

Briefing Note - Consideration of a Neighbourhood Development Plan, Single Issue Neighbourhood Plan or Alternative Planning Strategy – July 2026

This briefing note has been prepared by the Clerk as requested to assist Councillors in considering whether Bugbrooke Parish Council should commence work on a statutory Neighbourhood Development Plan, pursue a more limited Single Issue Neighbourhood Plan focusing on housing site allocations, or consider an alternative non-statutory approach.

The report summarises advice received from planning consultants, Locality, West Northamptonshire Council and other parish councils that have undertaken neighbourhood planning. It also considers the likely costs, timescales, risks, funding opportunities and resource implications before Councillors determine whether to proceed.

Background

West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) is expected to adopt its new Local Plan around December. Current advice suggests WNC wishes to progress adoption using the existing housing figures before changes to national planning policy require a further review.

Planning advisers have indicated that, although the Local Plan may be adopted this year, it is likely to require revision relatively quickly following future changes in national planning policy and revised housing targets. This could result in further housing allocations being required across West Northamptonshire, including additional development around Bugbrooke.

The Parish Council therefore faces an important strategic decision. It can either:

- seek to influence future development through a statutory Neighbourhood Development Plan;
- prepare a more limited planning document focused on housing;
- or continue responding to planning applications on a case-by-case basis.

Regardless of which option is chosen, it should be recognised that Bugbrooke is likely to continue experiencing development pressure due to its sustainable location, existing infrastructure and the current lack of a five-year housing land supply within West Northamptonshire.

Without an adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan, the Parish Council has fewer planning tools available to influence where future development takes place and what standards new development should achieve.

Although Parish Councils remain statutory consultees on planning applications, their comments carry less weight than policies contained within an adopted Development Plan.

A Neighbourhood Development Plan sits alongside the Local Plan and becomes part of the statutory Development Plan once adopted following referendum. Decisions on planning applications must therefore have regard to both documents.

Importantly, a Neighbourhood Plan cannot simply duplicate policies already contained within the Local Plan. Instead, it must add locally specific planning policies that reflect the needs and

aspirations of Bugbrooke. Therefore, if policy already exists in national or local plans it cannot be included in the NDP.

Options

Option A – Full Neighbourhood Development Plan

A full Neighbourhood Development Plan provides the greatest opportunity for the community to influence future development.

Rather than simply allocating housing sites, a full NDP can also include policies covering:

- Housing site allocations
- Local Green Spaces
- Protection of important views
- Village design guidance
- Heritage assets
- Biodiversity enhancement
- Wildlife corridors
- Climate change mitigation
- Sustainable drainage
- Flood mitigation
- Infrastructure requirements
- Community facilities
- Walking and cycling connections

Once adopted following independent examination and referendum, these policies become part of the statutory planning framework.

One significant financial benefit is that the Parish Council would receive 25% of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts arising from development, compared with 15% without an adopted NDP.

However, producing a full NDP represents a major commitment requiring significant financial resources, professional support and volunteer time.

Option B – Single Issue Neighbourhood Plan

A Single-Issue Plan could focus solely on housing site allocations.

However, advice received suggests this approach may not represent the most effective use of resources.

Several advisers noted that housing allocations cannot realistically be considered in isolation because issues such as flooding, drainage, landscape, ecology, highways, infrastructure and village character are all closely linked.

A Single-Issue Plan would still require:

- community consultation
- call for sites
- site assessments

- environmental screening
- examination
- referendum

Consequently, although slightly cheaper than a full NDP, much of the procedural work remains the same.

Locality advised they have rarely encountered Single Issue Plans focused solely on housing allocations, with most limited neighbourhood plans instead concentrating on design guidance.

Option C – Settlement Spatial Plan (Non-Statutory)

One alternative suggested by consultants is preparation of a Settlement Spatial Plan (SSP).

This would not be a statutory planning document but would:

- assess potential growth options;
- identify the most sustainable areas for future development;
- consider broad infrastructure constraints;
- review flooding and drainage;
- provide evidence to influence future Local Plan reviews;
- assist the Parish Council when responding to planning applications.

