



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Writing Planning Policies

A toolkit for neighbourhood planners





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Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Fry Building 2 Marsham Street London

SW1P 4DF Telephone: 030 3444 0000

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Introduction

Your neighbourhood plan is only as good as the planning policies it contains. In order to have maximum impact, these need to be clear, relevant and deliverable. Planning jargon can seem like a foreign language so this guide shows how to write planning policies which will address the issues that matter to your neighbourhood.

The guide should be read in conjunction with the Neighbourhood Planning Roadmap, which provides an accessible summary of how to produce a neighbourhood plan. Planning Practice Guidance found on the GOV.UK website is also a useful tool for neighbourhood planning.

What are policies?

Policies guide many aspects of our lives, insurance policies for our homes, employment policies at work and government policies for issues such as health, defence and the environment. They are all used both to express intent and to guide decisions. Planning policies are no different - they exist to:

- Set out requirements in advance for new development in an area – after all, planning is about the future
- Inform and guide decisions on planning applications
- Ensure that the multitude of individual decisions add up to something coherent for the area as a whole

Without planning policies, every planning decision would be made in isolation. This would make it very hard to achieve collective aims, such as having development in the right place, getting the housing we need, protecting green spaces or achieving good design for housing and other types of development. Planning policies also ensure that individual developments meet a range of minimum requirements.

Why do neighbourhood planning policies matter?

The policies in your neighbourhood plan carry significant legal weight when decisions on planning applications are made. Planning decisions are ‘plan led’ as planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined “in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise”. This is sometimes called the presumption in favour of the development plan – where the starting point for deciding on a planning application is whether the proposals align with planning policies.

Your neighbourhood plan is part of the ‘development plan’ (which also includes your local authority’s Local Plan and any Spatial Development Strategy which applies in your area) and so the policies it contains will be central to the planning decisions in your area.

The key point is that neighbourhood planning policies have real significance in the planning system, so it is essential that they are prepared properly.

Good planning policy

What makes a good planning policy?

The golden rule is that your policies should be clear, precise, positive, relevant and capable of being delivered.

Planning is as much art as science. There are many different ways to write planning policies intended to achieve the same outcome. Although the language of planning can appear unfamiliar, using common sense and plain English in drafting your policies is the best approach.

The style and format of many Local Plan policies can be off-putting, but you don't need to copy them. It is helpful to take on board advice, while using language and approaches that work for your community. Clarity is the key to a policy achieving its objectives.

As of March 2026, the government has commenced sections 98 and 99 of the Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023. Section 98 clarifies and expands the policy areas which a neighbourhood development plan can include. It also adds an additional requirement that a neighbourhood plan should contribute to the mitigation of and the adaptation to climate change and take into account any local nature recovery strategy that relates to their neighbourhood area.

Paragraph 16(d) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that plans should “contain policies that are clearly written and unambiguous, so it is evident how a decision maker should react to development proposals”. This is a test which will be applied when your plan goes to independent examination. A number of neighbourhood planning policies have been rejected by examiners for not being clear enough, so paying attention to how you write your policies is essential.

The Government's Planning Practice Guidance states that “A policy in a neighbourhood plan should be clear and unambiguous. It should be drafted with sufficient clarity that a decision maker can apply it consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. It should be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence. It should be distinct to reflect and respond to the unique characteristics and planning context of the specific neighbourhood area for which it has been prepared. It is important that your policies do not repeat existing policies set out in national policy such as the NPPF and national development management policies, local or supplementary plans and spatial development strategies.”

Any policy needs to be justified and should be supported by evidence. There should be a strong link between evidence and your communities' needs and views.

You will find some top tips on how to write planning policies in Box 1.

Box 1 -Top tips for writing planning policies

Approach to drafting

- **Write in plain English** – try to avoid jargon and stick to straightforward language.
- **Avoid duplication** – there is little point in addressing issues that are already covered by the policies in your Local Plan or in national policy. It is important that neighbourhood plans do not repeat existing policy.
- **Be clear** – avoid ambiguity and be as precise as you can about the intention of your policy.

On content

- **Keep it local** – your planning policies cannot conflict with national policy and should work alongside other parts of the development plan for your area.
- **Evidence** – policies need a clear and well-reasoned justification. Every policy should be underpinned by robust evidence and rooted in feedback from public consultation.
- **Informed by local views** – There must be a strong and transparent link between evidence, community views and needs and the reasoning for each policy.
- **Be positive** – Be positive and proactive in creating policies, welcome development that meets your expectations and needs.
- **Targets** – use your policies to set targets or provide indicators which can be used to monitor success.
- **Delivery** – your policies need be capable of being delivered within the time frame of your plan.

