



The Planning Slowdown

How decision times for major housing applications in England have changed since 2010

June 2026

Key Findings

349

Median determination period in days for all planning applications for 10 or more homes in 2025.

3.3x

The increase in the median determination period over the last 15 years.

439

The median number of days to determine an outline planning application for new homes in 2025.

278

The number of days extra planning committee decisions take compared to those delegated to officers.

Introduction

Despite all the planning reforms of the last 15 years, it is taking longer for applications to be decided. We can't improve the system until we recognise how slow it has become.

Successive governments have worked hard to make the planning system quicker and more efficient over the last 15 years.

The original National Planning Policy Framework in 2012 and its various re-writes (with another one the way), various legislative changes and frequently updated guidance, all aimed to get the planning system working more efficiently and to allow more new homes to be permissioned.

Yet beyond application numbers themselves - which tell us little about how efficient the decision-making process actually is - there is next to no data on how long planning applications are actually taking.

This report is intended to change that, and fill the gap in the dearth of data available on the performance of the planning system.

Drawing on data provided by Searchland, a specialist property data company, we have been able to see how the time needed to determine a residential planning application has changed over the last 15 years.

The results paint a bleak picture of worsening performance across every type and size of application - but with some having been hit harder than others.

It is hoped that by understanding the realities of the decision-making process we can begin to consider how to improve it.

About the data

The dataset comprises around 132,000 planning applications decided between 2010 and 2025.

Searchland aggregates and standardises data from a range of trusted UK sources including HM Land Registry, Ordnance Survey, Rightmove and local authorities.

The planning data includes details of every planning application submitted in England since 2010, including information such as the type and size of the proposal, the date the application was submitted, and the date a decision was reached.

That information formed the basis of this research.

Qualifying applications

The data set was first narrowed down to those applications which met the following criteria:

1. Proposed 10 or more new dwellings.
2. Received a final decision between 2010 and 2025.
3. Was a standalone, primary application (excluding child applications like condition discharges or non-material amendments).

That produced a dataset of approximately 132,000 planning applications.

Measuring decision speed

The data was then categorised in a number of ways: by the size of the application; by application type (full, outline or reserved matters); and by decision level (whether committee or determined).

For each application, the determination period was measured from the date the application was received by the local planning authority to the date a final decision was issued by the council. That means the data does not capture the time associated with any planning appeal in the event an application was refused. It also means that applications which were appealed for non-determination - where the council had not made a decision within the agreed time period - are not included in the dataset.

Applications were allocated to the year in which the decision was finally made. This avoids more recent years being artificially skewed toward quicker decisions, as slower applications may still be awaiting determination.

The time period for decisions in each of those years is expressed as a median - half of all

applications will have been decided more quickly than the median, and half more slowly. This is to prevent the data being skewed by a small number of applications with very long determination periods which may be genuine, but may also be a result of issues with the source data from the local authority.

Known limitations and caveats

Data is messy, especially planning data which has different standards in each local planning authority. Where possible, we have tried to control for biases and limitations in the data.

