AI tool and new delegation rules to speed up planning decisions

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Press release

Faster planning decisions as new rules and AI tackle delays

Homeowners and small businesses to get quicker answers as new rules put expert officers in charge of straightforward applications

From:

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP

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Homeowners and small businesses to get quicker answers as new rules put expert officers in charge of straightforward applications

New AI planning tool cuts time spent on key tasks by 58%, halving processing times for routine householder applications

Over 400 planners recruited through government-backed schemes, exceeding manifesto commitment of 300

Homeowners looking to extend or convert their loft, and small businesses improving their premises, could get faster planning decisions under new rules to cut unnecessary delays.

From today (Saturday 31 October) straightforward applications will be decided by expert planning officers rather than waiting for a planning committee slot, helping families, shopkeepers and pub landlords get decisions sooner.

The new National Scheme of Delegation will give greater certainty for applicants, while freeing up councillors to focus on the most significant developments.

Families and businesses could also get quicker decisions thanks to 420 newly recruited planners through government-backed programmes, surpassing the government’s 2024 manifesto commitment to recruit 300 additional planners more than two years before the end of this Parliament.

New AI technology designed to take time-consuming admin off planners’ desks will also help homeowners get quicker decisions on their applications, like getting permission for a house extension or a conservatory. Developed with Google DeepMind, Google Cloud, Faculty and local authorities, PlanAssist brings together applications, policies and site constraints into one place for trained officers to review. Early testing cut time spent on key planning tasks by 58% - helping us halve processing times for routine householder applications from eight weeks to four.

Following a successful trial in Camden, Barnet and Dorset Councils, the tool will now expand to 15 councils for 12 months, with the government intending to make it available to every council in England by the end of 2027.

With householder applications accounting for nearly 70% of applications each year, the changes will get more everyday applications moving, delivering a faster, more efficient planning service for residents and businesses and giving planners more time to tackle complex cases.

Housing Secretary Angela Rayner said:

“Families wanting more space and businesses looking to grow shouldn’t be left waiting unnecessarily for straightforward planning decisions.

“We’re giving councils the people, tools and reforms they need to get applications moving faster, while freeing up

planners and councillors to focus on the developments that will deliver the homes and infrastructure communities need.

“We’ve already beaten our manifesto commitment to recruit 300 planners, and we’re going further with 1,400 new recruits across the planning system by the end of this Parliament.”

AI Minister Kanishka Narayan said:

“Whether it’s building an extension or converting a loft, families shouldn’t face unnecessary delays getting the go-ahead to improve their homes.

“This is what putting AI to work for the public looks like in practice. By slashing the time spent on routine planning tasks by more than half, we’re helping families get quicker answers while freeing up skilled planners to focus on the major developments that will get Britain building.”

Owen Larter, Senior Director, Frontier AI Policy & Global Affairs at Google DeepMind said:

“PlanAssist puts AI to work by freeing planning officers to spend more time deciding on applications and less time on administrative paperwork

“Providing the tool to more councils is the natural next step, and we’ll continue supporting the government and local councils as they seek to build more homes and unlock economic growth.”

Maureen Costello, Vice President, UK, Ireland and Sub-Saharan Africa, Google Cloud said:

“We aren’t just helping local councils digitise paperwork; with Google’s frontier AI and secure cloud infrastructure, we are building a system of intelligence that tackles real operational backlogs. Building on encouraging early testing with local authorities, expanding PlanAssist across 15 councils will help speed up everyday household applications like kitchen and loft extensions, while freeing up vital capacity for planning officers to help the UK reach its national homebuilding targets.”

Paul Maltby, Director of Public Services, Faculty:

“AI has the potential to rid the state of backlogs. To do that, it must be trustworthy and built with those who use it in mind. We have worked with planning officers in Camden, Dorset and Barnet to shape the system around them. It shows it’s working in a way that they can follow, and is tailored to tackle the challenges they face.

“That’s why this system halves the time it takes to review applications, and it is how the same technology will go on to help unclog the planning system and get homes built more quickly.”

Through the Incubator for AI, the government’s applied AI team, this project forms part of the Prime Minister’s AI Taskforce’s drive to put AI to work across government, cutting bureaucracy, improving public services and delivering real benefits for working people.

Together, these changes form part of the government’s planning reforms to speed up decisions, strengthen local planning services and support the delivery of the homes and infrastructure the country needs.

Further information

PlanAssist brings together planning applications, local policies and site constraints in one place, helping officers identify key information more quickly and efficiently. Planning officers remain responsible for reviewing applications and making decisions.

The tool compiles the information officers need and gives an evidence-backed initial assessment, speeding up routine householder applications which make up 70% of planning officers’ workload.

Following successful initial testing with the London Borough of Camden, London Borough of Barnet and Dorset Council, the government has now expanded testing to a further 12 councils, bringing the total number involved to 15. The 12 additional councils are: Ashford Borough Council, London Borough of Lambeth, Newcastle City Council, Nottingham City Council, Bristol City Council, Cumberland Council, North Lincolnshire Council, Rochdale Borough Council, London Borough of Redbridge, South Gloucestershire Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Westminster City Council.

Officers will use PlanAssist alongside their normal process, to test its performance at scale

PlanAssist will not be mandated software and the government is removing blockers to AI adoption by mandating the digitisation and publication of key planning documents as open data by the end of 2027, which will support all property technology tools with better quality data.

In 2026/27, the Department is investing over £14 million in two major routes into the profession: the Pathways to Planning graduate scheme and Public Practice.

Pathways to Planning, delivered by the LGA, provides a structured two-year placement and fully supported master's-level training for graduates working in local planning authorities. Over £12 million has been allocated this financial year, including £8.5 million for salary bursaries.

Public Practice, a social enterprise specialising in placing mid-career built-environment professionals into the public sector, is receiving over £2 million this year, including £1.6 million in targeted salary support for eligible councils. Alongside direct placements, Public Practice is helping authorities strengthen recruitment processes, address organisational barriers and promote more inclusive hiring practices.

PlanAssist is the name now given to the AI prototype announced in June 2026: AI tool to slash planning decision times as government accelerates push to build 1.5 million homes - GOV.UK

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