On policy structure

- **Vision and objectives** - each planning policy should stem from a clear vision for your area and help deliver at least one of your plan's objectives.
- **Clear format** – the policies are the centrepiece of your neighbourhood plan – make them stand out by putting them in a box in clear bold text.

Add value to the planning system

Your neighbourhood plan should focus on adding value rather than repeating what is already set out elsewhere. There is little benefit in addressing issues that have already been fully covered by your local planning authority. Instead, neighbourhood plans can add value by addressing gaps or providing detail which reflects your community's priorities or solves specific local issues.

Your vision and objectives

Planning policies should be clearly linked to an overall vision and set clear objectives for your neighbourhood plan. Planning policies do not exist in isolation, they are tools for delivering your community's ambitions through planning decisions (see Box 2). Having a well-defined vision and clear objectives will help ensure that your policies are focused, coherent and clearly justified, helping them to have the impact you intend.

Clear intentions

When starting out, many neighbourhood planning groups find it helpful to write down, in plain English what they want each planning policy to achieve. Being clear about a policy's purpose at an early stage helps ensure it addresses the right issues before your attention turns to planning processes and its technical language. The draft policies can then be tested against your plan's vision and objectives to check they are doing what you intended and that no important matters have been missed.

Positive wording

Your planning policies should be positively worded. National policy requires neighbourhood plans to “plan positively” and makes clear that they should not seek to promote less development than set out in the wider development plan or undermine those wider policies (NPPF, paragraph 29). By framing policies, this helps to demonstrate how development can contribute to achieving your community's vision for the area.

Keep it simple

There is no limit to the number of objectives or policies you can include, but it is normally best to focus on the issues where your neighbourhood plan can make the greatest difference. It is important to be realistic about your group's time, capacity and resources and avoid overstretching these by trying to address too much. Some of the best neighbourhood plans are often the simplest.

Box 2 - Linking your vision, objectives & policies

The text below provides an example of how the link from a vision to policies could work in relation to two neighbourhood plan objectives.

Vision

To be known by people at all stages of their lives as one of the best parts of the City in which to live and for its strong community, rich urban character, attractive green streets and spaces and thriving natural environment. The neighbourhood will be safe and enjoyable to move around on foot and bike and will be well connected to the rest of the city and beyond by public transport.

Objectives	Policies
Protect and enhance all green spaces within the neighbourhood	EN1: Protection of green spaces within the neighbourhood Development that results in the loss of green spaces or that results in any harm to their character, setting, accessibility or appearance, general quality or to amenity value will only be permitted if the community would gain equivalent benefit from provision of a suitable replacement. EN2: Valley Park

	Development which would detract from the landscape or ecological value of Valley Park will not be permitted
Manage traffic and encourage walking, cycling and public transport	T1: Sustainable transport Development as appropriate to its scale and location should include proposals which enhance the attractiveness of walking, cycling and transport. T2: Through traffic Design and highways proposals that mitigate against the impact of traffic within residential areas will be supported.

(Derived from Exeter St James Neighbourhood Plan-July 2013)

The limits of neighbourhood planning

Neighbourhood planning policies only influence development that requires a planning application. You cannot have planning policies on issues that fall outside of the scope of planning control. There is also a wide range of development that falls within planning control but does not require a planning application (known as 'permitted development'). See Box 3 for a full explanation and a breakdown of the different categories and then check your understanding with the exercise in Box 4.

There are also some specific limits on neighbourhood plans, for example by law they cannot deal with minerals or waste issues and must have regard to national planning policy, such as Green Belt.

An early conversation with the local planning authority is advisable to coordinate your efforts and avoid conflicting policies. Where an issue is central to your neighbourhood plan, you should feel confident in taking a different view where appropriate. It will be for the Examiner to address as part of their assessment of whether your plan meets the 'basic conditions'.

Paragraph 20 of the NPPF notes that: Strategic policies should set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places, and make sufficient provision for:

- a) homes (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development;
- b) infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
- c) community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and
- d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The 2024 NPPF states that neighbourhood plans cannot include strategic policies, the focus must be on non-strategic policies. Paragraph 29 of the NPPF notes that non-strategic policies set out more detailed policies for specific areas or neighbourhoods and can include allocating sites, the provision of infrastructure and community facilities at a local level, establishing design principles, conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment and setting out other development management policies.

Although Green Belt boundaries are certainly strategic, neighbourhood plans can amend them, but only if a strategic or local plan first makes provision for them to do so (see Paragraph 145 of the NPPF).

You cannot use your neighbourhood plan to require your local authority to make designations or exercise particular powers which would help you deliver your plan objectives. If these are required then they need to be dealt with through negotiation and liaison with the local authority. Examples include:

- Serving a tree preservation order
- Listing an asset of community value
- Putting a building on the local list
- Designating or extending a conservation area
- Serving a compulsory purchase order

Your plan may help support the justification for exercising any of these powers, but you cannot compel your local authority to use any of them.

