

Parish and Town Council Planning Update

National Scheme of Delegation – 2 September 2026

Presentation

Gavin Chinniah, Head of Planning, provided an overview of the new National Scheme of Delegation, which will come into effect on **31 October 2026** and introduce a consistent national approach to determining which planning applications are decided by officers and which may be considered by Planning Committee.

Key points included:

- The Council will need to amend its constitution to comply with the new national requirements.
- Existing automatic call-in arrangements for Parish Councils and Ward Councillors will cease, alongside current objection thresholds which can trigger referral to Planning Committee.
- Most applications will therefore be determined by planning officers.
- Certain Schedule 2 applications may still be referred to Planning Committee where they raise significant economic, social or environmental issues, or significant planning matters/departures from policy. Discussion must take place before this referral is agreed.
- Parish Councils, Ward Councillors and residents will **continue to be consulted**, and their representations will continue to be considered as part of the planning process.

General Q&A

Will Parish Councils still be consulted on planning applications?

Yes. Parish Councils will continue to be notified and can submit comments, support or objections. The change is that an objection will no longer automatically trigger referral to Planning Committee.

Can applications still go to Planning Committee?

Yes, some Schedule 2 applications may be referred where they meet the national criteria relating to significant local economic, social or environmental impacts, or significant planning matters/departures from policy.

Do Neighbourhood Plans still matter?

Yes. A significant departure from a Neighbourhood Plan policy could be relevant when considering whether an application meets the criteria for committee referral. Parish

Councils were encouraged to clearly identify relevant Neighbourhood Plan policies within their consultation responses.

Parishes were also encouraged to continue developing and updating Neighbourhood Plans despite the wider changes to national planning policy.

How will local knowledge be taken into account if more decisions are made by officers?

Planning officers will continue to consider comments from Parish Councils, residents, Ward Councillors and statutory consultees. For major applications, engagement with Ward Councillors and consideration of local information will continue.

Does the Planning Team have sufficient capacity for the increased responsibility placed on officers?

Gavin advised that the team has appropriate officers and consultees in place, with site visits and further assessment undertaken where required. Concerns were raised by attendees about officer workload and the importance of maintaining strong communication with parishes.

Why did Bedford Borough Council object to the national changes?

The Council's concern was principally around the reduction in local democratic involvement, particularly the removal of existing Parish and Ward Councillor call-in arrangements. It was noted that even smaller applications can have significant local impacts.