

How to CONTACT us

We are here to support parishes through the neighbourhood planning process.

For further information and advice please contact the neighbourhood planning team:

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5 Neighbourhood Plans Adopted

Residents of Almouth, Craster, Embleton, Hexham and Lesbury now have more of a say over future development in their parishes, following the adoption of their Neighbourhood Plans.

The Neighbourhood Plans will form part of the Statutory Development Plan for Northumberland, meaning that future planning decisions in the five areas will be made in accordance with policies in the respective Neighbourhood Plans unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The plans were officially adopted – or ‘made’ - at a Cabinet meeting on 13 July. This comes after there were referendums in each area, asking residents if they wanted the Neighbourhood Plans to be considered during the planning process.

All of these plans and supporting documents may be viewed on the [Council's neighbourhood planning website](#).

The Neighbourhood Plans will become a key part of the planning process for these five areas. They will carry real weight in decisions on the provision of new housing, businesses and services, retaining community facilities, protecting green spaces, providing sustainable transport, protecting local heritage assets and the design of new development. They were created by parish and town councils with significant input and support from local residents, who worked closely with the neighbourhood planning team to determine what is important to each area during the creation of the plans.

Northumberland Local Planning Authority has a statutory duty to support any local community preparing a neighbourhood plan. Work is continuing to prepare neighbourhood plans for 26 other parishes while 10 are already in place.



Revised NPPF PUBLISHED

A new version of England's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published by MHCLG on 20 July.

Impact on Neighbourhood Plans?

Policies in existing neighbourhood plans should not be considered out-of-date simply because they were made prior to the publication of this Framework. Due weight should be given to them, according to their degree of consistency with this Framework.

Neighbourhood Plans currently being prepared must have regard to the policies contained in **this** Framework.

Key changes

The revised framework confirms proposed changes published in the January consultation, and include:

- Modifying the presumption in favour of sustainable development for plan-makers.
- Incorporating the United Nations' 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development, which address social progress, economic well-being and environmental protection.
- Incorporating measures to improve design quality, including a new requirement for councils to produce local design codes or guides. The term "beautiful" has been added to the NPPF but should be regarded as a "statement of ambition" rather than a policy test.
- Imposing new limits on restrictions on permitted development rights.
- Clarifying aspects of policy concerning planning and flood risk.
- Tightening of rules governing when isolated homes in the countryside can be acceptable.

The revised NPPF can be viewed [here](#).

What's happening around the County?



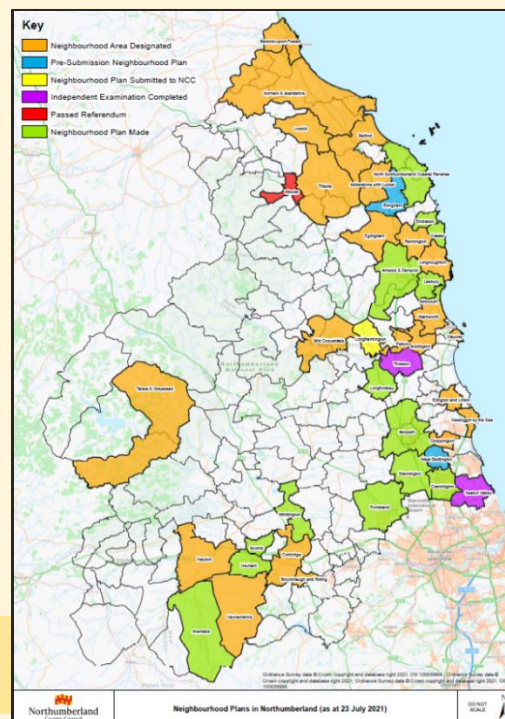
There are currently fifteen made neighbourhood plans in Northumberland. These plans form part of the Development Plan for their areas and planning decisions must be made in accordance with their policies unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Seaton Valley and **Thirston** Neighbourhood Plans are at Referendum stage. These plans have successfully passed independent examination and will proceed to referendum on 29 July 2021 (Seaton Valley) and 16 September, 2021, Thirston. These plans can be given significant weight in decision-making, so far as they are material to the application.

[Longframlington Parish Council](#) has submitted its plan to the County Council. The County Council has invited comments on the submission draft Plan until 31st August 2021. The 7 policies set out in the Plan cover the following issues: housing, economy, community facilities, open spaces, biodiversity, and design. The Plan should be given limited weight in decision-making.

Following consultation, [West Bedlington Town Council](#) is revising its plan before submitting it to the County Council.

