



Urban Vision Enterprise

Town and Parish Council Planning Service

Evidence for Neighbourhood Plans

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1. Introduction

1.1 Neighbourhood Plans and Evidence

Neighbourhood Plans are planning policy documents. Planning policies need to be based on evidence, in order to meet legal requirements.

This guide describes the kinds of evidence required to support different kinds of policy. It also suggests where existing evidence can be found and when it may be necessary or useful to prepare or commission new evidence.



2. What Evidence is Needed?

2.1 Themes and Policies

To identify the evidence requirements for a neighbourhood plan, it is necessary to identify the key issues that the policies should address. This can be based on a range of factors, including local knowledge, technical reports and feedback from the community and local stakeholders.

Not all issues are relevant to planning policy, but many are. The list of key issues can be translated into a set of policy headings, for example housing, employment, community facilities, heritage, design, natural environment, active travel, and other planning themes.

2.2 Identifying Evidence Requirements

The evidence required depends on the scope and detail of the different policies. Each policy will require a planning justification and be supported by relevant and proportionate evidence to support that justification.

For example, housing policies may need a housing needs assessment, especially to demonstrate that the Plan meets overall housing need or to include guidance on housing mix.

Design or character policies could be supported by design analysis, a design code, Conservation Area character appraisal, parish plan or other design-focused documents. The National Design Guide or standards like Building for a Healthy Life could also inform policies.

Natural environment policies could be based on the type of national and local designations, landscape assessments and other documents concerned with the natural environment.

2.3 Incorporating Evidence

It is not necessary or desirable to include detailed planning and technical evidence in the neighbourhood plan document itself. Indeed, this can be counter productive as it makes the Plan unwieldy and can quickly become out-of-date. Rather, the Plan should make reference to relevant external evidence documents or sources and explain briefly how they support the policy.

3. Existing Evidence

3.1 Where to Find Existing Evidence

A review of existing evidence should be undertaken. This may be sufficient to support the proposed policies.

Key areas of evidence are:

Local Plan: The adopted or emerging Local Plan will be supported by a range of technical reports and other evidence. This could include housing needs assessment, environmental assessments, economic and employment data, socio-economic analysis, heritage records and reports, transport studies, retail or town centre analysis and other kinds of data and analysis. Such evidence will often be district wide, and this may or may not affect its relevance to the specific Neighbourhood Area.

Census: The census will provide demographic and socio-economic data, at ward or parish level. This includes population, work, travel, housing and a range of other factors. This may inform a range of policies and help to provide an overall understanding of the area. Census data will also be useful at a later stage, where Equalities Analysis is undertaken to demonstrate that the policies comply with human rights law.

National Organisations: Records can be found on-line relating to heritage, landscape and natural environment designations. Examples include the DERFA Magic Map, the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest, scheduled monuments, details of conservation areas and other designations. Many national organisations also have on-line guidance and standards, for example relating to sports provision.

Property websites: Web searches can provide details of housing and commercial property prices and rentals, and these can be compared to regional and national averages. This can give a good indication of an area's economy, including any viability challenges or issues of affordability.

Plans and Strategies: Other plans and strategies on relevant themes, prepared by the local authority or other public bodies or statutory undertakers, may also contain useful data.

The local planning authority should be able to provide support with identifying sources of existing evidence.

4. Preparing or Commissioning Evidence

4.1 When is new evidence necessary

Some Neighbourhood Plan bodies prepare or commission their own evidence, for example reports to justify Local Green Space designations. It may be necessary to develop evidence at neighbourhood level, for example housing need, vacancy, or heritage analysis.

Supporting evidence can be presented in background evidence documents, rather than being included in the Plan itself.

4.2 Types of Evidence

The types of evidence depend on the themes and scope of policies, but could include:

Housing: A housing needs assessment for the specific neighbourhood area could inform housing mix or help to demonstrate that the Neighbourhood Plan, together with any strategic sites, meets housing need. The Plan could then meet the requirements of Paragraph 14 of the National Planning Policy Framework. If making housing site allocations, a report would be prepared to apply site selection criteria and justify the sites selected and not selected.



Design, Character, Heritage: Evidence could include a design code document or character analysis. Documents focused on the specific neighbourhood could allow locally specific character policies to be formulated. Heritage evidence could include a report setting out statutory designations, or summarising the character of a specific conservation area.

