

Neighbourhood Planning Guidance

Gathering evidence and information

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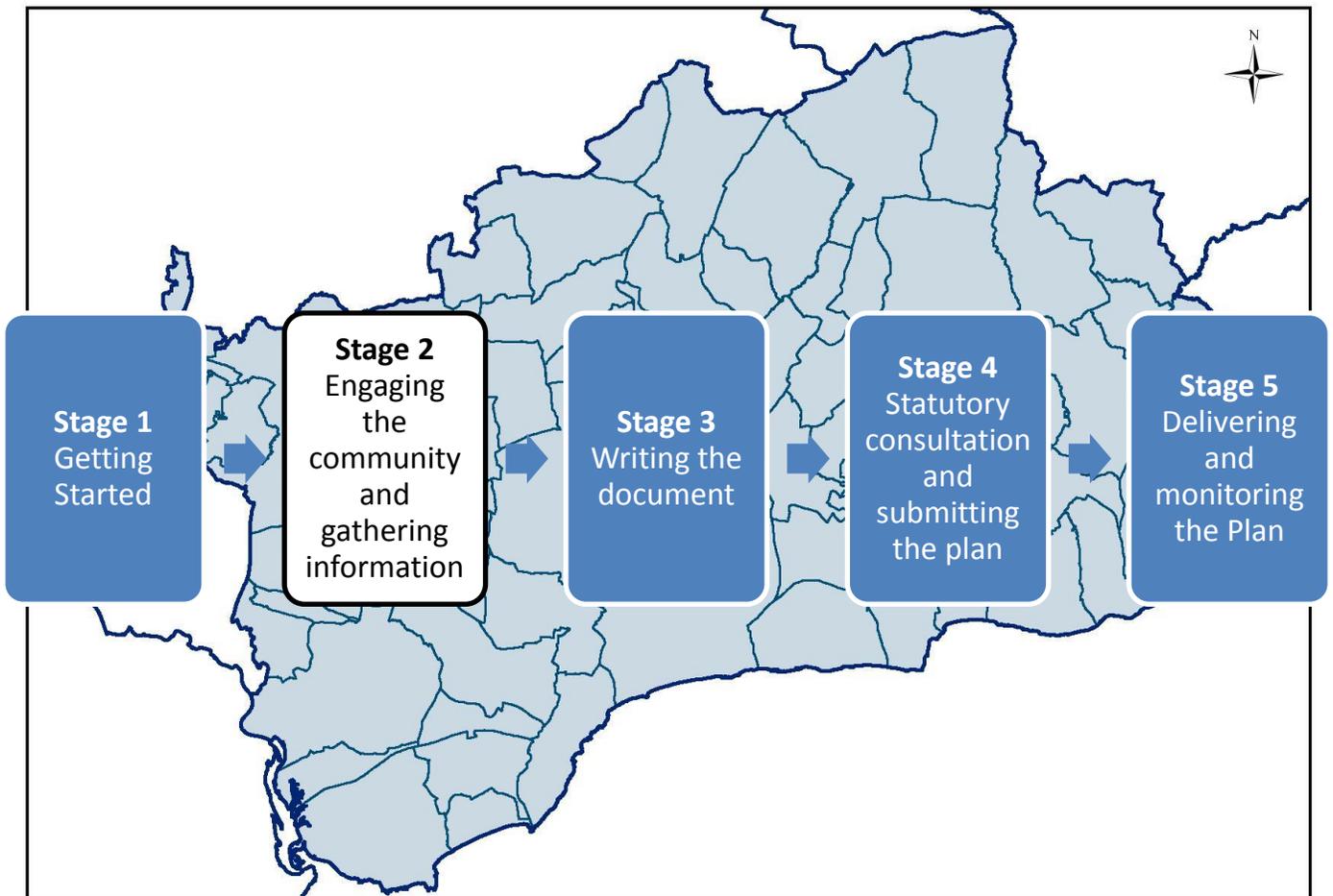


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Produced by the Planning Policy Team
01395 571533

planningpolicy@eastdevon.gov.uk

Gathering Evidence and Information

Your Neighbourhood Plan will be an important document that will form part of the development plan once adopted. It is therefore necessary for the content of your plan to be supported by a robust evidence base. Whilst the evidence requirements are not as rigorous as those for a Local Planning Authority formulating a Local Plan, your plan can still run into difficulties at examination if the contents is not supported by the data you have gathered.

