



Value My Land

Maximising Returns for Landowners

Types of Planning Applications in England

A Practical Guide for Landowners

How full, outline, permission in principle and prior approval routes affect evidence, timing, risk and development value.



Value My Land

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Understanding the Main Planning Application Routes

The correct planning route depends on what is proposed, how much detail is available, the policy position and whether the land or building benefits from a national permitted development right.

Full and outline applications are decided against the development plan and other material considerations. Permission in principle separates housing-led development in principle from its technical details, while prior approval operates only where every requirement of the relevant permitted development class is satisfied.

Route selection changes what the council decides, which evidence is required, the statutory programme, appeal rights and the certainty created by the consent.

What are the main routes?

Each route answers a different planning question. Selecting the route early helps ensure that the application plans, surveys, ownership evidence, programme and commercial objective are properly aligned.

- Full planning permission — the principle and detailed design are decided together
- Outline planning permission — the principle and parameters are established before reserved matters
- Permission in principle — location, housing-led use and amount are decided before technical details consent
- Prior approval — the council considers only the matters specified by an applicable permitted development right
- Classes Q, R and MA — separate GPDO routes with their own eligibility, evidence and implementation rules

How do the routes fit together?

Full application → detailed permission | Outline → reserved matters | Permission in principle → technical details consent | GPDO right → prior approval or notification

[Read the Full Online Planning Applications Guide](#)

Choose the Planning Route Before Committing to Application Costs

Choosing an application route is not simply an administrative decision. It affects which matters the council can determine, how much information must be prepared, the statutory period, appeal rights and the certainty created for a future sale or development.

A site may have more than one possible route. The objective is not automatically to choose the quickest or least expensive application, but to select the route that can produce a lawful, deliverable and commercially useful planning outcome.

Start with the intended planning outcome

A landowner seeking a detailed implementable consent may need a full application. Where the immediate objective is to establish the principle and maximum parameters before a purchaser prepares the design, outline permission may be more appropriate.

Confirm that the legal route is genuinely available

Permission in principle is limited to housing-led development and excludes specified categories. Prior approval under Classes Q, R or MA depends on exact use-history, date, floorspace, building, designation and procedural tests; an attractive proposal cannot cure failed eligibility.

Plan evidence, programme and value together

Access, flood risk, drainage, ecology, structural suitability, contamination, heritage, landscape and utilities can be decisive. Seasonal surveys, statutory consultation, planning obligations and condition discharge may extend the real programme beyond the headline determination period.

The quickest or least expensive route is not automatically the best route. Select the process that can produce a lawful, deliverable and commercially useful outcome.

[Request a Free Planning Route Review](#)

The Main Planning Routes at a Glance

The six routes below are frequently relevant to development land and existing buildings. They are not interchangeable: each has its own legal purpose, information requirements, decision scope and route to implementation.

Full Planning Permission The principle, layout, scale, appearance, access, landscaping and other details of a defined scheme are determined together.	Outline Planning Permission The principle, use, amount and parameters are established before access, appearance, landscaping, layout or scale are approved as reserved matters.
Permission in Principle A housing-led two-stage route: location, land use and amount first, followed by a complete technical details consent application.	Class Q A prior approval route for qualifying agricultural buildings to dwellinghouses, subject to use history, conversion, access, designation and impact tests.
Class R A notification or prior approval route allowing qualifying agricultural buildings to move to specified flexible commercial or diversification uses.	Class MA A prior approval route for qualifying Class E commercial, business and service buildings to change to dwellinghouses.

Route selection can affect:

- Whether the council decides both the principle and every design detail
- Which plans, surveys, certificates and legal evidence must accompany the submission
- The statutory determination period and whether an extension can be agreed
- Conditions, section 106 obligations, CIL and biodiversity requirements
- The available appeal route following refusal, conditions or non-determination
- Time limits for reserved matters, technical consent, commencement or completion
- The level of planning certainty and flexibility available to a purchaser or funder

Before committing substantial application costs, confirm the policy objective, exact statutory route, land and rights required, decisive constraints and the form of consent needed for the intended sale or development strategy.