Natural Environment Policies: A report could summarise landscape designations (national and local), key landscape features, and any issues, opportunities or threats to the natural environment. This could then enable the drafting of a locally specific natural environment policy. For example, a policy could relate specifically to a river and its environs.

Other policy areas: Other evidence specific to the neighbourhood area could include analysis of employment, community facilities, local flooding, local transport issues, vacancy in high streets, green and blue infrastructure or any

other issues for policies would address. There is often a strong overlap between employment and community facilities, for example through local shops and food outlets. In rural areas, the need or scope for diversification of agricultural sites could be assessed.

4.7 Site Allocations

It is especially important that site allocations be supported by evidence and rigorous analysis.

Potential sites may already have been identified, or a call for sites could be undertaken.

Site selection criteria should be formulated and be subjected to community and stakeholder engagement.

For housing site allocations, a report could set out:

- How potential sites were identified, for example through a call for sites or local authority identified sites;
- The selection criteria used to select the sites (these are often based on a traffic light approach);
- Analysis of each site against the selection criteria;
- Conclusions, making clear why certain sites were selected, and why others were not selected;
- An appendix of detailed proformas including data for each site.

For town and local centres, opportunity sites could be identified for commercial, community or residential development.

4.8 Local Green Space Designation

Where Local Green Spaces (LGS) designations are proposed, these should be based on robust evidence and analysis. The detailed analysis could be in a report, demonstrating how each space meets NPPF criteria.

UVE has prepared a more detailed guide to Local Green Space Designation, available for download from the web site.

4.9 Local Lists

If the Neighbourhood Plan is to include a local list (non-designated heritage assets), then a report should be prepared to justify it.

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Local lists are non-statutory. Nonetheless, it should be clear how buildings were selected. Selection could be based on local architectural or historic interest.

For each building or structure included, there should be a clear justification. This could be fairly concise and could include:

- The date, if known, or general period of construction;
- The architect or designer, if known;
- Whether the building is vernacular in nature or a more formal architectural style, such as classical, gothic or Modern;
- Any known historic facts, including the original purpose or reason for being built;
- Any feature of interest, architectural or in terms of landscape and hard surfaces;
- Anything else relevant to the building or structure's value.

There is little point considering buildings in a conservation area as these are already part of a designated heritage asset, so have a greater level of protection.



5. Support with Evidence

5.1 About Urban Vision Enterprise

Urban Vision Enterprise (UVE) is a professional planning consultancy providing services in planning, regeneration, economic development and third sector organisational development. UVE provides a Town and Parish Council Planning Service in England.

UVE has supported well over 200 neighbourhood plans and can provide support at all stages of the process. This includes drafting of effective and locally specific policies, site allocations and advice on legal compliance at all stages.

5.2 Technical Evidence

UVE can prepare a range of technical evidence reports, including:

- Housing needs assessment;
- Site assessment;
- Housing capacity studies;
- Local Green Space (LGS) analysis;
- Design analysis and Codes;
- Heritage and character analysis;
- Masterplanning and site briefs;
- Justification for local lists;
- SEA screening;
- High street and town centre analysis.

5.3 Experience and Specialisms

UVE specialisms include:

- mediation and complex negotiations;
- neighbourhood planning;
- regeneration and economic development;
- town centres and high street recovery;
- housing growth, site selection and masterplanning;
- heritage-led regeneration and conservation;
- natural environment and blue and green infrastructure;
- urban design, including strategies, policies, guidance and design review;
- community and stakeholder engagement;
- statutory consultation (legal compliance);

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- technical reports including housing need, site assessment and heritage studies;
- feasibility and viability studies and project business plans;
- training, continuing professional development (CPD) and education;
- preparing guidance and briefings;
- in person (verbal) and written evidence for Parliamentary committees;
- third sector (not-for-profit) organisational development, including strategy, operations, governance and business development.

Urban Vision Enterprise is ISO 9001 Registered. The practice is an IHBC recognised historic environment service provider (HESPR) and CPD provider.

5.4 Our Clients

Current and past clients include government and funding bodies, UK and national professional bodies and membership organisations, local authorities, town and parish councils, neighbourhood forums and third sector (not-for-profit) organisations. These include the Heritage Lottery Fund, Locality, Royal Town Planning Institute, Institute of Historic Building Conservation, and the National Trust.

5.5 Contact

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