This guide has been put together to advise groups on what evidence you will need to gather to support your Neighbourhood Plan, the best methods of collecting it and where you can find it.

Top Tips!

1. Don't be daunted!

Once you start building your evidence base, it is very easy to start feeling overwhelmed as you are exposed to the range of potential sources available to you. Whilst evidence is an important part of the plan making process, you only need to present enough evidence to support the approach that you have taken in your plan.

2. Tailor your evidence to your objectives!

Make sure you only gather evidence that is useful. There is no use in quoting figures and facts in your plan out of context that do not necessarily support the decisions you have taken in your plan. For example, if one of your objectives is to '*meet identified housing needs across all sections of the community*' then you will need support that objective with an up-to-date housing needs assessment.

3. Don't duplicate!

Don't conduct unnecessary work! You only need to gather more evidence if you plan on varying or adding detail to already adopted policies. For example, if a particular site or set number of houses were allocated in the local plan, the work justifying that site can be used that as evidence for your plan without the need for duplication

4. Evidence should be proportionate!

Ultimately, the evidence you gather needs to be "proportionate" so the more challenging or unusual the approach you take, the more evidence you'll need to support that decision. If a particular policy you have included is controversial or has drawn criticism from the local community, the inspector will scrutinise the evidence you have gathered to see whether the approach taken is justified. Conversely, if a policy is less controversial the evidence required will be less stringent.

5. Evidence should be appropriate!

The evidence you do gather should be the evidence should be focused tightly on supporting and justifying the particular policies in your plan. When assessing whether you need to include a particular policy it may be useful to ask yourself the following questions?

- Is it relevant to our area and the objectives?
- Does it support the choice/s made in the plan?
- What would happen if we didn't use it?

6. Evidence should be up-to-date!

There are no guidelines for how up-to-date the evidence needs to be but it is important to remember that the older the data you are using, the less reliable it may be. If the situation or demographic of your area has changed since the study was undertaken, this should be considered before using it to support key decisions in your plan.

7. Think of the developers!

It's important to remember that there will be numerous parties that will have an interest in developing land that will not necessarily have been included in your Neighbourhood Plan. It's safe to say that some developers with significant resources will be looking very closely at the evidence behind the policies you include in your plan in order to find a weakness. Should it come to a legal challenge you will need to have the confidence to stand up to defend your policies.

Step 1: Review the existing evidence

Where possible, neighbourhood groups should use evidence that is already in the public domain. It may be that existing evidence will be sufficient to cover certain topics in your plan which will negate the necessity of conducting your own research.

A good starting point is to look at the demographics of your area, e.g. population changes, housing types and tenures, occupations etc, to start putting together a profile of your Parish, this may already have been done if your Parish has already produced a Parish or Community Plan. The profile will help you build a picture of the current social portrait of the parish and will give you an understanding of the current situation, as well as identifying future needs.

To support the parish profile, you will also need to gather and interpret all other evidence related or relevant to your plan. The profile and your expert knowledge of the parish should already give you an insight as to what you think may be the main issues for your community, so now is the opportunity to start developing and supporting these ideas.

This can be organised in different ways. One practical method is to set up task groups to look at the various topics of research, e.g. the environment, housing, economy, heritage, amenities etc that can then report back to the steering group on progress.

These task groups can then undertake an assessment of the area's physical assets and take note of the various land use designations that apply to the neighbourhood area to help understand the constraints and opportunities available for development and for conservation.

This can be carried out by a mixture of desk top research of existing evidence and walks through the area to photograph assets, note them on a map and also make a record of their condition. Assets may include community centres/village halls, churches, recreation grounds, play areas, sports facilities, allotments, health facilities, housing stock, footpath networks, highways infrastructure, employment sites. The audit may also include often unseen infrastructure such as energy generation and broadband.

