

Neighbourhood Planning in a Changing World

What do the planning reforms mean for communities?

**LURA • New NPPF • National Decision-Making Policies •
Neighbourhood Plans**

October 2026

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Is neighbourhood planning becoming more important — or less?

The planning system is changing rapidly. We now have:

- A new local-plan-making system
- New national plan making policies
- New national decision-making policies
- Changes to the legal framework for neighbourhood plans
- Greater emphasis on housing delivery
- Greater emphasis on design

**What is the distinctive role for a
Neighbourhood Plan?**

Three changes we need to understand

1. LURA (Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023) sections 98 & 99

- Changes the legal framework for neighbourhood plans.

2. The new NPPF

- The August 2026 NPPF is structured around:

- **Plan-making policies**

and

- **National decision-making policies**

3. The relationship between the two

- Neighbourhood plans remain part of the development plan, but they have to operate within a much clearer national policy framework.
- The 2026 NPPF expressly identifies neighbourhood plans as an additional component of the development plan and sets out a specific policy, PM5, for them.

What has LURA changed?

- **LURA section 98: a bigger role for Neighbourhood Plans**
- Section 98 amends the legislation governing what a neighbourhood development plan may contain.

A neighbourhood plan may include policies concerning:

- **Amount** of development
- **Type** of development
- **Location** of development
- **Timing** of development
- Local land-use issues

What has LURA changed?

- Specific sites
- Infrastructure requirements
- Affordable housing requirements
- Design requirements

That is significant.

The legislation expressly recognises that neighbourhood plans can be much more than a collection of design or conservation policies.

Section 98: Infrastructure and Affordable Housing

Section 98 specifically allows neighbourhood plans to include:

- **Infrastructure requirements**
- Where development resulting from neighbourhood-plan policies creates infrastructure needs.
- **Affordable housing requirements**
- Where appropriate.
- **Design requirements**
- For development across:
 - the neighbourhood area
 - part of the neighbourhood
 - specific sites

Section 98: climate change and nature

Section 98 also introduces important requirements concerning:

- **Climate change**
- Neighbourhood plans must, so far as appropriate having regard to their subject matter, be designed to secure that development and land use contribute to:
 - climate-change mitigation
 - climate-change adaptation
- **Nature recovery**
- Plans must take account of relevant **Local Nature Recovery Strategies**, including:
 - areas important for biodiversity
 - areas where biodiversity recovery could provide wider environmental benefits
 - priorities for nature recovery

This gives neighbourhood planning a stronger environmental dimension.

Section 98: New Limitations

There is an important limitation.

A neighbourhood plan **Must not:**

- include material outside its permitted scope; or
- be inconsistent with, or substantially repeat, **national development management policy**.

This is one of the biggest changes to understand.

- Neighbourhood planning remains local —
- **but national decision-making policies increasingly establish the baseline.**

Section 99: the Basic Conditions change

Section 99 changes the basic conditions applying to neighbourhood plans and neighbourhood development orders. The important change concerns housing.

- A neighbourhood plan must not result in the development plan proposing **less housing** than would otherwise be provided.

In simple terms:

A neighbourhood plan cannot be used to reduce the amount of housing proposed through the wider development plan.

What does that mean in practice?

The question for a neighbourhood plan is no longer simply:

"How much housing do we want?"

It becomes:

"How can we shape the housing that the planning system requires?"

But this is not the end of local choice

Section 99 does **not** make neighbourhood planning irrelevant.

Quite the opposite. The neighbourhood plan can still determine important matters such as:

- **Where?**
- **What type?**
- **What design?**
- **What character?**
- **What infrastructure?**
- **What local environmental priorities?**
- **What community facilities?**
- **What should development contribute?**
- The key is to work **within the housing requirement and the national policy framework.**

The August 2026 NPPF

The new NPPF was published on **17 August 2026**.

It is a major restructuring of national planning policy.

- The document is explicitly titled: "**Plan-making and national decision-making policies**"

It separates:

- Plan-making policies
- Decision-making policies
- It contains dedicated sections for each

Why does the separation matter?

- Previously, the NPPF largely operated as a single policy framework.
- The new structure makes an important distinction:
- **Plan-making policies- What should our plans contain?**
- **National decision-making policies- How should planning applications be determined?**
- The NPPF says that its decision-making policies should be read alongside the development plan, while its plan-making policies should not be used when making individual development decisions.

