

The return of strategic planning

Highbury Group
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The national context

- Key to the Government's Plan for Change and Mission to kickstart economic growth and Devolution is the **target of Building 1.5 million homes** in England this Parliament.
- **Planning reforms aimed at providing more confidence in the system** with reduced political, financial and technical risks – key will be **getting the 'plan-led' system working again.**
- Reforms to be introduced throughout 2025, starting with the **Planning & Infrastructure Bill, updated national policy** (and guidance) and introduction of **National Development Management Policies.**



Government Planning & Infrastructure reforms, Year 1

- JULY 24** ➤ Changes to NPPF/PPG on **onshore wind**
 - **New Towns Task Force** established
- AUG 24** ➤ **New Homes accelerator programme** introduced
- SEPT 24** ➤ Working paper on **Brownfield Passports**
- DEC 24** ➤ **English Devolution White Paper** setting out proposals for a return to **mandatory and universal strategic planning**
 - Working paper on **nature recovery**
 - **Updated NPPF** focused on updating housing targets and introducing 'grey belt' (with follow up PPG on Green Belt)
- JAN 25** ➤ Working paper on **streamlining NSIPs**
- FEB 25** ➤ Consultation on **land-use framework**
 - **Government's response to local plan reforms** (as set out in the LURA)
- MARCH 25** ➤ **Planning & Infrastructure Bill** which includes **legislation for spatial development strategies (SDS)**
 - WMS on **Statutory Consultees**
- APRIL 25** ➤ WMS on **Reforms to national infrastructure**
- MAY 25** ➤ Technical consultation/ working paper on **build out rates**
 - Consultation on **BNG and nationally significant infrastructure, and for small, medium & brownfield sites**
 - Working paper on **site thresholds**
 - Technical consultation on **Planning committees** (update from Feb working paper)
- JUNE 25** ➤ **10 Year Infrastructure Strategy** published with strong **references to spatial planning & specifically SDS**
 - New streamlined approach to **processing appeals** announced



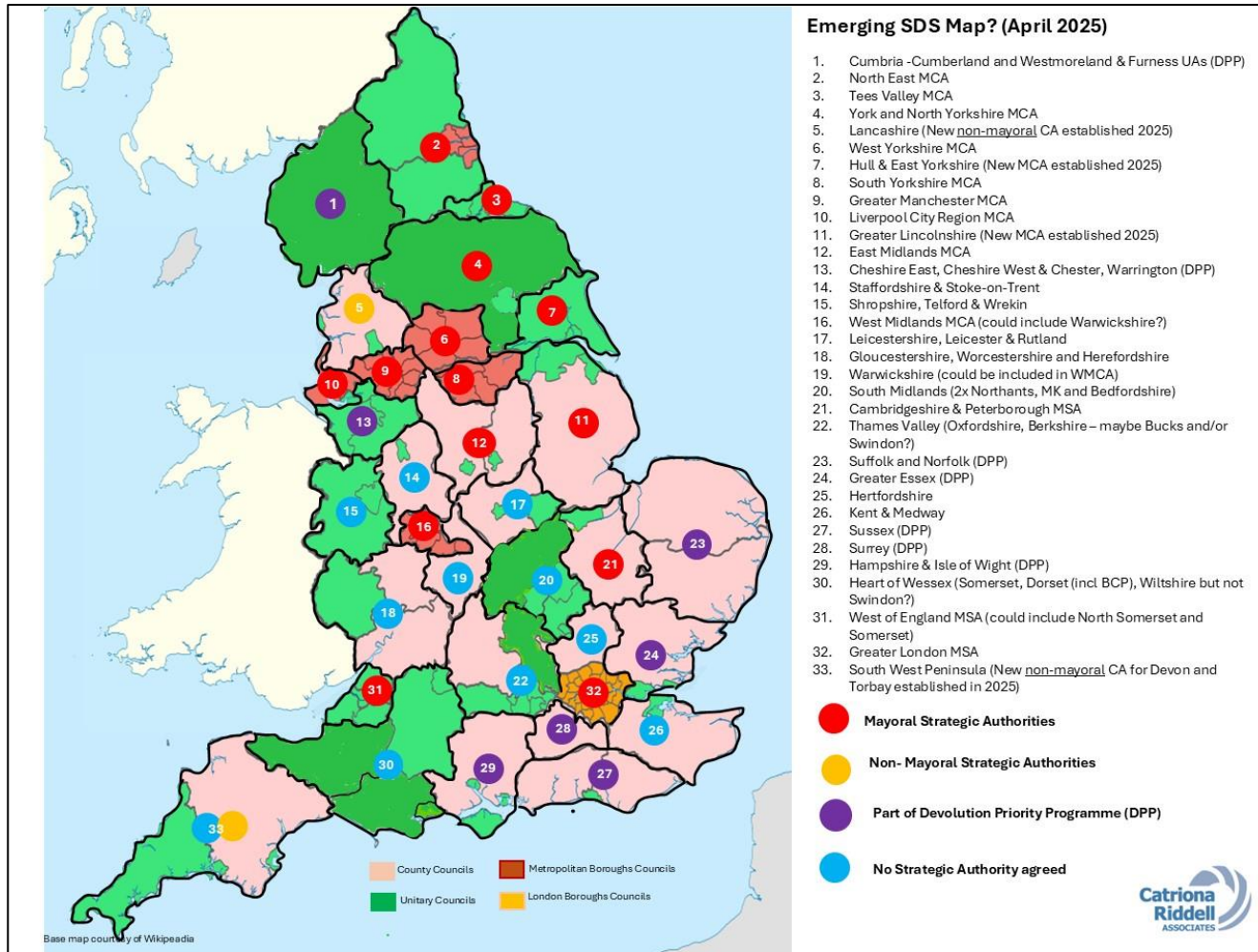
Still to come in 2025

- **English Devolution Bill**
- Consultation on **NDMPs and strategic planning**
- Update to the **National Design Guide and National Model Design Code**
- Recommendations from the **New Towns Task Force**
- **Updated NPPF/PPG** – to incorporate new approach to local plans and spatial development strategies
- **Planning & Infrastructure Bill secondary legislation**

What are the Government's proposals for strategic planning?

