
Planning system updates: Guidance improvements

Fact sheet

July 2026

Purpose

This fact sheet summarises updates to key planning guidance and what they mean for councils, industry and agencies.

What has changed

The NSW Government has updated key planning guidance to improve clarity, consistency and ease of use. This includes:

- Updated Local Environmental Plan (LEP) Making Guideline and a revised section 9.1 Ministerial Direction – Local Plan Making, reflecting current legislation, policy and strategic priorities
- Introduction of modular digital and PDF formats for the LEP Making Guideline, making guidance easier to navigate and update
- Simplified planning proposal categories and clearer requirements to support consistent application
- Streamlined and consolidated guidance to remove duplication and simplify requirements
- Consolidated 18 planning circulars with 12 remaining active on the website
- Alignment with Development Coordination Authority referral settings to reflect current statutory arrangements and improve consistency.

These updates make the planning system simpler, clearer and more consistent, helping councils and industry work more efficiently and supporting housing delivery across NSW.

What this means for you

- Clearer, easier-to-use guidance reducing time spent interpreting requirements.
 - Less duplication and rework, helping lower costs and streamline workflows.
 - More consistent decision making, supporting more efficient processes and faster housing delivery.
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How to apply the updates

- From 1 July 2026, ensure any planning proposals not yet lodged on the NSW Planning Portal are prepared and submitted using the updated guidance.
 - Use the updated [LEP Making Guideline](#) as your primary reference.
 - Refer to new [section 9.1 Ministerial Direction – Local Plan Making](#).
 - Access [planning circulars](#).
 - Continue to apply existing statutory requirements.
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Find out more

- Read the FAQs below about:
 - General and transitional arrangements
 - LEP Making Guideline
 - Section 9.1 Ministerial Direction – Local Plan Making
 - Planning circulars
 - Where to find archived information
- Email the Department's [Agency Partnerships team](#).

Frequently asked questions

General and transitional arrangements

When do the updated guidance and section 9.1 Ministerial Direction – Local Plan Making apply?

The updated materials apply to planning proposals lodged on the NSW Planning Portal from 1 July 2026.

What happens to planning proposals that have been created but not yet lodged?

Planning proposal applications that have been created but not lodged on the NSW Planning Portal before 1 July 2026 will need to use the updated requirements.

Will I need to resubmit my planning proposal?

If your proposal has not been lodged on the NSW Planning Portal before 1 July 2026, you will be required to prepare and submit it in line with the updated requirements.

Are these changes introducing new policy?

These updates improve guidance and process, making sure it aligns with other changes in the planning system, including updated policy settings and statutory arrangements.

How should inconsistencies between old and new guidance be managed?

The updated guidance should be treated as the primary source from 1 July 2026.

Previous guidance and materials should only be used for historical reference or for planning proposals lodged prior to 1 July 2026.

How do these updates align with Development Coordination Authority (DCA) settings?

Guidance has been aligned with DCA referral arrangements to improve consistency between plan making processes and agency consultation pathways.

How do these changes support broader planning reforms?

These updates establish a clear and consistent foundation, making it easier to incorporate future policy changes without creating additional complexity or duplication.

LEP Making Guideline

How has the LEP Making Guideline changed?

The LEP Making Guideline has been updated to provide clearer and more consistent requirements, aligned with current legislation, policy settings and strategic planning priorities. It also introduces a modular format to improve navigation and usability.

What is the modular format?

Guidance is now structured into modules online, allowing users to access relevant sections more easily, rather than navigating a single document.

What are the key technical improvements?

- Clearer step-by-step guidance across the plan making process
- Updated merit test considerations aligned with current legislation
- Simplified planning proposal categorisation
- Improved articulation of minimum evidence and study requirements
- Clearer guidance on agency referrals and consultation triggers
- Better alignment with Planning Portal processes and templates

Have planning proposal categories changed?

Yes. Categories have been simplified and clarified, with clearer guidance on expectations and timeframes to support consistent application.

How does this affect proposal quality?

Clearer upfront requirements are expected to improve proposal quality at lodgement, reducing requests for additional information and helping streamline assessment.

How often will the Guideline be updated?

The modular format enables ongoing updates as policy evolves. The Department will keep stakeholders up to date on any changes made on our website and via email.

Why wasn't council consulted?

The Department has engaged with a range of stakeholders, including councils, as part of broader planning reform engagement.

These updates are primarily focused on improving and aligning existing guidance rather than introducing new policy directions.

Targeted briefings and communication materials are being held to support councils and industry in understanding and applying the updated guidance.

Are there changes to report templates?

Templates and supporting materials have been updated where needed to align with the revised guidance, improve clarity and support more consistent application.

Have timeframes changed?

No. Timeframes have not changed, with the exception of rezoning reviews.

Currently, the LEP Making Guideline allows for a rezoning review to be lodged if council has failed to indicate support within 90 or 115 calendar days (dependent on the planning proposal category). It is proposed that the timeframes be updated to 95 working days for a standard planning proposal and 120 working days for a complex planning proposal, to align with the current benchmark assessment timeframes.