Neighbourhood planning projects

One of the most exciting things about neighbourhood planning is how it brings people together to generate project ideas for improving the local area. It is about much more than producing a neighbourhood plan for determining planning applications.

Many of these projects may fall outside planning control (see Box 3) but they can still be included in your neighbourhood plan, provided that you keep your planning policies and your projects physically separate in the plan. This can easily be done by putting them into different sections. Your policies section will be the only one to carry legal weight in planning decisions but the process of debating and agreeing your projects may well help them get delivered.

There can be important connections between your planning policies and your projects, such as where planning consent is required to deliver a project or where a project can be funded through giving permission for development. Many plans include a prioritised list of projects and how they will be funded as part of a delivery plan or action plan. You should only include projects capable of being implemented in the time frame of your plan.

Box 3 - What is development?

The term “development” has a specific legal meaning when it comes to planning. It covers building, mining, engineering or other operations and also material changes in the use of land or buildings. There are a number of exceptions, including the use of land for farming or forestry and also activities which only affect the inside of buildings (unless listed). These are not considered as “development” at all and so lie entirely outside planning control.

All “development” requires planning permission and this is the basis of the system of planning applications, which local authorities operate across the country. There are however further complications as some development is granted automatic planning permission and so does not require a planning application. This is termed “permitted development” and includes smaller scale house extensions and loft conversions or street works by utility firms and many changes of use.

The question of whether a neighbourhood plan is relevant to any particular issue can be broken down into four ways:

1. **Not development** - There will be a wide range of initiatives which a local community wishes to pursue but which fall outside the legal definition of development. This doesn't mean they are not important but a neighbourhood plan is not going to be an effective way of delivering them. You can include them in your plan as projects but they carry no particular status and are not subject to examination or referendum.
2. **Permitted Development** - In some cases the community will have an interest in an issue – such as the impact of satellite dishes on the character of a street – which is permitted development. Neighbourhood planning policies cannot address these issues. The only circumstances where a neighbourhood plan can have an impact is where a local authority has issued an Article 4 Direction, to remove permitted development rights for a given area and so require planning applications to be submitted.
3. **Development** – This is where neighbourhood planning comes into its own, with planning policies determining what development can take place and where. These issues will be the purpose of your plan.
4. **Conditions and obligations** – There are a further category of issues which can influence decisions on planning applications and so be addressed in your neighbourhood plan. These are:
 - a. **Planning conditions** – these are requirements which have to be met by the applicant. Examples might be the retention of trees or limiting use of a site to daylight hours
 - b. **Community Infrastructure Levy** – this is being introduced in many areas as a financial levy on new development which might be used to fund some of the proposals in your neighbourhood plan – your parish council or neighbourhood forum will have a direct say in how some of this money is spent and you can use your neighbourhood plan to set out your priorities. Parish councils have the strongest influence as 25% of the money raised in the area of the plan is given directly to them to manage.
 - c. **Planning permission** - there is more information available on the requirements for planning permission in the Planning Practice Guidance.

Box 4 - What can your neighbourhood plan influence?

This guide has explained how some issues can be controlled through neighbourhood planning while others fall outside planning control altogether. It has also distinguished between planning policies and projects. Test your understanding by answering whether and how a neighbourhood plan can deal with the following:

Can your neighbourhood plan:

Protect an ancient tree?	Yes – through policies which place appropriate conditions on planning permissions.
Provide affordable homes?	Yes – planning policies can require a proportion of new homes to be affordable and deliver this through a S106 agreement.
Improve the local train service?	No – you will have to lobby your train company and local MP.
Set up a local business green network?	No – but this could be one of your projects or actions.
Introduce a 20mph zone?	No – speed limits are a matter for your Highways Authority but traffic management in relation to new development is for planning policy.
Control of the addition of porches to homes	No - Provided that the porch falls within certain parameters (including size) this is considered 'permitted development' and is not subject to planning policy.

Policy drafting

Planning policies come in all shapes and sizes. This section explains the different types and provides guidance on how to present and word them to best effect. There are few absolutes and planning professionals and even Examiners have been known to have differing views. Don't let this worry you. Focus on what you are trying to achieve through your plan and keep things simple and clear.

Types of planning policy

Different planning policies are designed to achieve different things. The three most common (with examples) are:

Generic – a simple policy which applies universally to development across the entire neighbourhood plan area.

An example of this is:

Bratton Neighbourhood Plan, Wiltshire (Made July 2025).

