



New Forest District Council Local Plan Review Issues and Scope Consultation

This is a summary document of the first stage of review, the full document can be found at <https://newforest.gov.uk/localplan>. The public consultation runs until 4 April 2025.

The review is required by central Government and there are some hefty challenges posed, such as the new housing need figure being six times the level of current completions plus delivery of key infrastructure.

1. Introduction

New Forest District Council (N.F.D.C.) have been obliged to further the National Park purposes via the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. The first purpose of 'conserve and enhance natural beauty, wildlife, culture and heritage' must take precedence (as echoed from the National Park review document seen at 13 March meeting). The local plan will set out policies, land use and protection for the next 15 years. It guides all development in the area except for Minerals and Waste, responsibility for which rests with Hampshire County Council. Within the 2024 version of the National Planning Policy Framework (N.P.P.F) government seek to boost housing delivery with a target 1.5million dwellings across England by 2029.

It is expected that the draft plan will be available for consultation in Autumn/Winter 2025, with further review, testing and refinements into Spring 2026.

This document is specifically asking for views on the issues identified and whether they are the correct ones for the area, and to take further suggestions.

2. Spatial Context

The plan area has 6 main settlements being the market towns of Totton, Hythe, Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood and Fordingbridge, which harness most of the area's population. The settlement hierarchy is the same as the current Local Plan. From the 2021 census there was 175,800 people (51.9% male, 48.1% female) across the entire area including the National Park. This represents a 0.4% decrease from the 2011 figures. Hampshire population has increased by 6.3% and the UK by 6.6% making the New Forest one of 25 authority areas nationally that have a decrease, which indicates an ageing population and a decreasing work age population.

Due to government policy most of all types of development should come from outside of the National Park area, placing the onus on N.F.D.C. There follows in the full document a description of the Waterside and Coastal Areas, and highlights that most of the coast is nationally designated with international designation east of Milford on Sea and cliffs at Barton-On-Sea.(S.S.S.I.)

3. Current Spatial Strategy

The current plan (2016-2036) shows how the required 10,420 dwellings are distributed (policy STR5). The focus was on good quality design, landscape and environment while addressing need to conserve and enhance, provide homes for locals, support local business and promote safety and well-being. South coastal towns were allocated a total of 945 dwellings between them, using sustainably located sites. Economic growth was considered sustainable by retention and support as the unemployment rates at the time were generally low, with an ageing population.

4. Spatial Vision and Outcomes

The plan will aim to provide a direction of travel on how the area will evolve over the next 15 to 30 years' time and give principal guides on where development will and will not take place. The existing settlement hierarchy is based in sustainability: these are well linked places with access to local shops and services, schools and public transport links. The document suggests a different method, maybe from below list

- Development matched to the existing settlement pattern with different scales considered appropriate for the town, main village or small village
- A greater focus on brownfield sites and regenerating town centres
- Identifying a site for a new settlement which is sustainable, or smaller developments that are linked
- Identifying sites due to unique abilities to deliver benefits for redefining the countryside
- Focus new development on transport corridors like the A326 or with access to larger market towns
- Increase densities to enable more homes to be delivered on smaller sites.

5. People

Housing - The N.P.P.F. requires local authorities to provide local plans that meet the housing needs for their area, plus take on the numbers of neighbouring areas if they have justified reasons not to keep to their own targets. Using the standard calculation method from the N.P.P.F. the required level in this plan area is 1,501 dwellings per annum. This bears no relevance to the amount of land available or numbers achievable. Unmet demand from neighbouring authorities is yet to be provided. Due to the level of environmental designations covering the area, this constitutes a clear reason to restrict scale, type or distribution of development. All constraints will be considered when sites come forward for assessment. There are currently 2,100 households on the housing register, the majority needing one- or two-bedroom properties. Over half this number are in the highest priority need.

There is a balance to be struck between letting the market guide suitable sites in urban areas and making specific policy provision. There are demands for certain housing with the ageing population but it's necessary to supply housing for younger people for the support of this population. Housing mix is required to cater for all demographics. The N.P.P.F. states that density should be 'optimised' for efficient land use but not necessarily maximised. The focus should be to recognise opportunity for change and embrace new building forms, informed by local distinctiveness. The 2021 census also indicated there are approximately 2,000 second homes in the plan area. These are considered to have a positive economic effect on the area but also negative for social elements of a town and can harm viability of key infrastructure such as schools. There also needs to be fair inclusive assessment to inform policies specifically for Gypsy, Traveller and travelling show people. The New Forest has a small but higher than average population of such.

Infrastructure – There is a great need to provide relevant infrastructure, to ensure communities continue to function and none more so than on new development, when timely provision is crucial to new residents and those existing in the surrounds. Cumulative impacts of development will need assessment to identify needs for green infrastructure, transport schemes, doctors' surgeries and schools etc. Utility companies are under a statutory duty to provide services to new dwellings, and digital connectivity continues to be important in rural areas.

Community facilities are a vital component too, with larger scale developments often able to provide on-site facilities. A cultural strategy will also be produced to outline needs and opportunities for locals to participate in art and culture.

