

Fenland Developers Forum

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In this issue:

National Scheme of Delegation by Cllr Laws

Performance

Fens Reservoir – A Landmark Project for Fenland

Councils Could Soon Set Their Own Planning Fees

Self-Build Applications and the Introduction of a Unilateral Undertaking (UU)

Clarifying the Discharge of Planning Conditions

Fenland at the centre of major national infrastructure projects by Cllr Laws

Local Nature Recovery Strategy – Supporting Growth and Nature in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

National Scheme of Delegation by Cllr Laws

As many of you will know, the Government's Planning and Infrastructure Bill continues to move forward, and one of the most talked-about proposals within it is the creation of a National Scheme of Delegation. The Government say that this will bring greater consistency to how planning decisions are made across the country by setting out which applications are decided by officers and which go before elected Members.



The Bill had its last major debate in Parliament on 15 September 2025, and it is likely to move to the next stage, including further scrutiny and possible committee consideration, around 20 October 2025. If the process continues on its current timetable, this could result in the Bill becoming law by the end of November 2025.

While we don't yet have the final details, the direction of travel is clear: local authorities will be expected to operate under one scheme of delegation, that decision-making is mostly with planning officers and that Planning Committees will be focused on the most significant cases only. For Fenland, that could mean some adjustments to the way applications are handled and a significant reduction in the number of planning applications presented to the Planning Committee.

At the moment, the indication is that the National Scheme of Delegation will include a defined list of applications that must be determined by planning officers, alongside a smaller number of circumstances where referral to committee would still be possible. It is likely that, under the new arrangements, the majority of items considered by planning committees in the future will be major planning

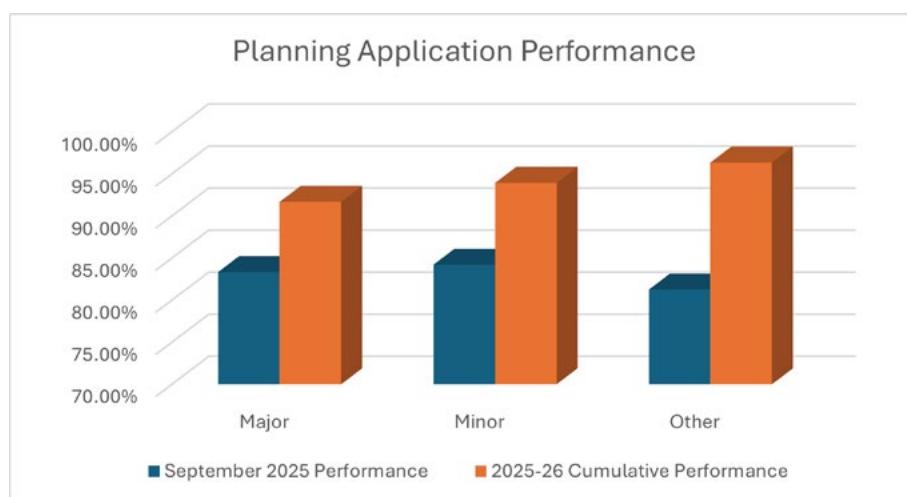
applications. Smaller-scale residential schemes and other routine developments would, except in exceptional circumstances and irrespective of public interest, be determined by officers under delegated powers.

As a Council we have always valued Members input and the importance of local knowledge has always been central to our approach to determining planning application. The local context and understanding that Members bring to planning decisions will continue to be an important part of how we shape development in Fenland. We'll be watching closely how the national scheme is framed to make sure that, while we deliver on the Government's requirements, we also retain a system that reflects the character and needs of our area.

We'll share more updates as the Bill progresses, but for now it's fair to say that change is on the horizon. As ever, our focus will be on keeping the planning process open, responsive and supportive of good-quality development in Fenland.