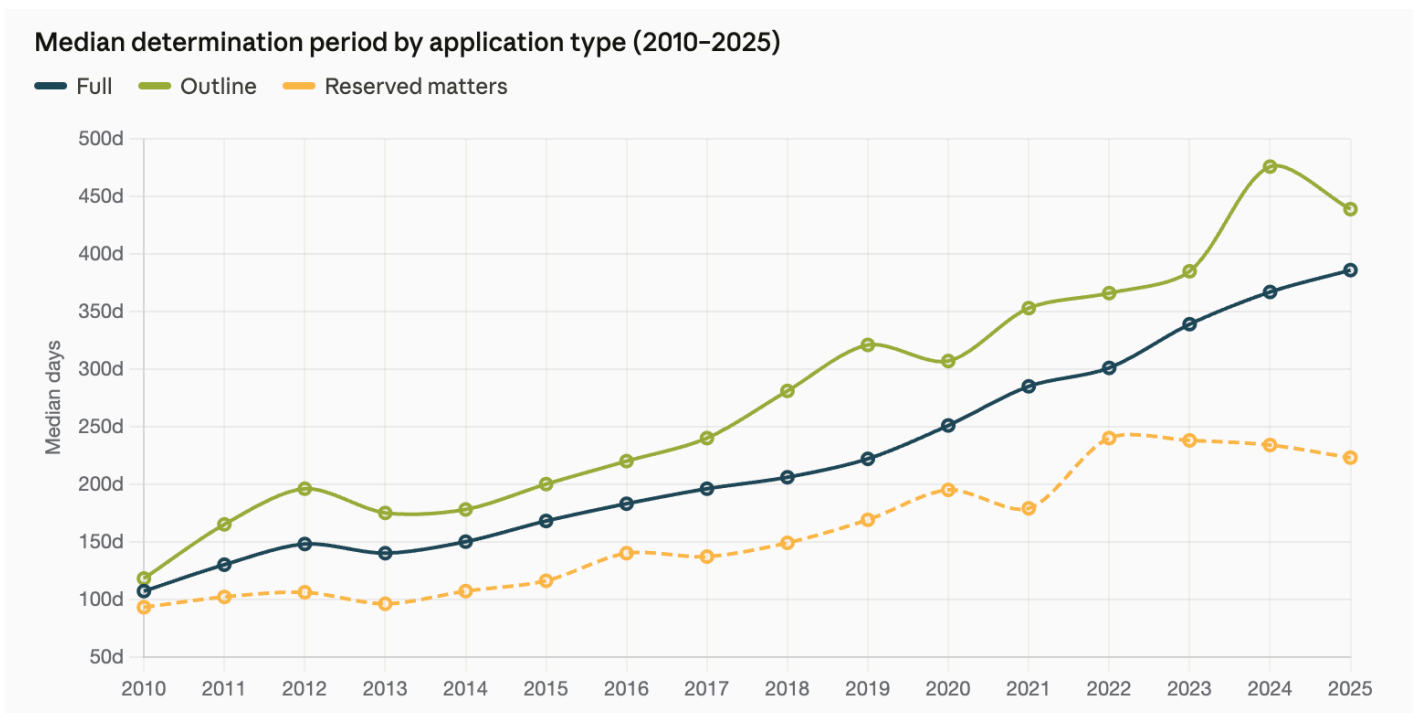
Not every council clearly states who made the final decision. We use a “waterfall” approach to fill the blanks, checking the main portal field, external committee meeting dates, and scanning documents. Although we’re confident we’ve correctly assigned over 90% of applications, the remaining unknowns were excluded to keep the data clean.

We extract dwelling numbers and application types from the council pages or standardised forms first. Where missing, Searchland’s algorithms fill the gaps based on the proposal text, with an estimated accuracy of over 99%.



Speed of decision by application type

Full, outline and reserved matters applications: which takes the longest?



The time taken to determine applications of all types has increased significantly. In 2010, the median planning application took 107 days to be determined, at just over 15 weeks this was only marginally longer than the statutory determination deadline of 13 weeks. By 2025, however, the median decision was taking more than three times as long at 349 days.

Although those increased time periods are apparent for all types of application,

the increase is most marked for outline planning applications. Despite some recent improvement, determination periods have increased almost four-fold from 118 to 439 days – over 62 weeks or nearly five times the target determination period. Full applications have slowed almost as much, with decision periods increasing from 107 to 386 days (55 weeks).

In contrast, reserved matters applications remain the quickest to determine, with the median decision being issued in just 223 days (32 weeks), up from 93 days in 2010.

