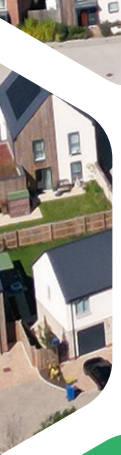
Future Homes Hub















Pieces into Place

Recommendations for simpler adoption processes and consistent quality on new residential developments

Future Homes Hub for MHCLG

November 2026

Part of the MHCLG consultation: 'Reducing the prevalence of private estate management arrangements'

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Executive summary

Developers, local authorities, utility providers, management companies and consumer representatives don't always agree. But ask them about the process of adoption and stewardship in new housing development, and the answers are similar: "inconsistent", "lengthy", "frustrating."

Across more than twenty stakeholder conversations and three workshops, participants converged on the same impactful issues, where they cluster in the development process, and the interventions most likely to help.

This is a complex policy area with no simple fix, but the degree of cross-stakeholder alignment creates a real opportunity for a better approach.

This report sets out targeted, credible propositions to bring us closer to a system where:

- Policy is coordinated and capacity is maximised
- Information and standards are more consistent
- Approach, cost and responsibility are clear
- Financial mechanisms are sound
- Residents have transparency and redress

The Hub is pleased to collaborate with government on this project, within the wider consultation "reducing the prevalence of private estate management arrangements". As a convening organisation between the new homes sector and government, we have been able to develop potential solutions and stress-test them across a wide range of actors within the system.



Recommendations overview

The long list of recommendations below will be developed through further prioritisation, impact and implementation work with MHCLG and contributors to the project where appropriate.

The body of the report goes into the following recommendations in more detail, including a summary of the issues they are seeking to address.

Intervention	Description
Policy is coordinated and capacity is maximised	
National policy coordination	Establish an ongoing national policy dialogue mechanism between planning, highways, drainage and greenspace disciplines, so contradictions stop accumulating. This should build on two nearer-term steps: embedding stewardship and adoptability requirements in the Manual for Streets 3 revision, which has a time-limited window, and auditing NPPF, Design and Placemaking PPG and highways policy for existing contradictions.
LA capacity, coordination and timelines	Map shared capacity and promote integrated team structures, including emerging shared models such as cross-authority 'stewardship hub' arrangements (e.g. Calderdale MBC's proposal). Internal alignment protocol for planning and technical approval teams. Maximum timelines for Section 38/104 and equivalent agreements to be introduced.
Information and standards are more consistent	
Information standards	Standardise terminology, what is submitted and in what format at each stage, proportionate to development scale. Reinstate standard technical information packs by asset type - highways and drainage first, landscape via Landscape Institute. Developed in collaboration with relevant sector bodies.
Specification standards	Agree a national baseline for what adopted assets look like by asset type. SuDS standards exist and could form example. Significant further workstream. Priority should go to core engineered assets – roads, sewers, drainage and SuDS – where there is strong support for firm national standards. Open space and other amenity assets need more local flexibility and should follow a lighter-touch approach, developed with appropriate sector bodies.
Approach, cost and responsibility are clear	
Stewardship strategy	Introduce a short, simple, evolving document bringing together any emerging stewardship information from pre-planning to resale. Integrates existing information, rather than adding new outputs. Functions as guidance rather than a new mandatory planning submission requirement, so it does not add a further hurdle to the planning process. Updated through the process and handed over to residents at completion as the Stewardship Guide
Stewardship diagram	Map each non-residential asset by stewardship route in a simple colour-coded plan within the strategy, showing at high-level which assets are adopted, privately managed or under another stewardship body. Not frontloading information but consolidating what's known at each stage. Long term this can make use of emerging digital planning processes to create continuity over time and between different actors in the system.

