

Neighbourhood Planning Guidance Note 7

Generating options

April 2013 - Revised April 2015



Although it can be tempting to launch straight into preparing your draft Neighbourhood Development Plan, especially if you think you already know what needs to happen, there are often choices to be made which need to be explored. This guidance note has been produced to assist you think about all the possible options and how to assess them.

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Why do we need options?

Once your Neighbourhood Plan vision and objectives have been established, following the detailed analysis of both consultation data and the environmental 'scoping' exercise carried out by your designated support officer, you can give serious thought to potential policies and site allocations.

However, before you plunge in, it is important to run all the feasible options past your community. In fact, this should form a key element of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of your Neighbourhood Plan; one of the roles undertaken by your support officer involves them assessing the impact of your plan proposals on the environment. The SEA process is explored in further detail at guidance note 9a, but it is an iterative process and a key stage in this process is demonstrating that alternative options were considered prior to the formal drafting of your Neighbourhood Plan.

The consideration of different options can help you decide what works well and what does not. It may be that the initial solution to the issues are not the most appropriate. Considering alternatives will also enable you to gather the local community's views on which option they would prefer to see happen and translate into an appropriate draft policy or site allocation. This will lead to open and transparent decision making.

Types of option

In addition to the SEA scoping exercise, options can be generated from ideas developed by the parish/town council or from other consultation exercises that you may have held involving the wider community. If you have developed a Vision and Objectives, you may wish to see which options are most likely to achieve them.

The sort of options you want to consider could vary depending upon the type of Neighbourhood Development Plan that you are preparing, for example, whether it is general policy or specific or detailed. (See guidance note on 'What is a Neighbourhood Development Plan')

Examples of the types of options include:

- The allocation of new housing and/or employment sites. A consideration of all the alternative allocation sites will ensure that a transparent and robust selection process has been undertaken when choosing areas of land to allocate within your plan (similar to the assessments undertaken within the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment). Separate guidance is available regarding selecting and allocation sites within your plan, guidance note 21.
- The scale, type, mix and location of development - this could include where any required affordable housing is located and how many dwellings/units? Should the scheme include the provision of community facilities, open space for recreation, play areas?
- Alternative ways of using land that the local community has identified as being appropriate for development or other uses, such as open space or environmental improvement.
- Different 'conditions' that could be applied to development, such as how development should look (its design), how transport issues should be incorporated, or issues such as renewable energy or landscaping.

When considering options it is recommended that you include a 'do nothing' option (also known as 'business as usual'). This is what would happen to the plan area and sites in question if you did not prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

You may need to generate a series of options for dealing with different issues. The number of options that you will generate is likely to be influenced by the intended scope of your Neighbourhood Development Plan:

- If your Neighbourhood Development Plan is dealing with a single site, then there may be just two or three options you feel you need to consider for that site.
- However, if your Neighbourhood Development Plan covers a large range of issues and aims to address the area in a comprehensive way then there may be a number of options required, grouped around issues and topics.

It is important to remember that when considering options ensure they are realistic and achievable.

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For example:

- If you have aspirations for a new children's play area think about how this may be delivered and who would pay for it.
- If you believe there is a need for more affordable housing in your community, is there a housing association or key landowner that you could have initial discussions with to help identify appropriate sites?

In developing your options it is advisable to check them against the strategy and policies within the Local Plan (Core Strategy) to ensure that there are no major conflicts. The independent examination of your plan will be checking that your policies are in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan (Core Strategy). The Neighbourhood Planning Team will be able to assist you regarding conformity with national and local strategic policies.

It will be important whilst developing your plan and the policies within it that decisions are made in an open and transparent way in order to reduce any conflicts and challenges. The generation and consideration of options, with a well documented decision making process will reduce this risk and ensure that the policies within your plan are the most appropriate to address the issues raised and the community vision aspired to.

Test the options

Having defined your options, it would be useful to consult the local community, to help inform your final choice.

Top tip

Questions you might ask when testing your options include:

- Have we identified the right options?
- Are there any options missing?
- Which option(s) do you prefer and why?

Taking the options forward in developing your plan

Following a consultation on the options, the option which has the most support can be taken forward to provide the detail and essentially the policies within your Neighbourhood Development Plan, subject to SEA and HRA outcomes - if either of these indicate that the roll out of a particular option would have an adverse impact on the environment and/or a European site, then a different approach should be taken.

Generating options

Neighbourhood Planning guidance notes available:

Deciding to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan

1. Which is the right tool for your parish
2. What is a Neighbourhood Development Plan
3. Getting started
4. A guide to procedures
5. Funding

Plan Production

6. Developing a Vision and Objectives
7. Generating options
8. Writing planning policies
9. Environmental Assessment
10. Evidence base and information requirements
11. Implementation and Monitoring
12. Best practice community engagement techniques
13. Statutory consultees
14. Writing a consultation statement
15. Planning and other legislation
16. Web enabling your plan
17. Using OS based mapping
18. Glossary of planning terms

Topics

19. Sustainable Water Management in Herefordshire
20. Guide to settlement boundaries
21. Guide to site assessment and choosing allocation sites
22. Meeting your housing requirements
23. Conservation issues
24. Recreational areas
25. Renewable energy
26. Transport issues
27. Community Infrastructure Levy

Additional Guidance

28. Setting up a steering group
29. Creating a questionnaire
30. Community facilities
31. Conformity with the Local Plan (Core Strategy)
32. Examinations of Neighbourhood Development Plans
33. Guide to Neighbourhood Development Plan Referendums
34. Tourism
35. Basic Conditions
36. Your plan - Contributing to sustainable development