HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO ADOPT A LOCAL PLAN?

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government track progress of local plans (strategic issues ‘core strategies’ for local planning authorities in England). The data includes dates at which a local plan has been:
- Published for consultation
- Submitted to the Planning Inspectorate
- Found sound
- Adopted

The following charts analyse this data to show how long it takes to adopt a local plan.

For 300 local plans, the average time it takes from publication to adoption is 19 months. The quickest turnaround is seven months, and there are several local plans that take less than 10 months. The chart however shows that there are several local plans that take 35 to 45 months.

This bar chart simplifies the scatter chart to show time taken in twelve-monthly periods. This shows that after local plans take between 13 and 24 months to get from publication to adoption. However, for some local plans it takes a long time to get from publication to submission, as shown by the orange area. As expected, the shortest part of the process is between found sound and adoption.

This stacked chart shows the time taken from publication to adoption split into stages. The blue area dominates and therefore shows that the time-consuming part of the process is between submission and found sound. However, for some local plans it takes a long time to get from publication to submission, as shown by the orange area. As expected, the shortest part of the process is between found sound and adoption.

Local plans that were adopted between 2007 and 2011 took on average under 15 months from publication to adoption, but from 2011 onwards, the average time gradually increased from 16 months in 2012 to 27 months in 2017.

Three National Parks feature in the fastest adopted local plans, and remarkably it only took Fareham seven months to get from submission of their local plan to adoption. As for the slowest, the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy (Daventry, Northampton and South Northamptonshire) took 45 months.

WHAT MAY CAUSE THE DIFFERENCES IN TIME TAKEN?

There are several factors that cause some local plans take longer than others, such as resources, politics, and national policy and legislative changes. These graphics show the time taken to adopt a local plan proportionally against various data sources to see if there are any relationships.

The political data shown in this graphic is from 2017, and therefore does not show the changes in control between 2006 and 2017 (to match the local plan data); nonetheless, the 2017 data shows the traditional domination of Labour in urban areas and Conservative in rural areas. Generally, it takes longer to adopt a local plan in a Conservative-run local authority than a Labour one.

CONCLUSIONS
- The average time taken to adopt a local plan is 19 months, and most local plans take between 13 and 24 months from publication to adoption.
- National parks feature mostly in the fastest adopted local plans, and this is likely due to their non-contentious nature.
- The average time taken to adopt a local plan between 2007 and 2011 was 15 months, but from 2012 to 2017, the average time taken increased to over 25 months. This may be due to the changes in planning system following the demise of regional planning, and the introduction of the NPPF in 2012 and PPG in 2004.
- However, these findings are not a true reflection of the average time taken to adopt a local plan, as the data only shows the last point of consultation before a local plan is submitted for examination; therefore, this leaves out the time taken up to the point of publication – for example, issues and options and preferred options consultations.

Most of the local authorities in East Anglia and the North East take less time than the local authorities in the urban areas of the Midlands and the North West. However, local plans in London take less time than those in the Midlands and the North West. East Sussex, Kent, Somerset and Gloucestershire are areas where local plans take proportionally longer to adopt.

The local authorities with less than 25% of constraints generally take the least amount of time to adopt a local plan but there are anomalies like the West Northants JCS which took 45 months. The category which has the longest time taken is between 50% and 75% constraints rather than between 75% and 94%.

Local authorities with Green Belt in their administrative areas generally take longer to adopt a local plan than those without. However, it is interesting to see that the local authorities surrounding London with Green Belt take less time to adopt local plans than other Green Belt authorities.

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