# UK government pushes ahead with radical planning reforms to accelerate water and green energy projects



Housing Secretary Steve Reed is set to introduce a series of amendments to the Government's flagship Planning and Infrastructure Bill designed to accelerate the construction of new water reservoirs and onshore wind farms across the UK. This move forms part of a broader “pro-growth” package aimed at dismantling what Reed described as the “stubborn” planning system that has historically hindered development. The proposed changes could see non-water companies permitted to build reservoirs, which would be categorised automatically as significant infrastructure projects, reflecting a strategic drive to enhance national water security.

The amendments also include provisions that could facilitate the expansion of clean energy infrastructure, particularly onshore wind farms. These changes reflect a shift in policy to overcome longstanding regulatory barriers that have limited the growth of onshore renewable energy projects. According to the announcement, new powers will enable ministers to prevent local councils from rejecting applications while deliberations over “call-in” powers are underway, streamlining decision-making processes. Further, the Government intends to curtail the use of protracted judicial reviews that often delay housing developments, a move designed to avoid lengthy legal blockades that have frustrated housing progress for years.

Mr Reed emphasised the urgency of these reforms, stating that the current sluggish planning environment has real-world impacts, including depriving families of homes and delaying essential job-creating infrastructure projects. The Government has committed to breaking ground on 1.5 million new homes within the current parliamentary term and is working to slash the bureaucratic red tape that has contributed to recent declines in housing approvals. Reed also announced plans to commence construction on three “new towns” in advance of the next election, part of a portfolio of 12 key development sites envisioned to collectively deliver up to 300,000 homes across England.

The Planning and Infrastructure Bill is scheduled to return to the House of Lords for further scrutiny in October. This timing coincides with ongoing government efforts to align planning reforms with wider economic strategies aimed at stimulating growth ahead of the forthcoming budget. Prime Minister Keir Starmer has pressed for these changes, criticising existing planning rules for stifling development and reiterating the Government’s ambition to deliver 1.5 million homes by 2029.

Complementing the planning reforms, broader governmental initiatives are underway to quicken major infrastructure delivery times. Recent reforms aim to halve the typical two-year statutory pre-consultation period for key projects including reservoirs, clean energy facilities, and rail infrastructure, thereby improving the UK’s connectivity and energy security. These measures dovetail with adjustments to the Contracts for Difference (CfD) scheme, designed to ramp up green energy project deployment, notably offshore and onshore wind farms, by relaxing planning consent eligibility and extending contract terms. Such energy policies align with the UK's climate targets that demand significant expansion of renewable capacity to meet net-zero ambitions by 2050 and interim greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Efforts to speed up infrastructure development extend to legal reforms that reduce the capacity for repeated legal challenges to major projects. The Government is poised to limit such challenges, which currently can be brought multiple times, causing years of delay. Proposed new rules would also expedite the dismissal of legally weak cases and restrict appeals, aiming to quell delays often linked to opposition from local pressure groups.

Simultaneously, the housing ministry plans to overhaul consultation processes to cut down delays from public reviews and objections. With over 25 public agencies currently holding legal consultation rights—often a bottleneck in housing developments—new rules are expected to narrow the grounds for objections and impose stricter deadlines. Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner has underscored the necessity of balancing reforms to avoid excessive delays while maintaining sensible oversight.

Moreover, in a significant policy shift affecting renewable energy, the government has effectively lifted the ban on new onshore wind farms in England, which had been stalled since 2015 due to rules allowing a single objection to halt projects. Under the new regime, decision-making will reflect the broader community’s views rather than isolated objections, potentially increasing the pace and volume of onshore wind development. This move is crucial in boosting renewable energy capacity, with renewables already accounting for 42% of the UK’s electricity production in 2022. Yet, environmental groups caution that despite these relaxations, substantial challenges remain in scaling up onshore wind to meet ambitious climate targets.

Labour’s shadow housing secretary Sir James Cleverly criticised the Government’s focus, arguing that while Britain urgently needs housing and infrastructure, Labour’s actual development efforts are misdirected. This political back-and-forth underscores the high stakes and contentious nature of planning reform as the Government seeks to navigate complex social, economic, and environmental priorities.