Twenty-six other parishes are at an earlier stage of plan-making. More information is on our [website](#), where you can also view a larger version of the neighbourhood planning county map.



Biodiversity Net Gain Update

On 7 July, Natural England launched its Biodiversity Metric.

This metric will help developers to meet the requirement for 'biodiversity net gain' as part of their planning permission.

The metric comprises 3 tools to ensure new developments are "nature positive".

- Biodiversity Metric 3.0 will provide a way of measuring and accounting for nature losses and gains resulting from development or changes in land management. This is the recognised metric for measuring biodiversity, as proposed in the [Environment Bill](#).
- The Small Sites Metric (SSM), a beta version designed to simplify the process of calculating biodiversity net gain on smaller development sites.
- The Environmental Benefits from Nature Tool (EBNT) gives developers a way of exploring the benefits habitats bring to people, such as improvements to water quality, flood management services and carbon storage.

The tools were launched as part of an online event which can be viewed [here](#).



High quality open spaces are important for the health and well-being of communities and this is reflected in national planning policy, which sets a presumption that open space should not be built on unless specific circumstances apply ([NPPF](#), para 98).

The NPPF also allows communities, through neighbourhood plans, to identify and protect green areas that are particularly important to them. These are 'Local Green Space' (LGS) and specific rules apply to their designation. The green area must be:

- in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;
- demonstrably special to a local community and hold a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and
- local in character and not an extensive tract of land.

Land can be designated as LGS even if there is no public access. Additionally, A LGS does not need to be in public ownership but before designation, it is essential that landowners are made aware of that intention at an early stage of plan preparation.

What evidence is required?

Once identified, proposed areas of LGS must be assessed against the criteria in the NPPF and National Planning Policy Guidance. In brief, the space must:

- Not be subject to a planning permission
- Not be allocated or proposed for development in the Local Plan (or Neighbourhood Plan)
- Be local in character and not an extensive tract of land
- Be in close proximity to the community it serves
- Be demonstrably special or hold particular significance for the local community

There is no specific procedure to follow; each neighbourhood planning group will have its own method of identifying local green areas of particular importance to them. But it is essential to show why each site has, or has not been, chosen. It is a good idea to set out this information in a background paper.

More information and a suggested template for the background paper is available on our [website](#).

The Future of the Planning System?

The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee have responded to the Government's proposed reforms to the planning system announced in August 2020 and set out in the [White Paper: Planning for the Future](#).

In general, the report states that there is a need for greater detail about how the Government's proposed reforms would work and the Committee are not persuaded that the Government's zoning-based approach will produce a quicker, cheaper, and democratic planning system.

What about Neighbourhood Plans?

In the White Paper, the government stated its intention to retain Neighbourhood Plans, to encourage their continued use, and to help spread their use further, particularly in towns and cities. However, the government appeared to suggest a more focused role for neighbourhood planning in producing design guides to shape the form and appearance of development in their areas.

The Committee reported strong criticism of the Government's perceived downgrading of neighbourhood plans. In particular, the loss of involvement in development management, which was seen as threatening community engagement and confidence. The Government's reforms to Local Plans were seen likely to squeeze out neighbourhood plans; and there was worry that neighbourhood plans would not apply where planning applications would no longer be required for development.

Committee response

The Committee recognises the value of neighbourhood plans but said that, to be effective, they need to be up-to-date and representative of the whole community and a clear part of the new framework.

They advised that local authorities and existing neighbourhood forums need to strive to ensure a representative range of voices are heard in the production of neighbourhood plans, and there should be a timeframe for producing and revising them to ensure they remain relevant.

Ahead of the Planning Bill, the Government must clarify the role and status of neighbourhood plans in the proposed system. The Government should consider how to make the neighbourhood planning more relevant to local people and how to ensure that residents feel empowered to both contribute to and own the plan.

The full report can be read [here](#).

Support for Neighbourhood Planning

Applications for grant funding and/or technical support are now open for this financial year (2021/2022).

In addition, MHCLG have launched a new technical support package: Site Viability.

This package is designed to support neighbourhood planning groups who wish to bring forward tricky development, particularly on less viable sites. The support will help groups understand what policy choices and investment requirements would be necessary to bring such sites into a viable use.

The [Locality](#) Neighbourhood Planning Support website has more information on this, and other support that is available to groups.

In addition, you will find useful information on neighbourhood planning during the Covid-19 Crisis. N.B. Groups should always ensure that they follow the Government guidance and instruction that is in place at the time when engaging in neighbourhood planning activities. Click [here](#) for government guidance.



Northumberland
County Council