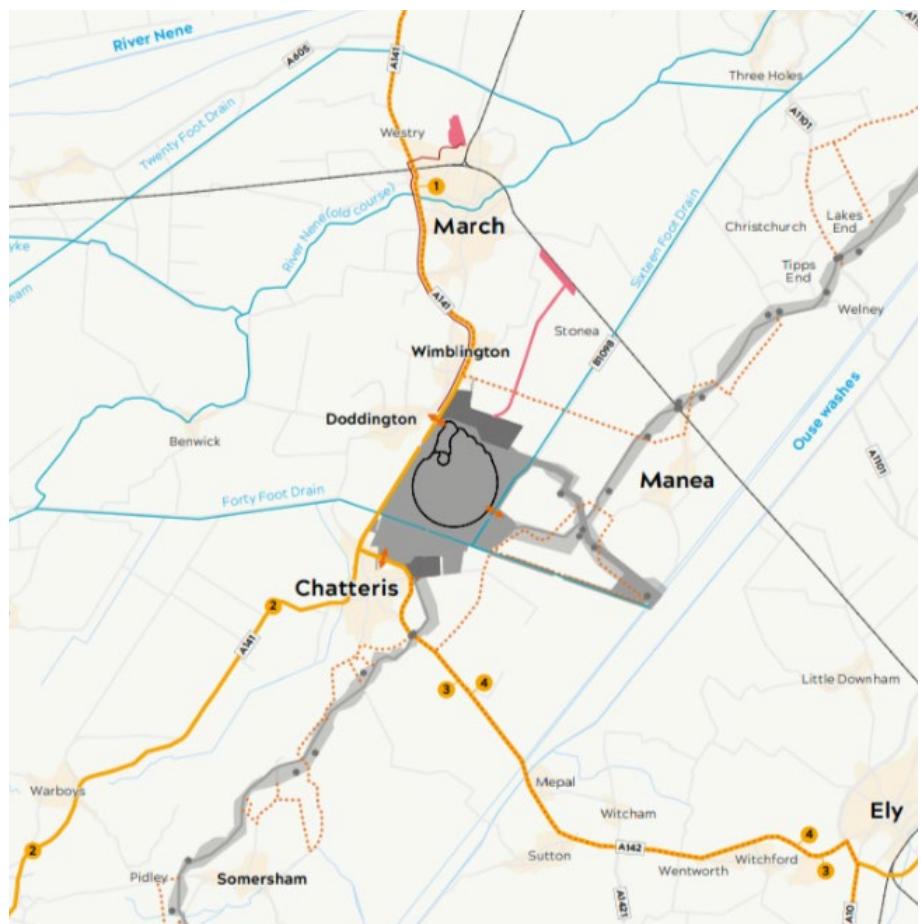
Councillor D Laws

Performance



Fens Reservoir – A Landmark Project for Fenland

The proposed Fens Reservoir is one of the most significant infrastructure projects currently planned in the district, both in scale and potential impact. Promoted by Anglian Water and Cambridge Water, the reservoir is designed to secure long-term water supplies for the East of England while creating new opportunities for environmental improvement, recreation, and local investment.



The project is now at its Phase 3 statutory consultation, where the promoters are seeking views on key aspects of the proposal—including the reservoir's design and layout, water transfer routes, access and transport connections, and the potential for landscape and community benefits.

This stage of consultation is an important opportunity for developers, landowners, and other stakeholders to engage directly with the project team. Your feedback can help influence how the scheme evolves and how wider infrastructure or growth opportunities might be realised around it.

Details of the proposals and consultation materials are available at www.fensreservoir.co.uk, and comments should be submitted directly through the website by 10 December.

Fenland District Council will also be submitting its own response as the host authority, and we would welcome colleagues or local stakeholders sharing any thoughts, ideas, or concerns with the Planning Policy Team via planningpolicy@fenland.gov.uk

Councils Could Soon Set Their Own Planning Fees

Homeowners and developers may soon see planning fees determined by their local council under proposals in the Government's Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

If the reforms are introduced, councils such as Fenland could set charges for planning applications based on the "real cost" of processing them. This could include the time spent by planning officers assessing applications, conducting site visits, completing administrative tasks, and seeking specialist advice in areas such as conservation or ecology. The Government suggests that this approach could improve efficiency and reduce the need for taxpayers to subsidise private development.

At the same time, some observers have highlighted potential challenges. With councils setting their own fees, there could be a lack of consistency between neighbouring areas and smaller developments may face higher charges than at present. This could affect householders and smaller developers when deciding whether to submit planning applications.

As the Bill progresses through Parliament, one clear outcome is that planning fees may no longer be uniform nationwide. As agents we would suggest that you will need to stay informed about any changes in their local area as this will impact on your clients.



Self-Build Applications and the Introduction of a Unilateral Undertaking (UU)

As we have highlighted previously, Planning Inspectors are increasingly dismissing appeals where developments intended as self-build are not supported by a legal agreement, such as a S.106. In response to this trend, Fenland District Council now considers it essential that such an agreement is in place before we can grant planning permission for a self-build application.

