

Planning and Infrastructure Bill: call for evidence

May 2025

About us

UKHospitality is the authoritative voice for over 750 companies operating around 130,000 venues in a sector that employed 3.2 million people prior to COVID. The body speaks on behalf of a wide range of leisure and 'out-of-home' businesses, from FTSE 100 enterprises to niche groups and independent single-site operators, as well as 6,000 affiliated operators. UKHospitality provides a single voice bringing together businesses from all aspects of hospitality: coffee shops, hotels, serviced apartments, pubs, restaurants, leisure parks, nightclubs, contract caterers, entertainment, wedding venues, holiday homes, bowling alleys and visitor attractions.

Issues in the planning system

Prior to providing comment on the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, it is important to note that hospitality businesses are experiencing a number of issues with the commercial planning system, including:

- Delays in the planning system **have been worsening significantly** since 2014-15, and show little sign of improving. **In 2014-15**, the percentage of **major applications** decided within the statutory time period of **13 weeks was 47%. Now, it is just 20%**. There is a similar trend for **minor applications**, where, in 2014-15, the percentage of applications decided within the statutory eight-week time period **was 64% but has since fallen to 38%**.
- These delays have led to the number of overall planning applications decreasing. In **2014-15**, a **total of circa 473k planning applications were received, which, in 2023-24, fell to circa 350k**.
- Statutory consultees **are taking far longer than the mandated 21 days to comment on an application**, with many hospitality businesses experiencing delays well beyond eight weeks for this stage of the process alone.
- There is currently **an unavailability of planning officers**, which is significantly increasing the workload for existing officers and leading to a deterioration of pre-application engagement.
- Decisions taken at planning committee level often exacerbate many of the ongoing issues hospitality businesses are continuing to experience with the planning system. Most significantly, **delays tend to be more prevalent where applications are determined at committee level**. In addition, hospitality businesses are increasingly experiencing committees overruling the advice of planning officers and **determining applications along party political lines**.

Key points

Whilst we support the overarching aims in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, there must be a greater focus on significant **reform of the commercial planning system** if it is to truly unlock economic growth.

- It is positive that the Government has made growth a core focus, but the Government must ensure that **hospitality is given due consideration** in any changes to the planning system, with the sector well placed to help deliver vibrant town and city centres.
- **We strongly support the proposal around streamlining planning committees**, setting out which types of applications should be determined by officers, and which should go to committees. This, alongside previously announced training for local councillors as part of planning committees, will help to streamline the planning process.
- Whilst we understand the cost challenges facing local authorities, it is essential that any increases as a result of local councils being able to set their own planning fees must lead to improvements in the planning system. There should be a **review mechanism preventing further increases where improvements are not made**.

Wider planning points

In order to achieve long-term reform of the planning system, the Government should:

- **Introduce a system of presumptive permission**, with automatic planning approval if certain criteria are met.
- Issue good practice to local planning departments, highlighting **the importance of pre-application engagement**.
- Introduce a system whereby **if statutory consultees have not responded within 21 days there is assumed support for the application**. It is positive that the Government has reaffirmed that decisions should not be delayed in order to secure advice from statutory consultees beyond 21 days, but we would like to see this go further with assumed support beyond this point.
- Introduce a fast-track system for both major and minor applications.
- Ensure that there is a freezing of fee increases where local planning departments are consistently falling behind targets.

For further information please contact info@ukhospitality.org.uk