

Neighbourhood Planning

‘How to go about it’: A step-by-step guide for producing a Neighbourhood Plan

For Town/Parish Councils or other groups who want to produce a Neighbourhood Plan

December 2025



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Introduction

A neighbourhood plan is a tool for communities to have a direct say in the future of their local area. A neighbourhood plan will sit alongside the adopted local plan for decision making on planning applications, and as such will include planning policies for the neighbourhood plan area which will be used to guide development. This will help ensure that future development aligns with local needs and aspirations. Neighbourhood plans can also include non-policy-based aims and aspirations for the neighbourhood plan area, such as community actions and infrastructure improvements.

This guidance has been designed to help town or parish councils who have decided to or are interested in producing a neighbourhood plan in towns and parishes in East Suffolk, which may also include parts of the Broads Authority (see map on page 8). It provides essential information such as initial questions to ask yourselves and sets out the roles and responsibilities of the neighbourhood planning group and those of the local planning authority, which is East Suffolk Council, including those parts of the district located in the Broads. It explains the stages involved in the plan-making process and guides you from the inception of the plan through to the making of it.

In some circumstances a Neighbourhood Plan area will also include areas of the Broads, in which case the Broads Authority will also be involved as a Local Planning Authority, and their Local Plan will also need to be considered. There is a map showing the Broads Authority in relation to East Suffolk on page 8 and we will advise you if you need to include the Broads Authority.

If you already have a neighbourhood plan and are considering reviewing it, this guidance may help you. However, there is also a guidance document on how to [Review Made Neighbourhood Plans](#).

Things to consider- before you start

Is a neighbourhood plan the right plan for you?

The very first step in your neighbourhood plan journey is deciding if a neighbourhood plan is the most appropriate tool to deliver the aims and aspirations of the community.

It is vitally important to talk to the residents and businesses of the town or parish to see what their concerns are and whether they would support the creation of a neighbourhood plan.

These initial steps will help you to set the tone and foundation for a successful and meaningful neighbourhood plan. However, it is very important to manage the expectations of the community as to what the plan can achieve and what it can and cannot do.

As a brief overview you would need to consider:

- Your purpose: what are you hoping to achieve?

- Is there support in the community? Is there local interest and are there any local volunteers willing to help?
- Early engagement: even informal surveys or records of conversations can help to build interest and identify priorities
- Understand the commitment: A neighbourhood plan requires time, resources and sustained effort and input, especially at the earlier stages

Having done all of this, you may decide that a neighbourhood plan is not the right tool for you and you may want to look at other types of [Community Led Plans](#).

Initial questions

Below are some initial questions to assist you and your local community in deciding if preparing a neighbourhood plan is the most appropriate tool to address the issues identified:

- What has prompted you to think about preparing a neighbourhood plan?
- What are your local issues, and have you discussed them as a local community?
- Is a neighbourhood plan the most appropriate tool for dealing with these issues?
- Do you have the necessary resources to undertake a plan, particularly interested individuals with the right mix of skills to progress the work?

Having a clear focus on why you want to create a plan and what you would like to achieve will help you successfully prepare your plan.

Experience has shown that not being clear or not having a reasonably good idea as to what the local issues are at this early stage, can result in wasted work. On occasion it can result in a later decision not to progress with the neighbourhood plan. East Suffolk Council, and the Broads Authority where relevant, is able to provide advice to assist with these discussions.

How long will it take to create a neighbourhood plan?

The time it takes to create a neighbourhood plan varies. Research has shown that on average, nationally, plans are taking anywhere up to four years to produce, and this is similar to the timings for neighbourhood plans in East Suffolk. However, factors such as the size of the plan area, the content of the plan, and how many people are involved will influence how long it will take.

In our experience it is not unusual for work on a neighbourhood plan to pause for a period of time and resume at a later date so you will need to consider possible risks to progress and what issues could impact the production of the plan. Issues could include loss of group members, uncertainty over what to include and potential conflicts over topics for example. If

you do stall in the production of your plan for any reason, you should contact your named officer for advice.

How are neighbourhood plans funded?

There is currently no funding available from central government, for groups who want to, or are in the process of producing a neighbourhood plan. However, there may be other options available to you such as funds from the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy or self-funding, and any further information or changes in funding will be updated on the East Suffolk Neighbourhood Planning webpages.

The average cost of producing a neighbourhood plan can vary widely depending on the size of the area, complexity of the plan, and level of professional support involved, for example if you choose to employ a consultant the costs will rise.

You can find out more about funding from the [Community Led Planning](#) pages. This includes a general list of available funding and not all of those shown will be appropriate for neighbourhood planning purposes. It is likely that you will need to demonstrate that you meet the specific requirements for any funding you may apply for.

Who can form a neighbourhood planning group?

A neighbourhood planning group usually consists of volunteers, interested members of the local community, businesses, other local representatives and members of the town or parish council.

What is a neighbourhood planning group?

A neighbourhood planning group is the team of people who lead the preparation of a neighbourhood plan. They're responsible for gathering evidence, engaging the community, drafting policies, and steering the plan through consultation and examination.

This group is not a formal legal entity, rather it is a working group which is set up by the qualifying body (often seen referred to in documents as the QB), which is the parish or town council (or a designated neighbourhood forum in non-parished areas).

What is the role of the qualifying body?

The qualifying body holds the legal powers under the [Localism Act 2011](#) to prepare a neighbourhood plan. That means:

- The qualifying body must formally establish the neighbourhood planning group
- The qualifying body remains accountable for the plan's content and statutory compliance
- The qualifying body submits the final plan to the local planning authority

Even if the neighbourhood planning group includes volunteers, planning consultants, or local stakeholders, it's the qualifying body that must authorise decisions, approve documents, and submit the plan.

Areas with a town or parish council

Members of the town or parish council will usually lead the Neighbourhood Planning process, although the group can, and should, include members of public and local business owners if possible. There is no minimum or maximum number of members needed, although you may want to consider the experience and interests of people involved.

You will also be working with the local community, community groups and other interested parishes.

Areas without a town or parish council

In unparished areas, neighbourhood planning forums can be created specifically for the purpose of producing a neighbourhood plan. Forums must include at least 21 members¹ and have a life span of 5 years. They must be designated as a qualifying body by the local planning authority before proceeding with the creation of a plan.

The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 Part 3 states that the following information needs to be submitted to the local planning authority to enable them to determine a forum application:

- a) the name of the proposed neighbourhood forum;
- b) a copy of the written constitution of the proposed neighbourhood forum;
- c) the name of the neighbourhood area to which the application relates and a map which identifies the area;
- d) the contact details of at least one member of the proposed neighbourhood forum to be made public under regulations 9 and 10; and
- e) a statement which explains how the proposed neighbourhood forum meets the conditions contained in section 61F (5) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

You will need to work with your neighbouring parishes, local businesses and community groups as they can come on-board and create a forum. You can also contact East Suffolk Council's Communities Team for help or advice or look at Community Led Planning.

Area to which a neighbourhood plan applies

You will also need to decide what area you want the neighbourhood plan to cover and this can be defined by certain boundaries, for example roads, rivers/bodies of water or other physical features and discussions with the local community will help you to decide appropriate boundaries. In most cases however, the defined parish boundary is usually the most relevant and obvious place to start and many neighbourhood plans in East Suffolk follow their defined parish boundary. If the town or parish boundary includes the Broads

¹ Neighbourhood Planning - Locality Neighbourhood Planning

Authority, then they will be involved in the process throughout so this will also need thinking about.

You will need to apply to East Suffolk Council, who will consult with the Broads Authority where necessary, to have your plan area designated.

If you are applying for a Neighbourhood Forum² as well, you can apply for these separately or at the same time, however you cannot apply for your area designation before having your forum approved.

For the purpose of this guidance the term **Neighbourhood Planning Group** will be used. As stated on page 2, you may also see the term 'Qualifying Body' used in some documents and this means the official group or organisation, such as the Town or Parish Council, that has the legal right to prepare a neighbourhood plan.

How much expertise is needed to create a neighbourhood plan?

Groups can produce a plan themselves, and this guidance will help with that, however whilst it is not necessary to have any expertise or experience to create a neighbourhood plan, it is beneficial if members of the group have some knowledge and understanding of the process. There will be a lot of preparation work that you can undertake yourselves including initial surveys and talking to the community. An initial task will be to focus on the scope of the plan such as the aims and aspirations and what you would like the plan to achieve. It is common for neighbourhood planning groups to contain members who have relevant experience such as planning, architectural or ecological backgrounds for example. This can help when dealing with complex areas such as surveys, evidence gathering, mapping etc. Project management experience is also valuable as neighbourhood planning can be a lengthy and potentially complex process. We have produced a project plan to help with the production of a Neighbourhood Plan.

East Suffolk Council will support you through the process but if more extensive or specialist help is needed, employing a Neighbourhood Planning consultant could be considered.

Employing a Neighbourhood Planning consultant

Consultants are professionals with planning experience and can help with the tasks necessary to create a neighbourhood plan. These may involve writing the plan (or part of it), mapping, creating/carrying out surveys, and producing consultation statements. There is no right or wrong approach to writing your neighbourhood plan, and a consultant can carry out however much of the work you decide you want them to do for you. Ideally, you will nominate a member of the group to be the main contact, who can then liaise with your consultant if necessary. We are able to discuss issues with the consultant, but it must be with the group's agreement and understanding that they remain responsible for the plan.

Using a consultant can be useful if you have limited resources or group capacity or lack of experience on certain matters amongst group members. In addition, your consultant should have experience and knowledge with neighbourhood planning.

² See page 4 for further information on Neighbourhood Forums and where they are needed

If you choose to employ a consultant, be clear as to what you want them to do and what you want them to be involved with. For example, do you want them to just help with surveys, do you want them to help you write the plan or do you want them to be present throughout the whole process and be available to help make any changes that may be needed? It is important that all evidence must be robust and therefore you may need some help from a specialist professional, especially if the plan is addressing complex issues such as housing needs, or landscape assessments where specialist input is likely to be needed.

Consultants can also be appointed in relation to the preparation of Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) and Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs) which are a compulsory part of the neighbourhood planning process where screening has indicated that these are necessary.

Consultant fees

Consultant fees will vary between consultants and will be determined by the complexity of your plan and will also depend on what work and how much you want them to do for you.

How to find a consultant

There are many consultants that carry out neighbourhood planning work, and you can find advice on this via Locality: [How to commission consultants to work on your neighbourhood plan.](#)

East Suffolk Council can supply you with information on consultants that frequently work in East Suffolk on request. However, we will not make any recommendations, and the onus is on the neighbourhood planning group to carry out research on available consultants and decide which consultant is the best fit for you.

Joint neighbourhood plans

Adjacent town or parish councils can work in partnership to prepare a joint neighbourhood plan which includes multiple parishes. A joint plan could cover the full extent of the parishes involved or certain areas could be excluded if appropriate.

This approach has worked particularly well for other smaller parishes in the district who wanted to achieve a more ambitious outcome than if they worked alone, however it does not exclude larger parishes who want to work together. You can find these plans on our [Neighbourhood Plans in the area](#) page.

The role of East Suffolk Council

If you decide to prepare a neighbourhood plan within the district, East Suffolk Council will help and support you through the process and will allocate a named planning policy officer to your plan. We will also inform you if your plan area is likely to include any parts of the Broads Authority area, who will also be involved throughout the neighbourhood plan making process.

It is advisable to contact East Suffolk Council at the earliest stage to enable us to plan for the necessary support. We have produced a project plan template for neighbourhood planning groups to use which will help you keep on track and will allow us to schedule the right

support for when it is likely to be needed. The Neighbourhood Planning Regulations require councils in their role as local planning authority to undertake specific tasks as a neighbourhood plan progresses through to adoption (see diagram pg. 10).

The Head of Service for Planning and Building Control has delegated authority for all stages up to 'making' the plan. Some elements are also delegated to other officers on behalf of the Head of Planning and Building Control. The final stage of the process 'making the plan' is subject to a decision by full Council. If your plan includes parts of the Broads Authority they may have slightly different processes, however you will be advised of any differences in process so you can factor this into your timelines.

What are the main steps?

Once you have considered whether a neighbourhood plan is right for your town or parish, having considered the information on page 1, you can now start working on your plan.

There are nine main steps identified to making a neighbourhood plan which are explained in more detail later in this guidance.