The new development-plan hierarchy

The Development Plan:

- **Spatial Development Strategy** (where applicable) ↓
- **Local Plan** ↓
- **Neighbourhood Plan** ↓
- **Planning decisions**
- **Alongside this sits:**
- **National decision-making policy**
- The 2026 NPPF identifies neighbourhood plans as an additional component of the development plan.
- **The neighbourhood plan remains part of the statutory planning framework.**

PM5: the new Neighbourhood Planning Policy

The new NPPF has a dedicated policy

It says neighbourhood plans allow communities to:

- **"plan positively for their areas"**
- by identifying and addressing community priorities that can be met or supported through planning.

PM5: the critical housing provision

PM5 states that:

- The contents of a neighbourhood plan should not result in less development than specified in other parts of the development plan covering the same area.
- **This aligns closely with the LURA changes.**

So we have a clear message:

- **Neighbourhood planning is about shaping and delivering appropriate development — not reducing the strategic level of development.**

PM6: don't duplicate national policy

Another important new policy is **PM6**. Plan-makers should:

- Address only matters necessary and relevant to the plan
- Avoid unnecessary duplication
- Avoid policies that duplicate national decision-making policies
- Avoid policies inconsistent with national decision-making policies
- Engage communities positively
- Use proportionate evidence

For neighbourhood plans this means:

- **Don't copy the NPPF.**
- **Use the neighbourhood plan to add genuine local value.**

NPPF National Decision-making Policies

The new NPPF contains a dedicated set of policies for determining planning applications, they include:

- **DM1:** Preparing development proposals
- **DM2:** Information requirements
- **DM3:** Determining development proposals
- **DM4:** Emerging development plan proposals
- **DM5:** Development viability
- **DM6:** Planning conditions and obligations

NPPF National Decision-making Policies

- **DM7:** Other regulatory regimes
- **DM8:** Enforcement
- **DM9:** Development orders
- **DM10:** Removal of permitted development rights

How does this change neighbourhood plans?

- neighbourhood plans **cannot simply repeat these national policies.**

Instead, the question becomes:

- **What genuinely local policy gap needs to be filled?**

- **National policy-** Sets the national baseline for development management.
- **Neighbourhood plan-** Can establish the locally specific requirements that respond to:
 - Local character
 - Particular sites
 - Local landscape
 - Settlement form
 - Local heritage
 - Local infrastructure
 - Community priorities

The "policy gap" test

1. Is this already covered by national policy?
2. Is it already covered by the local plan?
3. If so, is there a genuine local reason to add something?
4. Can we justify it with evidence?
5. Is it proportionate?
6. Does it add something geographically or locally specific?
7. Will an examiner understand why the policy is necessary?

The best neighbourhood policies are not necessarily the longest.

They are the policies that add something only the neighbourhood can add.

NPPF S3: the presumption in favour of sustainable development

The new NPPF contains a national decision-making policy:

- **S3 — Presumption in favour of sustainable development**
- Where development proposals accord with:
 - an up-to-date development plan, **and**
 - the national decision-making policies,
 - they should be approved without delay.
- **This makes the quality and currency of the development plan particularly important.**

S6: neighbourhood plans and the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

This is a particularly important new policy:

- For housing proposals, conflict with a neighbourhood plan can weigh strongly against approval where:
- The neighbourhood plan became part of the development plan **five years or less** before the decision; and
- The neighbourhood plan contains allocations to meet its identified housing requirement.

The message from S6

- A neighbourhood plan can have substantial decision-making influence, but the NPPF links that influence to:
- **Age** -Is the plan no more than five years old?
- **Housing**- Does it contain allocations meeting its identified housing requirement?
- **Policy compliance**-Does the proposal actually conflict with the neighbourhood plan?
- **This creates a strong incentive to: Keep neighbourhood plans current.**

H02: The Neighbourhood Housing Requirement

- The new NPPF says local plans should establish a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood plan areas. That figure should take account of:
 - **Local housing need**
 - **The population of the neighbourhood area**
 - **The local planning authority's latest planning strategy**
 - **Relevant housing allocations and planned development**
 - **The plan period and capacity of the area**
 - **Any relevant unmet housing need or wider strategic growth requirements.**

What Can A Good Neighbourhood Plan Do Now?

The new neighbourhood planning opportunity

- A strong neighbourhood plan could combine:
- **Housing**
- Where and what type?
- **Design**
- What should it look like?
- **Character**
- What makes the place distinctive?