Policy BNP5: Bratton’s Landscape and Locally Valued Key Views

1. Development proposals should conserve or enhance the landscape of the Parish and take account of the Management Strategy and Objectives of relevant Landscape Character Assessments. Development proposals that would have an unacceptable detrimental impact on the character of the landscape will not be supported.

2. The Plan identifies ten Locally Valued Key Views, as shown on Map 3 and Map 4 in Part B of the plan. Development proposals that would affect a Locally Valued Key View should assess the effect of the proposals on the View concerned and demonstrate how any adverse effects have been addressed or mitigated. Proposals that would have an unacceptable detrimental impact on a Locally Valued Key View will not be supported.

Criteria based – a policy with a series of requirements that should be met by development proposals. These can be set out as separate bullet points.

It is important to be clear if all the criteria apply or if they should be considered as alternatives. This can be clarified by linking the criteria with either “and” or “or” depending on whether they all apply or should be considered as alternatives. This is a frequent omission and led to the Examiner of the Lynton and Lynmouth Plan expressing doubt about the clarity and precision of the policies.

Examples of this are:

Wallingford Neighbourhood Plan, South Oxfordshire (Made February 2025).

Policy WS4: Affordable housing & housing mix

WS4.1 A mix of housing types and sizes to meet the needs of current and future households will be supported within new developments.

- *WS4.2 Housing development should be designed to ensure that it avoids segregation by layout, housing type or tenure. New housing development should:*
 - *(a) foster a sense of place that reflects the character of Wallingford, and*
 - *(b) respect the design and layout of existing buildings, and*
 - *(c) provide new, and where appropriate protect existing, public amenity green space as detailed in policies ENV1 and ENV2, and*
 - *(d) integrate affordable housing such that it is indistinguishable in appearance from the market housing on that site.*
 - *(e) not isolate affordable housing, nor concentrate it in clusters of more than 15 dwellings or 10% of the development total whichever is smaller, unless it is necessary for management purposes or to address local authority/registered provider requirements.*

Redruth Neighbourhood Plan, Cornwall (Made December 2025).

Policy DC1 – Design

Policy Direction DC1

New commercial and residential development will be supported in Redruth NDP Area where it is well designed to complement and enhance the local area and contributes to creating a strong sense of place.

- *All new development should reflect the principles in the Cornwall Design Guide and Cornwall Council’s Streets for People Design Code; and — Development within Redruth Town Conservation Area, or the Plain-an-Gwarry Conservation Area must meet the requirements of the relevant Management Plan.*
- *New development should reference the historic character of the parish where appropriate, demonstrating a use of materials and detail which respect the heritage and character of its setting and have regard to the prevailing scale, massing, and density in the locality.*
- *All development proposals should consider the need to design out crime and disorder to ensure ongoing community safety and cohesion.*

Site Specific -this is where a policy applies to particular areas of land. One of the most powerful tools for a neighbourhood plan is to allocate land for a particular type of development

Examples of allocating land for development are below:

Weymouth Neighbourhood Plan, Dorset (Made January 2026).

Policy W22: Land off Beverley Road, Littlemoor

- 1. Land off Beverley Road as defined on Map 21 is allocated for around 25 dwellings*
- 2. Proposals for residential development will be supported where the following criteria are comprehensively addressed:*
 - i. alignment with the height and form of the nearby housing;*
 - ii. the development respects the topography of the site;*
 - iii. the retention of the two through routes to Kestrel View, and the bridge over the Weymouth relief road;*
 - iv. a landscaping scheme that retains existing trees and provides wildlife corridors across the site;*
 - v. well-designed groups of dwellings, located in attractive, inclusive, and secure spaces;*
 - vi. landscape planning through the site that connects with the open space to the north and south allowing nature to permeate through the development;*
 - vii. affordable housing provision should form 50% of the development unless a Financial Viability Assessment or material considerations demonstrate a robust justification for a different percentage;*
 - viii. access to the site satisfying the standards required by Dorset Council, and*
- 3. The design and layout of roads should comply with the standards of Dorset Council and provide adequately for the safety of all road users as well as the amenity of residents.*
- 4. A development proposal should be supported by a surface water management strategy which seeks to minimise flood risk and the impact of the development on local water courses.*
- 5. Proposals should demonstrate, where relevant, that they respect and will cause no significant harm to the archaeology and heritage assets and their setting.*

Thame Neighbourhood Plan, South Oxfordshire (Made February 2026)

Policy GDE1: Land at Rycote Lane

1. *The Neighbourhood Plan allocates 7.8 hectares (gross) of land at Rycote Lane (as illustrated on Figure 17) for employment purposes, comprising B2 – B8 and E(g)(i)-(iii) uses. Proposals that include employment floorspace for Small to Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) will be supported. The proposed mix of uses should have regard to the proximity of safeguarded waste operations.*

