



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Baroness Taylor of Stevenage

*Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
Housing and Local Government*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our reference: MC2025/05484

Chris Hinchliff MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

26 March 2025

Dear Chris,

Thank you for your letter of 18 February addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister, regarding the appeals against the enforcement notices served by North Hertfordshire District Council at The Cabinet, High Street, Reed, Royston, SG8 8AH. I have been asked to reply.

May I firstly take this opportunity to apologise for the time it is currently taking to determine these appeals and assure you that we appreciate the importance of progressing them.

Regarding your concerns about the length of time it takes for appeals to be determined, the Inspectorate is performing well across a number of key areas such as local plan examinations, nationally significant infrastructure project applications, s62a applications and planning appeals proceeding by hearings and inquiries. It is, for example:

- meeting all statutory timeframes for national infrastructure applications;
- increasingly deciding planning appeals by hearing and inquiry in around 26 weeks (the Ministerial measure), having already cleared a backlog of casework; and
- beginning to decide enforcement appeals by hearing and inquiry in around 26 weeks (the ministerial measure) for the first time in many years, as it clears a long-standing backlog of casework.

The Inspectorate is implementing actions to maintain performance in these areas and to improve end-to-end times for other casework including by:

- focusing available capacity of both salaried and contract (non-salaried inspectors) on reducing the amount of open appeals. The number of open planning appeals by written representations has reduced significantly during 2024 and continues to reduce;
- using contract (non-salaried) inspectors to the full extent of their availability and expanding the range of casework they determine;
- moving more inspectors onto enforcement written representations casework in Spring 2025 once the work on improving hearings performance has progressed further;

In addition, the Inspectorate has designed and developed a new digital Appeals Service currently in Beta phase. This new service improves the process for submitting appeals, including reducing the number of invalid appeals submitted. In turn, this reduces the number of validation checks required and is speeding up the time taken to validate appeals. The new service has been expanded to cover all local planning authority areas. In five pilot local authority areas the digital Appeals Service is now being used to progress the appeal from receipt through to decision. This provides an interface for Local Planning Authorities and appellants to manage appeals and automate notifications which are

expected to save time for participants, improve their experience of the appeals service and be a foundation for further improvements.

The Planning Inspectorate is an Arm's Length Government Body with responsibility for allocation of resources, prioritisation and overall operational performance. The Inspectorate publishes updates on its performance on its website regularly.

On your second point concerning the protection of heritage assets, I would like to make clear that the National Design Guide states that well-designed places should be influenced by the history and heritage of the site. The guide also highlights the importance of conservation of historical assets.

The National Model Design Code sets out the importance of respecting local history and character, including encouraging the consideration of landscape and movement patterns that create a distinctive urban grain, when planning for new development. It encourages the use of materials that reflect the local character and identity. Design codes can include guidance on the use of colour, quality of materials and detailing, drawn from the surrounding context.

New schemes should respect the historic assets of the site and its surroundings. Design codes can help by setting out a necessary level of detail in sensitive locations, for example, with heritage considerations, and they can set out specific ways to maintain local character.

Thank you again for your letter, and for taking the time to write on this important matter.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Taylor', written in a cursive style.

BARONESS TAYLOR OF STEVENAGE

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing and Local Government