


Aerodrome Safeguarding Circular: update and next steps

April 2026

 Department for Transport

Update → Planning interface → Process →
Next steps

The problem we're addressing

Outdated guidance

2002 guidance (last refreshed 2016) no longer reflects current planning or aviation practices.

International safety standards have moved on

Guidance needs to keep pace

Development Complexity

More complex developments (height, renewables, temporary works) have outgrown existing guidance.

Inconsistent application through planning

Variable interpretation creates uncertainty.

Update → Planning interface → Process →
Next steps
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The planning law ‘hook’

The Safeguarding Circular is the key planning-facing document

- Aviation safeguarding is primarily delivered through the planning system, with requirements triggered through planning applications and consultations rather than separate aviation consents.
- The Safeguarding Circular provides the practical interface between aviation safety policy and planning decision-making, explaining when consultation is required and how safety considerations should be factored in.

Roles and ownership

- MHCLG is the formal owner of national planning guidance.
- DfT leads on aviation safeguarding policy and technical content, working with aviation stakeholders and planning colleagues to ensure guidance remains current and workable

What this update focuses on

- Making the planning-aviation interface clearer in practice
- Supporting consistent application by LPAs and consultees
- Ensuring planning-facing guidance reflects current aviation safety standards and development pressures

Policy Intent

Protect aviation safety while supporting sustainable development

Ensure aerodromes can operate safely while enabling growth and development to proceed where risks can be appropriately managed.

Improve clarity and consistency, not restrict growth

The aim is clearer, more consistent planning-facing guidance that improves predictability for industry and local planning authorities, rather than introducing new controls or consenting regimes.

✓ / ✗ What it will / won't do



What the update will do

- Clarify roles, responsibilities, and expectations at the planning-aviation interface, including when safeguarding consultation is required and how advice should be considered
- Support more consistent application of safeguarding guidance across the planning system
- Encourage earlier and clearer engagement between developers, LPAs, and aerodrome operators
- Improve clarity for practitioners, reducing uncertainty and late-stage issues in planning decisions



What the update won't do

- Introduce new planning powers, duties, or a new consent regime
- Change who makes planning decisions, which will remain with the relevant Local Planning Authority or Secretary of State
- Change the statutory framework for safeguarding, or in itself alter which aerodromes are safeguarded as a matter of law
- Override national planning policy or existing legislative requirements

Update → Planning interface → Process →

Next steps
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How we get there

Indicative delivery over the next 12 months



Draft

- DfT leading, working with the CAA and relevant government departments
- Early scoping to clarify approach, scope, and practical application
- Cross-government engagement, including MHCLG and Defence



Consult

- Public consultation on clarity, approach, and impacts
- Engagement used to refine guidance and implementation.



Publish

- Guidance finalised post-consultation
- Published as updated planning-facing guidance
- Operates alongside national planning policy

Work is at an early scoping and planning stage, focused on approach, scope, and engagement needs. Opportunities for industry engagement and formal consultation will be set out as the work develops.

Update → Planning interface → Process →

Next steps
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