2. *Proposals for this site will be supported where they accord with the principles established in the Thame Masterplanning Report (Appendix 1), including:*

a) Provision of a single point of vehicular access from the A329 (Rycote Lane), subject to further testing through the application process and to the satisfaction of OCC.

b) Parking and servicing areas should be provided to the side and rear of employment units.

c) The siting of buildings should respond to the contours of the site and be located at lower points and set back from site boundaries to minimise visibility of development from publicly accessible routes and spaces. In addition, detailed information should be submitted with development proposals to show the way in which the height of proposed buildings will relate to the contours of the site and how the new buildings will be seen in the wider landscape setting of the site and the height of other buildings on the site.

d) Where buildings are sited along the A329, they should be arranged with windows and entrances fronting onto the road.

e) Landscaping, including new and retained tree planting, shall be provided alongside site boundaries, providing a soft edge to the development. Existing hedgerows and tree cover should be supplemented with additional woodland planting, making use of native species, and taking opportunities to reconnect severed hedgerows and tree lines where possible. The scale and location of buildings on site and provision of new screen belt planting should help ensure a sensitive transition between the area of development and open landscape to the north and west of the site.

f) Provision of safe crossing points on Rycote Lane for pedestrian and cyclists which integrate into the wider network of existing pedestrian and cycle routes in Thame.

3. *Where required, applications will be accompanied by a programme of archaeological evaluation to be agreed with Oxfordshire County Council and undertaken in advance of the proposal being determined. Subject to the findings of any evaluation, mitigation measures may be required that preserve features of archaeological interest on site.*

As well as allocating land you can use your plan to set out the principles which need to be followed in developing a particular site. This might include specifying what needs to be covered in a design brief to accompany any planning application. If you have site specific policies, then you need to include a clear map showing the location and boundaries.

If you have detailed proposals for a particular site, then you may wish to take things further and use a 'neighbourhood development order'. This is an additional power for communities to effectively grant planning permission for a site, establishing the principle or even giving detailed consent.

With all site-specific proposals it is vitally important to speak with the landowner at the earliest opportunity in the site selection process. A fundamental requirement for neighbourhood plans is that policies and site allocations are deliverable, and this depends critically on the landowner's views. A failure to do so is likely to delay progress on your plan later on.

Neighbourhood plans can designate Local Green Space, which "allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them" (Paragraph 106 of the NPPF) providing it meets the criteria set out in Paragraph 107 of the NPPF. Further information on designating green space can be found in the Making Local Green Space Designations toolkit.

An example of local green space designation is:

Pyons Group Neighbourhood Plan, Herefordshire (Made February 2024).

Policy PG12: Local Greenspace

The following are designated as Local Green Spaces:

- 1. Recreational Playing Field and open space at Pyon Close, Canon Pyon as shown on Map 2 NDP Review Policies Map Canon Pyon*
- 2. Parish Council Land at Westhope as shown on Map 3 NDP Review Policies Map Westhope.*

Proposals for the Playing Field at Canon Pyon which enable it to be used more effectively for recreational use will be supported, provided there is no significant adverse effect on residential amenity or biodiversity. Opportunities to enhance the biodiversity value of the site should be taken where possible, in particular along Wellington Brook.

Development of the Parish Council Land at Westhope which would result in the loss of the area's biodiversity value will not be permitted. Proposals which enhance the area's biodiversity or improve public access will be encouraged.

Neighbourhood plans can identify valued community facilities and create policies to retain and enhance these. An example of such a policy is below:

Aldringham cum Thorpe Neighbourhood Plan, East Suffolk (Made February 2026).

Policy ACT14: Community Facilities Proposals including changes of use that would involve the potential loss of an existing community facility will not be supported except where an improved or equivalent facility can be located elsewhere in the parish in an equally convenient, safe, and accessible location or where there is no reasonable prospect of continued viable use. Proposals for new community buildings/facilities such as the following will be supported:

- *Community Hall or other public meeting place, which serves Aldringham*
- *Green space or play space in Thorpeness*

It is important to set out each planning policy so the intention is clear and it can be shown the evidence base is robust. This will help ensure it meets the basic conditions. It will also be useful to future applicants and the local authority planning officers who have to use the policy to make decisions in future years. These tips will help your presentation:

- Introduce each policy with a short explanation that provides any necessary context and robust evidence behind its inclusion
- summarise the intent of each policy
- word your policies clearly and concisely
- visibly separate the actual policies from other text – many plans use boxes and/or put policy text in bold/italics
- clearly number the policies to aid navigation around the plan - it is customary to use the letters relating to the different topics – e.g. Housing policies are numbered H1, H2, H3; Open Space policies are numbered OS1, OS2, OS3 etc.