Full Planning Permission

A full planning application asks the local planning authority to decide the principle and detailed design in one submission. It usually offers the clearest consent for a defined scheme, but requires the greatest level of design and technical evidence at the outset.

1. Feasibility and strategy — Review planning policy, history, access, ownership, constraints, likely capacity and whether pre-application engagement would assist.

2. Design and surveys — Prepare the detailed layout, scale, appearance, landscaping, access, parking and proportionate technical evidence needed to explain the finished scheme.

3. Submission and validation — Submit the application form, fee, ownership certificate, plans and documents required by national rules and the council's current validation list.

4. Publicity and consultation — The authority publicises the proposal and consults relevant bodies, which may include highways, drainage, ecology, environmental health and local councils.

5. Assessment and negotiation — The case officer considers policy and material considerations, requests clarification or amendments where necessary and reviews conditions and obligations.

6. Decision and implementation — Permission may be granted, conditioned or refused. Pre-commencement conditions, section 106, biodiversity, highways, building regulations or other consents may still need to be addressed.

Ordinary full applications normally use the 8-week, 13-week major or 16-week EIA framework, but validation, agreed extensions, obligations and conditions can lengthen the real programme.

Read: Planning Application Costs

Outline Planning Permission and Reserved Matters

Outline planning permission establishes whether the proposed type, location and amount of development are acceptable in principle while allowing one or more detailed matters to be approved later. It is commonly used for larger, phased or strategically promoted sites.

Principle & Parameters The description, use, amount, red line, access information and approved parameter plans establish the scope of the outline consent.	Access Vehicle, pedestrian and cycle routes to and within the site and their relationship with the existing highway and movement network.
Appearance The external form, architecture, materials, detailing and visual character of buildings and spaces.	Landscaping Planting, retained features, screening, hard surfaces, earthworks and integration of drainage or biodiversity measures.
Layout The arrangement and orientation of buildings, streets, parking, open spaces and other uses.	Scale The height, width, depth, massing and proportions of proposed buildings and structures.
Reserved Matters Outstanding matters are submitted later and must remain consistent with the outline description, parameters, conditions and mitigation.	Evidence & Conditions Access, ecology, flood risk, drainage, transport, heritage, landscape, contamination and infrastructure may still need resolution at outline stage.

Outline permission is not evidence-free or open-ended. The application must define the use and amount, identify access information and development parameters, and include enough technical work to demonstrate that the proposed development can be delivered without unacceptable effects.

Permission in Principle and Technical Details Consent

Permission in principle is a two-stage housing-led route. Stage one considers only location, land use and the minimum and maximum amount of development. Technical details consent is then required before any development can begin.

1. **Confirm eligibility** — The application route is for non-major housing-led development and cannot be used for householder, minerals, EIA or specified habitats development.
2. **Define the principle** — The application identifies the red-line site, proposed housing-led land use and a minimum and maximum amount of development.
3. **Stage-one decision** — The statutory period is normally five weeks from valid receipt unless a longer period is agreed in writing.
4. **Understand the limited effect** — Stage one grants no right to build and cannot carry planning conditions; it establishes only the matters within the permission in principle.
5. **Apply for technical details consent** — Submit all design, access, highways, drainage, ecology, amenity, infrastructure and mitigation needed to make the scheme acceptable.
6. **Resolve conditions and obligations** — Conditions, section 106, CIL and the biodiversity gain condition can arise at technical details consent, which has its own determination period.
7. **Check the brownfield and appeal routes** — Permission may also arise through Part 2 of a brownfield register. Application refusals and technical details decisions can be appealed, but non-entry on the register cannot.

Permission in principle is not outline permission. Stage one is limited to location, housing-led use and amount; every technical matter needed for development is resolved later.

Read: [Brownfield Land Registers](#)

Read: [Planning Conditions and Land Value](#)

How Prior Approval Under the GPDO 2015 Differs

Under the General Permitted Development Order 2015, Parliament grants planning permission nationally for specified development. The local authority checks whether the proposal falls within the class and considers only the matters expressly identified for notification or prior approval.