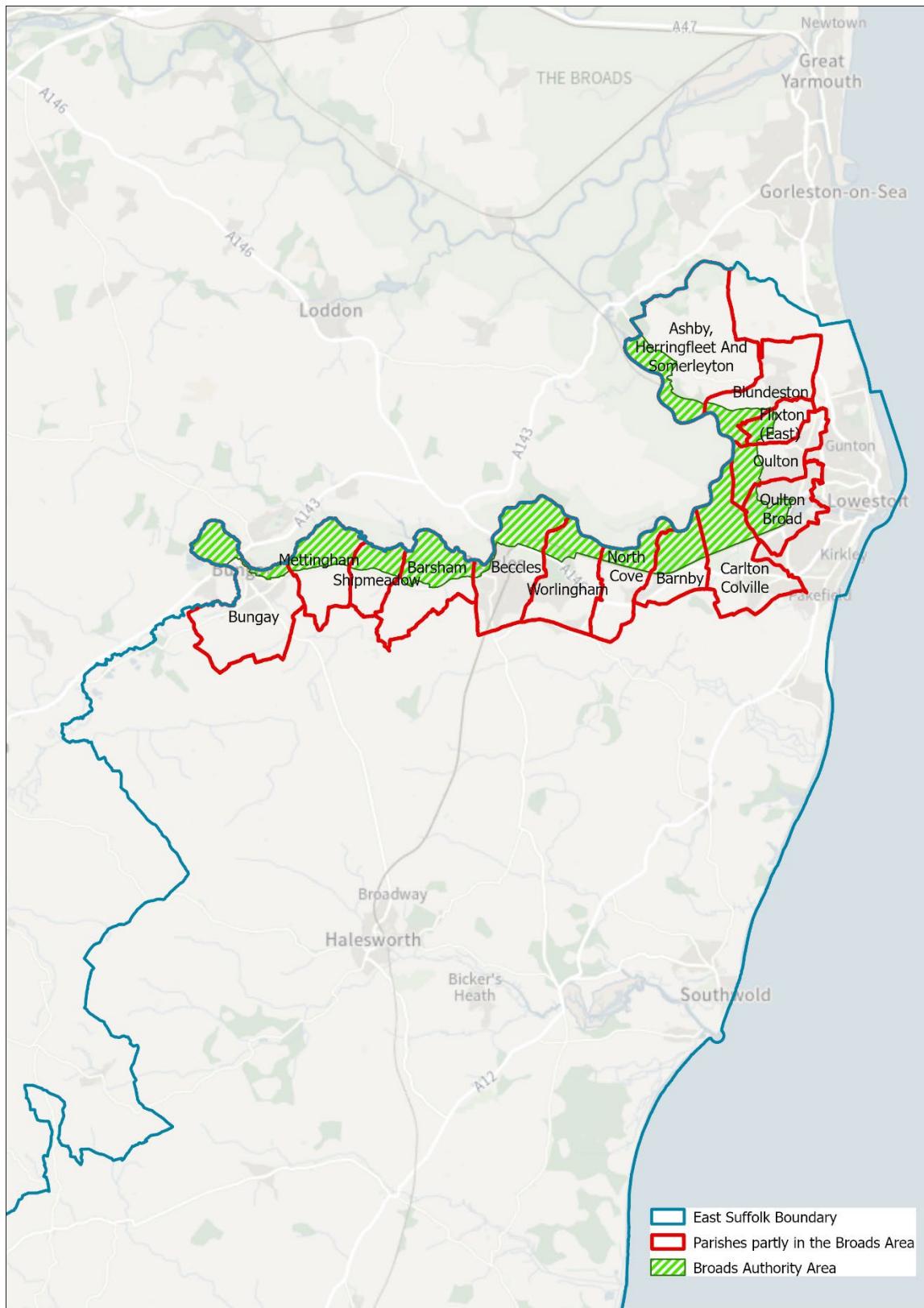
In short, these are as follows:

1. Designating the neighbourhood area
2. Engagement and starting to build the evidence base
3. Preparing the neighbourhood plan
4. Regulation 14 public consultation and publicity (minimum 6 weeks)
5. Finalising the draft neighbourhood plan and Submission to East Suffolk Council (pre-regulation 16)
6. Local Planning Authority to publicise draft plan for public consultation (minimum 6 weeks) (Regulation 16)
7. Examination and receipt of Examiner's report
8. Referendum
9. Making the plan (the term 'made' is used for a completed neighbourhood plan and while the plan can be referred to as adopted the correct term is made so you will see this used in guidance and legislation)

Who to contact?

- For help and assistance with the process, the Planning Policy and Delivery Team at East Suffolk Council can be contacted using the details below.
- For assistance with creating a neighbourhood planning group, the Communities Team at East Suffolk Council can be contacted using the details below.

The Broads Authority are the local planning authority for the part of East Suffolk which is situated in the Broads area and the map below shows what parts of East Suffolk they cover.



If any part of your proposed neighbourhood plan area falls within the Broads, the Broads Authority and East Suffolk Council will collaborate in the progression of the plan.

Useful contacts

East Suffolk Council

Planning Policy and Delivery Team

PlanningPolicy@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

East Suffolk Council

Communities Team

Communities@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

Broads Authority

planningpolicy@broads-authority.gov.uk



For assistance with County matters, which includes issues such as flooding, transport and highways, Suffolk County Council can be contacted using the following details:

neighbourhoodplanning@suffolk.gov.uk. Your named officer will be able to advise you if you need to contact the County Council for any county matters that are likely to arise in your neighbourhood Plan.

Useful tips

It is advised that neighbourhood planning groups talk to other groups who have, or are in the process of, preparing a neighbourhood plan to learn from their experience of the process.

Project Plans

A project plan is a useful tool to assist with the process and this guidance can be used in conjunction with the project plan template which is found at: [Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan](#).

It is important to emphasise early on, the critical role that a project plan can play during the neighbourhood plan process. However, it should be recognised that no matter how thorough the initial plan is, adjustments will likely be necessary, but a good project plan will help you stay on track and focused on what is needed and when. You can further your resilience by preparing and keeping an up-to-date risk assessment as it can help you to spot potential issues early on and plan for change. It will also be necessary to carry out continuous monitoring of progress to ensure the project plan and risk assessment remain relevant and effective.

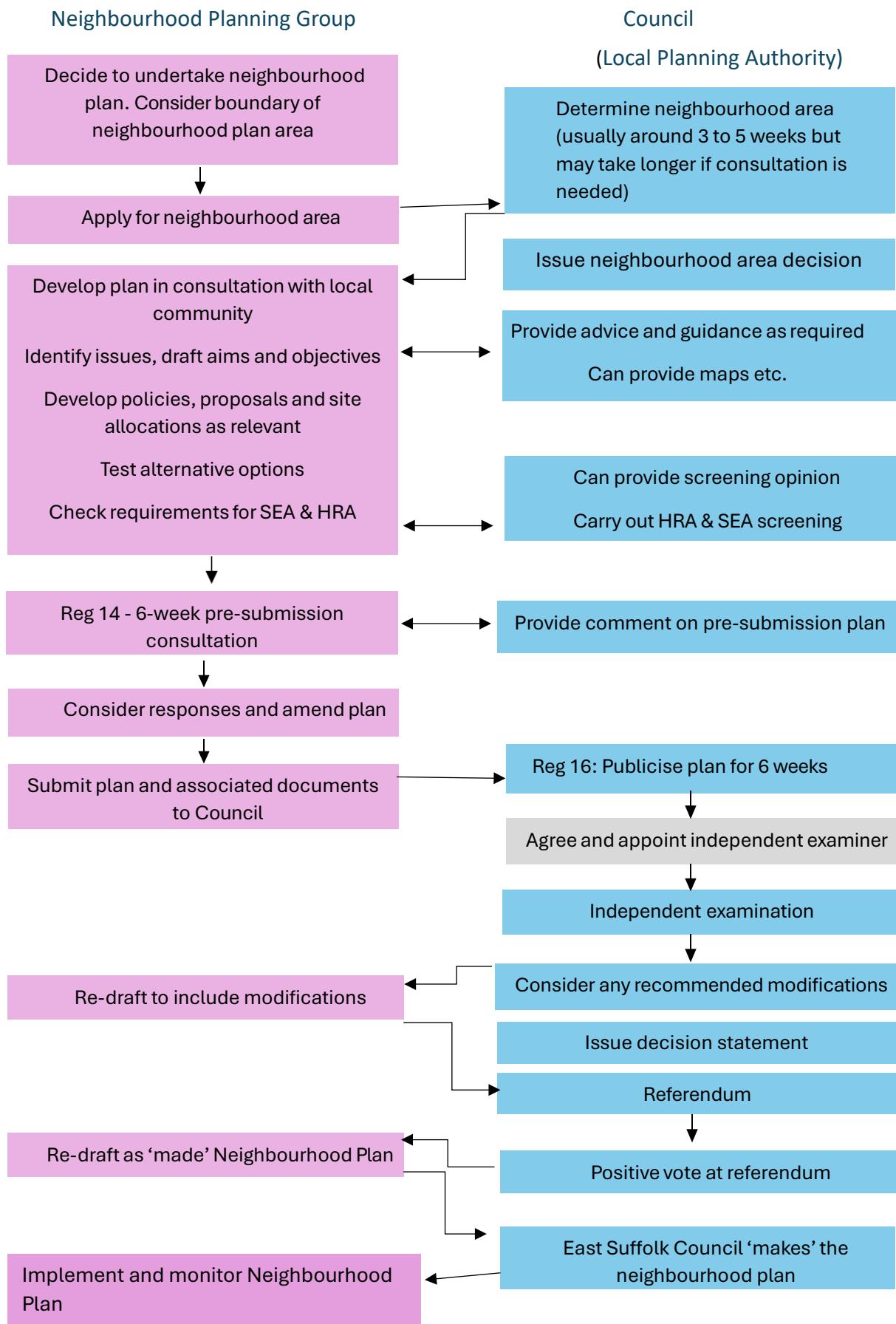
Further sources of help and information

- www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-planning
- <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/>
- <https://local.gov.uk/pas/planning-policy/neighbourhood-plans>
- <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/>
- <https://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/how-to-shape-where-you-live-a-guide-to-neighbourhood-planning/>
- <https://mycommunity.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning>

Typical Process for Creating a Neighbourhood Plan

The following stages are directed by national legislation and set out the responsibilities and actions of the qualifying body and/or the neighbourhood planning group and the Council. As the local planning authority, East Suffolk Council will support and advise the neighbourhood planning group throughout, and a named officer will be assigned upon receipt of the area designation.

A flow chart of typical process involved is shown on the next page.



Neighbourhood Plan Steps: from area designation to made plan

Having carried out the steps above and decided that a neighbourhood plan is right for your town or parish, the information in the rest of this guidance will take you through all the steps involved in preparing your neighbourhood plan from conception through to completion.

Each stage has a key milestone box which matches the colours on the project plan so you can see at a glance which steps you are responsible for, and which steps East Suffolk Council is responsible for. The neighbourhood planning group is in **purple**, and the Council is in **blue**.

1. Designating the Neighbourhood Area

Important to note- National guidance (the Planning Practice Guidance) states: “The community should consult the local planning authority before making an area application”. Therefore, before making an application to designate the neighbourhood area, neighbourhood planning groups should contact East Suffolk Council via email at PlanningPolicy@eastsuffolk.gov.uk.

Important and/or statutory tasks Neighbourhood Planning Group

- Decide on the area the neighbourhood plan will cover
- Map the area designation
- Submit an application for designating a neighbourhood area

Important and/or statutory tasks East Suffolk Council

- East Suffolk Council to consider the area designation application – consultation carried out if necessary
- East Suffolk Council issues the neighbourhood plan area decision (with agreement from the Broads Authority where necessary)

The qualifying body working alongside the community, will lead on the neighbourhood plan and will decide on the neighbourhood area (the area in which the neighbourhood plan policies will apply).

Deciding on the neighbourhood area³

You can choose the area you think is most appropriate, although in most cases, the neighbourhood plan area follows the town or parish boundary. However, you may decide that you only want to cover a particular part of the parish, especially if there is a specific issue you want to tackle.

³ [Neighbourhood planning - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neighbourhood-planning)

The area can cover part of an adjacent parish or parishes, but it will require the involvement and agreement of the relevant parish council(s), and they will need to be involved in the plan making process as the plan will also apply within their parish.

If you have decided to create a joint plan, all involved parishes will need to agree on the neighbourhood plan area which will usually, but not always, include all relevant parish boundaries as there may be instances where parts of parishes are excluded.

If the plan area also includes the Broads Authority, then East Suffolk Council will liaise on a joint decision with them, but East Suffolk Council will issue the decision notice.

Any plan that covers multiple or part of other parishes will require a consultation to ensure the area is appropriate⁴.

What if the neighbourhood area extends beyond the parish boundary?

If a proposed neighbourhood area covers more than one parish, it requires joint agreement and coordination between the parishes involved.

The local planning authority will assess the application and if approved, designate the area as a single neighbourhood area.

How it works

Under Section 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990⁵ a neighbourhood area can be designated to cover:

- A single parish
- Multiple parishes
- Part of a parish
- Part or all of more than one parish—if all relevant parties agree

Key Requirements

- The qualifying body must apply to East Suffolk Council (and the Broads Authority where appropriate) as the local planning authority for designation of the neighbourhood area. Area designations usually involve an officer delegated decision (meaning it is 'signed off' by officers). In the Broads Authority area this process can take around 5-weeks. In East Suffolk this usually takes around 3-weeks if no consultation is needed
- If the area includes part of another parish, the parish council for that area must consent or be part of the joint application.

⁴ [Neighbourhood planning - GOV.UK](#)

⁵ [Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#)

- Where consultation on the neighbourhood area application is required, East Suffolk Council will consult with the public, neighbouring parish councils, ward councillors, community groups, local stakeholders and any specified consultees (such as Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) and any neighbouring local authorities and then decide whether the proposed area is appropriate.

What to include in the application

- A map showing the proposed boundaries
- A statement explaining why the area is suitable
- Evidence of agreement between parish councils (if more than one is involved)

What other issues may affect your neighbourhood plan boundary?

There are other things that may need to be considered outside of the usual administrative boundaries that may be worth thinking about when you are deciding the boundaries of a neighbourhood area.

A few examples of when a plan boundary may not follow parish boundaries that could also be considered when deciding the boundaries of a neighbourhood area are given below⁶

- If a local plan allocation covers more than one parish, you may want to incorporate part of a neighbouring parish to cover all of the local plan allocation. However, you must have the agreement of the relevant parish to include this.
- Are there any areas where community-based groups operate? If so, will these areas be included in the designated neighbourhood area? If not, why?
- The physical appearance or characteristics of your neighbourhood, for example this could include buildings that may be of a consistent scale or style for example terraced housing, or use of materials. You may want to cover specific areas rather than the whole parish depending on what you are trying to achieve.
- Does the proposed neighbourhood plan area include any infrastructure or physical features that may define a natural boundary? This could include features such as a major road or railway line or waterway.
- What are the natural settings or features in an area? Do any of these features form a natural boundary?
- What is the size and demographic of the population living and working in the area?

⁶ [Neighbourhood planning - GOV.UK](#)

Mapping

Creating an accurate map of the proposed neighbourhood plan area is necessary to complete the area designation application. If the neighbourhood planning group decides to create the map further information on mapping can be found in **Appendix 1** of this guidance. Alternatively, East Suffolk Council can assist with this task, or you may decide to employ a consultant to complete this for you.

Submit application for a neighbourhood area designation

Once you have decided on the neighbourhood plan area, you must complete the [Neighbourhood Plan Area Designation Application Form](#). This is where the map will be required.

What will East Suffolk Council do next?

On receipt of your application, the Council will allocate a named officer from within the Planning Policy and Delivery Team as the person who will work with you throughout the neighbourhood plan process. We will also supply you with a contact in the Broads Authority where necessary.

Consultation

There is usually no need to consult where the application relates to a single parish area. However, a consultation may be required in some circumstances, an example is when the application involves more than one parish.

A small number of parishes in East Suffolk fall partly within the Broads Authority area. For these parishes, decisions on their neighbourhood plans will need to be taken by both East Suffolk Council and the Broads Authority. This does not require a separate application, and you only need to apply to East Suffolk Council as we will work with the Broads Authority to determine an area designation application.

Your named officer will explain what is happening and if consultation is needed. For example, circumstances where a consultation will be needed include:

- Multiple Parish Areas- where the proposed neighbourhood area spans more than one parish
- Where a neighbourhood area does not follow the Parish boundary.

Once the application has been considered and any consultation responses have been assessed (if consultation was necessary), East Suffolk Council will issue the decision notice to confirm the neighbourhood area has been designated.

Decision notice

The decision notice will be published on the Council's website, and we will send notification of the decision to the nominated contact (usually the parish clerk and/or neighbourhood plan lead).

Once the neighbourhood plan area is approved East Suffolk Council (and the Broads Authority where appropriate) will publish the designation of the neighbourhood planning area on the Council's social media sites, and the [Neighbourhood Planning pages](#).

The neighbourhood planning group can also put it on their website (usually the parish council website- it is advised that a specific page is set up for the neighbourhood plan).

How long will area designation take?

The process for issuing a decision on a neighbourhood area is usually straightforward if the plan is for a single parish area and will take around three weeks. If the neighbourhood area includes part of the Broads Authority area but does not require consultation designation may take up to five weeks.

If consultation is required but the neighbourhood area includes only one parish then determination could take up to 13 weeks⁷. However, if consultation is required and the proposed area includes the Broads Authority area or includes more than one parish it could take up to 20 weeks for the area decision to be issued⁸ - although this is quite unusual you should be aware the process could take that long.

At the end of this process, the lead officer will contact you and offer a meeting to discuss your plan and next steps. We will also send a draft Service Level Agreement (see **Appendix 2**) to be agreed and then signed. This document will outline what the Council will do to support you, and what steps we will undertake, as well as expectations on the neighbourhood planning group at each stage.

For further information on area designations, see [Planning Practice Guidance on designating a Neighbourhood Area](#).

2. Engagement and starting to build the evidence base

Important tasks Neighbourhood Plan Groups

- Community engagement
- Commissioning or undertaking surveys
- Building your evidence base

⁷ [The Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](#) 6A: F2 - (c) in all other cases, the date 13 weeks from the date immediately following that on which the application is first publicised.

⁸ (a) in a case where the area to which the application relates falls within the areas of two or more local planning authorities, the date 20 weeks from the date immediately following that on which the application is first publicised; <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/637/regulation/6A>

Community engagement

Community input is vital to the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan, and you can use surveys, workshops, walk and talk events and have conversations to gather ideas about what people love, what they want to change and what they are hoping for in the future.

You may have already carried out some early community engagement as suggested above and it is during this time that it will be really important to talk to the community about what they want, and how they would like to see the neighbourhood area developing in the future.

It is also important to recognise that no matter your efforts, there will inevitably be people who are not interested in the neighbourhood plan and choose not to engage. This is not a failing on your part but being aware of this at the outset can help to manage expectations when it comes to engagement. The important point is ensuring that the community are aware a neighbourhood plan is being prepared and that they have opportunities to engage with it if they wish to.

There are many different methods of community engagement, including social media, letter drops, drop-in sessions and community walks, but you may decide to take a different approach. The Communities Team at East Suffolk Council will be able to help you with any community engagement proposals and activities. See the [Community Led Planning](#) pages for further information and Locality has some guidance about [engaging with your community in a meaningful way](#).

Community engagement is fundamental to the success of your neighbourhood plan. You may have an idea of what your community needs but often talking to local residents can bring up topics that the neighbourhood planning group may not have considered. Later, the community will be asked to decide by voting for or against the neighbourhood plan at the referendum (final vote). It is important that they understand what the plan is trying to achieve, that it considers the different opinions that a public consultation will attract and they have been kept aware of the plan through the entire process where possible.

At this stage you will have gained some idea of what topics and/or policy areas you want to focus on, so it is important to look at the relevant local plans and make sure that the matters you want to address have not already been covered, although there may be local matters, such as design, for example, that can still be addressed. Neighbourhood plans can add value to existing local plans by identifying additional issues that may be missing in a local community context. It is important to understand that you cannot re-write or override local plan policies.

You can discuss your policy areas with your named officer who will be able to advise you on local plan policies.

Commissioning or carrying out surveys

Your initial survey should be used to find out what is important locally and be very clear that this will be an opportunity for residents to have a say in the future of your town/parish/area. There may be residents who are not familiar with neighbourhood planning so you will need

to explain what a neighbourhood plan is and its purpose. You can find further information on: [Community Led Planning » East Suffolk Council](#) for ideas on how to consult with your community and other useful links.

You can present your survey in any form, but it is good to have some idea of local issues to help you ask the relevant questions. You can also leave space for any other issues that may be forthcoming from the community.

Questions should remain as broad as possible and not be so detailed or defined that it leads residents to consider very narrow points of view at such an early stage. After all, the aim at this stage is to get a broad overview of topics that are locally important.

Surveys are usually (but not always) split into relevant sections and ask questions such as the examples below:

- How would you like (town/parish) to be described in 10-15 years?
- What currently works and what doesn't?
- If we agree that the neighbourhood plan should plan for more housing (town/parish) what form should this take and what kind of homes would you like to see?
- If we could help to improve cycle and pedestrian routes, how would you like to see this happen?
- Which services or facilities are the most important?
- What improvements would you like to see in the community?

This is not an exhaustive list but is an example of questions you could ask. You may decide to employ a consultant for this task, or you may want to carry this out yourself and commission a consultant for more specialist surveys such as housing, trees, landscape etc.

It is at this stage that you can start to build up a database of local contacts that you can use for later consultations, ensuring to comply with data protection requirements. When managing consultation lists during neighbourhood planning, you must comply with UK data protection laws, particularly the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018⁹.

Indicative Housing Numbers

Neighbourhood plans are not required to plan for new housing growth, but where they do plan for new housing, this should be informed by a housing requirement number. In some cases, the local plan provides a housing requirement number for a neighbourhood plan.

⁹ [Data Protection Act 2018](#)

Where the local plan does not provide a housing number for a neighbourhood area, the NPPF states that a neighbourhood planning group can request an indicative housing requirement from the local planning authority.

If you are thinking about allocating land for housing, you can ask your named officer to provide an indicative housing number for your neighbourhood area.

Site Assessments

If housing or other types of development is being considered for allocation through the Neighbourhood Plan, you will need to carry out a comprehensive assessment of each site to assess its suitability, and it may be that you need additional help from a consultant or similar.

East Suffolk Council have published guidance on considering the provision of housing in Neighbourhood Plans which includes different types of housing and how Neighbourhood Plans can help to address housing issues. Information on housing and allocating sites for development can be found in the [Neighbourhood Planning Guidance for Housing](#)

Locality¹⁰ also have guidance on how to assess and allocate sites for development which explains the principles behind site allocations and methods that should be used to ensure that sites chosen are the most appropriate for the neighbourhood plan area.

Building your evidence base

Your neighbourhood plan will be supported by your evidence base, but what is the evidence base?

The evidence base is a collection of data, research, and community input that supports the policies and proposals within a neighbourhood plan. It ensures that decisions made are based on facts rather than opinions, making the plan robust and defensible during examination.

Key components of the evidence base

- Community engagement – Surveys, consultations, and feedback from residents and stakeholders.
- Local demographics – Population statistics, housing needs, and employment trends.
- Environmental data – Information on biodiversity, flood risk, and green spaces.
- Infrastructure & Transport – Roads, public transport, utilities, and community facilities.

¹⁰ [How to assess and allocate sites for development - Locality Neighbourhood Planning](#)

- Planning policy context – Alignment with national and local planning policies which may include the Broads Authority Local Plan where relevant.
- Land use & development potential – Site assessments, housing allocations, and economic growth areas.

Why is the evidence base important?

- Justifies policies – Ensures that proposals are backed by credible data.
- Strengthens the plan – Helps avoid challenges during independent examination.
- Supports decision-making – Provides a foundation for sustainable development.

Your named officer can help identify existing evidence which may be of relevance and any other known studies which may be work in progress and can advise where additional evidence would need to be produced. For example, a policy proposing higher car parking standards than those adopted by the Council would need to be justified through evidence and be supported by the County Council as highway authority.

You will need to consider early engagement with other bodies such as:

- Suffolk County Council:
 - neighbourhoodplanning@suffolk.gov.uk
 - [Neighbourhood planning guidance](#)
- Anglian Water
 - strategicgrowth@anglianwater.co.uk
 - [aw-neighbourhood-plan-guide-sp.pdf](#)
- Broads Authority
 - [Neighbourhood planning](#)
- Environment Agency Planning:
 - Eastanglia@Environment-agency.gov.uk

There may be other groups you want to liaise with depending on your topics, for example Suffolk Wildlife Trust, and we may be able to help further with other organisations you may want to work with.

Finally, your named officer will be able to help you identify any evidence gaps and provide informal advice as to whether full strategic environmental assessment work is likely to be required.

As previously mentioned, it is vitally important that you keep your named officer updated on the progress of your plan. This engagement is invaluable in ensuring that your plan progresses smoothly and the council have the necessary resources available.

It is very important that the Council is regularly updated with the plan's progress to enable us to plan for the support you will need and avoid any unnecessary delays. Your named officer will also liaise with other teams within East Suffolk Council where necessary and at all appropriate stages of your plan.

Other teams include:

- Development Management
- Design and Heritage
- Design
- Trees and Landscape
- Coastal Management
- Economic Development and Regeneration
- Communities
- Assets
- Leisure
- Housing

3. Preparing the Neighbourhood Plan

Important tasks Neighbourhood Plan Groups

- During the drafting process
- Using your survey results
- How do define your aims and objectives?
- What are your topics and themes
- Writing your policies
- Defining Community Actions
- Pre Regulation 14 tasks and things to consider once your plan has been drafted

This stage is when you will look at your survey results to give you an idea of what areas are important to people locally and how they see the town or parish growing in the future. These results will influence what your overall aims and objectives will be, which will then inform your topic areas.

Providing the East Suffolk Council, along with the Broads Authority where relevant, with the opportunity to input at the early stages will help ensure that any policies drafted would operate as envisaged.

You can either submit individual chapters or the whole document to your named officer for comments and guidance. You can discuss with your named officer whether they, and you, would prefer to break the plan down into sections or look at it in its entirety. We need at least five weeks to be able to provide feedback. Additional time may be needed if your plan includes any part of the Broads Authority area.

But how does this help you to write your neighbourhood plan? The following headings are intended to help you with taking your surveys and associated data and creating a well thought out neighbourhood plan.

Using your survey results

Firstly, you will need to analyse the results of any surveys or questionnaires that you may have carried out. You can do this by splitting responses into quantitative or qualitative data

- Quantitative data (e.g. rankings, yes/no answers): Use charts or tables to show trends.
- Qualitative data (e.g. comments): Group into themes like housing, transport, green space.

Responses to your survey will help you to identify what the overriding issues are for the community and, what are considered minority concerns. Survey results will also help to identify any unexpected insights that may come from the results.

You can then link your findings to planning issues and apply them to themes. For example, concerns about traffic can lead to a transport policy; a desire for more green space can lead to an open space policy or support for affordable housing could lead to a housing mix policy. This may need to be supplemented by further specialist evidence. This is not an absolute list but just a sample of how you could apply your survey findings.

You can also use statistics to help justify and support your policies: for example, you could state that “X number of residents supported the protection of locally important views” and this will also help to strengthen your basic conditions compliance.

Your survey findings will also help you to identify any gaps that need to be thought about or if there are likely to be any conflicts or differences of opinion. Nevertheless, it is not necessary, or even possible for the plan to do everything that has been raised in the consultation. Although you will be required to explain why these matters cannot be addressed in the neighbourhood plan or haven’t been taken forwards.

Finally, you will need to clearly explain the outputs and outcomes of consultation in your consultation statement, which is required as part of your submission documents at Regulation 16 consultation stage, and this can include charts, quotes and how the community was consulted, who responded, how many and when, for instance. It is therefore important that good records of community consultation activities are kept, as well as records of the responses received and how they have informed the plan.

Once you have undertaken an initial analysis of your questionnaire responses, you may find it useful to meet with your named officer to talk through issues, current policy approaches and what neighbourhood plan policies could seek to achieve. This discussion will also help to clarify the extent of current permitted development rights that may be relevant to your area, and how East Suffolk Council approach matters such as identifying new conservation areas and tree preservation orders.