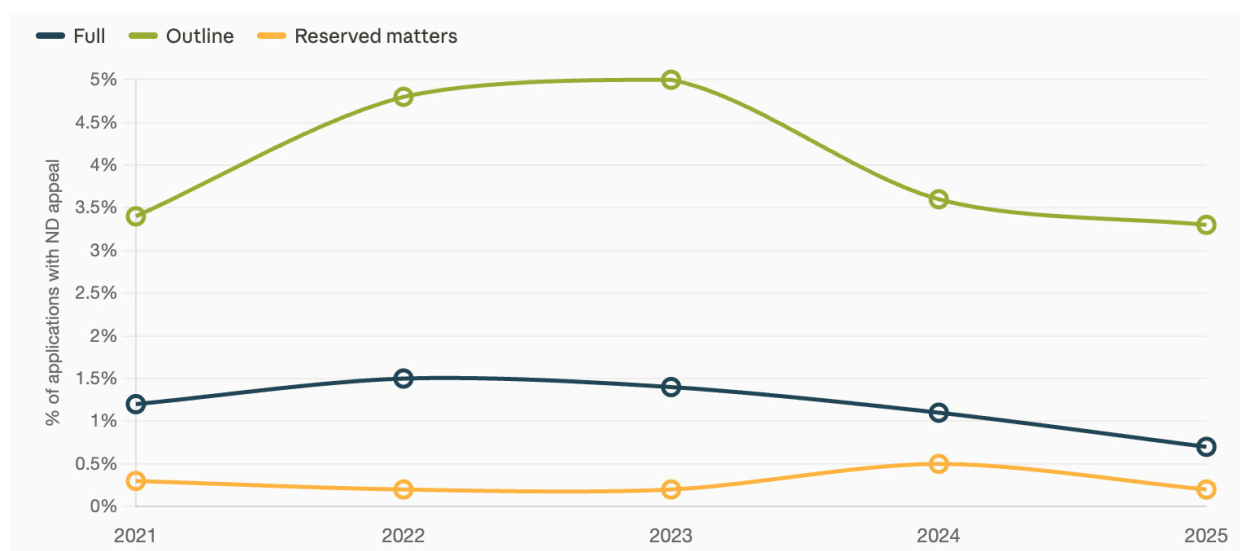
As full and outline applications take by far the longest, and both deal with the principle of development, this pattern indicates that the greatest time and complexity lies with establishing that a site is suitable for new homes.

Once the principle is established, in contrast, the subsequent reserved matters applications can be processed more quickly. The time needed to enter into a Section 106 agreement could be another explanatory factor. S106s are usually required for outline and full

applications, but not for reserved matters applications, adding another step in the process.

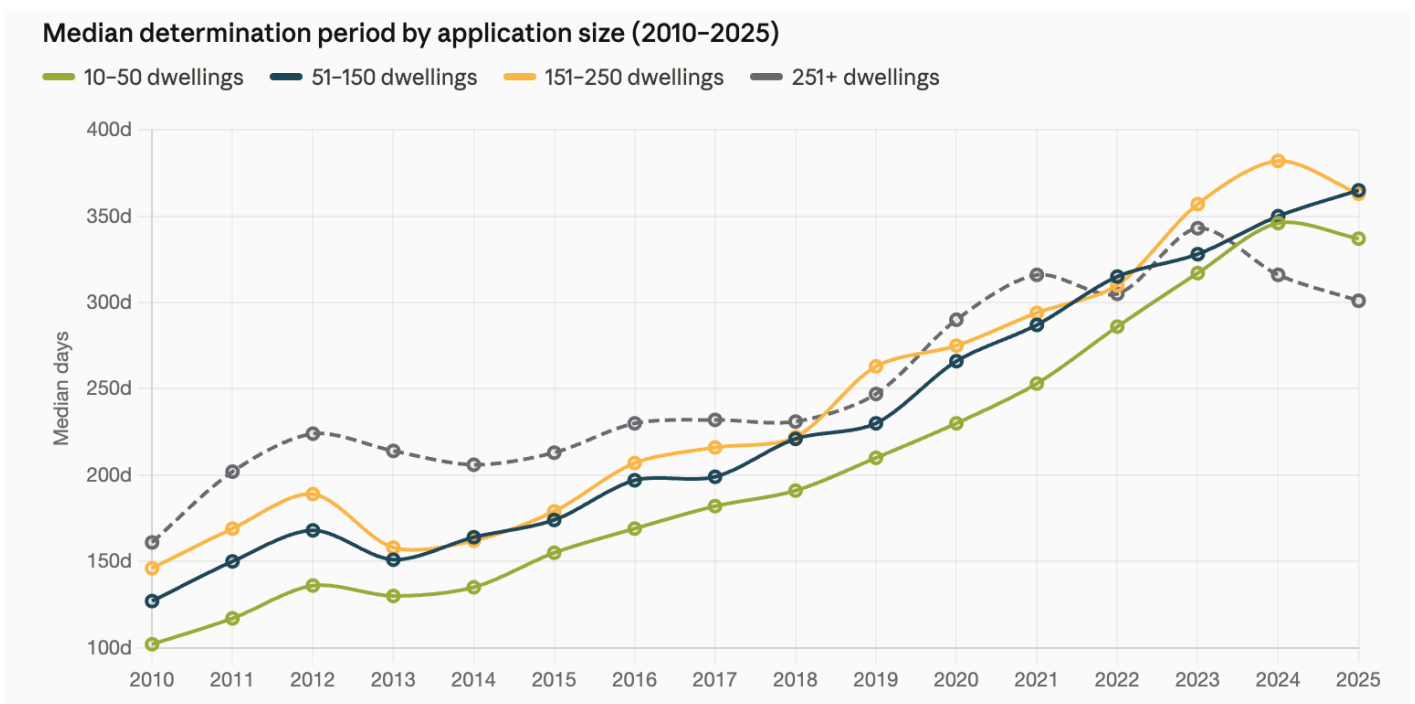
As the chart below shows, it is also the case that outline applications are far more likely to be the subject of appeals for non-determination. (This data is only available for the last five years). Those applications - which are likely to be amongst the slowest - will no longer appear in the data as a result.