- **Spatial Development Strategies (SDS) will be required across all of England.** These will be part of the statutory development plan alongside local and neighbourhood plans. Can be used for decision-making where LP is out of date. BUT – LP preparation is expected to continue at pace!
- **Strategic Planning Authorities** will be CA/CCAs and upper tier authorities although the expectation is that all areas will eventually be represented by a (Mayoral) Strategic Authority. Mayors will have a casting vote. Strategic Planning Boards will be formed where there is more than one UTA.
- **Strategic planning will play a critical role in implementing a wide-range of devolved powers** e.g. housing (including affordable housing), environment, local growth priorities, health, regeneration, transport. They will be vision-led/outcome focused with clear links to the integrated funding settlements with Mayors.
- **SDS will be long term (30 year), high level frameworks** with key roles around spatial distribution of growth and identifying strategic infrastructure priorities. Addressing climate change and health inequalities will be embedded across all policies. They will have to be specific around the location of strategic development areas, strategic infrastructure but will not allocate sites.
- **Housing targets set by government will be amalgamated at the SDS scale** – Strategic Planning Authority will determine targets for individual LPs.
- **Strategic Planning Authorities will have to work closely together to address cross boundary issues**, e.g. housing market areas, national infrastructure or new town proposals.
- **Mayoral Strategic Authorities likely to have significant delivery tools** to ensure SDS are implemented e.g. Strategic Infrastructure Tariff, Development Corporations, call-in powers for strategic applications. These will be set out in the English Devolution Bill.
- **Strategic planning geography will (largely) mirror devolution landscape** – existing and emerging, with universal coverage of SDS across England expected by 2029. Confirmation of spatial planning geography expected soon.

Is this the new strategic planning geography?



Potential SDS in the 'Wider South East':

- Kent & Medway
- Sussex
- Surrey
- Hampshire & Isle of Wight
- Thames Valley
- South Midlands
- Cambridge & Peterborough
- Greater Essex
- Suffolk and Norfolk

Recommendations from the Strategic Planning Group

Purpose and Objectives	1	Strategic plans should be the core of the reformed planning system.	Setting Vision and Ambition	9	Strategic plans must be ambitious, with a compelling place-specific vision.
	2	Strategic plans must be joined up to provide a clear framework for national spatial and infrastructure priorities.		10	SDSs should be developed through honest and meaningful engagement with communities and stakeholders.
	3	Strategic plans must provide clarity and certainty for the investment needed to deliver the vision and ambition of an area.	Evidence, Testing, Examination and Monitoring	11	Strategic plans must be supported by a focused and streamlined evidence base and in line with clear guidance to be provided by MHCLG.
	4	Strategic plans must ensure a resilient natural environment to underpin sustainable and equitable growth.		12	Strategic plans must be assessed under an Integrated Impact Assessment tied to a place based vision.
	5	Strategic plans must fully embed healthy placemaking principles, and address local need and inequalities.		13	Strategic plans should be evaluated through a streamlined technical examination process and in line with clear guidance to be provided by MHCLG.
Focus, Approach and Scope	6	Strategic plans must set out visual and compelling spatial strategies with clear intent to support sustainable growth.		14	Strategic plans must be capable of demonstrating how they will accelerate delivery of development and infrastructure priorities over time and how the anticipated outcomes of the strategy will be monitored.
	7	Strategic plans must be digitally enabled for the 21st century and be effective, efficient, accessible and transparent.	Leadership, Skills and Capacity	15	Strategic plans must be championed by strong place leaders willing to make the difficult decisions that will inevitably be required through the strategic planning process.
	8	Strategic plans should be delivered at pace, with a clear delivery framework and measurable outcome-focused targets monitored annually.		16	Strategic plans must be prepared by multi-disciplinary teams and incorporate a diversity of perspectives.
				17	The successful preparation of SDS will require investment in a new generation of strategic planners to support the essential role of partnerships and embed innovative practices and thinking.



“The Government should therefore consider establishing a small number of 'Spatial Planning Monitoring Units' across SDS geographies. When defining their geographical extent, existing functional geographies (e.g. housing market areas) and the relationship with national infrastructure and new towns should be taken into consideration. The extent of existing partnerships should also be a factor in determining these new cross SDS geographies (e.g. where existing combined authorities already work together, where there are established growth partnerships across local authority boundaries or where there are regional transport partnerships).

The secretariat for these new units must have a clear and focused role, especially in relation to how they will work with Strategic Planning Authorities within their defined area. This should include annual reporting to the Government (especially in relation to how housing targets are being managed at the strategic scale) and NISTA to inform its biennial review of its 10-year national infrastructure strategy.

Quarterly meetings of the relevant Strategic Planning Authorities should be held to support ongoing co ordination. These should also include representatives from any pan-SDS grouping and the relevant government agencies.”