Top Example! – Aylesbeare, East Devon

The Aylesbeare Neighbourhood Plan Group have pulled together a short and concise review of existing evidence related to their parish which has helped inform the decisions taken in their Neighbourhood Plan.

To view their evidence base follow this link:

<http://www.aylesbeareparishcouncil.co.uk/Core/Aylesbeare-PC/UserFiles/Files/Draft%20review%20April%202015.pdf>

Important!

At this stage, you should also be making a note of topics where you can't find any current information, or the information is out-of date and requires updating. It may be that you'll want to conduct your own research to fill these gaps.

East Devon District Council has a duty to support Parishes in creating their Neighbourhood Plan. We have drafted out a series of evidence collection worksheets to help support you along this process, these can be found on page 13.

East Devon District Council can also provide your group with up-to-date maps showing the locations of various features in your parish including:

- Built-up Area Boundaries
- Conservation Areas
- Listed buildings and ancient monuments
- Tree Preservation Orders (and protected groups of trees)
- Wildlife sites
- Ancient woodlands
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Coastal Preservation Areas
- Flood-zones
- Cycle routes
- Open spaces such as allotments, churchyards, recreation space
- Sites of special interest or importance

- Landscape character
- Heritage sites

If you require any maps containing this information please don't hesitate to contact us at planningpolicy@eastdevon.co.uk.

We have also put together a table which parishes can use as a steer to the kind of existing information that is already out there. We have tried to advise by not only compiling evidence used as supporting documents for the East Devon Local Plan, but have also looked for other sources that parishes may find useful. You can find this table on page 9.

Step 2: Conducting surveys to gauge community aspirations

This step is all about using the information you collected in the previous stage to engage with residents, community groups and businesses to ascertain their views and opinions about the area, as well as their needs and aspirations for the future.

East Devon District Council have put together a comprehensive guide to get the best out of consultation. This can be found at the following link:

<http://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/886685/guide-to-consultation-v2.pdf>

A variety of techniques and approaches should be used to maximise opportunities for involvement. The range of consultation methods that are particularly suited to neighbourhood planning includes:

- Self-completion questionnaires
- Public meetings
- Focus groups
- Stakeholder seminars
- Parish website
- Exhibitions

The steering group will need to decide which methods to use to engage different sections of the community or to cover particular topics / themes in more depth. Landowners should be invited to comment on site specific issues. Relevant organisations and protected groups should be invited to comment on matters where they have a particular interest.

For each community involvement exercise, the steering group must gather basic demographic data to show some information about who took part. In addition, the steering group should continue to gather the contact details of anyone interested in the Neighbourhood Plan so they can be kept informed and invited to comment at later stages.

When selecting and designing methods to gather information, the steering group must also consider how responses will be processed and the costs involved.

Once you have completed an initial engagement with the community you can then start to bring all of the information you have collected in order to develop your aims and objectives for the area. This next step is tackled in the subsequent guidance note.

Evidence Base Source Tables

The following table is aimed to provide communities with a steer on the sources they could use to collect existing evidence bases to support the development of their Neighbourhood Plan.

Demographic/Parish Profile Data	
Population	<p>Devon County Council have pulled together a brilliantly simple resource for Neighbourhood Plan Groups wanting census data specific to their parish areas. https://new.devon.gov.uk/factsandfigures/area-profile/</p> <p>https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning-in-east-devon Rural services online have put together a series of interactive tables and graphs of demographic data taken from the latest census conducted in 2011.</p> <p>Alternatively, you will be able to locate all census data topics on the national statistics website below.</p> <p>http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/</p> <p>For those that prefer a visual representation of census data, data shine has mapped out all the census data layers into an intuitive, interactive resource. http://datashine.org.uk/ .</p> <p>Profiling data may also have been put together as part of work carried out on any parish or community plans previously adopted in your parish. Lists of these can be found at the following location.</p> <p>http://new.eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-and-community-plans/parish-plans/</p> <p>The Indices of Multiple Deprivation, 2015, includes information on various aspects of deprivation including income, employment, education, health, crime, children, older people and housing.</p> <p>http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/idmap.html</p> <p>The Church Urban fund provides an online look up tool. It shows data on the church parish system (rather than the town and parish council area) but in rural areas these are likely to be very closely matched. It is very simple to use and provides a quick visual representation of what, if any, are the particular issues within the area relating to the causes of poverty. This data is based on the indices of multiple deprivation.</p> <p>http://www2.cuf.org.uk/poverty-lookup-tool</p>
Number of dwellings	
Age Structure	
Economic Activity	
Household Composition	
Car or Van availability	
Occupation	
Qualifications and Students	
Deprivation	
Housing Tenure	
Health and Care	<p>The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) looks at the current and future health and care needs of local populations to inform and guide the planning and commissioning (buying) of health, well-being and social care services within Devon.</p> <p>http://www.devonhealthandwellbeing.org.uk/jsna/</p>
Housing	