Maintenance cost estimate	Estimate maintenance costs within the strategy, with high-level assumptions for maintenance costs that become progressively refined, eventually informing resident disclosure. Again, calculations should be proportionate to stage and based on existing information, rather than front-loading additional detail. Should aim to estimate likely annual costs for at least the first 30 years.
Stewardship Guide	Produce a final resident-facing iteration of the stewardship strategy to include stewardship diagram, high-level cost estimates and redress routes in plain English. Acknowledgement required rather than passive info. Extends to resale. Aligned with and integrated into the Home Buying and Selling Reform programme. The costs information should be provided to prospective customers at the earliest reasonable stage in the purchase process.
Financial mechanisms are sound	
Commuted sum and bonds review	Review calculation methods across sample of LAs, including bonds, with particular attention to BNG as legal requirement. Progress toward standard approach, including a consideration of whether this should be guidance or mandated.
Sinking fund mandation review	Review options for mandating sinking funds, then enact. Initial feedback suggests mandation is the most credible long-term mechanism but will likely need to be scaled and scoped proportionately to each asset type, so it does not become a disproportionate cost for minimal benefit on lower-risk assets. Significant implications - legal, financial, contractual.
Long term maintenance funding review	Review how long-term maintenance is funded, including government funding for adoption, value capture mechanisms for the environmental and social benefits of quality assets, and fairness measures e.g. council tax rebates. 'Value capture' here means government/local authority funding mechanisms that recognise the social, health and environmental benefits of high-quality publicly adopted assets, not a new cost for developers.
Minimum maintenance and defects liability period review	Explore the potential for assets to pass a defects liability period before being transferred to a stewardship body. Links to consumer protection and whole-life cost modelling. Rapid review needed - high complexity. 'Stewardship body' can mean a local authority, management company or other body, not only a public authority; this review should align with the bonds, commuted sums, guarantees and New Homes Ombudsman recommendations, which are closely linked.
Residents have transparency and redress	
Managing agent regulation and accountability	Mandate professional body membership, consistent with proposals in the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill. 'Accountability to residents' refers to the transparency measures coming via Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act secondary legislation and existing mandatory redress scheme membership, rather than a new separate mechanism.
New Homes Ombudsman scope	Ensure estate management arrangements are explicitly within scope of the statutory New Homes Ombudsman. Align with Ombudsman legislative timetable.
Consumer redress information	Signpost clear redress routes for each asset by body responsible - highway authority, water company, management company, RMC etc. This intervention should also close the redress gap between RMCs and managing agents (residents can currently only take an RMC to a First-tier Tribunal).
How to buy on a freehold or commonhold estate guide	Produce a plain English buyer guide analogous to How to Rent and How to Lease. May become unnecessary if information standards and disclosure work as intended. Should reflect the format/language of the site specific "Stewardship Guide".

Introduction

About this report

The Future Homes Hub was commissioned by MHCLG to develop recommendations on adoption processes and design quality standards for non-residential elements of new housing developments (highways, drainage, greenspace and other shared areas) to supplement the government's consultation on reducing the prevalence of private estate management arrangements.

The Future Homes Hub is also delivering the Housing Delivery Productivity Review (HDPR) under terms of reference with MHCLG and with the oversight of a cross-government steering group. HDPR is reviewing opportunities to improve the efficiency of the housing delivery system without compromising quality, safety or sustainability. Several of the recommendations align with HDPR's work, and the project may become a vehicle through which they are taken forward.

What we are trying to achieve

Five things need to work better, and they need to work together:

1. **Policy needs to be coordinated and capacity needs to be maximised**

National and local policy on planning, highways, drainage and greenspace needs to align, so contradictions stop accumulating. Local authorities need the resource and skills to engage meaningfully with adoption, and the system needs to use that capacity more effectively.

2. **Information and standards need to be more consistent**

What is asked for, in what format and when, should not vary arbitrarily between authorities, asset types or stages of a development, particularly between what is agreed at planning and what is then required at technical approval.

3. **Approach, cost and responsibility need to be clear**

Stewardship and adoption decisions need to be made clearer earlier, with information consolidated to provide continuity through each stage, supporting alignment between planning, technical approval and legal agreement.

4. **Financial mechanisms need to be sound**

Approximate whole-life costs should be visible from masterplan stage onwards, long term maintenance should be properly funded, and financial mechanisms and calculations should be consistent and proportionate.

5. **Residents need to have transparency and redress**

Buyers should understand what they are committing to before they commit. Once in occupation, residents should have clear rights, accessible redress and the assurance that whoever manages their shared spaces is properly accountable to them.

No single intervention will resolve the problems in the system; these five things must be addressed together or risk limited results.

What we are not trying to do



This report does not argue for universal local authority adoption, nor does it treat private management as inherently inferior. The evidence is more nuanced: most developers want adoption, and quality outcomes depend more on governance and funding arrangements than on which stewardship model is used. The question is not which model but whether any model is properly governed, funded and accountable.

This report focuses on new residential development and does not address existing privately managed estates.

The recommendations do not seek to place unnecessary burdens or complexity onto an already stretched system. The aim is to make better use of existing information, processes and capacity as far as possible.

