Consultation: *Land use statistics in England: methodology changes* (MHCLG)
Closing date: 28 October 2026

1. What MHCLG Is Proposing

MHCLG is consulting on a new methodology for producing three national land-use statistical series:

- Land use in England
- Land use change: new residential addresses
- Land use change: hectarage

The statistics would be rebuilt using Ordnance Survey's National Geographic Database (NGD). The consultation seeks views on the proposed approach and its implications.

2. Headline Changes

- Replacement of LUCS methodology due to OS product retirement
- New land-use classification system based on OS Tier A/B
- New developed/non-developed classification
- Removal of "vacant land"
- New density metric
- Break in the time series
- New publication schedule

3. Implications for Local Authorities

- Evidence bases will need updating
- Brownfield/greenfield monitoring affected
- Density policies may need recalibration
- Monitoring frameworks must be rewritten
- GIS/data capacity pressures likely
- Authorities mid-plan will need transitional support

4. Why This Matters for Local Plan making

Evidence Base Implications

The Local Plan relies on land-use statistics for:

- Settlement hierarchy analysis
- Density and land-use efficiency studies
- Brownfield land assessments
- Spatial strategy development
- Housing delivery monitoring

A change in methodology may affect trend data, baselines, and monitoring indicators.

Potential Benefits
NGD-based statistics may provide:

- More granular and accurate land-use data
- More frequent updates
- Better alignment with digital planning tools
- Improved national consistency

Risks and Dependencies

- Historic data may not be directly comparable
- Local monitoring systems may require adjustment
- Definitions of land-use categories may change
- Mixed-use classification may shift

5. POS Position

POS supports modernisation but emphasises the need for:

- Clear guidance to support the transition to the new methodology.
- Correspondence tables linking existing and new land-use classifications.
- Practical examples showing how the new system will be applied.
- Guidance on managing breaks in long-term monitoring data.
- Support for brownfield monitoring under the new framework.
- Training and technical resources for local authorities.
- Additional support for councils with limited GIS capacity.

LUCS Category	OS Tier A/B Equivalent	Notes
Domestic Buildings	Residential (Tier A)	Gardens now separate category
Non-Domestic Buildings	Commercial / Industrial	More granular under NGD
Transport	Transport Infrastructure	Includes roads, rail, airports
Community Services	Community Facilities	Schools, hospitals, libraries
Utilities	Utilities & Infrastructure	Mixed-use classification issues
Defence	Defence	Similar coverage
Green Space	Natural Land-Cover Classes	Woodland, grassland, scrub
Agriculture	Agricultural Land	More granular under NGD
Water	Water Bodies	Similar coverage
Vacant Land	***No direct equivalent***	Removed; classified by last known use
Hardstanding	Built Surfaces	Included within site-based classification
Mineral Workings	Mineral Extraction	Similar coverage
Recreation	Sports & Leisure	Mixed-use classification issues
Mixed Use	Site-based classification	Assigned to dominant site use

POS is the single credible voice for public sector planners, pursuing good quality and effective planning practice. The Society's aim is to ensure that planning makes a major contribution to achieving sustainable development in ways that are fair and equitable and achieve the social, economic and environmental aspirations of the community.

We operate in three main ways:

- *As a support network for planners in the public sector*
- *As promoters of best practice in planning*
- *As a think tank and lobbying organisation for excellence in planning practice*

Where we can, we will work across the sector to craft proposals that have widespread support from the people who operate the planning system at the coalface: landowners, developers, agents, legal, local authorities and politicians. We will be both radical and practical as we look for solutions to tangible problems that will make a real difference to crucial areas. Our objective is to improve the planning system to enable it to deliver its key aim of sustainable development. It is within this context that we have set out this advice to Government so we can plan together for a better future.

By email to:
Ned Blackburn
Planning.Statistics@communities.gov.uk

07757 175173
policy@planningofficers.org.uk

27 October 2026

Dear Ned

Land Use Statistics in England: Methodology Changes Consultation October 2026

The Planning Officers Society (POS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to MHCLG's consultation on proposed changes to England's land use statistics methodology.

POS supports the move from Land Use Change Statistics (LUCS) to an approach based on the Ordnance Survey National Geographic Database (NGD). This should provide more detailed, timely and consistent data, support digital planning and replace retiring Ordnance Survey products.

