



PLANNING ENFORCEMENT PLAN (2025)

The revised Plan aims to improve clarity, accountability, and communication regarding how the Council enforces breaches of planning control.

The original Planning Enforcement Plan for the London Borough of Hounslow was formally adopted on 5 July 2012, therefore it is considered that a refresh of the Plan was appropriate and to gain feedback from residents on the service and proposed Plan.

Consultation occurred through the Summer 2025 rendering 18 responses, these responses have been taken into account into the new Plan.

All updates are shown **[Added: text]**

1. What is a Local Planning Enforcement Plan?

A Local Planning Enforcement Plan is designed to offer residents guidance on the planning enforcement system, the enforcement powers available to the Council and to outline what they can expect from the Council's Planning Enforcement Team.

[Added: It now includes clearer definitions of key terms such as 'harm', 'minor breach', and 'expediency' to ensure consistency across all cases.]

This plan is designed to be a clear and concise guide to an extremely complex system. It does not provide detailed guidance on legislation, nor is it legally binding.

Comprehensive information may be found on the Government's website here:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-effective-enforcement>

2. What Does Planning Enforcement Do?

The Planning Enforcement Team is responsible for taking action against breaches in planning control within the borough. Planning enforcement is not a statutory function of the Council, but it underpins planning in the borough and ensures public trust.

[Added: The updated Plan promotes proactive inspections in known areas of concern and conservation zones, rather than relying solely on complaints.]

The enforcement team investigates around 1200 complaints a year, engaging with a property owner and/or developer to establish if a breach has taken place and take remedial action where necessary.

[Added: Complainants will receive updates within 10 working days and be assigned a named officer for their case.]

The team commonly investigates:

- Household extensions
 - New buildings/structures
 - Changing the use of a building
 - Adverts
 - Conversion of houses to flats
 - Works to listed buildings
 - Infrastructure/telecommunications
 - Removal of protected trees and trees within Conservation Areas
 - Illegal works in the Green Belt & on Metropolitan Open Lands
 - Planning conditions
 - Section 106 requirements
 - Targeting of portfolio criminal landlords
-

3. What Planning Enforcement Don't Do

The role of the Planning Enforcement Team is not to punish developers but to remedy breaches of planning control.

[Added: The Plan sets clearer communication targets, ensuring updates are provided within 10 working days.]

The team can only investigate matters of planning law and will continue to refer other concerns to relevant departments such as Licensing, Building Control, and Housing Standards.

The team cannot investigate:

- Anonymous allegations without supporting evidence (except at the Council's discretion)
- Reports submitted under pseudonyms
- Neighbour boundary disputes
- Property or land ownership issues
- Persistent complaints already investigated
- Breaches of covenants or trespass issues
- Malicious or vexatious reports
- Alleged reductions in property value
- Competition between businesses
- Dangerous building practices
- Obstruction of the highway
- Right-to-light issues
- Fencing law disputes

However, the team will assist in redirecting concerns to appropriate departments such as:

- Licensing: licensing@hounslow.gov.uk
 - Community Enforcement (noise, odour, fly-tipping): pollution@hounslow.gov.uk
 - Building Regulations: building.control@hounslow.gov.uk
 - HMO Licensing & Housing Standards: housing.enforcement@hounslow.gov.uk
-

4. What is a Breach in Planning Control?

A breach in planning control occurs when *development* commences without the correct permission, or is not implemented in accordance with those permissions.

[Added: Clearer definitions of “harm” and “minor breach” have been added to guide consistent decision-making.]

Broadly, this can include building or engineering works such as extending a house, erecting a structure, or changing the use of land or a building.

Further information can be found at:

- <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/permission/responsibilities/planning-permission/permitted-development-rights>

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/when-is-permission-required>
 - <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/permission/common-projects/change-of-use/use-classes>
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/outdoor-advertisements-and-signs-a-guide-for-advertisers>
-

5. Submitting a Complaint

Complaints can be submitted via:

<https://www.hounslow.gov.uk/planningenforcement>

Before submitting a complaint, please check whether planning permission has been issued.
[Added: Complainants will receive confirmation of receipt and a target timescale for the first response.]

All complaints are kept anonymous.

6. Upon Receiving a Complaint

The Planning Enforcement Team prioritises cases based on potential harm and urgency.