Eligibility always comes first. A prior approval decision does not correct a failure to meet the underlying limitations, and work must not start until the statutory procedure allows it. Evidence of lawful use history, building eligibility and compliance should be retained.

Before relying on a permitted development right, check:

- The exact class, qualifying use history, relevant dates and cumulative floorspace
- Whether an Article 4 direction, earlier condition or protected designation removes the right
- The building's structural capability, curtilage, access and any excluded land or asset
- The specific highway, flood, contamination, noise, design, light or other matters the council may assess
- The class-specific notification, prior approval, decision and implementation deadlines
- Whether external alterations, engineering works or another consent require a separate application

Prior approval is not a simplified full application

The council does not reconsider every planning merit, but it may refuse where the development is not permitted development at all or where a specified prior approval impact is unacceptable. Strict eligibility and procedure can therefore be more important than the apparent simplicity of the route.

A missed deadline should never be treated as automatic permission without confirming that every eligibility, information and procedural requirement of the relevant class was satisfied.

Classes Q, R and MA

Class Q can allow qualifying agricultural buildings to change to dwellinghouses with limited operations reasonably necessary for conversion. Agricultural use history, structural conversion capability, existing highway access, protected designations, tenancies and previous Class Q development must be checked.

The council can consider specified matters including highways, noise, contamination, flooding, location, design, natural light and adjoining amenity. The right is for conversion rather than substantial demolition and replacement, and the scheme must remain within the current dwelling and floorspace limits.

Class R — agricultural buildings to flexible commercial use

Class R supports farm diversification by changing qualifying agricultural buildings to specified flexible uses, subject to a cumulative floorspace limit. Smaller schemes use notification; larger schemes require prior approval for transport, noise, contamination and flooding. External operational works may need full permission.

Class MA — Class E buildings to homes

Class MA can change qualifying commercial, business and service buildings to dwellinghouses where the use-history and other statutory tests are met. Article 4 directions, protected sites, external works, space standards, natural light, access, contamination, flooding, noise, local services and fire safety may be decisive.

Each permitted development class has its own legal tests. A qualifying current use or suitable building does not by itself establish that prior approval or implementation will be lawful.

[Read: Can I Convert Farm Buildings?](#)

Evidence, Decision-Making and Appeal Strategy

The correct evidence is route-specific and proportionate. A complete application normally begins with the form, fee, ownership information, location plan and necessary drawings, then adds the policy, design and technical material required by the proposal and the council's validation list.

Core Application Documents Application form, fee, ownership certificate, agricultural declaration, location plan, site plan and necessary drawings, elevations and sections.	Policy, Design & Capacity Planning statement, design information, accommodation schedule, masterplan, parameters, housing or employment evidence and viability where relevant.
Access, Flooding & Ecology Access design, transport, flood-risk and drainage work, ecological surveys, protected species evidence and biodiversity information.	Landscape, Heritage & Ground Tree, landscape, visual, heritage, archaeology, contamination, mining, geotechnical, noise, air, lighting and building evidence as triggered.
Validation to Decision The authority validates, publicises and consults, assesses policy and impacts, seeks amendments where justified and decides by delegation or committee.	Conditions & Appeals Conditions, section 106 and CIL may follow permission. Refusal, objectionable conditions or non-determination can create an appeal route with strict deadlines.

How Value My Land Can Help

Value My Land can review the policy position, planning history, ownership, access, constraints and intended commercial outcome before detailed application expenditure is committed. We can help distinguish an immediate application route from longer-term Local Plan promotion or another strategy.

Where a suitable opportunity is agreed, we can coordinate the planning and consultant team, align the masterplan with technical evidence and manage the application or promotion process at our own cost and risk under the agreed Promotion Agreement. The landowner retains ownership and remains involved in key decisions.

[Request a Free Planning Route Review](#)



Which Planning Route Fits Your Land or Building?

If you own land or buildings and need to understand whether full, outline, permission in principle, prior approval or a longer-term planning strategy may be appropriate, contact Value My Land for a free, no-obligation initial review.

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Further reading: [Planning Policy](#) | [Planning Application Costs](#) | [Brownfield Registers](#) | [Planning Conditions](#)

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