Local Plan Housing Allocations	If relevant, housing allocations for your area can be found in Strategies 20-27 in the adopted Local Plan: https://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan-2013-2031/
Affordable Housing Needs Surveys	A Housing Needs Survey will assess the demand for affordable housing in your area. The majority of these in East Devon are conducted by Devon Communities Together. More information and contacts can be found on the following website: https://www.devoncommunities.org.uk/services/catalyst-consultancy
Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment	This identifies a range of potential housing sites and assesses them against deliverability criteria such as transport access and location on flood plains etc. The latest SHLAA for East Devon was conducted in 2012 and can be found at the following location alongside those conducted in previous years. http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/housing-issues/strategic-housing-land-availability-assessment/
East Devon Draft Villages Plan	The Villages plan sets out the extent of the built-up area boundaries for the 15 settlements identified in strategy 27 of the Local Plan. http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/villages-plan/ A previous version of the Villages Plan also undertook various assessments of development sites in the villages which can also be useful information to inform decisions in your plan. http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/villages-plan/village-document-library/
Housing Aspirations of Older People Living in Rural Devon	This study, undertaken in January 2011 assesses some of the demands for certain types of development across the district. http://new.eastdevon.gov.uk/planning-libraries/evidence-document-library/chapter8.1-housing/hsg006-housingaspirationsofolderpeoplelivinginruraldevon-2011.pdf
Housing and employment study	Assesses the demand and potential provision for housing and employment within the East Devon District. (This may not be particularly relevant for the smaller parishes) http://new.eastdevon.gov.uk/planning-libraries/evidence-document-library/chapter8.1-housing/hsg002-eastdevonhousingandemploymentstudy2011.pdf
Amenities and Open Space	
Open Space Study	An assessment of open spaces for recreational use across the district in terms of current provision and opportunities for enhancement. http://new.eastdevon.gov.uk/planning-libraries/evidence-document-library/chapter8.4-environment/env046-openspacestudyreview2014.pdf
Fixed Sports Facilities Assessment	An assessment of non-pitch sports facilities across the district in terms of current provision and opportunities for enhancement. http://new.eastdevon.gov.uk/planning-libraries/evidence-document-library/chapter8.4-environment/env029-assessmentoffixedsportfacilitiesforeastdevon.pdf

Playing Pitch Strategy	An assessment of playing pitches across the district in terms of current provision and opportunities for enhancement. http://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/1182367/adopted-east-devon-pps-2015.pdf
Facilities Checklist	A checklist produced in 2009 listing local community assets. http://new.eastdevon.gov.uk/planning-libraries/evidence-document-library/chapter8.5-parish-and-town-councils/ptc020a-facilitieschecklist.pdf
East Devon Interactive Map	Allows you to view the location of play areas and crematoria. http://maps2.eastdevon.gov.uk/mapping/localplan2016/
Heritage and the historic environment	
Listed and historic buildings	English heritage has produced a comprehensive database of all nationally designated heritage assets. These can also be viewed using an interactive map for ease of reference. https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list The Devon Historic Environment record also provides a comprehensive resource of archaeological sites, historic buildings, historic landscape and other heritage features within Devon.
Scheduled monuments	https://new.devon.gov.uk/historicenvironment/the-devon-historic-environment-record/ The Devon History Society's website contains a host of local historic information about Devon and the group has conducted various research projects in the Devon area which are available to access.
Registered parks and gardens	http://www.devonhistorysociety.org.uk/ The South West Heritage Trust holds all types of historical archives relating to the county of Devon and the City of Exeter. These include the records of ecclesiastical parishes, the Diocese of Exeter, county, district and parish councils, and innumerable families, estates, businesses, societies, chapels, schools and individuals. https://devon-cat.swheritage.org.uk/
World heritage sites	East Devon District Council has also started the process of formulating a local list of important heritage assets that are not currently offered national protection as a listed building or scheduled monument. Neighbourhood Planning offers an excellent opportunity to not only identify these unlisted assets but also offer them greater protection in your plan. More information on this can be found on the English Heritage website by clicking on the following link: https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/improve-your-neighbourhood/policy-writing/
Historic Maps	Devon County Council has a selection of Tithe maps and apportionments to view on their website https://www.devon.gov.uk/historicenvironment/tithe-map/ or at the Devon Heritage Centre.