These time periods also reveal that outline applications are no longer a simple way to secure a decision about the principle of development. They are just as time consuming and just as complicated as full applications.



Speed of decision by scheme size

Does size matter? The relationship between size and speed.



In 2010, the bigger an application became, the longer it took to determine. Whereas applications for 10 to 50 homes took just 102 days (just over 14 weeks), applications for 250 homes or more typically took 161 days (23 weeks).

Since then, decision speeds have slowed for applications of all sizes, with the smallest schemes - those of between 10 and 50 homes - seeing the steepest proportionate increase

with decisions taking 3.4 times longer in 2025 than in 2010.

In recent years, the relationship between application size and decision speed has become more complex. Whilst the last year has seen an improvement in decision speeds for schemes of all sizes, apart from those of between 51 and 150 homes, the largest applications of 250 homes or more are now being decided the most quickly - in 301 days

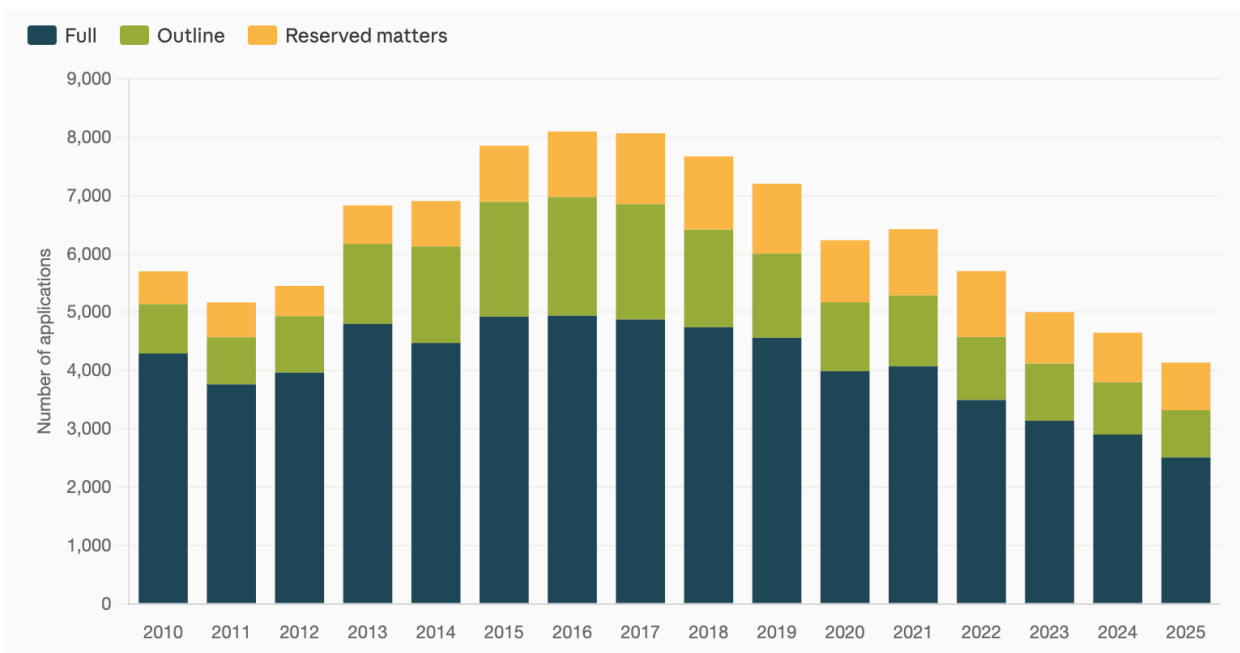
(43 weeks), compared to 337 days (48 weeks) for schemes of between 10 and 50 homes.

