



## INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE FOR RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS

### A LETTER FROM OUR CHAIR

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Dear Members,

I write to you all following our first live committee meeting since pre Covid, which was held in Winchester and attended by more than half the Committee. With a new Government now in place, the approach of 2025 and being able to meet in person once again, this seems the perfect time to resurrect NORA as the only national body representing Residents.

Having said that, we have not been completely inactive and have held a number of Zoom meetings during the intervening two years. We have responded to a Government Consultation on Reform of the National Planning Policy Framework, which can be seen on our website. The implications of the proposed reform could have serious impact on residents (see below). There has been little else requiring a response.

You may have noticed we have now built a new website, [www.nora-uk.com](http://www.nora-uk.com), and appointed a new Webmaster, although the previous site does still appear when typing in NORA, as does another which has recently appeared with a similar title [www.nationalresidentsassociation.co.uk](http://www.nationalresidentsassociation.co.uk). **It appears to be bogus and certainly nothing to do with NORA - please note!**

I am pleased to report we have at last found a new Secretary to replace Alan Grant, who has had to retire due to ill health, and the Committee passed a vote of appreciation for his long and tireless service of over 20

years, although he does remain available to assist and support the new Secretary. All Members' emails to NORA should either go to our open access [info@nora-uk.com](mailto:info@nora-uk.com) or to the relevant email address in NORA circulars.

We need to emphasise our prime role as the self-help organisation for Members so that membership is sought by resident groups seeking advice on problems affecting their members. We are trying to re-establish our links with government departments responsible for planning, entertainment and policing, which lapsed when COVID struck the nation. As part of this campaign we would like to suggest that NORA members contact their MPs so that they know of NORA's role, a tactic recommended by a previous Chief Planner. We would also be happy to receive Members' views on relevant matters you would like us to take up at a national level.

We would much like to hold a live AGM in London in the Spring with a minister as a speaker, as was our practice, but it would be helpful to know whether this would be practical for members knowing the cost and difficulties with transport. Let our secretary have your opinion please at [info@nora-uk.com](mailto:info@nora-uk.com).

## Reports

The new government has been floating several proposals that would have serious impacts on residents. The Reform of the NPPF is the only significant report that has been published, and we await the government's response to the Responses it has received from organisations and the community.

## Planning

The NPPF Reform proposals that would have a serious impact on residents include the increase in permitted development, the change in the formula for assessing the need for new housing in Local Authorities (LAs), the emphasis on building on brownfield sites and the opportunity to build in the Green Belt. That the public will retain the right to respond to eventual planning applications is repeatedly mentioned throughout the document, but the power of central government remains to intervene when political policies are involved.

The permitted development includes high-rise newbuilds, increasing the height of existing buildings and more freedom to build extensions. The newbuilds formula is related to the shortage of affordable dwellings instead of household predictions, but

lacks an emphasis on newbuilds for renting, which is the main shortage; the new formula leads to some unrealistic figures in Local Authorities with few possible sites! An up-date on enforcement has recently been floated. It reminds us of the freedom of LAs to take action over development lacking planning consent, an enforcement to cover 10 years rather than the current 4 years, and also development that conflicts with the actual planning consent. It recognises that many local planning departments lack sufficient funds and staff to take action.

## Councils

Only very recently a proposal to amalgamate all district councils with unitary authorities has been floated with the aim of simplifying administration and reducing its cost. The development of Unitary Authorities some years ago led to the loss of hundreds of LAs, with the main effect of substantially increasing the area of each constituency and the number of residents per councillor. This reduced the understanding of their area and their contact with their constituents leading to a reduction in 'democracy'!

Best wishes

*Jerry Gillen*

## A MESSAGE FROM THE TREASURER

NORA is coming to the end of the calendar and the financial year so please would all members who don't pay by standing order pay their subscription. It is still £25 a year for most and £10 if you number less than 100 members. Please transfer the money to Barclays 20-77-85, account 50108499 or by cheque to the Treasurer. Here's to a successful 2025 for us all



## Discover the New NORA Website: A Hub for Residents' Associations

We're excited to announce the launch of the revamped **National Organisation of Residents Associations (NORA)** website at [www.nora-uk.com](http://www.nora-uk.com).

This user-friendly platform is designed to support Residents' Associations across the UK. Packed with resources, the site provides expert guidance on community challenges, the latest news affecting neighbourhoods, and a network for sharing best practices.

Key features include:

- **Consultation Returns to Government:** Stay informed about how NORA represents your views.
- **Priority Areas for RAs:** Access key information on topics that matter most to your association.
- **Contact Information Made Easy:** Find the best ways to connect with other RAs and key stakeholders. Join us in building stronger, more vibrant communities. Explore [www.nora-uk.com](http://www.nora-uk.com)

## CHANGES IN PLANNING LAW

With falling revenues and rising costs many local councils are in deep financial trouble and national government is again looking at measures to save costs. The last time there were significant changes was some 50 years ago when Edward Heath's Conservative administration rationalised a complex system of rural and town councils into County and District councils, followed by Tony Blair's appointment of Mayors for areas such as Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and Greater London. *Zofia Lovell*

Currently there are 21 County Councils in England supplemented by 164 district councils, all requiring premises and facilities and a hierarchy of administrative staff: from CEOs to clerks and telephonists.