	British history online provides historic ordinance survey maps across Devon dating back to the 19 th century. http://www.british-history.ac.uk/map.aspx?compid=55114
Conservation area appraisals	East Devon District Council produced a series of conservation area appraisals across the district in 1999. Although these are under review they may still be relevant and hold useful information for your parish. http://eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/planning-services/conservation-and-listed-buildings/conservation-areas/
Heritage at risk	The heritage at risk register provides a list of sites most at risk of being lost through neglect, decay or inappropriate development. Allows you to search by parish. https://www.historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk
Historic Landscape	In 2005 Devon County Council conducted a study to record and understand the wider historic landscape of the county by characterising areas across Devon. https://www.devon.gov.uk/historicenvironment/the-devon-historic-environment-record/historic-landscape-characterisation/
Environment	
Flood risk	The Environment agency hold a flood map for planning which is available for public use https://flood-map-for-planning.service.gov.uk/
Landscape character assessment	Devon County Council, East Devon District Council, East Devon AONB and Blackdown Hills AONB have compiled a landscape character assessment of the various character types across the district to help inform planning policy and decision making. https://eastdevon.gov.uk/media/2816886/lca_complete_final_march-2019_low-res.pdf
Blackdown Hills and East Devon AONB Management Plans	The East Devon and Blackdown Hills AONB Management Plans describe the special qualities of the areas and why the AONB is important, sets out an agreed vision for its future, identifies the challenges and opportunities for the area, and how these will be tackled. http://www.blackdownhillsaonb.org.uk/managementplan.html http://www.eastdevonaonb.org.uk/index.php?page=aonb-management-plan
Devon Biodiversity Records Centre	For a fee of £64.50 + VAT, DBRC are able to provide a neighbourhood plan resource map showing wildlife sites and species information. Information and an example report can be found here http://www.dbrc.org.uk/neighbourhood-plans/
Biodiversity	East Devon District Council holds geographical data on designated wildlife and species sites and can produce maps for any groups upon request free of charge.
Economy	
East Devon retail study	This study analyses the current offering and assesses potential future need across the district up to 2026. http://new.eastdevon.gov.uk/planning-libraries/evidence-document-library/chapter8.3-retail/ret003-eastdevonretailneedsstudy-update2011.pdf

Broadband	Connecting Devon and Somerset are working to roll out superfast broadband availability across areas that are not covered commercially. You can search to see if your Parish is included in their plans. https://www.connectingdevonandsomerset.co.uk/
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Evidence Collection Worksheets

East Devon District Council have produced the following worksheets to guide Neighbourhood Plan producers to think about the broad range of issues a Neighbourhood Plan can tackle.

You can refer to the evidence base table above for some of the answers to these questions, some will need to be answered by conducting some form of community survey, whilst others may not be relevant to your parish at all.

Although not all of these may be relevant or indeed relate specifically to land use, it is a useful exercise to think about the full range of possibilities and gauge community support for various options and priorities, if you can't include a land use policy on them you may wish to include a community action if it's an idea you want to pursue separate to the Neighbourhood Plan process.

