

NIPA AWARD 2026

1,500 Words | 15 min Presentation | £1,500 Prize

As the world faces environmental challenges and the people of the United Kingdom look to government to address the urgent need for sustainable infrastructure, effective and efficient planning plays a crucial part in delivering vital national infrastructure. National infrastructure must deliver the necessary outcomes whilst balancing the environmental impact and contributing to the overall wellbeing of users and communities.

The National Infrastructure Planning Association (NIPA) is the leading community of public and private sector practitioners focused on the planning and delivery of national infrastructure in the UK.

NIPA invites participants to delve into one of the topics and respond to **one** of the related questions below. The following are some guiding points to help you frame your response:

- **Choose a Topic of Interest-** Select a topic that is relevant to planning, infrastructure or environmental consenting and aligns with NIPA's areas of focus.
- **Identify Pertinent Questions and Challenges-** Clearly outline the key issues your topic raises. What are the main questions that need answering? What challenges or uncertainties exist?
- **Explain Your Approach-** Describe how you would go about addressing these questions. Consider both theoretical frameworks and practical methodologies.
- **Draw on Evidence and Examples-** Support your discussion with academic research, case studies or real-world examples. Show how these inform your thinking.
- **Present a Compelling Insight or Argument-** Go beyond description—offer a perspective or recommendation that NIPA should consider. Make your argument clear, logical and impactful.
- **Demonstrate Critical Thinking-** Highlight different viewpoints, acknowledge complexities and justify your conclusions.
- **Keep It Structured and Concise-** Use headings or bullet points for clarity. Aim for a well-organised submission that is easy to follow.

We look forward to receiving entries from talented and intellectually curious post-graduates who show passion in key areas of infrastructure planning.

Questions:

1. How can national infrastructure deliver effective local community benefits?

Your answer should explore the fundamental questions of what is a 'community', including for long linear schemes, as well as what amounts to a 'benefit'. You should also consider the construction and operational phases of the project, exploring how infrastructure projects can do more to create a lasting legacy for host communities. You may also wish to consider whether and how meaningful community benefits could be used as an effective tool to engage support for infrastructure projects from host communities.

2. To improve the quality and efficiency of national infrastructure delivery, how can the use of digital tools (e.g. GIS, Artificial Intelligence) be deployed in the end-to-end process.

You may wish to explore what digital or non-digital tools are currently available or likely to be available to deploy in the near future and how these could increase efficiency and the quality of decision-making. You should consider the extent to which any product of the tool (e.g. selecting a cable route) should be ground-truthed and verified, as well as the evidence that would need to be submitted to give the decision-maker, regulatory bodies and local communities confidence that the most appropriate solution has been identified by the tool. Additionally, you should reflect on the challenges and opportunities associated with human interpretation of digital information and AI-generated material. Consider both the risks and benefits, and discuss how transparency can be enabled in a digital world to build trust and understanding among all stakeholders.

3. How can the delivery of national infrastructure meet the national need to decarbonise and ensure climate resilience for communities and the environment?

You may wish to consider how methods or approaches to good design can lead to reductions in carbon emissions as well as support local communities to achieve climate resilience. Consideration should also be given to the need to balance delivery programmes (i.e. to urgent timescales) and project costs (some of which will be publicly funded or subject to strict regulatory controls) with the ability to decarbonise and build in additional climate resilience.

Prizes:

- **1st Prize: £1,500**
- **2nd Prize: £500**
- **3rd Prize: £250**

All prize winners and shortlisted entrants will be invited to attend the NIPA Annual Conference on 06 July 2026.

The Award is open to:

- Post-graduates attending accredited planning schools in the academic year 2025/6.

How to enter:

- Choose one of the questions
- Write your 1,500-word essay
- Submit your essay to info@nipa-uk.org by 5pm on 30 April 2026
- In Subject, please put NIPA Essay Submission Final

Please note that all applicants must declare any background and research use of AI and verify all sources used in their essay. AI-generated essays will not, however, be considered.

The award process:

- Shortlist of entrants notified – May 2026
- 15 min presentations to NIPA Leadership – June 2026
- Awards at NIPA Conference – 06 July 2026

Any questions about the process should be sent to info@nipa-uk.org .

About NIPA

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

The National Infrastructure Planning Association (NIPA) was established in November 2010 with the aim of bringing together individuals and organisations involved in the planning and authorisation of major infrastructure projects.

NIPA was created to develop and disseminate learning and best practice for both promoters and those affected by proposed projects.

We provide a forum for those with an interest in the planning and authorisation of national infrastructure projects in the UK, particularly those brought forward within the framework of the Planning Act 2008.

In summary, we:

- Advocate and promote an effective, accountable, efficient, fair and inclusive system for the planning and authorisation of national infrastructure projects and act as a single voice for those involved in national infrastructure planning and authorisation;
- Participate in debate on the practice and the future of national infrastructure planning and act as a consultee on proposed changes to national infrastructure planning and authorisation regimes, and other relevant consultations; and
- Develop, share and champion best practice, and improve knowledge, skills, understanding and engagement by providing opportunities for learning and debate about national infrastructure planning.

For further information, refer to: <https://nipa-uk.org/>

09 January 2026