This report should also be read alongside other live reforms affecting the same lifecycle, including the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill, Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act secondary legislation, and Home Buying and Selling Reform. These recommendations are intended to complement that wider programme, not duplicate it.

How we got here

The Hub convened three workshops between February and April 2026, drawing on its developer membership alongside local authorities, water companies, managing agents, stewardship organisations, consumer representatives and government officials. The process began with a polling exercise and initial one-to-one conversations to identify the most significant issues and test early hypotheses. Workshop 1 brought those findings to a wider group for challenge and refinement.

Workshop 2 tested potential responses across five themes. Workshop 3 gathered feedback on draft recommendations. Throughout, the workshops were supplemented by targeted small group and one-to-one conversations with specialists in highways adoption, drainage, greenspace stewardship and financial mechanisms, and by sense-check discussions with local authority officers and volume housebuilders to test the recommendations against operational experience.

This draft further reflects written feedback received from workshop participants and Hub steering group members during June 2026.

All engagement was conducted under Chatham House rules. Findings and recommendations are anonymised.



1. Policy is coordinated and capacity is maximised

National policy coordination

Issue

NPPF design policy, highway standards including LTN 1/20, SuDS guidance and active travel requirements contain contradictions.

Intervention

Medium term goal: establish an ongoing national policy dialogue mechanism between planning, highways, drainage and greenspace disciplines at national level, to prevent contradictions accumulating. This should build on two nearer-term, supporting steps.

In the short term, the Manual for Streets 3 revision: MHCLG is confirmed to be in dialogue with DfT, and stewardship and adoptability requirements must be embedded before MfS3 is finalised, given the time-limited window. Second, a systematic audit of contradictions across NPPF, design PPG and national highways policy.

Local authority capacity, coordination and timelines

Issue

There is often internal disconnect between planning and technical approval teams within the same authority. Designs agreed at planning are challenged at technical approval, triggering costly redesign, delay and in some cases retreat to private management.

Intervention:

Local authorities should establish an internal alignment protocol requiring planning and technical approval teams to agree on design and adoption requirements before consent is granted. Where a design has been agreed at planning stage, there should be a presumption of technical acceptance at adoption stage unless there has been a material change in standards or site conditions.

Maximum timelines for Section 38, Section 104 and equivalent agreements are worth establishing and could be phased in on a near-term basis – starting with authorities and shared-service arrangements that already have adequate capacity – rather than held back as an open-ended 'future requirement once capacity is improved'. Accountability must apply on both sides, and capacity constraints should not become a standing reason to defer action indefinitely.

Several authorities already operate shared engineering resource, peer review functions or combined authority approaches. These models should be mapped as a rapid near-term exercise to identify what works and what could be extended, rather than designing new structures from scratch.

Integrated team structures combining planning, highways and drainage functions should be promoted as a model. Where full integration is not feasible, formal cross-team liaison protocols are a minimum. Local government reorganisation creates a structural opportunity to address two-tier inconsistencies and should be noted as a relevant contextual factor in implementation.

This aligns with emerging HDPR recommendations on institutional roles and capacity.

Calderdale MBC's proposed 'Stewardship Hubs' model was highlighted as a shared-service example worth exploring further as part of this mapping exercise.

2. Information and standards are more consistent

Issue

There is no consistent standard for what information is required at each stage, in what format, or to what specification. Applicants working across multiple authorities face a bespoke negotiation each time. Poor submission quality is also a contributor to adoption delays.

Intervention

Information standards

A proportionate, staged information standard should be introduced covering all non-residential asset types. Requirements should scale to development size. Standard terminology and technical information packs for adoption submissions should be introduced, starting with highways and drainage first, then landscape, potentially through the Landscape Institute. This is about making consistent what is already expected, not adding new requirements. Developed in collaboration with relevant sector bodies, not government alone.

Specification standards

Nationally agreed standards for what adopted assets look like by asset type - materials, construction methods, maintenance requirements. SuDS standards already exist but are inconsistently applied and not well understood across the system.

This is a significant further workstream and should not be attempted before information standards are in place. The Sewers for Adoption document provides a potential model: a national baseline within which authorities can add requirements but not contradict it.

Consultation feedback strongly supports common national standards for core 'engineered' amenities – roads, sewers, drains, SuDS – but is more nuanced on open spaces and other softer amenities such as car parks and playgrounds, where local flexibility matters more. Standardisation work should prioritise the engineered assets first and take a lighter-touch approach for the rest, developed with appropriate sector bodies.

Both recommendations align with HDPR recommendations on more consistent information and standards in the wider system.

Consistency does not mean adding new requirements—it means making clear what is already expected, at every stage.



3. Approach, cost and responsibility are clear

Issue

Who is responsible for which assets and what the likely cost of long-term maintenance will be is unclear and, in some cases, unconsidered at earlier stages of the development process. This increases inconsistency and risk in later stages. There is no desire to introduce new front-end information burdens or new complex processes, but the information that already exists could be used more transparently and efficiently.

Intervention

Stewardship Strategy

The stewardship strategy is a proportionate, evolving document that coordinates existing stewardship information into a single resource, initiated at pre-planning stage and updated through planning, design, construction and handover. It replaces and integrates several documents that already exist in fragmented form rather than adding to them. It should be proportionate to scale: a brief declaration for a small site, a progressively refined document for a large or complex scheme.

The aspiration is a single digital resource accessible to multiple actors at multiple stages. Where digital systems are not yet in place, an analogue approach should apply in the interim.

This should function as design and masterplanning guidance rather than a new mandatory planning submission requirement. The steering group was clear that stewardship and long-term land management is, in many places, not itself a planning matter, and that requiring a specific new document as part of a planning application risks creating a further hurdle rather than better placemaking. The intent is for stewardship thinking to inform design decisions early – not to give councils new grounds to negotiate over which assets they will or won't adopt at the design stage.

It should also give future residents a proportionate opportunity to understand – and, where relevant, contribute to – the stewardship model proposed for their development, without creating a new formal consultation requirement.

This aligns with HDPR recommendations on process sequencing improvements across the wider system.

Stewardship diagram

A colour-coded spatial plan giving a high-level indication of each non-residential asset on the development mapped by stewardship route. Three potential categories in addition to asset type (highways, greenspace, drainage etc):

- Adopted
- Private management
- Other stewardship body including resident management companies, third-sector or not-for-profit organisations such as community land trusts, parish councils, etc.
- The plan will be indicative at pre-application and updated through the process as certainty increases. It should ideally show who is responsible for maintenance in the pre-adoption or pre-handover period.

There is a role for making this digital as online platforms and mapping is introduced to the wider system.

Maintenance cost estimate

The financial element of the strategy. Begins with high-level assumptions at masterplan stage and becomes progressively more detailed as design decisions are made. Covers adopted and privately managed elements. Ideally captures major replacement costs including road resurfacing, drainage replacement, street lighting and ecological management that fall outside the five to ten year window that currently forms the norm.

The stewardship partner does not need to be formally appointed at pre-application stage in order to provide certainty on costs; a sense of the likely route and a high-level cost assumption is sufficient early on.

The RICS publishes guidance documents for service charge management in commercial and leasehold residential settings. An equivalent residential freehold guidance document - setting out standardised cost categories, useful life assumptions and calculation methodologies for common asset types - would provide a reference framework for whole-life cost estimates across the sector.

A participant in the workshop recommended that residents receive estimated annual costs for at least the first 30 years of ownership, before they purchase. Work is already underway to determine building lifecycle costs from a large sample of existing buildings, and AECOM are separately developing a costing exemplar for SuDS – both are worth drawing on.

Stewardship Guide

The final, resident-facing iteration of the stewardship strategy at handover. It should be the accessible, plain English version of the document built through the development process rather than a separately produced document.

Content: which assets are adopted, privately managed or under another stewardship arrangement; who is responsible for each and redress mechanisms; the annual service charge breakdown; lifecycle cost projections including sinking fund contributions; plain English explanation of any drainage or other complex features and why maintenance matters.

A trigger acknowledgement requiring buyers to confirm they have received and understood it, not merely that it was made available would give greater clarity. Ideally the same disclosure requirements will extend to resale, so the information travels with the property.

The document should include redress routes by stewardship type - setting out where residents should go if things go wrong depending on whether the issue involves a highway authority, water company, management company or resident management company. This addresses the current situation where residents have no clear guide to accountability and no coherent path to resolution.

Any requirements should build on/plug into the New Homes Ombudsman rather than creating a parallel regime. There is also a clear opportunity to align the timing and format of this document with the Home Buying and Selling Reform programme, rather than developing it as a standalone mechanism.

Buyers should understand who is responsible, what they will pay and where to turn when things go wrong—before they purchase.



4. Financial mechanisms are sound

Commuted sum and bonds review

Issue

Commuted sum and bonds calculation methodologies vary significantly between authorities, are not publicly documented in many cases, and have become disproportionate for some asset types - particularly nature-based assets and BNG features where charges are making adoption financially unworkable.