The Environment

East Devon is blessed with beautiful countryside. In fact two thirds of the District are recognised as being nationally important for its high landscape quality and designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Many consider the environment one of the main reason why they live here and value the continued protection of it.

The following questions are intended to encourage communities to consider the environment and biodiversity in their Neighbourhood Plan.

- Are there any designated environmental sites in or close to your neighbourhood plan area? (This could include Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, County Wildlife Sites, Nature Reserves, SSSI, Coastal Protection Areas etc).
- In some cases, large mitigation zones have been identified around 'Special Areas of Conservation' such as the Exe Estuary, the Pebblebed Heaths, the River Axe and the Beer Quarry Caves. Even if you are some distance away from these areas, have you checked that they are not relevant to your Plan?
- What would you consider to be the most important aspects of the landscape that require conservation? e.g. hedgerows, woodlands, coastlines, rivers etc.
- Can you think of any positive changes that could be made to the landscape of your area?
- Have there been any recent negative changes to the landscape that should be avoided in the future?
- Where in your parish do you go for the best views?
- Where are the areas in your parish that suffer from flooding?
- Are there any preferred methods of reducing flood risk? e.g. using permeable materials as part of a design guide, incorporating Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) in new development.
- Are there known to be protected species located in sites that you are considering developing in your plan? e.g. birds nesting in hedgerows. Are there measures you could put in place to protect these?
- Are there any important habitat areas located in your parish that may require additional protection or could be enhanced further in your plan?
- Are there buildings which could provide important features for species, for example nesting barn owls or swallows, or bat roosts?

- Is your area surrounded by a green wedge and how important is its protection?
- Could the sites provide any mitigation or enhancement for impacted protected species or habitats? For example could buffer zones for woodlands or watercourses be provided? Or could a new green corridor be created by linking two existing habitat areas?
- Are there any “green corridors” that would be impacted? (For example the removal of hedgerows can break vital routes for dormice or bats, or the removal of parcels of undeveloped land which are already “pinch points”, for example a field or woodland block, can break a green corridor).
- Are there any sites where community open space, for example allotments or an orchard could be sited to link with off-site important habitats?
- Do your identified open spaces meet the criteria to be designated as Local Green Spaces (see Locality’s guide for more information: <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/making-local-green-space-designations-neighbourhood-plan/>) through the Neighbourhood Plan?
- Are there any important trees or ancient trees located in your area?
- Should you introduce green buffer zones to protect views, ecology and the natural landscape?

Housing

For many groups the design, location and scale of dwellings that are going to be developed in their area is the most important issue that a Neighbourhood Plan can tackle.

The following questions are intended to encourage communities to consider housing in their Neighbourhood Plan.

- How many individual dwellings are currently in your area and what type and size are they?
- What are the current housing tenures?
- Is the housing affordable?
- How many dwellings have been built in your area over the last 5-10 years?
- What does the community consider to be an appropriate/needed scale of development?
- Where are the suitable sites for development in your area?
- Are there needs and demands for certain types of development, and if so, what are they? (e.g. for social rented, shared equity, intermediate sector and private rented accommodation).
- Does your area have any notable design features or building styles? e.g. sliding sash windows, roof pitches, material usage etc.
- Has a design statement previously been produced for your town or village, are the contents still relevant and should they be adopted in the Neighbourhood Plan?

The historic environment and heritage

Neighbourhood Planning represents an excellent opportunity to provide greater protection on any heritage assets that the community considers to be important in their area.

East Devon District Council have also started the process of formulating a local list of important heritage assets that are not currently offered national protection as a listed building or scheduled monument. Neighbourhood planning offers an excellent opportunity to not only identify these unlisted assets but also offer them greater protection in your plan. More information on this can be found on the English Heritage website by clicking on the following link: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/improve-your-neighbourhood/policy-writing/>

The following questions are intended to get communities thinking about opportunities to include heritage in their Neighbourhood Plan.

- Where/what are the registered heritage assets in your area?
- Where/what are the heritage assets in your area that are not currently registered?
- Are there particular heritage assets in disrepair or at risk?
- Does your area have a locally distinctive development type in terms of scale, material, features?