The main advantages are speed and cost but the major disadvantage is that the document would carry no statutory planning weight.

Estimated preparation time is approximately three months at an estimated cost of around £5,000.

However, it could later form the evidence base for a future Neighbourhood Development Plan should Councillors decide to proceed.

Option D – Internal Parish Planning Strategy

The Parish Council could instead prepare an internal planning strategy.

Although this would have no formal planning status, it would enable the Council to:

- evaluate potential development sites consistently;
- assess planning applications using agreed criteria;
- identify community priorities;
- engage residents before formal planning applications are submitted.

Developers frequently approach local councils informally before applications are lodged as the council are already experiencing.

Rather than waiting until planning applications are received, the Parish Council could hold early public engagement sessions to explain what developers are proposing and seek residents' views before adopting a formal position.

This approach would help ensure the Council's responses genuinely reflect community opinion rather than solely the perceptions of councillors.

Whilst this approach cannot prevent development, it would improve transparency and community involvement.

Summary of Advice Received

Louise – ONH Planning

Advice from Louise focused heavily upon the relationship between the emerging WNC Local Plan and a future Neighbourhood Plan.

Key points included:

- Although WNC expects to adopt the Local Plan shortly, national planning reforms are likely to require another review with revised housing targets.
- Bugbrooke may therefore receive additional housing allocations during the next Local Plan review.
- A Neighbourhood Plan sits alongside the Local Plan and can include locally specific planning policies that influence future development.
- A Settlement Spatial Plan could be prepared quickly and relatively cheaply to identify preferred growth areas and assist discussions with WNC (£5k).
- Detailed drainage and wastewater studies become increasingly expensive, and developers will almost always commission more comprehensive technical evidence than a Parish Council can realistically afford.
- Even where the Parish Council commissions technical reports, developers often possess significantly greater resources to challenge findings through specialist consultants.
- A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) would normally be required where site allocations are included (£15k)
- An adopted NDP increases the Parish Council's share of Community Infrastructure Levy from 15% to 25%.

Dave Chetwyn – Urban Vision Enterprise

Urban Vision suggested beginning with an independent options report rather than immediately committing to preparing an NDP.

The proposed report would:

- explain each available option;
- identify likely costs;
- explain advantages and disadvantages;
- consider likely effectiveness;
- review methods of influencing development;
- consider infrastructure, flood risk, highways, drainage and village character.

The fee quoted for this work was £876 plus VAT.

Urban Vision also advised that if the Parish Council ultimately proceeds with a full Neighbourhood Plan including site allocations, Councillors should anticipate costs significantly exceeding £20,000 once environmental assessments and specialist reports are included.

Locality – Dave Chapman

Locality provides national support to communities preparing Neighbourhood Plans.

Advice received highlighted that preparation begins by designating the parish as a Neighbourhood Area through WNC, which should be relatively straightforward as the parish boundary already exists.

Key observations included:

- housing allocations should only follow a formal call for sites (maybe able to use WNC as they have done this recently but may need more sites specifically around Bugbrooke)
- communities should be consulted before selecting preferred sites;
- every potential site should be assessed using consistent methodology;
- allocations should include policy requirements covering access, trees, drainage and constraints.

Locality also advised that a modern Neighbourhood Plan should normally address:

- Local Green Spaces
- Important views
- Biodiversity
- Climate change
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- Sustainable drainage
- High-quality design

The most contentious part of any NDP is usually the site assessment process. Selecting one landowner's site over another frequently attracts challenge and therefore independent professional review is strongly recommended.

Indicative costs included:

- Independent review of approximately 15 sites - around £10,000
- Strategic Environmental Assessment screening - approximately £7,000
- Habitats Regulations Assessment - approximately £6,000
- Planning consultant - approximately £500–£600 per day
- Community consultation costs
- Printing and statutory consultation expenses

Locality also emphasised that even after allocating preferred sites, speculative planning applications can still come forward elsewhere, and appropriate planning policies remain essential.