What are basic conditions?

Basic conditions demonstrate compliance with a set of legal tests that are required by the [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#) and [The Neighbourhood planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](#). These are assessed by an independent examiner.

The basic conditions can help to ensure that your neighbourhood plan is legally sound, but they also show how it reflects what your community cares about. This could be anything from protecting green spaces to shaping housing that fits your community, and every policy should be rooted in local opinions and aspirations.

Key legal requirements are:

Conformity with National Policy¹¹

- The plan must have regard to national policies and advice from Government including the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the government's planning priorities and principles¹² and Planning Practice Guidance¹³.
- A qualifying body is advised to set out in its basic conditions statement how they have had regard to national policy and considered whether a particular policy is or is not relevant.¹⁴

General Conformity with Local Strategic Policies

- The plan must be consistent with the strategic policies in the Local Plan prepared by the local planning authority.

Contribution to Sustainable Development

- The plan should promote economic, social, and environmental sustainability. This includes supporting local jobs, protecting green spaces, and encouraging community wellbeing.

Compatibility with EU Obligations

- Although the UK has left the EU, neighbourhood plans must still comply with retained EU law, such as environmental directives (e.g., Strategic Environmental Assessment).

Human Rights Compliance

- The plan must respect the rights set out in the Human Rights Act 1998, ensuring it does not discriminate or infringe on individual freedoms.

Appropriate Referendum and Examination

¹¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/schedule/9/enacted>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#basic-conditions-for-neighbourhood-plan-to-referendum>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#National-policy-and-advice>

- Before adoption, the plan must pass an independent examination and a local referendum, confirming community support and legal soundness.

To demonstrate legal compliance, plan-makers must prepare a Basic Conditions Statement. This document explains how the plan meets each of the conditions above and is submitted alongside the draft plan to the local authority.

How do you define your aims and objectives?

Defining your aims and objectives will help you to plan your direction and purpose and help you to add clarity to your neighbourhood plan.

Aims

These are your strategic statements that outline what you and the community want to achieve over the plan period (this is usually 10-15 years).

- Your aims should reflect the overall vision for the neighbourhood plan area, and they should respond to those key issues identified through your consultation.
- Aims are usually fairly broad and aspirational rather than being policy specific. For example, you could say that you want to “protect and enhance the character of the neighbourhood plan area while supporting sustainable growth that meets local needs.”

Vision

Creating a vision for your neighbourhood plan is a very important early step as it helps you to set the tone, direction and purpose for everything you want your plan to achieve.

A vision is usually a short statement that describes what your community wants the neighbourhood or parish to look like in the future and usually plans for 10-15 years in the future. A vision should reflect local aspirations, values and priorities and will help everyone understand the ‘big picture’.

Why is a vision important?

- It gives your plan focus and direction
- It helps build community support
- It guides your objectives and policies
- It shows examiners and decision-makers what your plan is trying to achieve

How to create a strong vision

- Start with community input use surveys, workshops, and conversations to gather ideas about what people love, what they want to change, and what they hope for.

- Identify key themes. Group ideas into topics like housing, environment, transport, heritage, and wellbeing.
- Write a clear, positive statement. Keep it short (1–2 paragraphs), locally distinctive, and easy to understand.

Example vision:

The wording below is given as an example of what form a vision could take. You can also look at existing [Neighbourhood Plans in the area](#) in East Suffolk to see what other towns and parishes have done.

“Our neighbourhood will be a thriving, inclusive, and resilient place, where new development respects local character, green spaces are protected and enhanced, and everyone feels welcome and connected. We will support sustainable growth, celebrate our heritage, and ensure that future generations enjoy a safe and healthy environment.”

Objectives

- Objectives break down your aims into specific intentions
- Objectives guide the development of your policies and can help you to assess whether the plan is working once it is made
- Objectives should be clear, focused and achievable

Examples of wording you could use are:

- ‘Ensure that new housing will reflect local characteristics, design and scale’
- ‘There will be support for small-scale employment opportunities within the parish/neighbourhood plan area’
- ‘There will be a focus on preserving key views and heritage assets’

How to develop your aims and objectives

To do this you will need to start with your vision for how the community would like the neighbourhood plan area to be developed over the next 10–15 years for example. What do you want the plan area to look like in 10–15 years?

Using your evidence base will help you to create realistic aims. Use your survey and questionnaire results, are there any other local studies you can use (such as Conservation Area appraisal for instance) and any other consultation feedback you may have received.

Draft your aims first, then you can develop your objectives under each aim.

Group your aims together. For example, common aims may include housing, the environment, transport, economy, community facilities, ecology and biodiversity and

heritage. There may of course be others depending on what is important to your local community.

Finally, you can test your aims and objectives out with your community. Are they relevant, meaningful, easy to follow, and shaped by earlier consultations. Are they reflective of the needs identified and are they supported locally.

What are your topics and themes?

You will be able to define your plan's topics and themes by translating your aims and objectives along with your community's priorities, aspirations and concerns into structured areas of focus. This will help you to guide and write your policies.

We have broken this down further into the steps below:

- Start with your aims and objectives as these should show themes as grouped
- You can also use your community's overall vision to identify your broad themes
- You may find that your themes become obvious and progress naturally from survey results, workshops, questionnaires or other local evidence

Group your issues into planning topics, however it is important to remember that your plan does not have to cover every topic, and you could in theory, just focus on one topic if that topic was a significant local issue that needs addressing.

Common themes may include

- Housing – type, affordability, location, design, availability
- Environment – watercourses and rivers, trees and hedgerows, green spaces, ecology and biodiversity, climate resilience¹⁵
- Sustainability, Infrastructure and Environmental Design¹⁶ including climate change and adaptation
 - Reducing overall water demand
 - Managing local water resources effectively
 - Supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation goals
 - Enhancing community resilience
 - Housing Orientation

¹⁵ [Check the long-term flood risk for an area in England - GOV.UK](#)

[Shoreline management plans - GOV.UK](#)

[Developers: get environmental advice on your planning proposals - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁶ To achieve this, neighbourhood plans should promote:

- Water-efficient building design, including low-flow fixtures and smart metering.
- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to manage surface water and reduce flood risk.
- Water reuse and recycling, such as rainwater harvesting and greywater systems.
- Integration of water management with wider objectives like biodiversity enhancement and community amenity creation

- Areas in your neighbourhood with particularly high value for climate mitigation – peatlands, woodlands etc.
- Local microgeneration
- Facilities they may need to adapt to climate change – cooling facilities etc.
- Transport and movement – traffic, parking, walking and cycle routes
- Community facilities – community centres, schools, leisure facilities, meeting spaces, allotments
- Local economy – tourism, retail, employment
- Heritage and design – non-designated heritage assets, conservation areas, local building styles and scales, key views
- Flooding and drainage – SuDS design, landscaping/planting, flood risks, water management, water availability and wastewater management.
- Local Green Spaces

This is not a full list but is an example of how you could group your topics together.

Check what you have suggested is actually planning related

- You should focus on land-use matters, that is those things that can be influenced through your neighbourhood planning policies.
- You do not need to re-write the local plan, rather your neighbourhood plan policies should add local value and cover any issues that are not in local planning policy. The two plans must work in harmony together.
- You will need to be careful to avoid purely aspirational policies, for example trying to include a policy for improved bus services, as this is outside of the scope of the neighbourhood plan.

Write clear theme introductions

Each theme section should start with a short explanation of:

- Why it matters locally: why is this particular theme important?
- What evidence supports it: use your community engagement to show why the theme is important locally.
- What the plan aims to achieve: you have shown why the theme is important and you have evidence to support that but how will the plan deliver it?

What is a policy?

Your neighbourhood plan policies will have the same weight as those in the local plan (Including the Broads Local plan where appropriate) once made and will be used to determine planning applications.

Writing your policies

Writing successful neighbourhood planning policies is turning your community's aims and objectives into clear, useable policies that can help to guide development in your neighbourhood plan area. But how do you achieve that?

Start with your evidence and objectives

- Use your survey results and the work you have already carried out which have identified local issues
- Link each policy to a specific objective as this will help you keep your plan focussed and easy to follow and understand.

Supporting evidence/reports

If you have had any additional surveys or reports carried out, you will use these to support the associated policy or policies.

To help you to write strong, effective, and legally compliant neighbourhood plan policies, you will need robust evidence, especially when your policies relate to specific topics, for example, local green spaces, housing needs, flood risk, or heritage assets.

This kind of specialist or topic-based evidence helps ensure that your policies are:

- Justified: They're based on facts, not just opinions
- Targeted: They respond to identified local needs and priorities
- Defensible: They will stand up to scrutiny by examiners, developers, and decision-makers

How this evidence will support your plan

These surveys and reports will help to shape policy wording that is clear, specific, and enforceable and it provides a credible basis for decisions about land use and development. Finally, they will help you to show the examiner that your plan meets the Basic Conditions, especially around sustainability and conformity with strategic policies.

What type of evidence will you need to think about?

- Local Green Space assessments: this will help you to show why certain spaces meet national criteria for protection.
- Housing Needs Assessments: this is only needed if you are planning to identify sites for the delivery of housing, but it is used to identify the type, size, and tenure of

homes needed locally.

- Flood risk mapping or SuDS studies: you may want to consider this if local flooding is an issue you would like to tackle through your plan, and it will support policies on climate resilience and infrastructure.
- Heritage appraisals: This can be used to identify Non-Designated Heritage Assets or locally important buildings or features and can be used to justify policies that protect the identified buildings, views, or character areas.
- Biodiversity or landscape studies: Inform policies on nature recovery and green corridors.

Use clear, planning focussed language

- Policies must relate to the use and development of land so you should avoid vague aspirational comments like 'we want better community spirit' or 'we want to keep the village nice' unless they are linked to physical changes. For example, you could use wording such as 'New residential development must reflect the scale and character of existing buildings in the village' as this is more structured and achievable.

Structure your policies consistently

- Use headings for each theme/topic, for example: housing, environment, transport etc
- Number your policies: you can use any numbering or identification that you choose but they must be consistent. For example, you could use the first part of your parish followed by a number such as WEH1 etc or you could do it by theme/topic such as H1 for housing or ENV2 for environment. However, East Suffolk Council's preference would be to keep the structure as simple as possible, such as a maximum of three letters for parish identification then two characters for the policy number (e.g. WEH01). Whatever method you choose, just make sure that you are consistent.
- Keep each policy concise, specific and enforceable. Your named officer will be able to give you advice on this.

Types of policy you can include

The following points are given as examples of policies you might want to consider and the things that they can cover.

- Site allocation/s: these can identify land that could be used for housing, employment or leisure uses. If you have any allocations in your plan, you will have carried out a call for sites and the associated assessments at an earlier stage.
- Design criteria: these can set standards for materials, layout, scale informed by local character.

- Protections policies: these safeguard green spaces, trees and hedgerows, views and heritage assets and you will need evidence to underpin policies of this type (see evidence base above) Whilst these policies can safeguard these areas, they can also be written to identify opportunities for enhancement.
- Infrastructure policies: such as supporting improvements for cycling and walking routes, SuDS and parking.
- Community facilities: these will be used to promote or support new or existing community facilities.
- Healthy Lifestyles: What changes could encourage residents to make healthier choices? Could improving walking and cycling infrastructure reduce car dependency?

Test your policies

Once you have drafted your policies and discussed them with your named officer as necessary, you will be able to test your policies in the following ways:

- Ask yourself whether the policies can be used to assess a planning application. You can use a previous application as a test run to see how the policies would be applied.
- Check for conformity with national and local policies: your named officer will be able to help you with this.
- Make sure you have avoided any duplication, and your policies only add value beyond existing local plan policies.

Locality also has a comprehensive guide to writing neighbourhood plan policies which can be found here: [How to write planning policies for your Neighbourhood Plan](#)

Community actions- what are they?

You may also have some issues that are not covered by policy, and you may choose to turn these into a community action.

As an overview, community actions are those non-statutory proposals that sit alongside your neighbourhood planning policies. While your policies will shape land use and development (and these policies will be used in planning decisions), community actions focus on local projects, initiatives, or improvements that fall outside the scope of formal planning powers.

These are locally driven goals which reflect the aspirations of the community identified as part of your earlier engagement, and these often relate to services, facilities, and events amongst others. Whilst these are not legally binding, they can help to influence funding, collaborations and delivery of actions.

Examples of community actions

Community actions you could think about include:

- Green infrastructure: organising tree planting days or wildflower and verge management.
- Transport: you may want to consider lobbying for improved bus services or improved pedestrian crossings.
- Community facilities: does your neighbourhood area need a youth club or does the village hall need repairs?
- Heritage: do you want to look at hidden history of the neighbourhood plan area? Can you create a local heritage trail?
- Inclusion and accessibility: can you improve awareness around neurodiversity or disabilities and make your neighbourhood area more accessible for all?

How to include them in your plan

There are a variety of ways you can include your community actions. For example:

- Include a section at the end of each topic chapter relevant to that chapter.
- Create a separate section called 'community actions' where you may be able to expand on your aspirations and include maps if necessary. Alternatively, you may choose to keep them to bullet points or short paragraphs, but whatever method you choose they need to be clear and achievable.
- Link your community actions to your surveys and consultation results.
- You may already have a list of priorities in your [Parish Infrastructure Investment Plan \(PIIP\)](#).
- Make sure that you are clear that these are not planning policies, but they are still important.

It is very important that the Council is regularly updated with the plan's progress to enable us to plan for the support you will need and avoid any unnecessary delays.

Now you have drafted your plan what are your next steps?