Category A (Urgent – Immediate Harm)

- Works to Listed Buildings
- Works to Trees with TPOs
Site visit: 1 working day
Initial response: 3 working days

Category B (Harmful, with potential to worsen)

- Unauthorised construction or breach of condition
- Breach of Enforcement Notice
- Unauthorised adverts causing highway danger
- Substandard living accommodation / HMOs
- Planning breaches causing direct harm (noise, privacy)
Site visit: 5 working days
Initial response: 5 working days

Category C (Harmful, unlikely to worsen)

- Unauthorised construction
- Unauthorised change of use
Site visit: 7 working days
Initial response: 10 working days

[Added: The Council will publish anonymised monthly statistics showing performance against these timescales.]

7. What Tools Are Available to the Team?

The Planning Enforcement Team operates under the relevant legislation and has the following formal powers:

- **Planning Contravention Notice** – Requesting further information.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-effective-enforcement#Planning-contravention-notice>
- **Enforcement Notice** – Where a breach is established and voluntary compliance has failed.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-effective-enforcement#Enforcement-Notice>
- **Planning Enforcement Order** – Where a breach has been deliberately concealed.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-effective-enforcement#Planning-Enforcement-Order>
- **Stop Notice / Temporary Stop Notice** – To halt harmful works immediately.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-effective-enforcement#Stop-Notice>
- **Breach of Condition Notice** – Failure to comply with conditions on planning permission.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-effective-enforcement#Breach-of-Condition-Notice>
- **Injunctions** – For serious breaches or harm, such as to Listed Buildings or protected trees.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ensuring-effective-enforcement#Injunction-on-planning-control>
- **Planning Warning Notice** – To begin enforcement action in situations where development has occurred without proper planning permission, but the authority considers it can be regularised.

[Added: Use of enforcement tools will be reviewed quarterly to ensure proportionality and consistency.]

8. On the Matter of Expediency, Planning Harm & Minor Breaches

Local planning authorities have discretion to take enforcement action when it is *expedient* to do so.

[Added: Each “not expedient” decision must now include a written justification and will be reported on via the monthly updates.]

Authorities should usually avoid action where:

- The breach is trivial or technical and causes no material harm.

- The development is acceptable on its planning merits.
- A planning application is a more appropriate route.

[Added: Complainants will receive a summary explanation when cases are closed on expediency grounds.]

This ensures decisions remain transparent and fair.

[Added]

(a). Harm

Definition:

In planning enforcement, harm refers to the adverse impact that a breach of planning control has on the public interest, the environment, or the amenity of an area.

Explanation:

It includes any detrimental effect on (but not limited to):

- Visual amenity (e.g., an unsightly structure),
- Residential amenity (e.g., noise, overlooking, loss of privacy),
- Heritage assets (e.g., damage to listed buildings or conservation areas),
- Environmental quality or safety.

Authorities must identify material planning harm before taking enforcement action.

(b) Minor Breach

Definition:

A minor breach is a technical or small-scale departure from planning control that results in little or no material planning harm.

Examples include:

- Slight deviations from approved plans (e.g., small dimensional differences),
- Minor changes of use without noticeable local impact,
- Small structures or developments that are visually unobtrusive.

These breaches are often resolved through negotiation, retrospective applications, or are deemed not expedient to enforce.

(c) Expediency

Definition:

Expediency in planning enforcement refers to the judgement of whether it is in the public interest and proportionate to take formal enforcement action, considering the seriousness of the breach and the degree of harm caused.

Explanation:

Authorities must balance:

- The level of harm or impact caused by the breach,
- The likelihood of resolving the issue informally or through a planning application,
- The resources required and public benefit of enforcement.

If a breach causes little harm, it may be not expedient to pursue formal action.

9. Planning Enforcement and GDPR

The Council keeps a register of Enforcement Notices (under Section 188 of the Act) via the Planning Enforcement search function on the Councils website [added].

Protecting personal data in a Planning Enforcement Plan is essential under GDPR. Sensitive information about property owners, tenants, and complainants must be kept secure to prevent misuse, reputational harm, or legal issues, while ensuring enforcement remains fair, transparent, and trusted. [added]

The Council will not release details of ongoing investigations but will maintain transparency once statutory notices are served.

[Added: Monthly anonymised enforcement data will be published, detailing the number of cases received, resolved, and closed as 'not expedient'.]

Complainants will receive confidential updates, and no personal data will be shared without legal justification.