
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Sandra Tudor
Head of Profession for Statistics
Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
(by email)

18 December 2020

Dear Sandra

Land Use Change statistics and Land Use in England

As you are aware, we recently completed our review of the compliance of the [Land Use Change statistics](#) against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). I am pleased to confirm that these should continue to be designated as National Statistics. As part of this work, we also reviewed your [official statistics on Land Use in England](#). We found several positive examples in the way that both sets of statistics are produced and presented by your team:

- The statistics are clearly presented with the main points easily digestible. The team makes good use of tables, charts and maps to improve the clarity and ease of data interpretation.
- The underlying data sets and sources are explained, and background information on the methodology and supporting quality assurance statement are published alongside the statistics to assist users in fully understanding the data. We welcome the team's plans to publish an updated version of the methodology and quality assurance guidance to reflect the latest developments, including proposed changes to the team's approach to measuring hectareage.
- Demonstrating transparency through publishing a flow chart outlining the production and quality assurance processes, and publishing details of your assurances around the quality of the data.
- The team has taken an innovative approach to increasing usability and adding to the user experience by using Power BI to produce an interactive report on Land Use and introducing topic factsheets. We welcome plans to explore the use of social media to broaden your reach to users and promote the statistics.
- The positive relationship the team has with its data supplier – Ordnance Survey – which means any data queries identified during quality assurance can be dealt with effectively and your team is able to draw on Ordnance Survey's technical expertise.
- Plans to add further value to the Land Use statistics by publishing more detailed breakdowns of land use categories in response to user need.

Our review also identified several ways in which we consider that you could further enhance the trustworthiness, quality and value of the statistics:

- In order to support transparency and ensure that all users are informed about delays to Land Use Change statistics due to delays gaining access to the latest Ordnance Survey data, publicly inform users through the appropriate channels, including the Land Use Change statistics webpage, the reasons for the delay and plans for forthcoming releases as soon as possible. Use these channels to communicate planned developments in advance and for users to feed in their views on proposals.
- As definitions of land use have, and can, still be developed further, it is important to communicate clearly to users where updated or improved definitions used by Ordnance Survey and your team have led to changes in the statistics or their interpretation over time, and draw users' attention to any potential discontinuities within the statistics and data tables.
- Some of the commentary within the releases could be improved to:
 - add further insight to give a broader picture across topical aspects of land use where possible, by enhancing the statistical commentary to include material of relevant policies or related statistics on relevant topics (for example, Green Belt statistics or the National Planning Policy Framework).
 - aid users' interpretation and understanding of the flow of land use between the different land use categories, for example by explaining the Sankey diagram used within the Land Use Change release more clearly.
 - communicate definitional differences in the term 'developed land' used in Land Use Change 2017-18 which is based on 2011 Census geographies, and that used in Land Use stock 2018-19, to avoid any confusion between the two definitions.
- Your team explained that due to the highly visual nature of the releases there are several constraints in place preventing the publication of the statistics in the more accessible html format compared to pdf. We suggest speaking with the [Government Statistical Service Good Best Practice team](#) as it may be able to offer some advice.
- Draw users' attention to details of the [Central Local Information Partnership \(CLIP\)](#) meetings held on the [Knowledge Hub website](#) and consider publishing a summary of the relevant minutes and actions from the CLIP Planning Statistics Subgroup that your team attends, to demonstrate transparency about your approach to engaging with users and to help foster wider user engagement.

We appreciate the clear commitment shown to the continued development of these statistics through the [public user consultation](#) on proposed changes to the Land Use Change statistics and proposed additional statistics on Land Use stock. We suggest the team consider with users how greater insights could be drawn from using the two sets of statistics together, including exploring whether bringing them together into a single publication would add value. The team shared with us some of its future plans for getting the new releases peer reviewed within the wider directorate and with subject experts such as the Office for National Statistics geography team, as well as engaging with users about the new products. We welcome the news that work is progressing well with regards to procuring the new data from Ordnance Survey and particularly commend the team's willingness to share knowledge and expertise with the other UK countries should they wish to develop their own land use statistics.

Your team told us that it would like Land Use statistics to be considered for a future National Statistics [Assessment](#), which could include a potential reassessment of the Land Use Change statistics. Undertaking the steps outlined in this letter will go some way in preparing the statistics for this. We welcome the plans from your team to continue engaging with our Housing, Planning and Local Services domain as the statistics are developed over the coming months.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further. I am copying this letter to Andrew Presland and Alexander Reynolds, the responsible statisticians, and Richard Field, head of housing and planning statistics at MHCLG.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pont', with a short horizontal line underneath.

Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead