

Briefing Note - Parish Development Framework – June 2026

The purpose of this briefing note is to explain some of the options, costs, challenges with creating a Parish Development Framework that has not previously been fully explored in the council meetings. The council has ruled out producing a Neighbourhood plan as this will typically take 18-30 months to produce and the average cost is between £20,000 - £50,000. It requires a referendum and can quickly go out of date. If the parish council want to have a formal document; a Parish Development Framework is more appropriate for the scale of the proposed development and the timescale.

What is a Parish Development Framework?

A Parish Development Framework is a non-statutory planning document that:

- Identifies potential development sites within the parish
- Assesses their suitability
- Recommends preferred locations for development
- Provides evidence to support the Parish Council's position on planning applications

It does not allocate land formally but can become a material consideration in decisions made by West Northamptonshire Council. If the Parish Council wish to create a statutory planning document then a 'Single Issue' Neighbourhood Plan is an option this would still require a referendum so in addition to the points raised below there would potentially be further cost and expertise required.

Why does it need to align with planning policy?

For the document to carry any weight, it must align with:

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- The adopted and emerging Local Plan prepared by West Northamptonshire Council

This means:

- The Parish Council cannot simply oppose development
- It must show how development needs (126 homes) can be met
- It must apply recognised planning principles (e.g. sustainability, flood risk, infrastructure capacity)

If the document does not follow these principles, it is unlikely to be given weight by planning officers or inspectors.

What is involved in producing the Framework?

The process typically includes:

- Defining site assessment criteria (flooding, drainage, access, etc.)
- Identifying all potential development sites

- Assessing each site against evidence-based criteria
- Reviewing infrastructure constraints (including sewer capacity and flood risk)
- Producing maps and comparative analysis
- Drafting a formal report
- Undertaking public consultation
- Revising and formally adopting the document

This is a structured and evidence-led process, it cannot simply be Councillors perceptions or opinions.

Why would the Parish Council need to employ the services of a Development Consultant?

While the Clerk plays an important supporting role, there are key limitations:

A) Technical planning expertise

Producing a credible document requires:

- Knowledge of planning policy and case law
- Understanding of how planning decisions are made
- Ability to ensure compliance with the NPPF and Local Plan

This is specialist work typically undertaken by qualified planners.

B) Access to evidence and data

A robust framework requires:

- Flood risk mapping and interpretation
- Infrastructure capacity input (e.g. from Anglian Water)
- Site assessment methodologies used in planning practice

Consultants have:

- Access to data sources
- Experience interpreting technical constraints
- Established contacts with statutory bodies

C) Credibility and weight

Planning officers at West Northamptonshire Council are more likely to give weight to:

- A professionally prepared, evidence-based document

A purely parish-produced document risks being viewed as:

- Subjective
- Lacking technical robustness
- Given limited weight in decision-making

What is the role of a consultant?

A planning consultant would:

- Design a defensible methodology
- Undertake site assessments
- Interpret planning policy correctly
- Prepare a clear, professional report
- Ensure the document can be used as a material consideration

They effectively ensure the work is credible, compliant, and usable.

What is the potential time commitment for the Parish Clerk?

Even with a consultant, the Clerk would likely spend:

- 2–4 hours per week over 4–6 months
- Total estimated time: **50–100 hours**

Tasks include:

- Coordinating the project
- Liaising with the consultant
- Organising meetings and consultation
- Managing communications and documentation

Without a consultant, this could increase significantly potentially **150+ hours** with no guarantee of a usable outcome.

What is the public consultation requirement?

Although not legally required in the same way as a Neighbourhood Plan, consultation is essential to:

- Demonstrate community support
- Strengthen the document's credibility
- Reduce challenge from developers

This typically includes:

- Public display or meeting

- Online consultation
- Review and incorporation of feedback

What is the cost vs benefit

Option A: Commission a Development Framework (estimated between £5,000 - £15,000)

Benefits:

- Provides a clear, proactive strategy
- Influences where development is likely to occur
- Strengthens the Parish Council's position
- Helps resist unsuitable sites (areas that would exacerbate existing problems such as flooding or sewage capacity)

Risks:

- Upfront cost
- Still not legally binding

Option B: Do not commission – react to applications

Instead, the Parish Council could:

- Create a simple internal checklist for evaluating applications
- Respond to each proposal as it arises

Benefits:

- Minimal cost
- Less upfront work

Risks:

- Reactive rather than proactive
- Developers choose sites, not the Parish
- Harder to argue against unsuitable locations
- Less influence over cumulative impacts (e.g. sewage, flooding) but these will be looked at by the relevant authorities and should be robust.

Conclusion

A professionally prepared Development Framework offers greater influence and clarity, particularly where there are known infrastructure constraints.

However, it does not guarantee control over development outcomes.

Decision for Councillors

Councillors are asked to consider the following options:

Does Bugbrooke Parish Council want to:

1. **Commission a Parish Development Framework** to provide a proactive approach to influencing the location and form of future development. This option would involve additional cost, which is not currently budgeted for, and councillors may wish to consider whether it would represent value for money for residents, particularly as developers and statutory consultees will also assess matters such as flooding, sewage capacity and access.
or
2. **Respond to planning proposals as they arise** by using a Parish Council checklist to support a consistent and neutral assessment of each application against the same set of criteria.