At this stage you should have shared your plan with your named officer, as this will help you to consider any issues with wording, if the evidence is robust enough or if anything else needs consideration. You should also share your plan with the Broads Authority if your plan includes any part of the Broads area.

Typically, when first drafting your plan, it is easy to assume that the reader has the same level of knowledge of your neighbourhood area as you do. Asking someone with little/or no knowledge of your neighbourhood area to proofread the draft can help you to identify any issues or areas of the plan that need further thought.

Once your plan is written you must ensure that your policies are clear and unambiguous, that all associated maps are correct, and that consent is in place so these can be shared. See **Appendix 1** for more information on mapping.

Once your plan is drafted, you can ask your named officer to carry out screening for your Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). The draft SEA screening assessment is shared with Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency, as statutory consultees, who will have an opportunity to comment, and the draft HRA screening assessment is shared with Natural England for comment.

See **Appendix 3** for further information on SEA and HRA process and requirements.

If a full environmental report is needed, it must be completed before the Regulation 14 consultation commences.

Pre regulation 14 tasks and things to consider once your plan has been drafted

At this stage you will be preparing to carry out your regulation 14 consultation, and this is carried out by the town/parish council and the neighbourhood planning group. These tasks will ensure that your neighbourhood plan is legally compliant, well- evidenced and led by the community, making sure that it is ready to be scrutinised by the public and other stakeholders.

What to prepare:

At this stage you will be finalising your draft plan and making sure that all policies are clearly written and supported with evidence and you will need to include:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) Screening or full reports where needed.

Prepare consultation materials

You can begin to prepare your consultation materials ready for consultation to start and these should include:

A draft consultation notice which covers:

- Where the plan can be viewed.
- How to comment (email, post etc with contact details).
- Deadline for comments: this will be a minimum of 6-weeks from first publication. You will need to think about the timing of your consultation and whether additional time may be needed such as over major holidays, or whether you can arrange your consultation to miss these.
- Where feedback forms can be found (both on-line and paper versions).

- Include a statement that any comments received will be made public.¹⁷

Plan publicity – how and where you will publicise the consultation, for example social media, posters, community notices or magazines, drop-in events. Make sure that your plan and consultation materials are easy to read and available in different formats. You could also consider using plain-language summaries or even use visual aids.

Create your consultation list

You should include:

- statutory consultees (your named officer can advise you on who these are)
- local residents
- local businesses
- local community groups
- any other associations, groups or people you think should be notified

You should also notify your named officer and give advance notice of the date so that they can prepare for any internal consultations that may be required and to give them time to collate responses into a cohesive single response. Internal consultees can include, housing, development management, conservations, design etc.

4. Regulation 14 consultation

Important tasks Neighbourhood Plan Group

- Publish consultation documents.
- Carry out 6-week consultation (include additional time, recommended at least 8 weeks, if carried out over Christmas, Easter or summer holidays).
- Collate and respond to comments post consultation.
- Re-consider and amend plan in response to comments received.
- Update/maintain the Consultation Statement.

***Note** - if as a result of responses received you propose major changes to your plan you may need to repeat the Regulation 14 consultation

Important tasks

East Suffolk Council

- Respond to Regulation 14 consultation
- Request shapefiles – these are the digital technical maps that we will need to be able to plot policy areas etc

¹⁷ Appendix 4 Advisory note for sharing consultee details with East Suffolk Council must be made available to ensure that East Suffolk council have consent to contact respondents at later stages

Consultation

Your plan has been written and edited as necessary. You can now carry out your 6-week Regulation 14 consultation – this consultation is run by the neighbourhood planning group. There are some circumstances where a consultation may take longer than 6-weeks, such as over major holidays such as school summer holidays, Christmas or Easter, and you may need to question whether the timing of your consultation is appropriate or if it could be started at a different time or if the consultation period could be extended.

You should notify your named officer of the date you are expecting to start your consultation. We can help you with a consultee list upon request to ensure you meet the requirements of [The Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](#). This is unlikely to be a definitive list as you may have knowledge of local groups that the Council does not so you will need to add these to your consultee list.

It is important to note that regardless of how much notice and information you may have given to the lead officer in advance, it is a statutory requirement to notify the Council at the start of the consultation.

Publishing the consultation

The neighbourhood planning group will need to publish their neighbourhood plan and all supporting documents such as reports and surveys. This can be done both online and with paper copies for those who may not be able to access them online. You will need to let people know where they can view the documents. There is an advisory note at [Appendix 4](#) that should be available for people to agree that their contact details can be shared with East Suffolk Council.

This is necessary because East Suffolk Council will undertake the Regulation 16 consultation on behalf of the neighbourhood planning group. If the respondent does not agree for their details to be shared, they will not be directly notified of the Regulation 16 consultation. However, in order to ensure everyone who commented at the Regulation 14 stage has the opportunity to comment on the plan at the Regulation 16 stage, you may be asked to share the details of the consultation with those respondents on behalf of East Suffolk Council.

Local Consultees

The following list includes those who will need to be consulted for the Regulation 14 stage, this list is outlined in [The Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](#)

Direct notifications should be sent to those who East Suffolk Council has provided details for, including East Suffolk Council themselves.

- Local residents and businesses.
- Voluntary bodies - some or all of whose activities benefit all or any part of the neighbourhood area (this includes community groups, schools etc).

- Bodies which represent the interests of different racial, ethnic, or national groups in the neighbourhood area.
- Bodies which represent the interests of different religious groups in the neighbourhood area (churches etc).
- Bodies which represent the interests of persons carrying on business in the neighbourhood area.
- Bodies which represent the interests of disabled persons in the neighbourhood area.

You will need to ensure that all of your consultation materials make it clear that any responses received and their contact details will be shared with East Suffolk Council, and the respondent should agree to this. See **Appendix 4** for agreement template.

Responding to comments post consultation

Responding to comments received during the preparation of your neighbourhood plan, especially at the Regulation 14 stage, is a vital part of demonstrating how you have considered these comments, what changes have been made to the plan (if any) or why comments have not been considered or actioned, for example the issue is outside the scope of the neighbourhood plan. Even if this is the case, it will need to be explained. You should read, consider and respond to all comments and note if any changes to the plan occur as a result of comments received.

How to respond to comments is further outlined in the consultation section below.

What happens after the consultation ends?

You will need to assess and consider each representation/comment received and consider whether you need or wish to make changes to the plan. This exercise will also form part of your consultation statement, and all comments should be summarised. You will need to address each comment and explain if you did/didn't change the plan and why – for example some comments may be outside of the scope of the neighbourhood plan.

Summarising comments effectively involves capturing the key points while maintaining clarity and neutrality. When summarising comments, it is important to consider the following:

1. Identify Key Themes

- Group comments by plan section, paragraph or policy.
- You can consider main ideas or themes although you will need to show that individual opinions have been considered.

2. Keep It Concise

- Avoid repeating details where possible and aim for a clear and brief overview. However, some repetition may be necessary if the same point applies to a number of different sections.

- Use bullet points or short paragraphs for readability.

3. Maintain Neutrality

- Represent all viewpoints fairly, without bias or personal interpretation.
- If comments express strong opposing views, acknowledge the diversity of perspectives.

4. Highlight Actionable Points

- If comments received suggest changes or improvements, summarise what these changes could be and how they have been considered.

Example of summarising a comment

Full Comment: "I think the local park needs better lighting because it feels unsafe at night. Other people have said the same thing in community meetings."

Summary: Several residents have raised concerns about park safety at night, suggesting improved lighting as a solution.

Consultation statement- what is it?

The neighbourhood planning group is required to produce a statement of consultation which sets out how it consulted, who it consulted, and a summary of the responses received. The statement will also state how these responses have been considered in any amendments or why changes have not been made to the draft neighbourhood plan. Your consultation statement will need to be submitted with your Regulation 15 submission. Ideally you should have started writing this after the first round of consultations, but you can add to it for each stage of consultation. This will help you to keep track of comments made, when they were made and what your response was and whether it resulted in any changes to the plan.

The legal basis of the consultation statement is provided by Section 15(2) of The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012¹⁸ which requires that a consultation statement should:

- contain details of the persons and bodies who were consulted about the proposed neighbourhood development plan
- explain how they were consulted
- summarises the main issues and concerns raised by the persons consulted
- describes how these issues and concerns have been considered and addressed in the proposed neighbourhood development plan.
- State name and organisation of the respondent (if relevant)

This helps to ensure that records are kept of the activities undertaken to publicise the consultation and notify consultees. This could include copies of posters, photos from drop-

¹⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/637/regulation/15>

ins and images of social media posts. You will essentially create a record of any changes that have been made in response to any comments received from consultees and residents.

Next Steps

Before you are ready to submit your plan for Regulation 15 checks (also called pre-submission), you will need to discuss your proposed changes with your named officer. You should advise the officer of any changes that have been made and check whether your SEA/HRA need updating (for example if you have created a new policy, then East Suffolk Council will need to re-screen the plan) and the evidence might need to be revisited.

If your plan has added new policies or made significant changes, there may be a need to carry out a further focussed Regulation 14 consultation, and your named officer will advise you on this.

5. Finalising the draft neighbourhood plan- Regulation 15 (pre-regulation 16)

Important tasks – Neighbourhood Plan Group

- Make a ‘tracked change’ document
- Share draft plan with your named officer

Make a ‘tracked changes plan’

It is advised to create a ‘tracked changes’ version of your plan to monitor any amendments to the document.

What are ‘tracked changes?’

‘Tracked changes’ is a feature in Microsoft Word or Google Docs which lets you see any amendments made and the feature is usually found in the ‘review’ tab in the document. Amendments you can see include additions, deletions, and formatting changes without permanently altering the original text. Changes can be accepted in a copy of the plan and a ‘clean’ version created. This makes it easy to track what changes have been made.

Why do you need to make a ‘tracked changes’ plan?

Tracked changes documents are vital to allow your named officer to clearly see what changes have been made. They will also create a record of any changes that have been made in response to any comments received from consultees and residents and how the plan has been changed in response. Ideally your documents should be shared with your named officer for review before the formal submission of your plan for the Regulation 16 stage.

Share amended plan with the named officer

Finally, once you have addressed comments, discussed the plan with your named officer and the plan has been amended as appropriate, showing the tracked changes, you can:

- Ask someone not involved in drafting the plan to proofread it to check for any errors.

- Check all documents that are needed to be submitted with the plan are complete – you can include a check list of consultees and all reports, surveys or supporting documentation.
- Submit the revised plan to your named officer for checking.
- Update the consultation statement setting out:
 - How the requirements for consultation have been met
 - A record of comments received and how these have been addressed including
 - Any matters arising that cannot be accommodated in plan changes, for example, unrealistic expectations, matters that are dealt with in local/national policy.
 - How comments have been addressed and an explanation as to why comments have or have not been acted upon.

If any new policies have been added or there are any significant changes to the HRA and SEA (Screening or full assessment) this may need to be revisited and will include a further 5-week consultation period.

6. Local Planning Authority publicise submission plan (Regulation 16 consultation)

Important tasks

Neighbourhood Planning Group

- Submission of documents to East Suffolk Council

Important tasks

East Suffolk Council

- Commencement of Regulation 16 consultation
- Appointment of examiner (with agreement of neighbourhood planning group)

Make sure all submission documents are correct – The following outlines the list of what is required:

- Draft neighbourhood plan, including a map identifying the neighbourhood plan area and the area(s) covered by any area specific policies.
- Consultation statement.

- Basic conditions statement.
- HRA & SEA screening or full reports.
- Any evidence, surveys or reports that justify the policies in your plan (for example local green space evidence, Non-Designated Heritage Assets evidence, landscape / views assessment, housing needs assessment).
- A list of organisations previously consulted and those individual respondents who have opted to allow their details to be shared with the Council.

Following the submission of your plan and supporting documents to East Suffolk Council, we will start the Regulation 16 process.

The Regulation 16 consultation involves:

- A 6-week consultation although this will be extended if the consultation period falls over a major holiday.
- Your named officer will advise you of who was consulted.
- Press and social media releases.
- Publicising the consultation on the East Suffolk Council website.
- Provide documents to customer services centres and libraries.

East Suffolk Council will provide a response to the Regulation 16 consultation.

Following the consultation, we will publicise all responses received.

Responses received are not formally considered by East Suffolk Council, or by the parish council at this stage, however they are passed to the examiner once the consultation has been completed and an examiner has been appointed. Nevertheless, it is good practice for the neighbourhood planning group to review the responses and consider how/whether you would like these to be addressed as the examiner may ask for your views on comments received during the examination process.

Appointing an examiner

During the consultation process East Suffolk Council will appoint an examiner, with the agreement of the neighbourhood planning group and the Broads Authority where relevant, via a service called 'NPIERs', which stands for Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service. This is a service, administered by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)¹⁹ and is designed to support the neighbourhood planning process by access to impartial, experienced examiners who can assess neighbourhood plans.

¹⁹ This process is also supported by: Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG),

We will share details of all examiner applicants with you and agree with you who to appoint. The Council will carry out this process, exchange contracts and will pay their fees.

7. Examination and Examiner's Report

Important Tasks – Neighbourhood Planning Group

- Respond to any questions that the examiner may ask
- Fact checking the draft report and discuss with your named officer

Important Tasks- East Suffolk Council

- Support examination process
- The Council submits documents to examiner
- Fact checking draft report
- Final report submitted to the Council by the examiner
- Consider the Examiners recommendations and prepare decision statement
- Discuss referendum date with Elections Team

Once the Regulation 16 consultation and appointment of an examiner have been completed the examination period commences. The examination process is normally carried out by written representations where all comments are addressed and recommendations received via written communication. The examiner may request a public hearing however this is not the norm for Neighbourhood Plans.