One example of a well-presented policy from the Newport Pagnell Neighbourhood Plan is detailed below:

Newport Pagnell Neighbourhood Plan, Milton Keynes (Made 2024)

Policy NP1: Settlement Boundary and New Housing.

A. The Neighbourhood Plan will provide for approx. 1,163 homes to meet the housing needs of the Town over the plan period 2020 – 2031. New housing will be supported on sites that lie within the Settlement Boundary of Newport Pagnell as shown on the Policies Map in accordance with other relevant policies of the development plan.

Housing will be delivered through:

- The 173 dwellings from completed schemes at North Crawley Road Industrial estate (73), at the Aston Martin Works site (86) and at the Union Street Mustard Factory site (14) as at January 2023;*
- The 930 dwellings allocated on the Tickford Fields Development Site;*
- The 21 dwellings consented on windfall schemes elsewhere;*
- The housing site allocation at the Police Station site, High Street, as set out in section D of this policy; and*
- Windfall schemes that are in accordance with the relevant policies of the Neighbourhood Plan: Plan: MK Policy DS5, and the NPPF.*

B. Development proposals for the suitable and beneficial reuse of previously developed land within the Settlement Boundary will be supported. Proposals to subdivide residential plots to develop new homes on rear or side garden land will not be supported unless they maintain the area's prevailing character and setting as defined in the Newport Pagnell Design Study. Proposed residential development outside the defined revised settlement boundary as shown in the Modified Policies Map will not be supported unless it meets the requirements of the Milton Keynes development plan for managing development in the open countryside.

C. Schemes for residential development in the Town Centre at St John's Street, Union Street and the High Street should provide a majority of small dwellings, particularly those with one and two bedrooms, where this can be achieved without detriment to the amenities and the character of the surrounding area and neighbouring properties.

D. The Neighbourhood Plan allocates the Police Station site as shown on the Policies Map for residential and community use. Development proposals will be supported provided the following key principles are met: The residential scheme delivers retirement living and downsizing opportunities as part of the mix of homes. The non-designated heritage asset comprising the police station, magistrate's courts and cell block building on site is retained for community use.

Lessons in vocabulary

There is constant debate over the use of particular words in planning policies and growing experience from how they have been addressed by different Examiners.

Some of the most common debates are over the following words:

- **'must'** and **'must not'** – only use **'must'** where you are sure that the requirements of the policy are compulsory in all circumstances. This is likely to be unusual but is appropriate where the policy is binding.
- **'should'** and **'should not'** – this leaves room for exceptions and, while it is commonly used, 'should' opens the door to applicants to justify why the policy doesn't apply to them.
- **'normally'** and **'not normally'** – this is generally frowned upon because it introduces a vagueness which doesn't fit with the legal prominence given to planning policies when making decisions. The Examiner of the St James Exeter Neighbourhood Plan also considered such wording to introduce "a degree of conflict with national policy" although not so great as to fail the basic conditions. The word also adds little to the meaning of the policy.
- **'presumption against/in favour'** – this phrase is generally frowned upon as all neighbourhood plans are prepared on the basis of a general presumption in favour of sustainable development, which underlies national planning policy.
- **'where possible'** – this is another loose phrase which doesn't offer any certainty as to the circumstances where it is or is not 'possible' to meet the policy requirement. It can be appropriate to require applicants to include supporting information to show how they have considered alternatives as a way of showing what is 'possible'.
- **'encouraged'** or **'supported'** - many plans uses these terms to convey a positive approach to development and generally 'encouraged' is considered as being the more proactive.
- **'preserve'** – this is commonly used but rarely appropriate outside consideration of listed buildings and conservation areas as it literally means keeping things exactly as they are. In most circumstances planning policy is about managing change and not absolute preservation.
- **'conserve'** – this is often a better term than preserve as it includes management of change.
- **'character'** – this is frequently used to describe the distinctive look and feel of an area which needs to be protected but it does little in itself to explain what this is. You may be better identifying supporting evidence (such as a local character study) which explains the elements that add up to define local character or describing it more fully in your policy text.

- **'contemporary'** – this is often used to indicate a like or dislike of a modern style of development and is very unlikely to be appropriate. It is very poor practice to prescribe personal stylistic preferences in policy. Care is required not to suppress creative design.

Clarity and precision

It pays to be precise in your wording of policies to avoid ambiguity or unintended consequences. Four examples illustrate the point:

Student accommodation – the Exeter St James plan seeks to address the impact of both 'large scale' and 'small scale' student accommodation. The original drafting identified large scale as above 10 units and small scale as below 10 units – with the result that a developer bringing forward accommodation of exactly 10 units would have slipped through the policy net.