All timeframes have been updated to working days, to improve consistency and understanding across the system.

Does simplifying planning proposal categories reduce the steps or time required in the process?

The simplification of planning proposal categories will improve clarity and consistency, not reduce the rigour or necessary steps in the process.

While the structure has been streamlined, the intent is to support more efficient processes by reducing duplication and improving guidance upfront, rather than removing essential steps.

Over time, this should help reduce delays by improving proposal quality and minimising rework.

Have the fees for rezoning reviews changed?

Yes, a rezoning review fee applies as determined by the location of the proposal:

- \$50,000 for proposals in Metropolitan NSW
- \$25,000 for proposals in Regional NSW

Section 9.1 Ministerial Direction – Local Plan Making

What has changed?

The 54 section 9.1 Ministerial Directions have been consolidated into a single section 9.1 Ministerial Direction – Local Plan Making, organised around the statewide strategic planning priorities.

What does this consolidation mean in practice?

- Less duplication and overlap across requirements
- Clearer alignment between related policy objectives
- Improved usability and consistency in application

Which version of the section 9.1 Ministerial Direction – Local Plan Making applies to a planning proposal?

A planning proposal will be assessed against the Ministerial Direction that was in force when it was lodged on the NSW Planning Portal.

Are there transitional provisions for planning proposals already in the system?

Yes. Planning proposals lodged on the NSW Planning Portal before 1 July will continue to be assessed against the Ministerial Direction that applied at the time they were lodged.

Planning proposals lodged on the NSW Planning Portal on or after 1 July will be assessed against the requirements of the new Direction.

To support this transition, previous directions will remain available online until they are no longer considered relevant.

Will I need to restart my application via the Planning Portal if I haven't lodged by 1 July?

Yes. For planning proposal applications started but not lodged before 1 July, the NSW Planning Portal has been updated to direct applicants to restart their application using the updated form.

Where did the old content go?

See Appendix 1 for new guidance locations.

Will the previous section 9.1 Ministerial Directions still be available?

Yes. The previous version of the section 9.1 Ministerial Directions will remain available online. It can be used for reference in relation to planning proposals that were lodged before 1 July 2026.

How is consistency with the Ministerial Direction considered?

Planning proposals must be consistent or substantially consistent with each priority under the revised Ministerial Direction, in accordance with section 9.1(2A) of the EP&A Act, or otherwise justify inconsistency.

A single consistency statement has been provided at the beginning of the new Direction to make the requirements clearer and more streamlined.

Planning circulars

What is changing with planning circulars?

Planning circulars have been reviewed and consolidated. Overlapping or outdated content has been removed, and remaining content integrated into updated guidance and digital materials.

How many circulars are affected?

Eighteen circulars have been consolidated, with 12 remaining active.

What happens to archived circulars?

Archived circulars will remain available online. While these circulars are no longer current, they provide historical information on planning system matters.

Where can I find replaced content?

See Appendix 2 for new planning website location.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – section 9.1 Ministerial Directions

Previous section 9.1 Ministerial Direction	Guidance from 1 July 2026
1.1 Implementation of Regional Plans	Refer to the EP&A Act and LEP Making Guideline
1.2 Development of Aboriginal Land Council Land	Refer to the Planning System SEPP and LEP Making Guideline
1.3 Approval and Referral Requirements	Refer to the EP&A Act, SEPPs and LEP Making Guideline
1.4 Site Specific Provisions	Refer to the Standard Instrument framework and LEP Making Guideline
1.4A Exclusion of Development Standards from Variation	Refer to the Standard Instrument framework, clause 4.6 Guide and LEP Making Guideline
1.5 Parramatta Road Corridor Urban Transformation Strategy	Refer to the relevant region plan
1.6 Implementation of North West Priority Growth Area Land Use and Infrastructure Implementation Plan	Refer to relevant region plan
1.7 Implementation of Greater Parramatta Priority Growth Area Interim Land Use and Infrastructure Implementation Plan	Removed. Outdated
1.8 Implementation of Wilton Priority Growth Area Interim Land Use and Infrastructure Implementation Plan	Refer to the relevant region plan
1.9 Implementation of Glenfield to Macarthur Urban Renewal Corridor	Refer to the relevant region plan
1.10 Implementation of the Western Sydney Aerotropolis Plan	Refer to the relevant region plan
1.11 Implementation of Bayside West Precincts 2036 Plan	Refer to the relevant region plan
1.12 Implementation of Planning Principles for the Cooks Cove Precinct	Refer to the relevant region plan
1.13 Implementation of St Leonards and Crows Nest 2036 Plan	Removed. Outdated