Overall, these planning reforms, combined with energy and legal system changes, reveal a concerted government effort to overhaul longstanding barriers to development. The success of these initiatives will be closely watched as the UK strives to meet ambitious housing targets, accelerate green energy adoption, and bolster economic growth while managing public and political expectations.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/flagship-planning-bill-amendments-to-speed-up-reservoir-and-wind-farm-building-S75STN2LVVM5RFPW55FTJABK7M/), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/planning-reforms-to-slash-a-year-off-infrastructure-delivery)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/flagship-planning-bill-amendments-to-speed-up-reservoir-and-wind-farm-building-S75STN2LVVM5RFPW55FTJABK7M/), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-tackles-infrastructure-blockers-by-cutting-legal-challenge-options-2025-01-23/), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-seeks-scale-back-reviews-that-delay-new-housing-projects-2025-03-09/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/flagship-planning-bill-amendments-to-speed-up-reservoir-and-wind-farm-building-S75STN2LVVM5RFPW55FTJABK7M/), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-government-tweak-planning-overhaul-boost-economic-growth-2025-10-13/), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-seeks-scale-back-reviews-that-delay-new-housing-projects-2025-03-09/)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-tackles-infrastructure-blockers-by-cutting-legal-challenge-options-2025-01-23/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-seeks-scale-back-reviews-that-delay-new-housing-projects-2025-03-09/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://apnews.com/article/45cc4f33c78e52e841d0f7d2bfc585ab)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/flagship-planning-bill-amendments-to-speed-up-reservoir-and-wind-farm-building-S75STN2LVVM5RFPW55FTJABK7M/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/flagship-planning-bill-amendments-to-speed-up-reservoir-and-wind-farm-building-S75STN2LVVM5RFPW55FTJABK7M/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-government-tweak-planning-overhaul-boost-economic-growth-2025-10-13/> - The British government announced plans to modify its proposed overhaul of the planning system to better support economic growth and alleviate fiscal pressures before the upcoming budget. Prime Minister Keir Starmer criticised the current planning rules for hindering development and emphasised the goal of building 1.5 million homes by the 2029 election. To address this, the government plans to include new measures in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill aimed at cutting red tape. These changes will reduce the impact of legal challenges on major housing projects, limit local council power to reject applications while under government review, and streamline approval for new reservoirs. The revised bill is returning to the upper chamber of parliament next week, coinciding with the finalisation of Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts for the November 26 budget. An improved economic forecast could ease pressure on Finance Minister Rachel Reeves, who is aiming to maintain fiscal discipline without raising income taxes, amid concerns from businesses and households about potential tax increases.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/planning-reforms-to-slash-a-year-off-infrastructure-delivery> - The UK government has introduced planning reforms aimed at accelerating the delivery of major infrastructure projects, including clean energy initiatives, reservoirs, and railway lines. These reforms seek to reduce the average two-year statutory pre-consultation period by half, thereby expediting the approval process for significant infrastructure projects. By streamlining the planning process, the government aims to bolster the country's connectivity and energy security, facilitating the construction of essential infrastructure more efficiently.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/uk-presents-plans-subsidy-reform-speed-up-green-energy-projects-2025-02-21/> - The British government has proposed reforms to its Contracts for Difference (CfD) scheme to accelerate the development of green energy projects, particularly offshore wind farms. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) suggests relaxing eligibility criteria for planning consent for fixed-bottom offshore wind and extending the CfD contract term beyond 15 years. Additionally, it aims to modify the budget allocation process for offshore wind projects and allow government access to anonymised bid information. The UK, which awarded CfD contracts for a record 9.6 gigawatts (GW) of projects, plans a new round (AR7) later this year. The proposed changes also include enabling CfD support for onshore wind repowering projects and temporarily preventing generators with existing CfDs from reallocating surrendered capacity into AR7. Stakeholders can provide input on the reforms until March 21, with a government response expected before AR7.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-tackles-infrastructure-blockers-by-cutting-legal-challenge-options-2025-01-23/> - Britain is seeking to accelerate major infrastructure projects by reducing the scope for legal challenges from opposition groups. Prime Minister Keir Starmer has targeted planning delays, impacting projects like nuclear plants, railway lines, and wind farms, as key obstacles to economic growth. Current laws allow even weak legal challenges to be brought to court three times, causing years-long delays. New rules will limit such weak cases to one challenge, as Starmer aims to curb the influence of "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY) groups. The government plans to eliminate the paper permission stage for legal challenges and prevent appeals to the Court of Appeal if a High Court judge deems a challenge "Totally Without Merit." This initiative aims to balance genuine case protections with reducing court-obstructed delays, exemplified by the two-year delay of the Sizewell C nuclear power plant despite parts of the legal challenge being termed "utterly hopeless."
6. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-seeks-scale-back-reviews-that-delay-new-housing-projects-2025-03-09/> - Britain aims to streamline the process of housing development by reducing the number of public reviews that delay projects. The housing ministry plans to consult on minimising the requirements for input from various public agencies and civic groups, whose objections often cause delays. Despite setting a target to build 1.5 million homes in five years, recent developments have fallen short, with only 193,000 homes built in 2023. Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner emphasised the need for sensible and balanced reforms to avoid delays. Over 25 agencies currently have legal consultation rights, often leading to disputes that must be resolved by ministers. Proposed changes include instructing local planning authorities to narrow objection bases and adhere to standard rules and deadlines. Further legislation on planning reforms is expected later in the week.
7. <https://apnews.com/article/45cc4f33c78e52e841d0f7d2bfc585ab> - The UK government has relaxed planning rules, effectively lifting the ban on building new onshore wind farms in England. The previous regulations from 2015 required only one objection to block a wind turbine development, which drastically decreased new turbines receiving planning permission. The current government, pressured by some Conservatives such as Alok Sharma, is aiming to speed up approvals for projects supported by local residents. Local officials will now make decisions based on the community's prevailing views rather than a few objections, and supportive communities will benefit from cheaper electricity. However, environmental groups argue that the changes are insufficient and maintain that significant obstacles to building wind turbines in England remain. Renewable energy, primarily from offshore wind farms, constituted 42% of the UK's electricity generation in 2022. Scaling up onshore wind energy is deemed critical for the UK to meet its climate goals, including a 68% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.