Development – The term 'development' has a specific meaning in the language of planning. This includes changing the use of land or buildings as well as construction (see Box 3) and it is important to be precise in its use. Tattenhall's neighbourhood plan includes a policy which supports 'new development' which meets a number of criteria, such as respecting local character. Its Examiner expressed doubt about limiting the policy to 'new' development which might be confined to 'new build' and therefore allow alterations and extensions of existing buildings to bypass the policy.

Take-away restaurants – the draft Exeter St James plan said that local retail, food and drink development:

“...will be permitted provided that.... (b) The proposed use is not already oversupplied in the area and will result in the excessive concentration of uses, such as takeaway restaurants.....”

As the Examiner stated that “The syntax leaves room for confusion. The policy appears to say (in part) that development will be permitted provided that the proposed use will result in excessive concentration of uses such as takeaway restaurants.” The simple replacement of 'will' by 'would not' before 'result' addresses the issue.

Up to – The Rolleston on Dove draft plan makes provision for “up to” 50% of new dwellings on allocated sites being for older persons. Yet as the Examiner notes “this could be satisfied by little or no provision”.

Hot topics

There is regular discussion of a range of other issues around the use of planning policies:

Positive policies – National planning policy for neighbourhood plans states Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to “develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan. Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies” (NPPF, paragraph 30). It is better to say “Planning permission will be granted if....” rather than “Development will not be allowed unless...” Nevertheless, brief, negatively worded policies that give effective control over types of development can be clearer than tortuous positively worded development control policies hedged with numerous criteria. As a result, most restrictive policies are more effective when phrased negatively, whilst promotional policies should be positively worded.

Homes for locals - this is one of the most frequently addressed topics in neighbourhood planning. The process of allocating social housing is a matter for housing management and not planning policy but requirements can be managed by legal agreement. It can be a complex area and one where it is well worth talking to the local authority housing team to avoid any risk of conflict with national policies. The question of who qualifies for access to such housing and how the ‘local connection’ is defined has been dealt with in different ways as shown in the examples below:

Frodsham Neighbourhood Plan, Cheshire West and Chester (Made November 2024)

Policy H4: Affordable Housing – The Local Connection Test

Affordable Housing must adopt the following principles:

- *On sites that have a capacity of three or more dwellings or comprise an area of 0.1 hectares or above 30% must be Affordable Housing.*
- *Affordable Housing, both rented and purchased, should be provided in Perpetuity and for those with a Local Connection to Frodsham. The Local Connection test that will be applied to all Affordable Housing is as follows: Local Connection means people or households who:*
 - *currently live in the parish (as defined in the map [fig 0.1] shown at the front of the Plan) and have been living there continuously for at least five years; or*
 - *have permanent employment in the parish; or*
 - *have close family members (defined as children, parents, siblings only) who have been residing in the parish continuously for at least five years; or*
 - *people who have previously lived in the parish for a continuous period of at least 10 years. Should there be no local households who meet the criteria of this policy, the CWaC cascade approach will be used to determine eligibility.*

Newport Pagnell Neighbourhood Plan, Milton Keynes (Made November 2024)

Policy NP7 – Affordable Housing and Tenure

A. *To meet identified needs within the community, subject to viability, at least 31% of all homes on major housing development schemes, as defined by national planning policy, should be affordable housing similar in quality to market housing and pepper-potted throughout the development. 10% of all new affordable housing will be initially reserved for people with a strong local connection with Newport Pagnell, whose housing needs are not met by the open market. A strong local connection means the applicant has either:*

- (i) lived in Newport Pagnell for 5 years or more, or*
- (ii) has parents or children who have lived in Newport Pagnell for 5 years or more, or*
- (iii) has been employed in Newport Pagnell for 5 years or more.*

Any reserved dwelling remaining unallocated to a person with a strong local connection after 6 months of its completion may then be allocated in accordance with the normal allocation policy.

B. *On the Tickford Fields development site 10% of housing will be for shared ownership. All other housing development proposals should meet the affordable housing requirements of the Milton Keynes Development Plan with respect to shared ownership and rental tenures which will be particularly supported.*

Use of targets - It is entirely appropriate for targets to be included in planning policies. This might range from the number of homes for a whole neighbourhood or a specific allocation through to the mix of land uses on a site. Numerical targets require clear justification and so your evidence base will need to be stronger than for general policies. Targets for housing numbers should not be included as ceilings for the level of development for a neighbourhood area.

Requiring extra information - your planning policies can require applicants to demonstrate how they will achieve the requirements of your plan in the information which is provided alongside the planning application. Any requirements need to be proportionate, relevant and necessary. Some requirements can often be included in a 'design and access statement' that must accompany applications for some development above a certain size.