What can a good Neighbourhood Plan do?

- **Infrastructure**

- What does development need to provide?

- **Environment**

- What should be protected and enhanced?

- **Community**

- What facilities and spaces are needed?

- **Regeneration**

- Where can the neighbourhood improve?

Design becomes even more important

The new NPPF allows neighbourhood plans to establish:

- Local design requirements
- Site-specific requirements
- Area-wide design expectations
- Design codes
- **This could be one of the strongest areas of local influence.**
- A neighbourhood plan can say:
- **"If development takes place here, this is what good development should look like."**

CLIMATE, NATURE AND LOCAL EVIDENCE

Section 98 + the new NPPF is a powerful combination.

LURA section 98

- Requires appropriate neighbourhood plans to address climate mitigation/adaptation and take account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

NPPF

- Requires plans to be evidence-led and proportionate.
- The NPPF specifically says plans should be based on a baseline understanding of needs, opportunities, constraints and context, using relevant, reliable and sufficiently up-to-date evidence.
- **Opportunity: Develop genuinely local environmental evidence.**

Parish and Town Councils Working together

- **Shared evidence**
 - Landscape, heritage, infrastructure, housing and environment.
- **Shared design principles**
 - What constitutes good rural/village development?
- **Shared infrastructure evidence**
 - Transport, schools, healthcare, drainage and utilities.
- **Shared environmental mapping**
 - Green corridors, habitats, flood risk and landscape.
- **Shared expertise**
 - Planning consultants, community engagement and legal advice.
- **Shared intelligence**
 - Track the local plan and major development proposals.

A “health check “for an existing plan

Every Parish or Town with a neighbourhood plan should ask:

- **Is it still legally and policy compliant?**
- **Does it reflect the 2026 NPPF?**
- **Does it duplicate national decision-making policy?**
- **Does it conflict with the current local plan?**
- **Does it meet the neighbourhood housing requirement?**
- **Does it contain housing allocations where appropriate?**
- **Are the policies still supported by evidence?**
- **Is it less than five years old?**
- **Does it contain policies that genuinely add local value?**

What is Local added value?

Ten possible areas of local added value

- Local character
- Design codes
- Settlement form
- Site-specific allocations
- Housing mix
- Affordable housing
- Local infrastructure
- Green infrastructure
- Heritage
- Regeneration
- The test:
 - Could this policy only sensibly have been written by people who know this place?
 - If yes, it is probably worth exploring.

The changing role of Parish and Town Councils

NEW OPPORTUNITY

- **Become a local place-making organisation.**
- That means:
- Gathering evidence
- Understanding the local plan
- Maintaining the neighbourhood plan
- Engaging residents
- Working with neighbouring parishes
- Influencing design
- Identifying infrastructure priorities
- Monitoring delivery

Next Steps

1. Understand

LURA sections 98 and 99.

2. Read

PM5, PM6, PM17 and S3/S6 of the new NPPF.

3. Audit

Existing neighbourhood plans.

4. Map

Local assets, constraints and opportunities.

5. Evidence

Housing, design, infrastructure, landscape and environment.

6. Collaborate

Work with neighbouring parishes.

7. Engage

Talk to residents before policy drafting.

A new agenda for neighbourhood planning

The question is no longer: **"can we stop development?"** Nor is it simply **"how much development do we have to accept?"**

The more useful questions are:

- **Where should development go?**
- **What should it look like?**
- **What should it provide?**
- **What should it protect?**
- **How should it respond to climate and nature?**
- **How can it strengthen the community?**

The big opportunity

- **LURA has constrained some aspects of neighbourhood planning.** But it has also clarified and potentially strengthened others. Neighbourhood plans now have an explicit legislative basis for addressing:
 - **Character**
 - What makes the place distinctive?
 - **Infrastructure**
 - What should be protected and enhanced?
 - What facilities and spaces are needed?

Design becomes even more important

The new NPPF allows neighbourhood plans to establish:

- Local design requirements
- Site-specific requirements
- Area-wide design expectations
- Design codes- **If development takes place here, this is what good development should look like.**

Discussion and questions:

1. What can our existing neighbourhood plans still achieve?
2. Which policies need updating following LURA and the new NPPF?
3. Where is the greatest opportunity for genuinely local policy?
4. What evidence should we develop collectively?
5. How can parishes work together rather than individually?
6. What should we ask our local planning authority to do differently?