1.14 Implementation of Greater Macarthur 2040	Removed. Outdated
1.15 Implementation of the Pyrmont Peninsular Place Strategy	Refer to the relevant region plan
1.16 North West Rail Link Corridor Strategy	Removed. Outdated
1.17 Implementation of the Bays West Place Strategy	Refer to the relevant region plan
1.18 Implementation of the Macquarie Park Innovation Precinct	Removed. Outdated
1.19 Implementation of the Westmead Place Strategy	Refer to the relevant region plan
1.20 Implementation of the Cameilla-Rosehill Place Strategy	Removed. Outdated
1.21 Implementation of the South West Growth Area Structure Plan	Refer to the relevant region plan
1.22 Implementation of the Cherrybrook Station Place Strategy	Removed. Outdated
3.1 Conservation Zones 3.4 Application of C2 and C3 Zones and Environmental Overlays in Far North Coast LEPs	P5.2 Conservation
3.2 Heritage Conservation	Refer to the <i>Heritage Act</i> , <i>National Parks and Wildlife Act</i> , cl5.10 of the Standard Instrument and the LEP Making Guideline
3.3 Sydney Drinking Water Catchments 3.9 Sydney Harbour Foreshores and Waterways Area 3.10 Water Protection Catchment	P5.3 Foreshores and Water Catchment Areas
3.5 Recreation Vehicle Areas	Removed. Outdated
3.6 Strategic Conservation Planning	P5.1 Strategic Conservation Planning
3.7 Public Bushland	Refer to the Standard Instrument and local environmental plans
3.8 Willandra Lakes Region	P6.2 Willandra Lakes Region
4.1 Flooding	P5.7 Flooding

4.2 Coastal Management	P5.8 Coastal Management
4.3 Planning for Bushfire Protection	P5.9 Planning for Bush Fire Protection
4.4 Remediation of Contaminated Land	P5.4 Contaminated Lands
4.5 Acid Sulfate Soils	P5.5 Acid Sulfate Soils
4.6 Mine Subsidence and Unstable Land	P3.3 Mine Subsidence and Unstable Land
5.1 Integrating Land Use and Transport	P4.1 Integrating Land Use and Infrastructure
5.2 Reserving Land for Public Purposes	P6.1 Reserving Land for Public Purposes
5.3 Development Near Regulated Airports and Defence Airfields	P3.3 Airport Safeguarding
5.4 Shooting Ranges	Refer to relevant firearms legislation
5.5 High Pressure Dangerous Goods Pipeline	P7.1 High Pressure Dangerous Goods Pipeline
6.1 Residential Zones 6.2 Caravan Parks and Manufactured Estates	P2.1 Housing
7.1 Employment Zones	P3.1 Employment
7.2 Reduction in non-hosted short-term rental accommodation period	Refer to the Housing SEPP
7.3 Commercial and Retail Development along the Pacific Highway, North Coast	Removed. Outdated
8.1 Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries	P3.4 Mining and Petroleum Production
9.1 Rural Zones 9.2 Rural Lands 9.4 Farmland of State and Regional Significance on NSW Far North Coast	P3.2 Rural
9.3 Oyster Aquaculture	P3.5 Oyster Aquaculture

Appendix 2 – Planning circulars

Archived Circular	New NSW Planning website location
PS 23-001- Assessing sustainable performance in buildings	<u>Practice Note – Assessing sustainable performance in buildings</u>
PS 21-035- Planning certificates: loose-fill asbestos material PS 21-034- Planning certificates: contaminated land PS 21-030- Planning certificates: biodiversity and native vegetation	<u>Practice Note – Guidance on section 10.7 planning certificate notations</u>
PS 21-031- Planning and assessment guidelines for hazardous industry	<u>Hazards</u>
PS 21-017- Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries	<u>Practice Note – Mining, Petroleum Production and Extractive Industries</u>
PS 24-005- Development near high pressure pipelines	<u>Practice Note - Development near high pressure pipelines</u>
PS 21-018- Development near rail corridors and busy roads – interim guideline	<u>Transport Infrastructure</u>
PS 21-038- Regulating expansion of schools	<u>Practice Note - Regulating expansion of schools</u>
PS 21-008- How to characterise development	<u>Practice Note - How to characterise development</u>
PS 17-001- Using the Apartment Design Guide PS 15-002- Design quality of residential apartment development	<u>Practice Note - Using the Apartment Design Guide</u>
PS 21-016- Approval to install relocatable and flat-pack homes outside a caravan park or manufactured home estate	<u>Practice Note - Approval to install prefabricated (manufactured and flat-</u>

	<u>pack) homes outside a caravan park or manufactured home estate</u>
PS 21-021- Caravan parks and camping grounds	<u>Practice Note - Caravan parks and camping grounds</u>
PS 23-003- In-fill affordable housing under State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing) 2021	<u>In-fill affordable housing Practice Note</u>
PS 22-001 Independent review of planning proposals for identified Aboriginal land PS 22-002 Delegations of plan making decisions PS 22-003 Independent review of plan-making decisions	<u>Make or amend an LEP</u>