The change is not merely technical: land use statistics underpin plan-making, monitoring and policy evaluation. The transition must therefore be carefully managed, with appropriate support for local planning authorities (LPAs).

Strategic Implications for Planning Authorities

The proposals will significantly affect LPAs. Existing evidence and monitoring rely on current classifications, so authorities may need to recalibrate their work for the new classification system, revised definitions, density metric and break in the time series.

These statistics inform settlement hierarchies, density and land-capacity studies, brownfield assessments, spatial strategies and housing monitoring. Changes may alter baselines, trends and indicators, and so authorities need confidence that the new data can be used consistently in Local Plans, Annual Monitoring Reports and supporting evidence.

Authorities midway through Local Plan preparation may struggle to reconcile evidence produced under the two methodologies. MHCLG should provide transitional arrangements aligned with the proposed 30-month Local Plan timetable, including guidance on any necessary recalibration.

New Classification System

POS supports the Ordnance Survey Tier A and Tier B framework, which should provide greater granularity and better reflect modern land uses.

To preserve understanding of trends, MHCLG should publish a comprehensive table showing how LUCS categories match the new Tier A and Tier B categories, explaining material changes and where no direct equivalent exists. In particular guidance should address mixed-use sites, utilities, recreational land and residential gardens, with practical examples showing how complex developments will be classified.

Developed and Non-Developed Land

POS supports clearer classification of developed and non-developed land but seeks greater transparency about how the definitions will be applied.

Because some categories have both developed and undeveloped characteristics, MHCLG should explain the rationale for each classification and its relationship to established planning concepts, including brownfield land.

Brownfield Monitoring and Vacant Land

POS is specifically concerned about removing the vacant land category, which is important to brownfield monitoring, development-opportunity assessments and land-supply analysis.

Classifying vacant sites by their last known use risks disrupting brownfield monitoring unless a clear replacement method is provided.

MHCLG should therefore explain how previously developed vacant land will be identified and how continuity with brownfield registers and related monitoring will be maintained.

Density Measures

POS supports the proposed density metric, which should offer a clearer measure of development patterns and housing delivery.

MHCLG should provide guidance on moving from the existing measure, comparing new and historic trends, and applying the metric in policy development, site assessment and monitoring.

Break in the Time Series

The break in the time series is a major concern because authorities use long-term trends to support planning decisions, monitoring and policy evaluation.

MHCLG should publish comprehensive guidance showing how the old and new categories relate, together with transition materials, including guidance on explaining discontinuities in Annual Monitoring Reports, Local Plans and supporting evidence.

Capacity, Skills and Implementation

Successful implementation will depend on LPAs' capacity to use the data. Many face resource constraints and lack specialist GIS and analytical skills for NGD-based datasets.

MHCLG should provide technical guidance, training, worked examples and code libraries for common analytical platforms, with additional support for authorities with limited GIS capacity.

Conclusion

POS supports modernising England's land use statistics through the NGD but stresses that the transition will affect Local Plan preparation, evidence bases, monitoring and brownfield assessment.

MHCLG should prioritise: clear transition guidance; information showing how LUCS categories match the new NGD categories; worked examples; support for authorities with limited GIS capacity; a method for monitoring vacant brownfield land; and specific arrangements for authorities preparing Local Plans. These measures are essential to maintain confidence in planning evidence while realising the benefits of the new methodology.

POS would welcome continued engagement with MHCLG during development and implementation.

Yours faithfully

Mike Kiely
POS Chair

POS is the single credible voice for public sector planners, pursuing good quality and effective planning practice. The Society's aim is to ensure that planning makes a major contribution to achieving sustainable development in ways that are fair and equitable and achieve the social, economic and environmental aspirations of the community.

We operate in three main ways:

- *As a support network for planners in the public sector*
- *As promoters of best practice in planning*
- *As a think tank and lobbying organisation for excellence in planning practice*

Where we can, we will work across the sector to craft proposals that have widespread support from the people who operate the planning system at the coalface: landowners, developers, agents, legal, local authorities and politicians. We will be both radical and practical as we look for solutions to tangible problems that will make a real difference to crucial areas. Our objective is to improve the planning system to enable it to deliver its key aim of sustainable development. It is within this context that we have set out this advice to Government so we can plan together for a better future.