspirations to speed up the planning process.

It is not clear what happens in situations where mutual agreement is not reached between the chief planning officer and the chair of planning committee. Presumably in such instances, applications would be refused. There must be safeguards to ensure that where committee consideration is appropriate that this is secured. This could be by way

of introduction of a 'Tier C', where major or significant schemes above a certain threshold would always be determined at planning committee.

There is reference to the Government setting 'criteria' for triaging Tier B applications. We suggest that guidance, not criteria, is published for further consideration. Criteria within regulations are less flexible, more susceptible to legal challenge and professionals are less able to apply professional judgement than is the case for guidance. Any guidance would need to be appropriately worded to ensure that those applications which do require committee consideration are heard appropriately, but such that not all Tier B applications have to be considered at committee.

There is reference within the consultation to such criteria referring to applications which raise issues "of significance to the local area" and a "significant planning matter having regard to the development plan". These references are quite vague and certainly in London many applications (particularly Tier B) will be significant or raise significant issues. However, this does not automatically mean that they should be heard at planning committee. We suggest that any criteria could be tightened up.

Westminster City Council's scheme of delegation includes a scenario where applications are heard at committee where, "*In the opinion of the Executive Director the application is of a major controversial or sensitive nature or where in his/her opinion the decision would be contrary to approved planning policies*". We suggest that this could form the basis of guidance for triaging Tier B applications, albeit we suggest that reference to approved planning policies refer to compliance with elements of the development plan, given that often complex schemes will be contrary to some planning policies but this does not automatically make such schemes unacceptable in the context of the wider development plan.

In summary, we suggest that the guidance for triaging Tier B applications at the 'second step' to determine if they go to committee be:

- For those applications, where, in the opinion of the chief planner, the application is of a major controversial or sensitive nature and where in his/her opinion the decision would be contrary to elements of the development plan.

Q7: Do you agree that the following types of application should fall within Tier B?

a) Applications for planning permission aside from:

- **Householder applications**
- **Minor commercial applications**
- **Minor residential development applications**

b) notwithstanding a), any application for planning permission where the applicant is the local authority, a councillor or officer

c) applications for s73 applications to vary conditions/s73B applications to vary permissions

We agree that these applications should fall within Tier B, subject to there being a more streamlined process to enable delegation where appropriate e.g. straightforward s73 applications, and subject to Tier A applications having a 'switch/lever' to enable planning committee consideration where appropriate.

Q9: Do you consider that special control applications should be included in:

- **Tier A or**
- **Tier B?**

All special control applications should be within Tier A. In Westminster and the City, there are a significant number of listed building consent applications, the majority of which are not controversial and delegated, and the assumption should be that these are determined under delegated powers in the first instance.

As above, there must be flexibility for such special control applications to be heard at Committee if needed, even if within Tier A.

Q10: Do you think that all section 106 decisions should follow the treatment of the associated planning applications? For section 106 decisions not linked to a planning application should they be in Tier A or Tier B, or treated in some other way?

No. Not all section 106 decisions even on larger schemes necessarily need to be heard at committee. Enabling quick determination of conditions and section 106 obligations is often crucial to enable starts on sites or a continuation of works. We suggest that these applications are default delegated under Tier A, with the flexibility for any more complex applications to be heard at committee via the mechanism we have suggested for Tier A above.

Question 11: Do you think that enforcement decisions should be in Tier A or Tier B, or treated in some other way?

No comment.

Q12: Do you agree that the regulations should set a maximum for planning committees of 11 members?

Q13: If you do not agree, what if any alternative size restrictions should be placed on committees?

Q14: Do you think the regulations should additionally set a minimum size requirement?

The LPA does not have any specific comments on the size of planning committees, nor if this should be set within regulation. We consider that the structure and size of committees within Westminster and the City of London works well.

Q15: Do you agree that certification of planning committee members, and of other relevant decisions makers, should be administered at a national level?

The LPA has no comment on who should administer the certification but suggest that any member training be tailored to address locally specific issues. Training should be specific and relevant, potentially involving local stakeholders. Issues such as the release of green belt land are complex but not directly relevant to some urban areas, such as the centre of London. Conversely, there are issues such as daylight and sunlight, World Heritage Sites, and the strategic function of central London's economy that are distinct to this area on which members should be trained and aware.

Q16: Do you think we should consider reviewing the thresholds for quality of decision making in the performance regime to ensure the highest standards of decision making are maintained?

No comment.

Q17: For quality of decision making the current threshold is 10% for major and non-major applications. We are proposing that in the future the threshold could be lowered to 5% for both. Do you agree?

No comment.