A report, commissioned from PWC and published by the County Councils Network in 2020, is the basis for the current government policy and is available on the internet (search for "unitary councils" in <https://www.countycouncilsnetwork.org.uk/>).

PWC has calculated that abolishing all District Councils and replacing County Councils with Unitary Authorities and a Mayor would save the taxpayer some £3 BILLION over the first five years and £700 million a year after that. This is the most efficient arrangement and PWC recommends it.

This process has already begun: Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset have recently merged into unitary authorities, encouraged by Robert Jenrick. The current government is proposing to replace about 10 of the remaining County Councils with unitary authorities, starting with the easy cases: authorities which are "open to reform" – possibly Essex, Kent, Norfolk and Suffolk.

It will have to be carefully handled and NORA would welcome your comments

*Marianne Pitts* (with acknowledgement to The Times 25/11/2024)

## THE TROUBLE WITH SEAGULLS



Our last article on Seagulls, and the distress which they bring to many of our members' towns and cities, appeared in the October Newsletter two years ago. In that piece, we highlighted the fact that reversion to the Seagull control regime which Local Authorities (LAs) used to operate, under a licence from DEFRA, some years ago, depended on decisions made by Natural England (NE): but no longer. More recently, there have been Press articles about contraception for gulls; and, characteristically, they were led by the City of Worcester (always ahead in gull initiatives!). However, NE will probably veto this idea on the grounds that the Lesser Black Backed Gull, the principal offender, is on the Endangered List (as is the Herring Gull). So, until this 'Whitehall Problem' is addressed (i.e. conducting an up to date and countrywide census of these birds, including those which are now breeding inland, and particularly on town and city sites and concluding, one can hope, that these birds are not now endangered, initiatives like this will get nowhere. These counts are conducted every 10 years or so, by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and, luckily, the latest one has recently reported\*. In summary, this is what it concludes (edited):

- **Lesser Black Backed Gulls:** The combined natural and urban-nesting population estimate of Lesser Black Backed Gulls breeding in Britain, Ireland, Isle of Man and Channel Islands is now 335,802 (nests), almost three times the combined estimate of 123,253 from the last census.
- **Herring Gulls:** At the previous census, there were 11,736 natural-nesting Herring Gulls in Britain and Ireland, and numbers have decreased

dramatically. However, considering the large number of Herring Gulls urban-nesting in England, now estimated to be 89% of the English population, these colonisations provide evidence of range expansion and increased urban habitat. England is the only country where the total Herring Gull population has potentially grown since Operation Seafarer in 2000, and is now estimated to hold 104,991.

\*The full report, containing all the figures and conclusions, is available only for a price, at [Seabirds Count | JNCC - Adviser to Government on Nature Conservation](#). So, is there a glimmer of light on the (Whitehall) horizon? NORA is pursuing this glimmer through LAs and Parliamentary avenues, as no comment or change of policy by DEFRA or NE has yet appeared. It's not as though affected LAs are asking for a direct cull; just a reversion to the control methods which Councils used in the past. These birds need to be taken off the endangered list in England and Wales; and the science now seems to agree with this conclusion.

*Robin Kerr.*

## What is a breach of Planning Control?

A breach of planning control is defined in [section 171A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#) as:

- the carrying out of development without the required planning permission; or
- failing to comply with any condition or limitation subject to which planning permission has been granted.

Any contravention of the limitations on, or conditions belonging to, permitted development rights, under the [Town and Country Planning \(General Permitted Development\) \(England\) Order 2015](#), constitutes a breach of planning control against which enforcement action may be taken.

## When should enforcement action be taken?

There is a range of ways of tackling alleged breaches of planning control, and local planning authorities should act in a proportionate way.

Local planning authorities have discretion to take enforcement action, when they regard it as expedient to do so having regard to the development plan and any other material considerations. This includes a local enforcement plan, where it is not part of the development plan.

In considering any enforcement action, the local planning authority should have regard to the National Planning Policy Framework, in particular [paragraph 59](#).

Enforcement.

NPPF Para 59

“Effective enforcement is important to maintain public confidence in the planning system. Enforcement action is discretionary, and local planning authorities should act proportionately in responding to suspected breaches of planning control. They should consider publishing a local enforcement plan to manage enforcement proactively, in a way that is appropriate to their area. This should set out how they will monitor the implementation of planning permissions investigate alleged cases of unauthorised development and take action where appropriate.”

The four-year rule was replaced by a ten-year rule on 25th April 2024. This means that moving forward, any works completed without the required planning permission will need to demonstrate ten years of continuous use rather than four - a far more arduous task.

Currently Enforcement is the poor relative within the Planning System That means that LPA's have very limited funds to take Court Action against developers who flout the regulations.

Changes are afoot, however they may well be very limited.

*Zofia Lovell*