

Building on fair foundations



Standardised rules.
Fairer participation.
Better decisions.



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Introduction

Why this matters now

For 20 years, Meeting Place has worked at the heart of the UK planning system, supporting developers, local authorities and communities to navigate complex decisions about the built environment.

We've seen the system at its best – collaborative, transparent, and capable of delivering places people genuinely support.

We've also seen where it falls short. Not in principle, but in practice.

Today, participation in planning is inconsistent, often unclear, and in some cases, unintentionally exclusionary. The result is a system that can amplify objection, obscure support and make balanced decision-making harder than it should be.

At a time when the government is focused on devolution, growth and accelerating delivery, these issues matter more than ever.

This campaign is about a simple idea:

If we want better outcomes, we need a better process for participation.



Nikki Davies
Chief Executive



The problem: A fragmented system

While local priorities should differ, the fundamentals of how people engage with planning should not.

Across England, local authority approaches vary widely:

- Different rules for how representations can be made.
- Inconsistent digital experiences.
- Varying levels of transparency and accessibility.
- Unequal weight given to different types of participation.
- Different requirements to publish personal details.

This fragmentation creates three core problems:

1 Barriers to participation

People are less likely to engage when systems are unclear, outdated or difficult to access.

2 Imbalance in representation

Processes often make it easier to object than to support, skewing the perception of public sentiment.

3 Reduced confidence in decisions

When participation feels inconsistent or opaque, trust in outcomes declines.

What we found:

Evidence from across England

To understand the scale of the issue, we reviewed local authority planning processes across England.

Our research focused on three key areas:

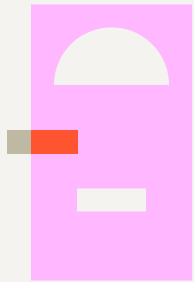
- Whether contributors are required to publish personal details.
- Whether authorities provide an explicit option to support an application.
- Website accessibility and any barriers to involvement.





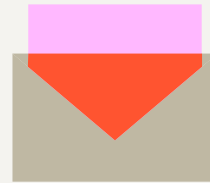
Headline findings

These inconsistencies are not minor technicalities. They shape who participates, how they participate and ultimately how decisions are made.



78%

of planning portals require contributors to publish their name and/or address for representations to be considered valid.



16%

of local authorities do not accept representations by email.

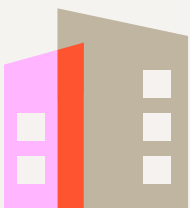
67%

of planning portals require users to register on the council's platform before they can submit a comment online.



One

local authority only offers the options to object, comment, or not object.



More than ten different naming conventions are used to describe planning committees across England.

- Planning Committee
- Development Control Committee
- Development Management Committee
- Planning and Development Control Committee
- Planning and Regulatory Committee
- Regulatory Committee
- Area Planning Committee
- Strategic Planning Committee
- Planning Applications Committee
- Planning Board
- Planning Sub-Committee
- Planning and Licensing Committee
- Regulatory and Appeals Committee
- Planning and Transportation Committee
- Joint Planning Committee



Two

local authorities do not provide an online platform for submitting comments.

The human impact: Experience from the ground

Behind the data are real experiences of communities, applicants and decision-makers navigating an uneven system.

Committee speaking rights

“In one local authority where I operate, supporters are only permitted to speak if an objection has also been registered.”

Petitions

“I submitted more than 50 letters of support to the council, collected at a single consultation event. The council recorded them as one supportive comment on the planning portal, classifying them as a petition.”

Google

“When you search for some local authorities alongside the term ‘planning committee’, the top result directs you to a page titled ‘Comment or Object’.”

Influence of AI



“I asked ChatGPT to help draft a response to a planning application and it only suggested several ways I could object to it.”

These are not isolated cases, they are symptoms of a system that lacks standardisation at the point of participation.

The opportunity: Level the playing field

This is not a call for more policy or more complexity, it’s a call for consistency in the basics.

The government’s devolution agenda rightly empowers local areas to shape their future. But for that to work effectively, participation must be:

- Accessible
- Balanced
- Transparent

Standardising core elements of the planning process would not remove local choice, it would strengthen it.

It would ensure that wherever you are in England, you can engage in planning in a way that is clear, fair and meaningful.



Our call to action

We are calling for a set of simple, practical changes that would create a more consistent and equitable system:

Standardised rules. Fairer participation. Better decisions.

- Provide a clear option to support, not just object or comment.
- Remove the requirement to publish your name and/or address.
- Introduce minimum accessibility and mobile standards, including removing the need to register on the council's platform.
- Ensure supporters have equal opportunity to speak at committee.
- Standardise the name of planning committees.



These are not radical changes. They are practical improvements that would make the system work better for everyone involved.

Conclusion: **Building on fair foundations**

Planning decisions shape the places we live, work and connect in. If we want to build more, and build better, we need a system that enables people to engage constructively and confidently. Right now, the process doesn't always do that. But it could.

Building on fair foundations ensures a system people can trust.



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