A closer look at the data reveals that the mix of applications is likely to be a factor.

The chart below shows a significant decline in the number of outline applications from around 25% of all applications ten years ago to closer to 20% of all applications now. In contrast, the proportion of reserved matters applications increased, from around 15% of all applications to closer to 20% over the same period.

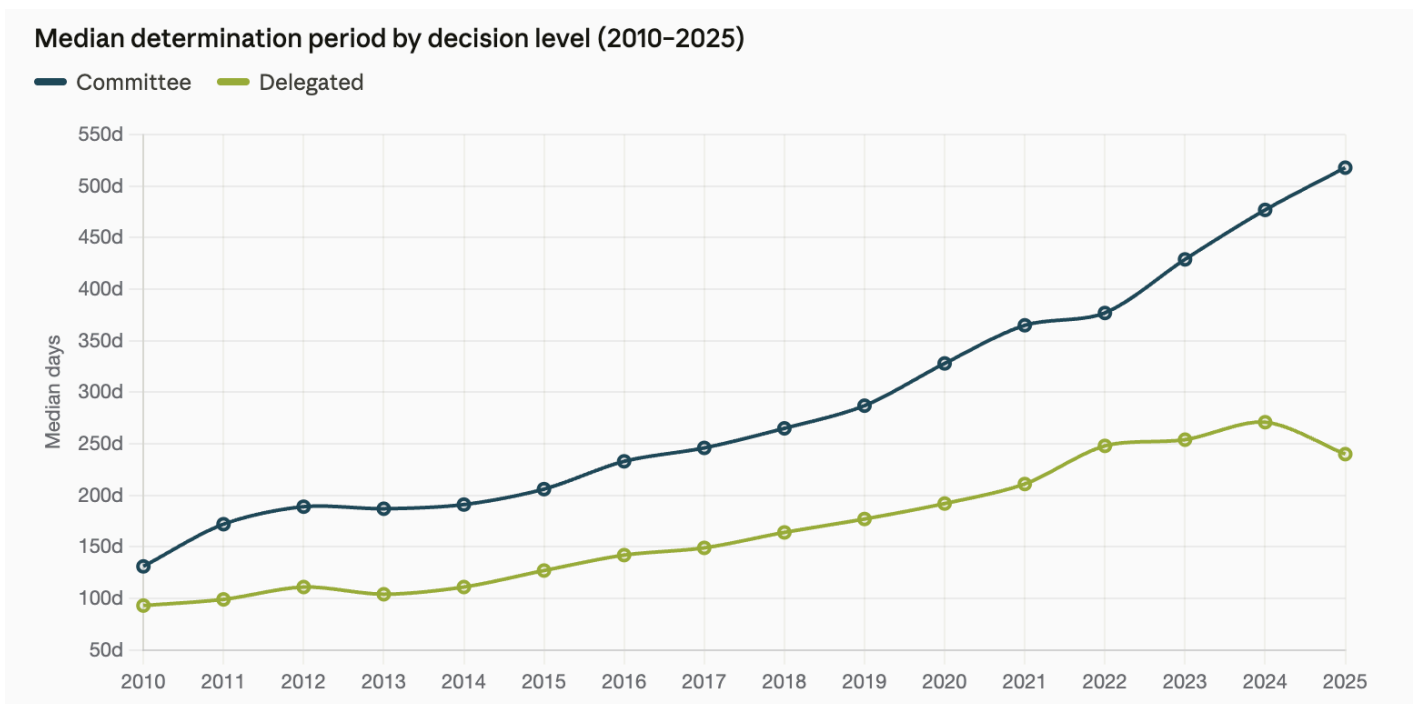
As reserved matters applications are quickest to determine, and outline applications the slowest, that change will result in an improvement in the median decision period.