What happens during examination?

East Suffolk Council will submit the plan and any documents requested by the examiner and we will answer any queries the examiner may have. The documents to be submitted will include the draft plan, the summary of comments from the consultees, and the consultation statement.

In addition, the examiner may send further written questions to both the neighbourhood planning group and East Suffolk Council, along with the Broads Authority where any part of the plan covers that area, if they have queries on the plan or need clarification on anything. These questions and any responses will be published on the Council's website.

There may also be an opportunity for you to comment on the representations received during the consultation or you may be asked for your views by the examiner. Not all examiners will ask for this; however, it is a worthwhile exercise to prepare for this, so your comments are ready if the examiner does make the request.

What is the examiner considering?

During the examination of a neighbourhood plan, the examiner will assess whether the plan meets legal requirements and that it can proceed to referendum. The examiner does not

test the plan for soundness (unlike local plans) but instead focuses on a specific set of criteria known as the basic conditions.

Under Schedule 4B of the, [Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#) the examiner considers whether:

- The plan has regard to national policies and guidance (e.g. National Planning Policy Framework).
- The plan contributes to sustainable development.
- The plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies of the local development plan.
- The plan is compatible with EU obligations (including environmental assessments and human rights).
- The plan complies with legal requirements (e.g. correct procedures, consultation, and submission documents).
- The policies relate to the development and use of land (not just aspirations or community projects).

Will the examiner carry out a site visit?

Examiners will usually carry out an unaccompanied site visit to the plan area and visit points of interest if they need some context or clarification on points in the plan. If the examiner needs to be accompanied for any reason, they will arrange that with you directly.

Note of clarification

A note of clarification is usually issued by the examiner during the examination stage. Its purpose is to ask for further information or clarification on issues they need to consider further, and they will usually send this directly to the neighbourhood planning group and your named officer. There will often be an opportunity for both parties to respond, or sometimes only the neighbourhood planning group is asked to respond.

Why is a note of clarification issued?

The following list does not cover all possibilities, but these are the usual reasons why a note of clarification may be issued:

- If there is any ambiguous wording in a policy.
- To better understand the intent behind a policy or policies.
- To check whether policies relate to land use.

- To address any inconsistencies between the plan and its supporting documents.
- To confirm factual details, such as boundaries for example.

What a note of clarification usually includes

- A list of specific questions or comments on policies to be answered
- A request for an explanation of terms used or objectives
- A request for clarity over non-land use contents of the plan
- Queries relating to consultation responses or environmental assessments

How to respond to the note of clarification

You should discuss the contents of the note with your named officer who will reply to the Examiner with a joint response. However, you must provide your named officer with:

- Clear, concise and logical responses.
- Clarify the intent of the policy being questioned and clarify whether it relates to land use.
- Accept modifications suggested or suggest alternatives.

Examiner's Report

The next stage of examination is the receipt of the examiner's report.

The examiner's report is the formal outcome of the independent examination of the draft neighbourhood plan. It is a critical milestone which determines whether the plan can proceed to a referendum.

Draft examiner's report

- Provided to you and East Suffolk Council (and the Broads Authority where relevant) for fact checking. This is not an opportunity to raise new issues, but clarification may be sought if necessary.
- The draft report will include suggested modifications such as amendments to wording, additional wording to add clarity, rectifying errors and any other changes deemed necessary by the examiner.
- You can discuss these with your named officer and agree comments or suggested changes, and East Suffolk Council will then prepare a joint response for the examiner.

Final examiner's report

- The examiner will recommend whether the plan should proceed to referendum, and whether this is with or without modification. They will also provide a conclusion on the appropriate referendum area. A recommendation to proceed to referendum subject to modifications is the most common outcome.

East Suffolk Council, as local planning authority, along with the Broads Authority if relevant, will take the decisions regarding the final report but will liaise with you throughout. You will then be able to amend your plan based on the recommendations of the examiners report, for republication as the Referendum Draft Plan. East Suffolk Council will need confidence that the changes are being made and to ensure the referendum version of the plan is produced in time for us to finalise and publish the decision statement. Publication of the decision statement triggers the referendum timetable.

This stage requires particular care to ensure that modifications are correctly made. The Council can also make changes at this stage that are needed to correct errors or to meet the basic conditions.

In some circumstances where the Local Planning Authority (following discussion with the Qualifying Body) decide to take a different view to the Examiner a further consultation may be needed, and in some cases a further examination, adding further time to the process.

The Council will then issue the **decision statement**, which agrees to the plan proceeding to referendum and this statement is the formal trigger for the start of the referendum process.

The Council has five weeks from receipt of the final examiners report in which to issue a decision statement, but this can be extended with agreement from the town or parish council as qualifying body, which can prove useful if further consideration needs to be given to the recommended changes.

8. Referendum

Important tasks East Suffolk Council

- Referendum date confirmed
- Publish specified documents by the set date
- Polling cards sent to all registered voters
- Publicity of referendum (press release and social media)
- Referendum held
- Votes counted

Important tasks Neighbourhood Plan Group

- Submit referendum version of the plan. Publicise the referendum (but remember you cannot lobby people)
- Attend the vote count
- Publicise outcome

A referendum²⁰ must be carried out no sooner than 28 days and no later than 56 days of the issuing of the decision statement by East Suffolk Council and the Broads Authority where relevant. We will publish an Information Statement which sets out the referendum date, the question voters will be asked (see below) and voting details.

East Suffolk Council's Elections Team will administer and pay for the referendum and in combination with your named officer we will:

- Confirm the date of the referendum with you.
- Carry out social media/press releases.
- The Elections team will send polling cards to all registered voters in the neighbourhood area (note that anyone with a second/holiday home will not be entitled to vote as they will not be registered in the parish, only at their main address).

Polling cards contain the following question:

"Do you want East Suffolk Council (and the Broads Authority²¹) to use the [title] neighbourhood plan to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?"

During the run-up to the referendum, you can also publicise the referendum, explaining what the neighbourhood plan is, what it is aiming to achieve, and publicise when and where the referendum is taking place. However, **YOU CANNOT** lobby the outcome or try to persuade voters.

Further guidance on publicity can be found here: [Recommended code of practice for local authority publicity - GOV.UK](#)

We will offer you the chance to witness the count and can agree this with either your lead officer or the Elections Team. Counts usually take place the day after the referendum.

A positive vote is achieved if over half of those persons who voted, vote 'YES'. This is usually referred to 50% + 1 of those who voted yes.

A neighbourhood plan which has received a 'YES' vote at referendum carries full weight in the determination of relevant planning applications and appeals. This means that any relevant planning application/appeal should be determined in accordance with policies in the neighbourhood plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The referendum result will be published on the Council's web pages. You can also put the result on your own website.

²⁰ [The Neighbourhood Planning \(Referendums\) Regulations 2012](#)

²¹ Reference to the Broads Authority will be removed where appropriate

9. Making the plan²²

Important Tasks – East Suffolk Council

- Date for full council identified
- Plan made by full council
- Final ‘made plan’ version submitted by town or parish council to ESC: publish on website
- Publicity for made plan

Important Tasks – Neighbourhood Planning Group

- Send the final ‘Made’ version of the plan to your named officer
- Publish made version (once it has been to Full Council)
- Implement and monitor your plan

The Council has 8 weeks starting the day after the referendum to take a decision on making the plan. East Suffolk Council will advise you of the date your neighbourhood plan will be going to full council. If your plan includes the Broads Authority, then the same process will be followed by them as both authorities need to ‘make’ the plan.

Making the plan is essentially a formality, provided it has received a majority ‘Yes’ vote at referendum.

The report to full council provides the final opportunity for East Suffolk Council or the Broads Authority to confirm that it is content that the neighbourhood plan does not breach and is otherwise compatible with EU obligations and convention rights.

Once the plan has been made by full council, we will then publicise that the plan has been made and on what date. You can update your website simultaneously. You can also carry out general notifications via local notices, parish magazines or any other form of communication you may use. East Suffolk Council will directly notify those who have requested to be notified of the outcome, and other consultees internal and external to the Council.

We will also organise for physical copies of the plan to be printed and distributed to appropriate local libraries.

²² The term ‘making’ is used in legislation, but it means the same as adopting the plan and these are sometimes used interchangeably

Next Steps: What happens after the plan has been made

Implementation and Monitoring

This may feel like the end of the process, but it will be important to consider how to implement your plan (put it into action) and frequently monitor how policies are performing.

East Suffolk Council and the Broads Authority, where appropriate, will use the plan to help determine planning applications in the area. When responding to a planning consultation (which could be a planning application or the Local Plan), the Parish or Town Council should use your Plan as a basis for responses, where appropriate. You will receive updates (approximately 6-monthly) from East Suffolk Council showing which policies have been used in determining planning applications.

It is good practice to undertake monitoring and regularly assess your plan as appropriate to make sure it is working. Monitoring and assessing your plan will help ensure that policies remain “up to date” in respect of decisions on planning applications/appeals and changes in national legislation.

East Suffolk Council is also in the process of producing guidance on Implementation and Monitoring of your plan.

Reviewing your plan

Whilst there is no formal requirement to review your plan, if you have identified any issues arising from monitoring your plan, you may decide that a review is needed. If you decide to review your plan in the future you can find guidance on this here: [Neighbourhood Planning Guidance Note-Review of Made Neighbourhood Development Plans](#).

Resources

Neighbourhood Planning:

- [Neighbourhood Planning](#): East Suffolk Council has a dedicated webpage that includes links to documents and guidance and other Neighbourhood Plans in the district.
- [East Suffolk Local plans](#): You will need to consider the policies of the relevant local plan when looking at what policies your Neighbourhood Plan could include, and these can be viewed via this link.
- [Statement-of-Community-Involvement](#) is a document that outlines how East Suffolk Council will engage with the community in planning decisions and policymaking, including Neighbourhood Plans.
- [Locality Neighbourhood Planning](#) is a resource funded by the government and includes lots of useful advice on Neighbourhood Planning

- [Neighbourhood Planning - MyCommunity](#) is a very useful tool linked to Locality that gives advice about Neighbourhood Planning and includes useful guides, and you can sign up-to receive emails and updates
- [Neighbourhood Planning Guidance for Climate Change](#) has been produced by East Suffolk Council to help Neighbourhood Planners to consider and address climate change in Neighbourhood Plans
- [Neighbourhood Planning Guidance for Housing](#) has been produced by East Suffolk Council to help Neighbourhood Planners to consider the housing needs of their community and the different types of housing that could be included in a plan.
- [Neighbourhood planning guidance - Suffolk County Council](#) which includes links to general guidance on [Neighbourhood Planning in Suffolk](#) and a guide to [Designating Local Green Spaces in Neighbourhood Planning](#)
- [How to shape where you live: a guide to neighbourhood planning](#) is produced by the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and includes a guide to Neighbourhood Planning and other guidance such as brownfield assessments

Data protection and mapping

- [Data protection: The UK's data protection legislation](#) – this covers the legislation around data protection controls and how personal information is used by organisations, such as the Neighbourhood Planning group and local authority.
- [Parish Online](#) is a digital mapping software service and also includes website and email services. There are other similar services available so you will be able to decide which service best suits your needs.

The following documents may be useful if your neighbourhood area is near the coast or is in a flood risk area, if you want to consider environmental issues in developments or considering including the historic environment as a topic.

Other types of resources available include:

- [Check the long-term flood risk²³ for an area in England](#) – this will show you an area and the long-term flood risk which may impact the content of your plan.
- [Developers: get environmental advice on your planning proposals](#) – this is aimed more towards developers but may contain some useful points to consider especially if you are planning on allocating land for development
- [HEAN 11: Neighbourhood Planning and the Historic Environment](#) is produced by Historic England and gives advice on how to explore historic places and local history

²³ [Check the long-term flood risk for an area in England - GOV.UK](#)

and how it can be included in a Neighbourhood Plan

- [The Historic Environment and Site Allocations in Local Plans](#) – this is more relevant to local planning authorities who are creating local plans, however there is some useful information that may prove beneficial to Neighbourhood Planners when considering site allocations
- [Local Heritage Listing: Identifying and Conserving Local Heritage](#) this advice has been produced by Historic England and addresses local heritage lists, what they are, how to identify them and their significance can be addressed via the Neighbourhood plan
- [Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\)](#) this is part of a nationwide move to create the space and connectivity needed on land and sea for nature to thrive, recover and be resilient. A key objective for the LNRS is to support the establishment of a national Nature Recovery Network (NRN)
- [The Nature Recovery Network](#) (NRN) is central to the aims of Government to improve nature and actively restore the natural environment. Natural England have examples of NRN projects here: [Nature Recovery Projects \(England\) | Natural England Open Data Geoportal](#)
- [Shoreline management plans](#) – these are strategic frameworks used to guide how coastal flooding and erosion risks are managed over the next 100 years.

