

Hullbridge Parish Council

Planning & Infrastructure Committee Report

National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026) and changes to planning decision-making from 31 October 2026

Purpose: To provide Councillors with a summary of the principal changes , explain their potential implications for Hullbridge and outline how the Parish Council can continue to influence planning decisions.

1. Summary of the August 2026 NPPF

The below identifies ten significant changes affecting town and parish councils. Its central message is that planning representations will need to become more precise, policy-based and supported by evidence, particularly where applications are increasingly determined by planning officers rather than elected committees.

Key change identified	Implications for Hullbridge Parish Council
1. New presumption in favour of development	Policy S4 introduces a stronger starting point in favour of development within settlement boundaries. Objections must identify specific adverse planning impacts rather than general opposition.
2. New policy structure	The Framework separates plan-making policies (PM) from national decision-making policies. Councillors will need to use the relevant new policy references.
3. Development near railway stations	Policy S5 supports qualifying development near well-connected stations outside settlement boundaries, subject to infrastructure and other criteria.
4. Neighbourhood planning changes	Neighbourhood plans can still establish locally specific policies, allocate sites and protect community assets, but cannot duplicate or contradict national decision-making policies.
5. Five-year neighbourhood plan protection	Policy S6 provides stronger protection against certain conflicting housing proposals where a neighbourhood plan is no more than five years old and contains allocations meeting its identified housing requirement.
6. Housing requirements	Policy HO2 generally expects neighbourhood areas to receive a housing requirement figure, with limited exceptions.
7. Settlement boundaries	Policies S4 and S5 place greater importance on whether development is inside or outside an established settlement boundary.

8. Environmental and community protection	Identify continuing protections for Local Green Space, community facilities, recreation land, Green Belt and heritage assets.
9. Digital neighbourhood plans	New digital publication and data requirements affect the preparation and review of neighbourhood plans.
10. Transitional arrangements	Separate transitional arrangements for Local Plans and neighbourhood plans, potentially resulting in plans being prepared under different versions of national policy.

2. Points to note

Settlement boundaries and proposed housing development: For applications affecting the edge of Hullbridge, the Council should identify the applicable boundary, development plan policies and any material impacts on the surrounding countryside.

Infrastructure: Concerns about highways, drainage, flood risk, schools, healthcare and other services should be supported by evidence wherever possible. The scale and cumulative effects of development may be particularly relevant when assessing larger proposals.

Protection of green spaces and community facilities: national policies supporting the protection of designated Local Green Space, recreational land and community facilities. Councillors should distinguish between formally designated protected land and land that residents value but which does not carry the same planning designation.

Local Plan representations: Given the ongoing Rochford Local Plan process, the Council should distinguish between commenting on the emerging Local Plan and making representations on individual planning applications. These are separate statutory processes.

3. Changes to planning decisions from 31 October 2026

From 31 October 2026, changes to the national scheme of delegation will affect which planning applications are decided by Rochford District Council officers and which may be considered by its Planning Committee. The main changes are outlined below.

Schedule 1 – Officer decisions: Certain applications, including householder applications and specified minor developments, will be determined by planning officers, subject to the exceptions set out in the regulations.

Schedule 2 – Possible referral to Planning Committee: These applications will generally be determined by officers. However, there is a procedure through which an application may be referred to Planning Committee where the relevant criteria are met.

Applications involving the District Council, its Members or officers: Separate provisions apply to certain applications where the local planning authority has an interest.

It is important for Councillors to be aware that an objection from a parish or town council will not automatically result in an application being considered by the District Council's Planning Committee. Similarly, a request from a District Councillor will not, on its own, require an application to be called in.

4. The gateway procedure – how parish and town councils can seek further scrutiny

For applications falling within Schedule 2, parish and town councils can request that the District Council considers whether the application should be referred to its Planning Committee. This does not give the Parish Council an automatic right to have the application heard by committee. The request must be considered against the following criteria:

Criterion A – Significant local impact: Whether the application raises an economic, social or environmental issue of significance to the local area.

Criterion B – Significant planning matter: Whether the application raises a significant planning matter when considered against the development plan and other material planning considerations.

Suggested procedure for Hullbridge Parish Council

1. Check whether the application falls within Schedule 2 and is eligible for consideration under the gateway procedure.
2. The Planning & Infrastructure Committee considers the application, identifies any significant planning concerns and agrees the Council's formal response.
3. Where appropriate, the office submits a written request to Rochford District Council, setting out the reasons for seeking referral and the relevant supporting information.
4. The District Council considers the request under its adopted arrangements, involving the nominated planning officer and nominated Planning Committee Member.
5. The Parish Council records the outcome and continues to make its planning representations through the usual consultation process.

Any request should clearly identify the planning application, the relevant gateway criterion, the planning policies involved and the reasons why the Parish Council considers that further scrutiny may be appropriate. General opposition to a proposal, or the number of objections received, will not in itself be sufficient grounds for referral.

5. Recommended actions for Hullbridge Parish Council

- Seek confirmation from Rochford District Council of its revised scheme of delegation and the process, timescales and contact details for submitting gateway requests.
- Ensure that the Planning & Infrastructure Committee's responses identify relevant planning policies and set out clear reasons for any objections or concerns.
- Consider introducing a standard format for gateway requests, with all formal correspondence submitted through the Parish Office.
- Continue to monitor the Rochford Local Plan, particularly matters affecting Hullbridge's settlement boundaries, Green Belt, infrastructure and open spaces.
- Provide Councillors with information and guidance on the revised NPPF and delegation arrangements as these are implemented.

6. Conclusion

The changes outlined in this report will affect how planning applications are considered and determined at District Council level. Although the Parish Council will have less opportunity to seek committee consideration simply by objecting to an application, it will continue to be consulted and can make representations on planning matters affecting Hullbridge.

It will therefore be important that the Council's responses are clear, refer to the relevant planning policies and are supported by evidence where available. Where an application raises significant concerns, the gateway procedure may provide an opportunity to request further scrutiny, although the decision on referral will remain with Rochford District Council.