Renewable energy

The planning system as a whole, including Neighbourhood Plans has a responsibility to minimise and reduce the Country's carbon emissions. The NPPF in particular states that plans should:

- Support the transition to a low carbon future by encouraging the use of renewable energy – this is a responsibility of all communities;
- Have a positive strategy to promote renewable energy;

Many communities have often limited their focus on renewable energy to considering suitable conditions for the placement of wind turbines and solar energy. It is important to remember that there is more to explore than these issues solely.

Community-run energy schemes in particular are also gathering speed across the country. Neighbourhood Plans provide a great opportunity to gauge support for these and with the benefit of tailoring renewable energy towards supporting local businesses, providing a long term sources of income for the community and reducing fuel bills by enabling local supply, can be a much more appealing prospect than the usual developer-led schemes that do not provide a local benefit.

More information on community-owned energy schemes can be found on the following website; <http://communityenergyengland.org/>

The following questions are intended to encourage communities to consider implementing renewable energy policies into their Neighbourhood Plan.

- Would your community support energy schemes which are owned by and benefit them?
- How might the revenue from any such scheme be invested to improve local services and facilities?
- What energy generation opportunities might there be in your area (in addition to wind and solar?) e.g. geothermal.
- Are any areas particularly suited (or unsuited) to specific forms of renewable energy?
- If your area is coastal, are there opportunities to look into the production or encouragement of small scale hydro energy?
- Is there scope in your area to support the creation of electric vehicle charging points?
- How else can you encourage and facilitate the use of renewable energy?

Transport

Transport can be an issue for many parishes, particularly for those in rural areas that are not served with regular public transport services. Although some of these issues may not necessarily be land use, neighbourhood plans can influence projects that you may wish to develop as part of the outcomes of your Neighbourhood Plan, for example through the introduction of a community action.

The following questions are intended to get communities thinking about opportunities to include transport in their Neighbourhood Plan.

- What does the evidence suggest are the key transport challenges in your community?
- How can transport services help meet these challenges?
- How well is your community currently serviced with public transport? e.g. buses, trains etc.
- Would your community support the introduction of a car-sharing club?
- Does your area operate a community bus service, are there opportunities to create one if not?
- Are there any opportunities to pedestrianise parts of the parish?
- Have 'softer' alternatives (e.g. travel plans) been considered?
- Is congestion a real problem in your parish and are there particular roads that suffer from it?
- Does your parish have a particular issue of cars parked on the roads causing disruption to traffic flow and safety problems?
- Can you think of any ways that these issues could be alleviated?
- What do you and your family use local footpaths, bridleways or cycle paths for?
- Are there any footpaths, bridleways or cycle paths in the area which you have a problem accessing?

Local facilities and amenities

Facilities and amenities are a crucial part of urban and rural life; they offer a social benefit by giving local residents a place to spend their leisure time, an environmental benefit by reducing the need to travel further afield, and an economic benefit by securing local jobs in an area.

The desire to protect and enhance the current range of local facilities is often one of the main reasons why communities embark upon the neighbourhood planning process. At a time when many rural areas are losing vital amenities like post offices and pubs, the need to offer them protection is considered by many to be more important than ever.

The following questions are intended to encourage communities to get them thinking about opportunities to include local facilities in their Neighbourhood Plan.

- What range of facilities that you have in your area?, e.g post office, pubs, doctors surgery
- Are any of these facilities at risk of closure and/or would their loss be a major issue to residents?
- Are there any particular facilities or amenities that you feel your parish is missing, which of these do the community feel are most crucial?
- Is there scope in your plan to include a development that would secure the needed facilities?
- Is there an opportunity in your community to form a community run shop, would your community support this idea?
- Should the neighbourhood development plan encourage a community library in an existing shop or community space?
- What do you value about the community hall? e.g. activities or facilities
- What would you like to see happen to the community hall in the future?
- Does your community support the creation of new allotment sites in your plan?

Contact us:

Planning Policy Team
East Devon District Council
Blackdown House
Border Road
Heathpark Industrial Estate
Honiton
EX14 1EJ
01395 571533
planningpolicy@eastdevon.gov.uk