

Neighbourhood Planning Update

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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This issue

- Changes to national planning policy? P.1
- County Round Up P.2
- Covid-19 & neighbourhood planning P.2
- Addressing climate change P.3
- NCC Climate Change Action Plan P.3
- A new focus on design? P.4
- Eye on Design Codes P.4

Proposed changes to national planning policy

The Government is consulting on draft revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The text has been revised to implement policy changes in response to the Building Better Building Beautiful Commission 'Living with Beauty' report.

This consultation is also seeking views on the draft [National Model Design Code](#), which provides detailed guidance on the production of design codes and policies to promote successful design (see page 4 for further details on this).

A number of other changes to the text of the NPPF are also set out but this is not a full review and further revisions are likely to be required in due course, depending on the implementation of the government's proposals for wider reform of the planning system.

In brief, these other proposed changes are intended to:

- Remove or amend out of date material

- Clarify existing policy in order to address legal issues
- Strengthen environmental policies including those concerning planning and flood risk
- Reflect a recent change made in a Written Ministerial Statement about retaining and explaining statues.
- Clarify the use of 'Article 4 Directions' to restrict development

The consultation closes at **11:45pm on 27 March 2021**. If you want to find out more information or indeed respond, please click [here](#).

These proposed changes to the NPPF are part of a package of national measures that bring the important matter of good design to the forefront of planning, including through neighbourhood planning. This is covered in more detail on page 4.



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What's happening around the County?

Covid-19 and neighbourhood planning

The Government has recently confirmed that elections will be held in May.

This means that we will now be able to plan to hold referendums on neighbourhood plans after current restrictions are formally lifted.

Six neighbourhood plans are scheduled to go to referendum this summer.

For qualifying bodies that are at earlier stage of plan-making, please note that our [advice on public consultation and publicity](#) still stands, i.e. this is allowed so long as it is done in a safe and equitable manner.

For more information on the elections, please check the Government's [May 2021 polls delivery plan](#) or go to the [Electoral Commission's](#) website.

There are currently ten 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.

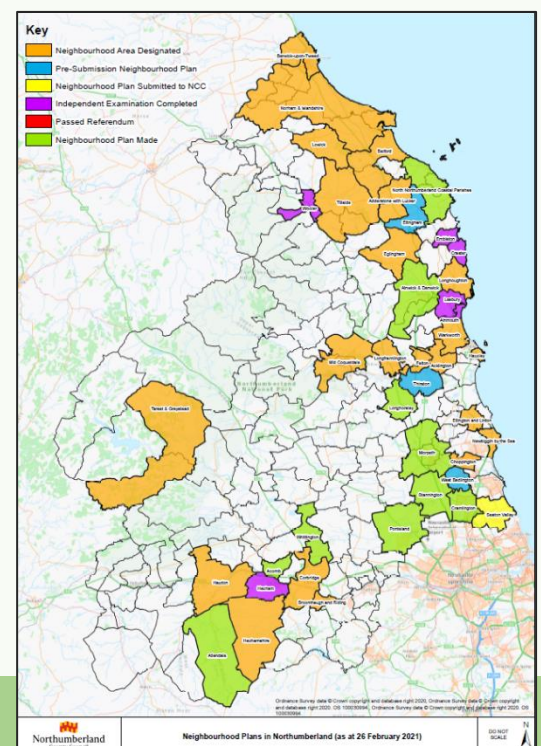
Six Neighbourhood Plans are at Referendum stage. **Hexham, Embleton, Wooler, Lesbury, Craster and Alnmouth** Neighbourhood Plans have successfully passed independent examination and will proceed to referendum this summer. These plans can be given significant weight in decision-making, so far as the plan is material to the application.

Seaton Valley has submitted its plan to the County Council. The Parish is seeking to protect areas of open and green space that are of demonstrable importance to the local community.

Following consultation, **Thirston Parish** is revising its plan before it is submitted to the County Council.

West Bedlington is consulting on its pre-submission plan. The Town Council is seeking to promote community well-being, support the local economy and enhance the natural and historic environment.

Twenty-six other parishes are at an earlier stage of plan-making. More information is on our website, plus a larger version of this map.



Northumberland Climate Change Action Plan

The County Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and set a target of a carbon neutral Northumberland by 2030.

The Council recently published its [Climate Change Action Plan](#) for the next two years, which sets out detailed plans to reduce Northumberland's carbon emissions to net-zero by 2030.