Setting out funding requirements - your policies can be used to specify particular funding requirements from development, including use of the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 planning obligations. You can also set out expectations for how the projects proposed in your plan can be funded through new development. Where policies are used that propose the use of obligations they must

also meet the three tests set out in Government regulations – that the requirements are necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms; directly related to the development; and fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development. Your local planning authority will produce a schedule for the Community Infrastructure Levy and any site specific requirements not covered need to be dealt with through Section 106 obligations. You may find your plan is being prepared ahead of the local authority's schedule and is able to influence its contents.

Broughton Astley included a prioritised list of requirements – see below.

Broughton Astley Neighbourhood Plan, Harborough District Council (Made January 2014

Policy statement CI1. – Contributions to new infrastructure and facilities

- i. Financial contributions will be required, as appropriate, from each developer to mitigate the impact of the development on essential infrastructure such as public utilities, libraries, policing, waste services and the highways network.
- ii. Financial contributions will be required, as appropriate, from each developer to fund additional healthcare, education and leisure services within the village in accordance with the obligations detailed in the Harborough District 'Provision for Open Space, Sport and Recreation 2009 (or subsequent revisions).
- iii. Community priorities in terms of additional local facilities to be provided as a result of new development are:
 - a) A centrally located community building suitable for use as a Medical Centre with associated parking spaces;
 - b) A centrally located community leisure facility providing a minimum 4-court sports hall, gym and dance facilities, all weather-pitch changing rooms, storage, meeting rooms and associated administration and parking facilities;
 - c) A centrally located community building with associated storage and parking spaces suitable for use by organised youth groups;
 - d) A centrally located multi-use synthetic sports pitch suitable for both community and schools use;
 - e) Two adult size Football Pitches with associated parking, changing and storage facilities;
 - f) The construction on an informal BMX / Cycle Track facility with associated shelter and parking facilities.
- iv. The construction of a swimming pool for joint community and schools use will be investigated and provided if financially viable.

It is important that targets, standards or requirements for extra information or funding do not impose unreasonable burdens on applicants or make it impossible for them to bring forward viable development.

Putting policies to the test

The most effective planning policies will be well grounded and clearly expressed. You should constantly test them and show they are robust.

The policy checklist below can be used to ensure your policies are well grounded. It tests each policy for support through your public engagement or your evidence base and then against each of the basic conditions which must be met at examination. Site based policies are subject to further testing for how they have been selected and their availability and suitability.

You will find that your policies evolve over time. Policy writing is an iterative learning process. You should also sit down with the development management staff in your local planning authority to test your policies against a range of different planning applications. Some of the questions you should ask are:

- How do they stand up?
- Do they add value?
- Can the wording be strengthened?
- Are there any gaps?
- Is there a risk of any of the neighbourhood plan policies undermining those in the Local Plan unintentionally?

The development management team is the one that will be using your policies daily so listen to their advice and feedback before finalising your plan.

In addition, you could find someone with a fresh pair of eyes to look at your plan or perhaps a planner who lives in the area. You can get help online from other groups and also seek support from independent consultants or other advisors. The more you test your policies now the stronger they will be when your plan is finished.

For more information on neighbourhood planning you should read the Neighbourhood Plans Roadmap Guide and The Planning Practice Guidance on neighbourhood planning.

Testing your policies: checklist

Questions	Neighbourhood Plan Policies
Link between policy and evidence or engagement	
Are your policies supported by evidence?	
Is there sufficient support from key entities such as landowners/ public bodies/ the public?	
Is the link clear between your policy, evidence and engagement? Y/N	
Is more work needed? Y/N	
For site allocations	
How do you know site is suitable? Set out reasons.	
How do you know site is available?	
Have you engaged with the landowner and local community?	
Is it clear how site has been selected as the best option?	
Does plan meet the 'basic conditions'?	
Is the plan in line with the national policy (NPPF and PPG) and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State (WMSs)*?	
Does the plan not prevent development from taking place which is proposed in the development plan for the area and if it took place, would provide housing?	
Does the plan not result in the development plan for the area proposing that less housing is provided by means of development than if the draft plan was not made?	
Does the plan contribute towards sustainable development?	
Does the plan comply with environmental outcomes reports ?	
Does the plan comply with Habitats Regulations requirements, and that have regard to all material considerations (including Environmental Impact Assessment where relevant)?	
Does the plan not breach, and is otherwise compatible with assimilated EU obligations?	
Does the plan meet prescribed conditions in relation to the plan (meaning that the plan has passed all necessary legal, environmental and procedural requirements)?	
Does the plan comply with human rights legislation?	

*NPPF- National Planning Policy Framework. PPG - Planning Policy Guidance. WMS - Written Ministerial Statement.