Intervention

A rapid review of methodologies across a representative sample of local authorities should be commissioned as a near-term priority, with the aim of developing a standard method. The review should identify the range of approaches in use, where they work and where they do not, and produce either a guidance document or the basis for a mandated approach. It should pay particular attention to BNG-related assets, where the interaction between biodiversity requirements and improper maintenance carries more legal risk. Risks and unintended consequences of any move toward standardisation should be considered carefully.

Sinking fund mandation

Issue:

Residents resist contributing to sinking funds in early years when no major work is visible. Major cost liabilities accumulate invisibly and fall on later purchasers.

Intervention

Mandation is the most credible long-term mechanism, based on feedback through this project. A rapid review of options should be commissioned immediately to determine how it is scoped, rather than whether it happens. Feedback showed support for mandation in principle but made clear it should be scaled and scoped proportionately by asset type and risk, rather than a flat requirement across every asset. This is an area with material risk of unintended consequences if implemented without careful design.

Long term maintenance funding review

Issue:

Local authorities have no structural incentive to adopt new assets and considerable structural reason to delay - taking on new assets means taking on new maintenance liabilities with no corresponding resource.

Intervention:

A government funding mechanism tied to the quantum of assets adopted would shift this dynamic. The emphasis should be on incentivising adoption rather than penalising non-adoption.

Financial mechanisms for capturing the health, sustainability and social benefits of adopted assets should be explored. Value capture here refers to government/local authority funding mechanisms that recognise the social, health and environmental benefits of publicly adopted assets – for example, additional central government funding support where a local authority takes on a significant piece of green/blue infrastructure that delivers wider social or health benefits. It is not intended as a new charge on developers.

Residents on privately managed estates pay full Council Tax for services the council does not provide. This review should explore a partial rebate which would help legitimise service charges and acknowledge the public service being delivered by private stewardship. The surface water drainage charge provides a partial existing precedent. Requires Treasury engagement. Long term and politically complex.

Long-term maintenance liabilities should be planned and funded from the outset—not left to accumulate invisibly for future residents.

5. Residents have transparency and redress

Managing agent regulation and accountability

Issue

Private management companies operating residential freehold estates are largely unregulated. Nothing prevents poor operators from taking on sites they cannot adequately manage.

Intervention

Formal accountability requirements should be introduced: mandatory membership of a recognised professional body, minimum qualifications, mandatory financial disclosure to residents. A policy or legislative mechanism is required. The Property Institute confirms there is already a legislative vehicle for this: the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Bill, which is expected to include mandatory qualifications and professional body membership, potentially alongside an independent regulator. 'Mandatory disclosure and accountability to residents' should be read as referring to the transparency measures coming via Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act secondary legislation, plus the existing mandatory redress scheme membership – not a new, separate mechanism. This recommendation should be reframed around supporting and aligning with that Bill, rather than proposing a parallel route.

New Homes Ombudsman scope

The New Homes Ombudsman should explicitly cover estate management arrangements. Current proposals risk leaving the most significant source of ongoing resident detriment outside its remit. Timing should align with the Ombudsman's legislative timetable.

Consumer redress by stewardship type

Clear, signposted redress routes by asset type and body responsible should be developed and included in the stewardship disclosure document. Workshop participants also flagged an important gap: RMCs do not currently have an equivalent redress mechanism to managing agents – a resident's only current route is the First-tier Tribunal. Signposting alone will not fix this; closing the gap should be an explicit part of the intervention.

How to buy on a freehold estate guide

A plain English guide for buyers analogous to the How to Rent guide and the How to Lease guide. This may become unnecessary if information standards and the resident Stewardship Guide work as intended. Worth developing in parallel as a bridge while systemic changes bed in.

Workshop participants supported this and have separately called for the How to Lease guide to be updated and its distribution mandated before purchase, plus a new How to Commonhold guide – both worth folding into this workstream. Terminology and format should be mirrored across this and the site-specific resident Stewardship Guides.



Conclusion and next steps

Feedback through this process has been unusually consistent. Where views differed, they largely focused on delivery detail rather than the underlying issue or broad approach to intervention.

The Future Homes Hub will now work with government to further refine priorities, understand the context for practical implementation, assess the “pain” of making a change vs the “gain” of process and quality improvements, and explore sequencing to align with wider government agendas. HDPR may be the vehicle for taking some of these interventions forward.



Future Homes Hub

If you have any queries or would like to give feedback please contact us.

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