Glossary

- **Broads Authority** – The local planning authority with responsibility for the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads area which is shared with towns and parishes in East Suffolk
- **Community/Communities** - Generally defined as a group of people who share common interests, values, goals, or geographical location. However, it may also be that the community could have conflicting views.
- **Community engagement** – this is the process of organised groups connecting and collaborating with members of the community. The aim is to find shared goals, address challenges, or improve overall well-being which will be basis of your neighbourhood plan. Community engagement puts the emphasis on active participation, open and honest dialogue, and a collaboration between individuals, organisations, and stakeholders within the defined community.
- **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** – this is a charge that local authorities can place on new developments to help fund the infrastructure needed to support growth in their area. This includes things like roads, schools, parks, flood defences, and health facilities, amongst other things. Further guidance on CIL can be found here: [Community Infrastructure Levy \(CIL\)](#)
- **Consultant** – usually a professional who is experienced with neighbourhood plans but could also include those carrying out surveys and reports for your evidence base such as landscape or heritage professionals for example.
- **Data protection legislation** -this is a set of laws that are designed to safeguard personal information and ensure it is handled responsibly. Its aim is to protect the privacy of individuals and give them control over how their data is used.
- **Decision Statement** – this is the statement that is issued by East Suffolk Council following the examination of the plan, and it is needed before the plan can proceed to referendum.
- **Evidence** – this is all surveys, reports and assessments you may have carried out or commissioned which have helped to inform and create the neighbourhood plan (such as housing, landscape, trees etc).
- **Examination** -the process of independent scrutiny of the neighbourhood plan by an independent examiner.
- **Full Council**- this is the name given to the formal meeting of all elected councillors within East Suffolk Council. It is the primary decision-making body responsible for major strategic decisions and any other legally required functions as necessary. They will be responsible for the formal acceptance of a neighbourhood plan taking it to 'made' status.

- **Habitats Regulations Assessment** – this is the process used to evaluate whether a plan might adversely affect the integrity of the site²⁴ and protected habitats and species in certain designated areas, such as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). These areas are part of a network of sites protected under UK and EU laws, designed to preserve biodiversity.
- **Infrastructure** - refers to the basic physical and organisational structures and facilities needed for the operation of a society or economy. There are different types of infrastructure including transport, utilities, communication, education, healthcare and recreation as well as green infrastructure such as woodland and green spaces.
- **Local Plan** – The local plan is the strategic document created by local planning authorities that sets out the vision, objectives, and policies to guide development within their area.
- **Locality** – A government organisation who supports neighbourhood planning with the creation of guidance documents and other sources of advice.
- **Named Officer** – this is the officer at East Suffolk Council who will lead on supporting your plan and will be your main point of contact throughout the process.
- **Nature recovery** – this refers to the process of restoring and revitalising natural ecosystems to reverse the damage caused by human activity, climate change, and pollution. Nature recovery supports the regeneration of biodiversity by improving the health of local ecosystems and helps to create sustainable environments where both wildlife and people can thrive.
- **Non-statutory consultees (or 'other' consultees)** – people and bodies consulted during the Regulation 14 & 16 stages.
- **Ordnance Survey copyright licencing** – this is the legal framework that governs the use of Ordnance Survey's geospatial data and mapping materials. To use their maps or geospatial information, individuals and organisations must comply with specific licensing terms.
- **Planning Policies** -these provide the framework in the local plan for making decisions on planning applications and ensure that development is sustainable, meets any identified local needs, and aligns with broader environmental, social, and economic goals.

Public Sector Geospatial Agreement (PSGA) - is a UK-wide contract between the Geospatial Commission and Ordnance Survey (OS) that gives public sector organisations access to high-quality location and mapping data, free at the point of use.

²⁴ [Managing and protecting Natura 2000 sites - European Commission](#)

- **Qualifying Body** - this is the term used in neighbourhood planning legislation to encompass town and parish councils.
- **Regulation 14 Consultation** – this is carried out by the neighbourhood planning group and is the first round of consultation with local residents, stakeholders, local businesses and both statutory and non-statutory consultees
- **Regulation 16 Consultation** – this is the second round of consultation which is carried out by East Suffolk Council. We will contact everyone consulted in the Regulation 14 consultation, where information has been shared with East Suffolk Council and consent given from consultees. In the absence of details being shared or consent not given to share details, you will be asked to contact those people on behalf of East Suffolk Council.
- **Service Level Agreements** – this is an agreement between the neighbourhood planning group and East Suffolk Council which outlines the level of support we will give you and what you are expected to do.
- **Shapefiles** – these relate to mapping and are a geospatial data format that is used in Geographic Information Systems (GIS).
- **Statutory consultees** – bodies specified in [The Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](#) consulted during the Regulation 14 & 16 stages: these include the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England and adjacent parishes and local authorities adjoining the neighbourhood plan area.
- **Strategic Environmental Assessment** – this is the process used to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of plans and policies and to test alternatives, before they are adopted. An SEA ensures that environmental considerations are considered at an early stage, to promote sustainable development.
- **UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)** – this encompasses a set of rules that determine how personal data is collected, used and protected.

Appendix 1

Maps, Mapping and Data Protection

Ensuring compliance with Ordnance Survey copyright licensing is crucial when producing maps for a Neighbourhood Plan, as is ensuring that all maps produced are accurate.

To use Ordnance Survey maps, you'll need to sign up for the Public Sector Geospatial Agreement (PSGA)²⁵. This agreement grants you a license to access and use OS mapping data. By joining, you'll also be able to share data with East Suffolk Council, which will help with better collaboration and efficiency between parties. [Ordnance Survey copyright licensing](#)²⁶ OS mapping and geospatial data are protected by copyright and database rights. Neighbourhood Plan groups using OS data must include appropriate copyright acknowledgments. If the Neighbourhood Plan group intends to use OS maps, you must ensure proper licensing and attribution are included.

East Suffolk Council can provide guidance on both topics, helping with data protection compliance and assisting in the production of maps. You can find more details on our website [Neighbourhood Planning data protection statement](#) or by contacting us directly at PlanningPolicy@eastsuffolk.gov.uk.

To obtain the necessary [Ordnance Survey Licensing](#), you will need to determine the type of license that best suits your needs. OS offers different licenses depending on whether you want to use, publish, share, or copy their mapping data.

How to proceed:

- Identify Your Requirements – OS provides licenses for businesses, individuals, educators, and public sector organisations. You will need to choose the right one based on how you intend to use the data. East Suffolk Council officers can help you determine which one you will need.
- Explore Available Licenses – You can also browse the different licensing options on the Ordnance Survey licensing page.
- Apply for a License – Each license has specific terms and costs. You can find guidance on how to apply on the licensing guide.
- Check Public Sector Agreements – If you're part of a public sector organisation, you may be eligible for free access under the Public Sector Geospatial Agreement (PSGA).

You could also look at and consider using tools such as [Parish Online](#). These tools are a tailored service which specializes in mapping for parish councils and Neighbourhood Plan groups and has been used by many other neighbourhood planning groups, however it will be your decision who to use.

²⁵ [The PSGA member registration process | OS](#)

²⁶ See appendix for further information

Data Protection

For data protection, the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)²⁷ outlines the key principles of Data Protection, which includes lawful processing, accuracy, storage limitation, and security. Any personal data collected or used in your Neighbourhood Plan must adhere to these principles.

²⁷ [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data \(United Kingdom General Data Protection Regulation\) \(Text with EEA relevance\)](#)

Appendix 2

Service Level Agreement between

East Suffolk Council

And

[xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx] Town/Parish Council

The Agreement

This Agreement is between

- a) East Suffolk Council Planning Policy and Delivery Team, Communities Team, and
- b) [add name] Town/Parish Council (delete as necessary)

Signed: Dated:

on behalf of Planning Policy and Delivery Team

Signed: Dated:

on behalf of Communities Team

Signed: Dated:

on behalf of XXX Town/Parish Council (delete as necessary)

Introduction and Purpose

Introduction

The purpose of this Agreement is to establish clear and effective working arrangements between the parties, ensuring that [xxxxx] Town/Parish Council can advance their Neighbourhood Plan efficiently. It aims to establish the arrangements for providing support to maximize the plan's chances of success at independent examination and referendum.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced the following provisions into the planning process: -

- Neighbourhood Development Plans
- Neighbourhood Development Orders
- Community Right to Build Orders

Under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011²⁸ East Suffolk Council are responsible for:

- Undertaking certain statutory requirements, and
- the provision to Parish/Town Councils and Neighbourhood Forums, of technical advice and support.

Purpose

East Suffolk Council as Local Planning Authority has a statutory duty to support groups undertaking neighbourhood plans. Planning Practice Guidance also includes clear indications as to when Qualifying Bodies (town and parish councils) should seek help from their Local Planning Authority (LPA). Key documents are the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) and [Planning Practice Guidance – Neighbourhood Plans](#).

Planning practice guidance (with reference to Schedule 4B Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)) states that:

“A local planning authority must give such advice or assistance to qualifying bodies as, in all the circumstances, they consider appropriate for the purpose of, or in connection with, facilitating the making of proposals for neighbourhood development orders (or plans) in relation to neighbourhood areas within their area;”

It goes on to confirm that this should not be taken to include financial help. The [Communities Team](#) can advise on other main funding options.

²⁸ [Localism Act 2011](#)

This Agreement takes those requirements on board. The timings provided are based on lessons learnt by the Council from working with neighbourhood plan groups whose plans are now 'made'

Experience has also shown that to work effectively, it is important that town/parish councils (and their associated neighbourhood plan groups) have a basic level of understanding of neighbourhood planning and planning more generally. It is important that neighbourhood plan groups understand:

- how their neighbourhood plan fits with strategic and other local plan documents;
- what a neighbourhood plan can and cannot do; and
- how they can respond most effectively to planning applications or be involved in the Council's local plan work whilst they are evolving their own neighbourhood plan.

As part of its wider duty to support those undertaking neighbourhood plans, the Council provides information on its web page [Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan](#) and also includes a template project plan. It is expected that the neighbourhood planning group will make use of this resource and will keep the project plan up to date.

You will also need to think about creating a risk assessment for your plan. Having a risk assessment means that you can further your resilience as it can help you to spot potential issues early on and plan for change.

You can also look at the Communities page which contains a range of help available on the neighbourhood plan process, such as different consultation techniques, survey methods and funding sources for which the Communities Team are the most appropriate source of advice.

Whilst responsibility for the neighbourhood plan lies with the town/parish council, planning practice guidance notes that "...it should work with other members of the community who are interested in, or affected by, the neighbourhood plan proposals to allow them to play an active role in preparing the neighbourhood plan."

This involvement should be through early and consistent engagement opportunities for local residents and businesses to comment on the neighbourhood plan as it evolves. A Consultation Statement is an important document and is one of the suites of documents the Town/Parish Council will be required to submit for independent examination. It may also involve setting up a working group(s) to undertake the plan preparation work on behalf of the town/parish Council to which local residents/ businesspeople are co-opted. The Communities Team can provide help setting up groups and engaging with the community.

East Suffolk Council has produced a project plan template for Neighbourhood Plan groups to use. It is very important that a project plan or schedule is used and communicated to your named officer. Regular updates are welcomed and encouraged and without this it is more challenging for us to keep to the timescales we have set out.

Working Arrangements

The following arrangements are based on key stages in the neighbourhood plan process and the information set out in the Council's latest guidance:

We have produced a guide to help you navigate the Neighbourhood Planning process and an associated project plan to help you keep on track. These can be found [here](#)

Table 1 below sets out the minimum level of contact / engagement identified as necessary between the Council as local planning authority (LPA) and the Neighbourhood Plan group. It also highlights those points where input from the Communities Team will be most helpful.

The level and scope of any additional contact and support an individual neighbourhood plan group may require will vary and may depend in part on whether a planning consultant is appointed to help.

For its part, the Council has identified that the key to a successful working arrangement is the appointment of a dedicated named Officer for each neighbourhood plan. On receipt of an application for a neighbourhood plan area designation the town/parish council is allocated a named Officer who will act as their primary point of contact in the Council. Your named Officer will be one of the planning officers/principal planning officers from within the Planning Policy and Delivery Team. The named Officer will be supported by another member of the team to ensure continuity when the named Officer is not available. You will also be provided with contact details for the Communities Team.

The role of the named Officer is to provide support and guidance to the neighbourhood plan group through the plan preparation process. It is the named Officer who will undertake or oversee, those parts of the neighbourhood plan process which fall to the Council. All requests for assistance or information from other teams in the Council should initially be directed via the named Officer. The named Officer should always be copied into any subsequent correspondence between the neighbourhood plan group and those other sections of the Council. This will ensure that the named Officer is able to remain up to date with issues and matters as your plan progresses.

The Parish Council should also identify the main contact within the Neighbourhood Plan group. Contact with the Neighbourhood Plan group will primarily take place with and/or include the main contact, unless specified otherwise for a particular matter.

It is also important if you are using a consultant that regular contact between the Neighbourhood Plan group and the Council is maintained, as per the paragraph above, and that it is clear if the consultant and Neighbourhood Plan group have differing views on any matter.

Depending on what your plan will deliver, you may need to contact Suffolk County Council officers (such as highways, education etc). However, it would be appreciated if your named Officer is copied in on any relevant correspondence.