We are mindful, however, of the additional time and cost associated with drafting and completing a S.106 agreement. To help address this, the Council has produced a standard unilateral agreement (UU) to be used when the only reason for a legal agreement is to secure a development as self-build. This document is available on the Council's website and is designed to simplify the process. [Custom and self-build housing - Fenland District Council](#)

Applicants will still need to submit the self-build declaration at the time of application to ensure it is valid. The Council will contact applicants about the UU once the application has progressed significantly and appears likely to receive a favourable recommendation, or where the planning committee has resolved to grant planning permission.

A checking and monitoring fee will be applied for reviewing the UU and ensuring compliance with its requirements. The use of a standard UU, which the Council is satisfied with and allows limited amendments, keeps this fee relatively modest. This approach is intended to make securing self-build developments both quicker and more cost-effective.

Please note that if a planning officer contacts you regarding the completion of a S.106 or UU, this should not be taken as an indication that your application is guaranteed approval. Any checking fee paid will not be refundable in the event the application is subsequently refused.

We hope this new approach provides greater clarity and efficiency for applicants seeking to deliver self-build homes within Fenland.

Clarifying the Discharge of Planning Conditions

Fenland District Council has recently reviewed how we provide guidance on the discharge of planning conditions. You may have noticed that in recent years, our decision notices have included specific text beneath certain conditions to explain when a formal application to discharge a condition would be required.

For example, some decision notices have stated:

"Please note this condition needs to be discharged through the submission of a Discharge of Condition Application through the Local Planning Authority. Please read this condition carefully and ensure that you comply in full. The additional information required by this condition is considered necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms."

This approach was originally introduced to offer greater clarity for applicants, agents, and developers, helping to ensure that developments are implemented correctly and in full compliance with planning permissions. While this additional text was intended to assist in understanding the process, feedback and an internal review have suggested that it may not add significant practical value and in most cases needlessly extended the text contained with the decision notice.

As a result, the Council has decided to discontinue this practice. Instead, all decision notices will now include a standard informative explaining the general process for discharging planning conditions. This will provide consistent guidance across all planning permissions and remind applicants of their responsibility to seek formal approval where necessary before commencing development.

This change aims to streamline our decision notices, ensure consistency in how information is presented and continue to support applicants in meeting their planning obligations.



Fenland at the centre of major national infrastructure projects

Fenland is currently identified as a host authority for four Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) — large-scale developments of national importance that could bring major change to our district.

These include the Grimsby to Walpole electricity line, Eastern Green Links 3 and 4, the Fens Reservoir, and the now consented Medworth Energy from Waste Combined Heat and Power Facility in Wisbech. Together, they represent some of the most significant development activity Fenland has seen in decades, , promising new infrastructure and investment but also raising questions about environmental impact, landscape change, and local benefits.



The Planning Policy Team is leading the council's work on these NSIPs, coordinating input across departments to make sure Fenland's voice is heard throughout the Development Consent Order (DCO) process. This includes influencing how each proposal is designed, delivered, and integrated locally — to ensure the best possible outcomes for our communities, environment, and economy.

For site promoters and developers, these projects bring both opportunities and challenges. Large-scale infrastructure investment can unlock nearby land for future development and stimulate improvements to transport, utilities, and green infrastructure. Engaging early allows developers and landowners to understand where growth opportunities may emerge and to help shape schemes, so they support and enable well-planned, sustainable growth across the district.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy – Supporting Growth and Nature in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Work is nearing completion on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough – a new area-wide plan that will set out priorities for restoring nature, improving habitats, and guiding investment in the natural environment.

Following public consultation over the summer, the LNRS is now moving through its final stages of preparation before being formally adopted. Once complete, it will provide a shared framework for how local partners, landowners and developers can work together to achieve nature recovery alongside sustainable growth.



For developers and site promoters, the LNRS will be an important reference when preparing planning applications. It will help identify where habitat creation or enhancement is most needed and demonstrate how proposals can contribute to wider goals such as Biodiversity Net Gain, green infrastructure, and climate resilience.

The strategy aims to ensure that new development not only supports growth but also helps to restore, connect and enhance natural spaces across the region.

Find out more and view the latest updates at: <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/what-we-deliver/environment/lnrs/>