
Neighbourhood Planning Activity in East Devon

There are now 27 neighbourhood plans in operation across the district. According to industry research published this Spring, East Devon is in the top 20 of Local Planning Authorities in the country with the greatest geographical coverage of neighbourhood plans. This is testament to the dedication and hard work of numerous local councillors and volunteers.

We are currently working with Woodbury to move their submitted plan on to formal consultation and examination. This is one of the last in the pipeline of neighbourhood plans coming through under the current adopted Local Plan since neighbourhood planning was introduced.

We recognise that the preparation of a new Local Plan in recent years has made it more challenging and uncertain for neighbourhood planning and many communities have, understandably, focused time and effort on engaging with consultations on the new local plan proposals. At the same time however, we welcome the renewed interest in neighbourhood planning that this has sparked in some areas, with new Neighbourhood Areas designated for West Hill and Plymtree parishes, and the first review and update of an existing neighbourhood plan for Bishops Clyst (Clyst St Mary & Sowton). The latter is heading for referendum shortly and significantly, includes the addition of an allocation of land for housing, aligning it more to the emerging Local Plan and giving it greater weight in decisions.

You can find out further details on all our neighbourhood plans here:

- [Neighbourhood Plans being produced in East Devon - East Devon](#)

Emerging new Local Plan: State of Play

The first half of this year has largely involved work relating to the formal consultation on the 'Regulation 19' stage draft Plan, which closed in March 2025. We received a large response to the consultation. This expressed much concern about overall housing numbers and some of the larger site allocations in particular, and raised issues of conflict with many existing neighbourhood plans. There was also much support for policies relating to environmental protection, many of which go further than in the adopted Local Plan, in recognition of the climate emergency and more recent evidence.

An initial report on the feedback received to the consultation was taken to our Strategic Planning Committee in early July. The [summary report](#) can be viewed together with an updated [Local Development Scheme](#), which sets out the latest timetable for the Local Plan.

We are now in the lead up to a further formal Regulation 19 stage consultation and focusing on ensuring various items of outstanding technical evidence are available for this, together with any changes required to the plan further to the consultation responses. This second and final consultation is expected to focus predominantly on the outcome of current master planning and transport modelling work related to the proposed new community.

On the current timetable, we would expect this consultation to take place in the autumn, with submission for independent examination next Spring and plan adoption during 2027.

Whilst the content of the new Local Plan is still subject to change, there is now a greater degree of certainty of its policies and proposals. This can be used to help to inform consideration of the focus and content for new and updated neighbourhood plans, which will need to generally align with the strategy but are well placed to add local detail and specificity to reflect local needs and circumstances.

As always, the best way to follow progress on the emerging new Local Plan is by keeping an eye on reports and minutes from our (approx. monthly) [Strategic Planning Committee](#). All meetings are available to watch live and as a recording on the [Council's YouTube Channel](#). Information related to the emerging Local Plan, including the full text as it currently stands and the raft of supporting evidence (which neighbourhood plan groups can also make use of), is also on our [website](#).

Government support for Neighbourhood Planning

As many of you will now be aware, the Government unexpectedly discontinued the annual grants programme to support neighbourhood plan production, run by Locality, as a result of the last spending review. This was not something we were consulted about or anticipated and naturally we are disappointed by this decision. The Government has however stressed that this does not signal the abolition of neighbourhood plans and that they will remain an option for communities to take advantage of as they see fit, and to build on the wealth of [knowledge and resources](#) that have been generated over the last decade of funded support.

We are working closely with other Local Planning Authorities in considering how best to support neighbourhood planning activity. Drawing on what you told us about your community's neighbourhood planning aspirations and support needs in our 2023 neighbourhood planning intention survey and from gathering best practice locally and from elsewhere, we are confident that meaningful neighbourhood planning can be supported to continue. Potentially simpler yet more effective plans may result, and some existing neighbourhood plans could likely be updated without significant work or cost implication.

Changes to the Plan Making System

The new Government continues to move forward with proposed changes to the plan-making system further to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 and the current Planning and Infrastructure bill, as well as the proposals for Local Government Re-organisation. We are still awaiting updates to the neighbourhood planning regulations to fully implement changes, including the introduction of the Neighbourhood Priority Statements, and also the proposed suite of national model development management policies.

An [updated version](#) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in December 2024, with the most significant changes relating to the Government's agenda for increasing delivery of new homes. A further update to the NPPF is expected later this year.

Any neighbourhood plans need to take account of the current national and Local Plan policy framework as exists at the time, with an eye on the overall direction of travel.

Neighbourhood Planning: Now and Future

Within the on-going changes nationally to streamline the plan-making system, the essence of neighbourhood plans remains the same, i.e. to increase community involvement and influence in planning for and shaping local development, building on the strategic policy context.

As we move into the later stages of the Local Plan making process, we are now encouraging communities with existing neighbourhood plans to consider reviewing and updating them, and for communities without a neighbourhood plan, to explore whether there may be merit in preparing one. It is worth bearing in mind that where there is an adopted (made) neighbourhood plan in place, not only will its policies carry statutory weight at least equal to that of the local plan in decisions on applications, the town / parish council will receive an enhanced (25% uncapped) level of CIL receipts collected from development in their area. Furthermore, the weight given to plans (Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans alike) has been enhanced in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, requiring planning decisions to be made in accordance with plans, unless material considerations strongly indicate otherwise.

All existing neighbourhood plans remain in place and are being given as much weight as possible in decisions on applications, although this is being impacted by the current shortfall in our housing land supply, which as many of you will know makes it more difficult to refuse speculative applications at this time. This makes the adoption of the new Local Plan particularly important. This, in turn, depends on a full (5-year) housing land supply being demonstrated, but once adopted, the Plan policies will carry full weight in planning decisions.

We are currently investigating the possibility of holding an event (in-person or online) open to all our town and parish councils and neighbourhood planning groups in the autumn, to update on the Local Plan and provide support for future neighbourhood planning in the district. There is potential for this to be delivered in association with [Locality](#) and other providers of support and guidance. More detail to follow. In the meantime, **please contact us to register your interest in attending and to make any suggestions of topics for the agenda or make any other requests or suggestions to make this a worthwhile session.**

More generally, do continue to get in touch if you have any questions or need any advice relating to neighbourhood planning (contact details on the cover page). If you are looking for inspiration of what neighbourhood planning can do for your community, you might be interested to view the [case studies](#) recently published by Locality to celebrate 10 years of neighbourhood planning.