Stage	Neighbourhood Plan group responsibility	Council (LPA) role and responsibility.
1. Area Designation Application	Meet with LPA ahead of submitting application to confirm neighbourhood area is appropriate.	Appoint named Officer and determine Neighbourhood Area application (may or may not require public consultation). Publish Decision Notice on website
	Complete and submit application for neighbourhood area designation.	
2. Early Draft Plan Initial Stages, Drafting policies and SEA / AA (Appropriate Assessment under the Habitat Regulations)	Establish working group; budgets; reporting procedures; communication strategy etc.	Communities Team can provide advice/support to set up working group; funding applications etc
	Produce project plan and share with named Officer and Communities Team contact.	Named Officer and Communities Team to note timelines.
	The project plan should be regularly updated and shared with your named officer.	
	Understand existing planning policy position (includes looking at types of planning applications regularly received).	Named Officer to provide list of relevant strategic planning policies; and an indicative housing requirement if requested
	Identify local issues, including through public consultation. Ensure that responses received show a geographic and demographic spread. May require additional consultation to be undertaken.	Communities Team can provide guidance on how to go about identification of local issues. Named Officer and Communities Team can help with questionnaires. (Note guidance on website).
	Meet with named Officer and Communities Team to	Named Officer and Communities Team to meet

Stage	Neighbourhood Plan group responsibility	Council (LPA) role and responsibility.
	<p>confirm which local issues may be dealt with through a neighbourhood plan and identify any gaps in evidence. Make use of published guidance identified on Council website; look and learn from examiners reports into other neighbourhood plans; make use of census information and other relevant published evidence.</p>	<p>with QB to confirm which local issues are appropriately dealt with through the neighbourhood plan; identify existing policy coverage and where the neighbourhood plan could add value to existing /emerging policies; advise where evidence may be found or what additional evidence may be required. Help identify how non-planning matters might be dealt with (for single requests the LPA will respond within 1 week or advise when a full response will be provided if this is likely to take more time.)</p>
	<p>Identify map and data requirements and if needed request help with map production – this should be in a GIS format. Liaise with Lead Officer to agree map colours/shading etc (necessary to avoid map clashes when policies transposed onto single policies map for the district).</p>	<p>Assist with map production if requested. Provide data requested.</p>
	<p>Produce first set of draft policies.</p> <p>Thoroughly check draft document, maps and plans and any supporting documents before sending to named officer</p> <p>Send draft policies to named Officer.</p>	<p>Provide detailed commentary on draft policies and compliance with Basic Conditions and return to neighbourhood plan group.</p> <p>Allow 5 weeks to ensure that there is time for internal consultation and</p>

Stage	Neighbourhood Plan group responsibility	Council (LPA) role and responsibility.
		<p>reviewing the full draft and returning comments</p> <p>However, we may need longer if advance notice has not been provided.</p> <p>Arrange meeting date to discuss comments</p>
	<p>Meet with named Officer to discuss response received and amend draft policies.</p>	<p>Meet with neighbourhood plan group to discuss comments and suggested amendments. Undertake initial discussions on additional documents – Basic Conditions Statement; Community Consultation Statement. Request QB include option to opt in to information being shared with LPA on consultation documentation (GDPR compliant).</p>
<p>4. Pre- submission (min 6-week consultation)</p>	<p>Undertake and consult on draft screening opinion of draft pre-submission plan; or request named Officer to do this. You will need to provide a draft of the plan for the purposes of screening</p>	<p>If asked: undertake draft screening opinion including consultation and publication of final screening opinion. (Approximately 8-10 weeks – includes 5-week consultation period). Publish final screening opinion on website.</p>
	<p>Formal consultation stage – undertake consultation on Pre-Submission Draft Plan.</p>	<p>LPA is a consultee. Named Officer to co-ordinate Council response and provide comments back by date required</p>

Stage	Neighbourhood Plan group responsibility	Council (LPA) role and responsibility.
	<p>Send copy of draft submission documents to your named Officer to review these and ensure they are satisfied before moving on to Reg 16 consultation</p> <p>Note: allow approximately 2-4 weeks each time a new draft is submitted for comment</p>	<p>Check draft submission plan and associated documents for further consideration against basic conditions and legal compliance.</p> <p>Note: allow approximately 4 weeks each time a new draft is submitted for comment.</p>
	(Additional meetings and re-drafting may be required at this stage).	
4. Submission (min 6-week consultation)	Submit plan together with other submission documents. Provide named Officer with list of respondents from Pre-submission stage (subject to GDPR)	Named Officer to ensure all required submission documents have been received. Named officer to publicise submission draft plan
	Agree examiner with LPA	Named Officer to liaise with neighbourhood plan group to apply for and appoint independent examiner (approximately 4 weeks).
5. Examination	Respond to any queries from examiner.	Named Officer to submit required documentation to independent examiner. Respond to any queries from examiner. Publicise Examiners Report
6. Consideration of Examiners Report	Discuss any recommended modifications with your named Officer.	Named Officer to discuss any recommended modifications with neighbourhood plan group and relevant officers. Request that neighbourhood plan group amend plan to incorporate

Stage	Neighbourhood Plan group responsibility	Council (LPA) role and responsibility.
		<p>recommended modifications.</p>
	<p>Amend plan and return to LPA as Referendum Version (approximately 2 weeks).</p>	<p>Council to consider Examiners report and formally sign off modifications by the issuing of the Decision Statement.</p> <p>Publish Decision Statement on East Suffolk website.</p> <p>In some circumstances additional time and/or consultation will be needed</p> <p>*Note timescales from publication of examiners report to final 'making' the neighbourhood plan are dictated by Regulations</p> <p>Officers issue decision statement no later than 5 weeks from the receipt of examiners report – the publication of this triggers the referendum countdown</p>
7. Referendum	<p>Neighbourhood Plan group can encourage people to vote but not influence their choice of vote. You can request 2 members of the group to observe the official count</p>	<p>Named Officer to provide information to Electoral Services Section.</p> <p>Electoral Services team is responsible for the referendum process.</p> <p>Referendum will take place no sooner than 28 days and no later than 56 of the publication of the Examiners report</p> <p>Referendum documents published including information statement</p>

Stage	Neighbourhood Plan group responsibility	Council (LPA) role and responsibility.
		giving referendum date and where to vote Social media and press releases issued Polling cards sent to all registered voters in the neighbourhood plan area
8. Making the plan	Amend plan following decision by Council for it to be re-published as 'made' plan.	Prepare Report for full Council to take decision on 'making' the plan
	Assist named Officer in publicising 'made' plan.	Liaise with Neighbourhood Plan group for plan to be published as 'made' version and publicised.

Meetings:

The meetings listed in the table above are the minimum amount that need to be held between the Council and the neighbourhood plan group. They represent critical points in the neighbourhood plan preparation progress and when the Council can add most value and support to the work being undertaken.

Your named officer and Communities Team contact will be available to attend other meetings as the work progresses but will not be a regular attendee at your working group meetings. They will attend where specific input is required to assist a debate and clarify what you will need to do. Nonetheless, it is recommended that your named officer and Community Team contact are provided with a copy of the agenda / discussion topics for each meeting to allow them the opportunity to discuss any potential issues with the Neighbourhood Plan Group, the need for any input and whether this would be by attendance or the provision of written advice. This would be in addition to any meetings where specific attendance is requested.

The following meeting arrangements should be followed where your named officer and/ or Community Team contact attendance is required:

- An agenda should always be provided. If papers / draft documents are to be debated these should be circulated with the agenda a minimum of a week before the meeting.

- Where possible meetings should take place during office hours.
- Attendance at meetings will generally be limited to 1.5hrs (excluding travel time).
- Draft minutes of the meeting should be circulated for agreement to all attendees.
- When draft policy documents are to be discussed, the meeting time should be extended.

Named Officers:

Named Officer:

Tel:

Email:

Supporting Officer:

Tel:

Email:

Communities Team Officer:

Tel:

Email:

Experience has shown that the amount of time a named officer will be required to dedicate to any individual neighbourhood plan will vary. The timings set out in Table 1 are based on our experience to date and are considered to be realistic.

Community Team contact time:

The role for the Community Team is primarily at the start of the neighbourhood plan process. They can provide invaluable help and guidance in getting your neighbourhood plan team up and running; how to go about identifying local issues; and funding opportunities and community engagement.

Given the varied range of information and guidance likely to be requested, your Community Team contact will agree with you the extent of the help required and the timeframe within which a response can be provided. Attendance at meetings or community events will be

subject to officer availability and a wide range of new engagement toolkits and suggestions will be provided by your nominated Communities Officer.

Full document links:

NPPF:

[National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework)

Planning Practice Guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>

Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan:

<http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-planning/preparing-a-neighbourhood-plan/>

Community Consultation Questionnaire:

<http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/assets/Planning/Neighbourhood-Planning/Preparing-a-Neighbourhood-Plan/Community-consultation-questionnaires-guide.pdf>

Appendix 3

Habitats Regulation Assessment/Strategic Environmental Assessment screening: what are they?

Both Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) are tools used in the UK planning system for both local and neighbourhood plans, to ensure that plans and projects consider their environmental impacts before they're approved.

The aim of the SEA is to promote sustainable development by integrating environmental considerations into planning from the outset. It assesses matters like biodiversity, air and water quality, landscape, and cultural heritage. HRA is used to determine whether plans or projects are likely to have a significant effect on European designated sites under the Habitats Directive.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA):

- **Purpose:** A Strategic Environmental Assessment assesses the potential positive and negative environmental impacts of a neighbourhood plan on local environmental assets.
- **Requirement:** If a screening process identified that a plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, a full Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
- **Timing:** Strategic Environmental Assessment screening is usually undertaken after an early draft of the neighbourhood plan has been drawn up, and it is good practice for the qualifying body to submit a screening request as soon as possible.
- **Process:** The Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations outline a series of sequential steps (these steps are screening, scoping, establish baseline, assessment of alternatives, creation of report and consultation) that must be undertaken as part of any Strategic Environmental Assessment.
- **Benefits:** A Strategic Environmental Assessment helps neighbourhood planners understand environmental impacts and tailor the plan's content to promote sustainable development.

Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA):

- **Purpose:** Habitats Regulations Assessment determines if a neighbourhood plan would have a significant impact on nature conservation sites of European importance (also referred to as Habitat Sites or Natura 2000 sites).
- **Requirement:** All plans that may have a significant effect on designated European sites are required to undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment.
- **Timing:** Habitats Regulations Assessment screening is usually undertaken after an early draft of the neighbourhood plan has been drawn up, and it is good practice for the qualifying body to submit a screening request as soon as possible.

- **Process:** Habitats Regulations Assessment legislation sets out a clear step by step approach for decision makers considering any plan or project against the HRA requirements. The first step is screening to determine if the plan is likely to have any significant effects on relevant site. If the screening stage identifies a likelihood of significant effects, an appropriate assessment is required.
- **Relationship to SEA:** If a plan requires a full Strategic Environmental Assessment, it will also require a Habitats Regulations Assessment.

Key Considerations:

- **Screening:** For both SEA and HRA the responsible authority determines whether a plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, commonly called "screening". This is the first step in the process.
- **Compliance:** Failure to adhere to the SEA and HRA processes can put a plan at risk of legal challenge.
- **Evidence Base:** SEA and HRA can form a component of the evidence base for a neighbourhood plan, alongside other evidence like household surveys and housing needs assessments. The outcomes of the reports should inform the content of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Who should screen a Neighbourhood Plan?

The Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment Regulations require the responsible authority to determine whether a plan will have significant effects and whether a full Strategic Environmental Assessment and/ or Appropriate Assessment is required as a result. This is referred to as the Screening stage. In most instances the Local Planning Authority will undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment screenings as we will be responsible for ensuring that the requirements have been met prior to the Neighbourhood Plan being made.

When should a Neighbourhood Plan be screened?

It is good practice to submit your request for screening as early as possible. Although legislation is not prescriptive about when screening is required, early screening will identify any potential issues that can then be addressed at the earliest possible stage and any recommendations incorporated into the plan as it develops.

It is important to remember that a full draft neighbourhood plan with policies is not necessary for the screening to be carried out. If the neighbourhood plan area has significant environmental constraints and the plan is considering site allocations, it is especially important for screening to take place as early as possible—before a full draft is prepared. Ideally, screening should be conducted well in advance of the pre-submission Regulation 14 consultation version of the plan. You will need both screening opinions, and any further SEA and HRA reports before submitting your plan for the Regulation 16 consultation.

If the neighbourhood plan has changed significantly since it was screened (e.g. new policies are drafted), a rescreening may be required.

What happens if full Strategic Environmental Assessment and /Habitats Regulation Assessment is needed?

A full Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment will usually only be needed if housing/development that was not included in the local plan is included in the neighbourhood plan.

A full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) are typically carried out by or on behalf of the neighbourhood planning group with the support of planning consultants or environmental specialists with expertise in these assessments. In the case of HRA in particular, it is likely that specialist ecology advice will be required.

However, East Suffolk Council plays a key role in the process:

- For SEA, the Council usually conducts a screening opinion to determine whether a full SEA is required. If it is, the neighbourhood planning group must ensure the assessment is completed, often with professional support.
- For HRA, the competent authority, usually the Council, must formally carry out or approve the assessment, especially the Appropriate Assessment stage if needed.

In both cases, the assessments must follow legal requirements and are subject to consultation with statutory bodies (Natural England, Historic England, and the Environment Agency). They will assess the impact of the proposed development on local environmental assets and impact on nature conservation sites of European importance. This process takes around five weeks so this will need to be considered when looking at your project plan. Once the SEA screening is undertaken, we have a duty to publish the screening report which means that there might be new information about your plan in the public domain.

Appendix 4

Advisory note for sharing consultee details with East Suffolk Council

During consultations on the Neighbourhood Plan, we will ask you to include the following statement on your website and/or make people aware and to ensure that their contact details can be passed to us for the later consultation stages.

Discretionary:

The information you have supplied is being collected for the xxx Neighbourhood Plan. By completing this form, you consent to xxx Neighbourhood Planning Group using your information in this way.

As part of the neighbourhood planning process, you have the option for East Suffolk Council to contact you in connection with later stages of the plan's development. Please read the statement below and tick the box if you consent to your details being shared.

Your information will be retained by the Neighbourhood Planning Group and East Suffolk Council until the Neighbourhood Plan is made following examination and referendum. You can request that your information is deleted at any time, however you will not be informed directly of any progress the Plan may make.

Data will be processed and held securely by East Suffolk Council and in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 (and any updates) and the [Planning Policy and Delivery Privacy Notice](#).

Please read the following statement and check the box:

I consent to my information being shared with East Suffolk Council so they can contact me in the future in connection with the later phases of the Neighbourhood Plan/Planning document