To achieve the net-zero target, action will focus on two fronts: increasing land use measures that capture carbon and reducing emissions in a targeted way.

A significant amount of Northumberland's emissions (61%) are offset through land usage, for example, forests. Assuming these levels are maintained, then CO₂ emissions will need to reduce by 709 kt or 39% across four areas: transport, domestic, business, and agriculture.

Implementation

The Action Plan focuses on seven priority action areas: Council policy, engagement and partnership, heating, transport, renewable energy generation, natural resource-based carbon sequestration, and reducing waste. Each priority area has a set of key targets detailed in the plan.

The Council estimates that to achieve net-zero would require inward investment of around £1.6bn but could create around 11,000 jobs.



How can Neighbourhood Plans address Climate Change?

Neighbourhood plans have an important role to play in reducing our contribution to climate change and in increasing the resilience of communities.

It is worth noting that some of the actions neighbourhood planning groups can take are not based in planning policy, but in individual and community actions. The neighbourhood planning process can help to identify community actions and initiatives that can be taken forward independently of the NP.

Planning policies can help to reduce a parish's greenhouse gas emissions and enhance activities that remove these gases from the atmosphere. They can also help increase resilience to the effects of climate change. Possible ideas are described below.

Reducing our contribution to climate change

- Locate development to maximise accessibility by active travel methods.
- If allocating sites for housing, specify a requirement for paths to connect the development to the centre / amenities.
- Protect local services and facilities, resisting change of use, so reducing the need to travel.
- Identify or allocate sites for renewable energy development.

- Protect green infrastructure, which can provide safe routes for walking and cycling, and places for recreation and play.
- Support the inclusion of low carbon technology and renewables in development.
- Support better design standards to reduce energy use / carbon emissions.

Increasing resilience to the effects of climate change

- Designate blue and green corridors to provide multi-functional space and natural flood management.
- Use flood zone maps to direct development to particular areas.
- Safeguard areas for flood storage.
- Identify and protect wildlife corridors.
- Designate Local Green Space
- Stipulate that any development must achieve a net gain in biodiversity
- Support development that incorporates design features to provide resilience to climate change

The [Centre for Sustainable Energy](#) offers advice and assistance to neighbourhood planning groups.



A new focus on design?

“All new developments must meet local standards of beauty, quality and design under new rules” says the Government.

In response to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission report, the Government is proposing changes to the NPPF to place greater emphasis on beauty and place-making. Key recommendations are:

- Inclusion of the term ‘beautiful’ to encourage beautiful buildings and places and help to prevent ugliness when preparing local plans and taking decisions on planning applications.
- Clarification of the role that neighbourhood planning groups can have in relation to design policies.
- Emphasis that all local planning authorities should prepare design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the [National Design Guide](#) (NDG) and National Model Design Code (NMDC) and which reflect local character and design preferences. (In the absence of locally produced guides or codes, the NDG and NMDC should be used to guide decisions on planning applications).
- Requirement for all design guides and codes to be based on effective community engagement and reflect local aspirations for the development of their area.
- Ambition to ensure that all new streets are tree-lined, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible.
- Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design.

“Local communities will be at the heart of plans to make sure that new developments in their area are beautiful and well-designed.”

In a [statement](#), the Government announced the creation of an ‘Office for Place’ within the next year to pioneer design and beauty within the planning system and to support councils and communities to help them set expectations of design quality in their area.

The Government said it intends for councils to use the NMDC as a foundation for their own “unique” local design codes, which would allow residents to “have a real say in the design of new developments in their area”.

EYE ON Design Codes

Neighbourhood Planning groups have already embraced design in their plans. Many groups, using a [technical support package](#) funded by Locality, have produced their own design codes. Examples include [Haydon](#) and [Eglingham](#).

Typically, a design code comprises detailed design guidance to inform future developments within the neighbourhood area, it is embedded in policy in the plan and should be followed by applicants seeking planning consent and by local planning authorities in assessing planning applications.

What is the draft NMDC?

It is important to note that the draft NMDC is not in itself a design code; it is a toolkit to guide groups on the design parameters and issues that need to be considered and tailored to their own context when producing design codes, as well as methods to capture and reflect the views of the local community at each stage in the process.

How will the new NMDC affect neighbourhood planning?

The principles set out in the NMDC (in addition to the NDG) should be taken into account by neighbourhood planning groups when developing a local design code.



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