West Northamptonshire Council

Planning Policy officers confirmed that guidance and mapping are available to support neighbourhood planning on their website.

WNC cannot recommend specific consultants but suggested:

- speaking to other parish councils;

- approaching RTPI chartered planning consultants;
- researching planning examiners who also undertake consultancy work.

WNC also indicated they would be willing to meet with the Parish Council once Councillors decide how they wish to proceed.

Experience from other Parish Councils

Only one detailed response was received following enquiries through the Northamptonshire branch of the Society of Local Council Clerks.

The experience was consistent with advice received from consultants.

Key observations included:

- preparation required a steering group of eight volunteers;
- steering group members could not all be parish councillors;
- meetings were held monthly for over two years;
- the overall process took six years (including COVID delays);
- professional planning consultants were considered essential;
- overall expenditure was approximately £10,000 after grant funding.

This demonstrates that neighbourhood planning should be viewed as a significant long-term community project rather than simply a Parish Council initiative.

Financial Considerations

No budget currently exists for preparation of either a Settlement Spatial Plan or a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

The Council is already facing significant financial pressures including:

- potential adoption of the Johns Road Estate
- funding requirements associated with the Captains Close retaining wall

Subject to Councillor approval, it may be possible to identify up to £10,000 - £12,000 from existing earmarked reserves by reprioritising projects. However, this would still leave a significant funding gap potentially if a full NDP is pursued. It would also deplete funds that would need to be topped up with a hefty percept increase potentially.

Councillors could investigate whether WNC has Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding or other neighbourhood planning support available that could contribute towards project costs. (The Clerk has already written to WNC so not to hold up obtaining this information).

There does not appear to be any external grants available, previous funding programmes have ended and WNC does not have any grants running.

Risks

Preparing any document that identifies potential development sites inevitably attracts attention.

By publicly assessing land around Bugbrooke, there is a possibility that additional landowners and developers could promote sites for development.

This risk exists because WNC currently lacks a demonstrable five-year housing land supply, increasing the likelihood of speculative planning applications.

Councillors should therefore recognise that undertaking a site assessment process may increase developer interest rather than reduce it.

Equally, not preparing any strategic planning evidence may reduce the Parish Council's ability to influence where development occurs.

Conclusion

Creating a Neighbourhood Plan offers Bugbrooke the strongest opportunity to influence future development.

A full Neighbourhood Development Plan would enable the Parish Council and residents to shape where development should occur, establish local planning policies, protect valued green spaces and views, improve design standards and secure a larger proportion of Community Infrastructure Levy funding.

However, Councillors should also recognise that producing an NDP represents a substantial commitment.

It is likely to require several years of work, extensive volunteer involvement, significant professional support and expenditure potentially exceeding £20,000. Even then, there is no guarantee that future speculative planning applications can be prevented, particularly where national planning policy supports additional housing delivery.

The Parish Council is currently facing competing financial pressures and has no dedicated budget for neighbourhood planning. Whilst up to £10,000 may be identified from existing reserves and further funding may be available through asking WNC if they have CIL money available there are no external grants available so a clear funding strategy would need to be agreed before work commenced some of which may be required to increase the precept substantially next year to cover it.

There is also a strategic timing issue. If WNC adopts its Local Plan around December, the Parish Council would need to begin work promptly if it wishes to influence future planning policy and any subsequent review of housing allocations.

Councillors may therefore wish to consider the following steps:

1. Commission an independent options report to provide an objective assessment of available approaches.
2. Engage with WNC regarding potential funding and Community Infrastructure Levy support.

3. Consider preparing a Settlement Spatial Plan to establish the Parish Council's preferred strategy for future growth knowing this has little planning weight but would contribute to a NPD is expanded.

4. Decide whether sufficient funding, volunteer capacity and community support exist to proceed with a full Neighbourhood Development Plan.

This approach would enable the Parish Council to make informed decisions, involve residents from the earliest possible stage and ensure that future responses to development proposals are based upon evidence and community priorities rather than reacting to individual planning applications as they arise.