However, such “statistical quirks” don’t account for all the improvement and it does appear that applications have been decided more quickly in the last year.



Speed of decision by process

Committee v delegated: does it make a difference to decision speed?



Delegated decisions – those made by planning officers rather than a planning committee – have always been quickest.

That is logical given the extra time needed to take an application to committee – reports need to be published ahead of the meeting, for example – while officers are likely to determine the least controversial applications.

However, the gap has become more

pronounced over time. In 2010, committee decisions were just 38 days slower than delegated ones. In 2025, that gap had grown more than seven-fold to 278 days.

Interestingly, while the rate at which the time for committee decisions was lengthening accelerated in 2022, the pace of increase for delegated decisions began to slow, even recording an improvement between 2024 and 2025.

This pattern supports the government's introduction of a national scheme of delegation, ensuring more decisions are made by planning officers in an effort to speed the planning process.

While under-resourced planning departments are clearly a factor in the increased decision timescales, if that were the only reason for slower decisions then we would expect both types of decision to be impacted equally. The data suggests, therefore, the political framework within which decisions are made is a significant constraint on decision speed.



Implications

Political and policy instability, under-resourced planning teams, ever-increasing policy burdens and an inefficient system all need addressing.

There is no single reason why residential planning applications are taking so much longer to determine.

Resourcing is clearly an issue, with spending on planning in England falling by 16.6% in real terms since 2010, according to the Royal Town Planning Institute. That is far from the only explanation, however.

Over the same period, there has been a gradual accretion of new policy requirements - Biodiversity Net Gain, more complex drainage designs, an increased focus on design and more. Yet nothing has been taken away.

There has been a constant churn of new policy announcements. It was six years before the original 2012 National Planning Policy Framework was first updated. This year will see the fourth major re-write in five years.

The resultant uncertainty for applicants and planning authorities - who are both forced to grapple with the impacts of new policy on live applications - is bound to slow decisions.

Political flux has been a major driver for that policy change - Sir Keir Starmer is our fourth Prime Minister in the last five years, and five different parties now believe they can form a government at the next election.

That instability impacts planning committees, with local councillors looking to make decisions based on politics as much as planning policy. Planning officers become more cautious about reporting applications to committee as a result, requiring more information from applicants about ever smaller issues.

Those factors - resourcing, complexity and political instability - combine to explain why applications are taking longer to determine even as fewer of them are submitted.

But decisions have been made more quickly in the past and can be again. Perhaps the recent signs of improvement are real and sustainable.

The solution is easy to say but hard to do. A period of policy stability will help changes bed in. More decisions should be made by officers under delegated powers, rather than politicians at planning committee. The government must have a laser focus on removing the grit from the system - identifying process improvements that can speed up decisions, and policy requirements that can be removed.

If this data tells us anything, it is that doing so is more urgent than ever.

The Strategic Land Group

The Strategic Land Group (SLG) is one of the UK's leading land promoters, working with landowners to unlock the development potential of sites across the UK. Founded in 2008, it has an established track record and is currently promoting sites with the potential to deliver 4,000 homes and a combined gross development value of £1.2bn.

SLG is led by MD, Paul Smith, a chartered town planner and surveyor with over 20 years' experience across the planning and housebuilding sectors. Paul has held senior roles within both national planning consultancies and PLC homebuilders and is widely recognised for his expertise in planning policy, land promotion and housing delivery. He is also a Director of industry body the Land, Planning and Development Federation, a member of the advisory board of Priced Out, Britain's largest campaign for affordable house prices, and writes a monthly column for Housing Today.

Searchland

Searchland is the UK's leading land and property data platform - transforming how property professionals source and assess development opportunities. Combining over a billion data points with powerful mapping and analysis tools, Searchland enables developers, planners and investors to identify off-market sites, analyse planning potential, and make faster, data-led decisions to build their development pipelines.



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