

**PLANNING POLICY
CABINET ADVISORY GROUP**

2.00 P.M.

13TH JANUARY 2026

PRESENT:- Councillors Sue Tyldesley (Chair), Louise Belcher, Dave Brookes, Keith Budden, Jean Parr, Joyce Pritchard and Paul Tynan

Apologies for Absence

Andrew Otway and Sandra Thornberry

Officers in attendance:

Paul Hatch	Principal Planning Policy Officer
Mark Cassidy	Chief Officer - Planning and Climate Change
Rebecca Richards	Planning Policy Officer
Eric Marsden	Democratic Support Officer

1 MINUTES

Nb. 13th January 2026 was the first meeting of the PPCAG.

2 ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the PPCAG, and also thanked Paul Hatch (Service Manager – Planning & Housing Strategy) for all his work, as he would be leaving the authority shortly.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 ITEM 1: NATIONAL CHANGES TO THE PLAN-MAKING SYSTEM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR LANCASTER DISTRICT

Officers introduced the main topics within the report previously circulated, and responded to questions from the members of the PPCAG.

Greater detail on changes to the Local Plan process had been awaited from the Government. Two of the most significant changes announced had been: a new 3 Gateway assessment procedure; and a 30 month period within which to complete. It was recalled that the previous Local Plan for the district had been undertaken between 2014-2020; nationally, Local Plans usually took 3-4 years. Consequently, the aim of completing a Local Plan within 30 months appeared ambitious, especially as LGR (Local Government Re-organisation) would be taking place simultaneously.

The aim of the new Gateway process was to identify problems and issues at an early stage, allowing them to be tackled and resolved at that point, rather than have them cause delays and additional work later on. Gateway 1 was a self-assessment process but, significantly, once it had been undertaken it then triggered the beginning of the 30 month period within which the Local Plan must be completed. A discussion then followed on when the optimum time would be to commence the 30 month period. This included the following points:

- work had already been prepared or taken place, in anticipation of what was likely to be required under the new Local Plan process;
- Cabinet had expressed a commitment to undertaking and completing a new Local Plan as quickly as possible, ideally commencing it in January 2026;
- a completed Local Plan achieved by mid 2028 would likely coincide with new LGR structures; and this may be advantageous;
- whilst it was not yet clear how individual Local Plans would be combined when local authorities merged under LGR arrangements, especially if they were at different stages, the message being given by Government was to press on and make progress with Local Plans, rather than wait for LGR;
- the worst case scenario would be not to have a new Local Plan ready and in place;
- there was no information yet on any consequences or sanctions should the 30 months be exceeded;
- the need for resources at the Planning Inspectorate to undertake all of the demands of the new Local Plan process was noted, along with the advantage of being an early completer and thus being ahead in the queue;
- following Gateway 1 and the start of the 30 month period would be the 'Visioning and Options' stage – however, the PPCAG were informed that this could not be undertaken any more promptly regardless of when the 30 month period was triggered, as it required work to be prepared and undertaken by consultants;
- pausing the triggering of the start of the 30 month period and potentially gaining some flexibility later on for unexpected delays was weighed against the advantages of making immediate progress and avoiding slippage.

Action: It was noted that Cabinet had agreed that the decision to initiate the Local Plan 30 month period was one for the Chief Officer to take. The Chair and Chief Officer agreed to have a further discussion and determine the optimum date to commence.

Gateway 2 would potentially take place in Autumn 2026. It was stressed to the PPCAG that whilst the outcome would only an 'advisory' report, it was likely that not addressing or resolving the issues or problems identified by the external assessor at Gateway 2 was highly likely to cause problems at Gateway 3. The Gateway 3 assessment was a 'stop/go' stage, prior to the completion and submission of the Local Plan to the Inspector. Outcomes at Gateway 3 would be mandatory. It was anticipated that each Gateway assessment would take 4-6 weeks, but within the overall 30 month period.

A national consultation on a revised NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) had commenced just before Christmas, with a deadline for responses of 10th March 2026. Significant for Local Plan making were non statutory NDMP's (national development management policies). A response to the consultation is being prepared by officers, and will be presented at a future PPCAG meeting (February, date TBC) and will invite input from Planning Regulatory Committee Members too. Following this, the consultation response will be presented to Council Business Committee prior to submission.

Action: NPPF consultation response.

5 ITEM 2: LANCASTER DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN REVIEW UPDATE

Officers introduced the previously circulated report, outlining: the work that had already been completed; what was currently underway; and the work programme to follow. It was noted that consultants were currently drafting a report on the Local Housing Need

Assessment. This should be available shortly, and it was intended that it would be made available to all Councillors via a briefing and presentation.

Action: all Councillor briefing to be arranged.

In response to questions from members of the PPCAG it was confirmed that:

- the methodology used for calculating housing need was prescribed by the Government, and differed from methodologies used previously;
- whether sites were deliverable / commercially viable would be addressed within the site allocation process, i.e. is there a reasonable prospect of delivery?
- it was considered that the Gateways assessments would examine deliverability;
- work assessing the siting for net zero and renewable energy reports would link into the Local Area Energy Plan;
- the sensitive topic of Green Belt and Grey Belt, and potential changes to designations and boundaries, was currently being worked upon by consultants, who would report in due course;
- potential new areas for Local Green Spaces had been supplied by the public, and were being assessed;
- the profile of the Local Plan process to the wider public was likely to be raised as the location of sites for development began to be considered, along with other issues such as whether a CIL (Community Interest Levy) ought to be introduced;
- the difficulty of resolving transport challenges and pursuing initiatives such as the 'cycle superhighway' or 'modal shift' was recognised, with the County Council (and National Highways) having greater responsibility and scope to lead and make progress (in order to enable Local Plan submission);
- any limits on development around Heysham, in particular regarding the nuclear energy plant and regulations around suburban population density criteria in the surrounding radius, would be considered as part of the plan-making process and would involve discussions with the Office for Nuclear Regulation and EDF (with it noted that the population density figures will include caravan sites and the traveller community).

Finally, it was confirmed that the Local Nature Recovery report would be published by Lancashire County Council later this week.

6 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

To be agreed with the Chair.

Chair

(The meeting ended at 3.05 p.m.)

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Eric Marsden, Democratic Support - tel: 01524 582000, or email:
emarsden@lancaster.gov.uk**