

# Draft NPPF 2025 Key Changes and Implications for Chelmsford & South Woodham Ferrers Consultation

## For Councillors – January 2026

**Purpose:** To summarise the government’s proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and highlight the implications for Chelmsford and South Woodham Ferrers (SWF), enabling councillors to decide whether to respond to the consultation (closing **10 March 2026**).

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### 1. What the Government Is Proposing

The draft NPPF 2025 represents a major restructuring of the planning system. It introduces:

- A new national planning architecture
- Stronger national rules for decision-making
- Higher and more rigid housing requirements
- A tougher presumption in favour of development
- New policies on climate, energy, transport and the Green Belt
- A shift toward faster, more rules-based planning

The intention is to make planning more consistent, more predictable, and more delivery-focused.

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### 2. Key National Changes (Summary)

#### A. National policies override local policies more often

- Decision-making policies are now separate from plan-making policies.
- Local policies that conflict “in any way” with national decision-making policies get very limited weight.
- Older Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans will be easier to override.

**Implication:** Local discretion narrows; national rules dominate.

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#### B. Stronger presumption in favour of development

- Refusal threshold rises from “significantly and demonstrably outweigh” to “substantially outweigh”.
- Within settlements, the presumption is very strong.
- Outside settlements, development must meet stricter tests but is still easier to justify than before.

**Implication:** More applications approved, especially on appeal.

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#### C. Higher housing need figures

- New formula: 0.8% of existing housing stock, not household projections.
- 35% urban uplift removed but replaced with a stronger affordability adjustment.
- Harder for councils to argue for lower numbers.

**Implication:** Chelmsford’s housing requirement will rise.

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#### **D. Five-year housing land supply reinstated for all**

- No exemptions for recently adopted plans.
- If supply falls short, the presumption applies automatically.

Authorities with weak supply will lose appeals more often such as Maldon.

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#### **E. Affordable housing becomes a strategic lever**

- Schemes offering more than policy-required affordable housing may receive flexibility on market mix or off-site delivery.

Developers may use affordable housing to negotiate faster approvals.

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#### **F. Green Belt → Grey Belt reforms**

- Weak-performing Green Belt parcels can be treated as Grey Belt.
- Development is not inappropriate if “Golden Rules” are met.
- Brownfield in the Green Belt can be intensified.
- New support for transport-led growth around railway stations.

More Green Belt release around Chelmsford is likely.

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#### **G. Local Plans must be more strategic**

- Plans must focus on where growth goes, not detailed development management wording.
- Plans delivering less than 80% of new housing need must be restarted.

Chelmsford’s Local Plan review must be ambitious and deliverable.

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#### **H. Economic development given “substantial weight”**

- Data centres, labs, logistics, gigafactories and similar sectors receive strong national support.

Harder to refuse major employment schemes, even outside settlement boundaries.

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### **3. Chelmsford**

#### **Chelmsford becomes a “growth authority”**

The combination of higher housing need, Grey Belt release, and a stronger presumption means:

- More pressure to deliver high housing numbers
- Expectation to intensify Chelmsford urban area
- Greater scrutiny of any attempt to limit growth
- More appeals allowed where supply is weak

## **Local Plan review must change**

Chelmsford's emerging Local Plan will need to:

- Focus on spatial strategy, allocations, and infrastructure
- Remove duplicated national policies
- Identify Grey Belt around Chelmsford
- Demonstrate a credible housing trajectory

## **Town centre and transport corridors**

National policy strongly supports:

- Higher densities
- Mixed-use redevelopment
- Active travel and public transport priority
- Urban intensification

Chelmsford city centre and key corridors will face increased development pressure.

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## **4. South Woodham Ferrers**

### **SWF remains a designated growth location**

The strategic allocation north of the town becomes even more important because:

- It is deliverable
- It is unconstrained by Green Belt
- It aligns with national policy for rail-linked towns

If Chelmsford struggles to meet housing need in the city, national policy may push for:

- Higher densities within the SWF allocation
- Additional edge-of-settlement sites
- Intensification around the station and town centre

Policies that simply repeat national wording will carry little weight.

Policies that specify local design, public realm, green spaces, and walking/cycling links will remain important.

### **Climate, flood risk and the Crouch**

New national policies strengthen:

- Surface water management
- Green/blue infrastructure
- Flood resilience
- Low-carbon design

This supports SWF's case for strong infrastructure requirements in the northern growth area.

## **E. Transport and town centre vitality**

National policy favours:

- Rail-linked intensification
- Active travel networks
- Mixed-use town centre development

This aligns with SWF's existing strategy but raises expectations for delivery quality.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-framework-proposed-reforms-and-other-changes-to-the-planning-system>