

## Planning decision-making reforms: what you need to know

As from 31<sup>st</sup> October 2026, the way local councils decide planning applications is changing.

This is not the choice of Bromley Council. Central Government is forcing major planning reforms on Local Planning Authorities, including Bromley. The purpose of the new legislation is to reduce the number of planning applications determined by councillors. It requires most planning decisions to be taken by unelected council planning officers.

Up until now, councillors have been able to 'call in' any planning application in their Ward. 'Call in' enables the application to be decided by a committee of democratically elected councillors in public. This will change under the new legislation.

As from 31 October 2026, all planning applications will fall into one of two categories, Schedule 1 and Schedule 2.

Schedule 1 applications will include:

- All householder applications
- Minor commercial developments
- Minor residential developments i.e. those with fewer than 10 units of housing, reserved matters for major planning applications with fewer than 500 units of housing
- Development of land without compliance with conditions previously attached
- Prior approval for permitted development rights and certificates of lawfulness of an existing use or development (where an applicant seeks to prove that a specific use, building work or activity on a piece of land is legal for planning purposes).

All Schedule 1 applications **must** be determined by planning officers themselves, a procedure known as delegation. Councillors lose the right to 'call in' these proposals.

Schedule 2 applications will include:

- Applications for planning permission which are not householder, minor commercial or minor residential applications, for example, major applications comprising 10 or more units of housing.
- Applications for planning permission which would otherwise fall into Schedule 1 but are connected to a Schedule 2 application for listed building consent or for the variation or discharge of a condition on a listed building consent.
- Reserved matters for applications with 500 or more units of housing
- Retrospective planning applications or part-retrospective applications i.e. those where development has already begun but no planning permission was sought
- Applications for listed building consent
- Applications for advertisement consent
- Applications for tree preservation orders
- 'Own' applications i.e. those where a councillor or council employee is the applicant

Councillors will be able to apply to 'call in' Schedule 2 applications for decision by a planning committee.

As from the end of October 2026, all planning applications will be clearly marked as either Schedule 1 or Schedule 2 on the weekly planning list that is circulated to all councillors. If a

councillor wishes to apply for 'call in' for a Schedule 2 application, they must do so within three weeks of the application appearing on the list.

Even with Schedule 2 applications, there is a presumption that they will be decided under delegation. A Schedule 2 application will have to meet the so-called Gateway Test Criteria. It can go to a committee only if **both** of the following requirements are met:

- **Statutory Significance Criteria:** The proposal must raise:
  - One or more issues of **economic, social, or environmental significance** to the local area, **OR**
  - One or more **significant planning matters** having regard to the development plan and any other material considerations.
- **Explicit Dual Agreement:** Referral requires the formal, joint agreement of a designated **nominated officer** [the chief planning officer or other senior planning officer] and a **nominated member** [the planning committee chairman].

The two nominated individuals will meet every two weeks or as necessary to discuss and decide which 'call in' applications go to committee.

In addition, a council planning committee must contain no more than 13 elected representatives as from 31<sup>st</sup> October. In many local planning authorities, this change will reduce number of councillors who can take part in the planning process.

For administrative purposes, Bromley Council will retain its present Development Control Committee (reduced from 16 members) plus two planning sub-committee structure until the end of this Council year in May 2027. It is likely that most sub-committee meetings will be cancelled for lack of business. From May, there will probably be just one planning committee which will meet monthly to decide all applications. This will give the new system time to 'bed in' and see what, if any, adjustments are required.

These changes are ostensibly to 'streamline' the planning system and to speed up decision times. In reality, it will remove democratic accountability in the vast majority of planning cases – the ability for locally elected councillors to make decisions on behalf of the residents who have elected them. Residents will no longer be able to speak for or against any Schedule 1 application as those will no longer be decided at committee. They will, however, be able to speak on Schedule 2 applications that are selected to come before committee.

Full guidance is available at: [Planning Committees and the National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions: Guidance for local planning authorities in England - GOV.UK](#)