Health and Wellbeing – A healthy place can help prevent ill-health and give conditions that aid positive health and wellbeing, through plan making active street layouts and providing green spaces are two ways of encouraging residents to make healthier choices, reduce isolation and impacts on air quality.

6. **Place**

Design - The N.P.P.F. reiterates that design is central to healthy, sustainable and safe placemaking for communities. N.F.D.C. will be preparing a new Design Code for the plan area. The planning also needs to be environmentally sensitive, well connected and future proofed. Minimal space standards can be set if justified, according to the N.P.P.F. as there is a need for homes to adapt to changing household need. Private and public gardens plus external space use such as bin stores, bicycle parking will be addressed.

The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Home Movers survey 2023 identified that 40% of new homes built in New Forest of 3 or more bedrooms were occupied by just 2 person households. The survey also showed that 15% work solely from home and 45% of households had no one in employment.

Climate Change – The legally binding target to reach net zero emissions by 2050 has created drivers across 4 areas – carbon reduction, climate adaptation, nature recovery and programme management. Achievements to date are held within the Annual Update Report. Extensive guidance has already been provided in a Supplementary Planning Document and sets best practice. The Local Plan needs to give a framework towards the national objectives, including distribution of development to lessen the need to travel and maximise travel by other means, sustainable materials to minimise demand for energy, identify opportunities for renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

Flood risk is an issue in low lying areas and around watercourses, therefore designing new buildings must ensure resilience to the effects of climate change, locating to minimise flood risk including predictions for sea level rise, protection of water quality and maximise water efficiency, and multi-function open spaces that can store carbon and address temperature increase, flooding and soil erosion.

Natural environment - The aim of the Local Plan will be to leave the environment in a better state, through the government dictated 10% biodiversity net gain. This essential asset is the lifeblood of our wellbeing and prosperity so has become the underpinning of the spatial strategy approach. These habitats cannot be harmed and are protected through legislation.

Natural capital – this concept is integral to NFDC growth strategy as the high-quality natural surrounds encourage activity and healthy living plus community cohesion so plays its own role in productivity, investment and economical enhancement.

Recreational impacts and nutrients – Adequate measures need to be taken to avoid or mitigate harm to protected sites from recreational impacts. The current strategies, 'Mitigation for Recreational Impacts on New Forest European Sites SPD' and 'Solent Recreation Mitigation Strategy' will need to be reviewed. The current strategy covers 4 elements

- New greenspace via developments over 50 dwellings must have areas of publicly accessible Alternative Natural Green Space
- Enhance and improve existing greenspace and footpaths/public rights of way located near to new development
- Ongoing monitoring of schemes including usage and visitor numbers
- Access and visitor management delivered by rangers to educate and monitor.

Biodiversity and BNG – The Environment Act requires a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain and possibility to have conservation covenants and register off site gains. Nature recovery and identifying

areas of opportunity, plus shaping projects to maximise nature benefits are led by Hampshire County Council through the required Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Green and blue infrastructure – Green infrastructure supports healthy lifestyles including active travel and recreation, air quality etc and with the network of rivers and lakes, work together as a multi-functional resource delivering quality of life and ecosystems.

Landscape character – These characteristics are set through history by physical and human changes, making the area unique. Recognising its importance and the vistas it gives is essential and being reviewed on an updated Landscape Character Assessment soon. Some sites are very sensitive so development needs to be carefully judged in relation to this.

Backup grazing land – This historic way of life, commoning helps suppress gorse and other vegetation, keeping the landscape open. Backup land is very important and acts as linked land to the open core of the forest. The cost of grazing land is providing a major constraint to long term viability of commoning. The land has not been protected in the past due to lack of published map and land has been lost to other uses, without considering the impact to the New Forest Special Protection Area.

Green Belt - Green belt is defined as checking unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas; prevent neighbouring towns from merging; assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; preserve setting and special character of historic towns and assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging use of derelict and other urban land. The plan area has the southwest part in South West Hampshire and adjoining South East Dorset green belt which stretches from Lymington across to Wareham and Verwood and Ringwood in the north. The last Green Belt study was published in 2016 when poorly performing land was removed. In the most recent NPPF a new classification of 'grey belt' was formed. This is defined as land in green belt that was previously developed and where it makes limited contribution to Green Belt purposes but excluding areas or assets of particular importance listed in NPPF.

Strategic Development Locations and Opportunities - Land will need allocating for housing due to the government's heightened targets. Smaller developments can be created quickly but the scale of need means there will also need to be greater scale allocations. These strategic sites offer best solutions in terms of climate change adaption and place setting. Environmental mitigation can be designed into the scheme from the start. In the new plan the existing allocations from the current plan will be assessed on status and where there is non-progression, new sites sought or allocation removed. There will be continued 'Call for Sites' throughout the plan making process.

Open Space, Sport, Recreation and Play - These areas provide a multitude of benefits including wellbeing and health, ecological value and add to green infrastructure. They can also help pull away recreation from more sensitive areas. These open spaces provide a fundamental community space for inclusive sports, both passive and active, and events.

Approach to formal sport – This, both indoor and outdoor, is for organised activity. There are a number of audits and quality assessments being conducted, including consultation and interviews with sports clubs, governing bodies, schools and providers. The demographic and socio-economic profile will provide activity rates to ensure facilities are of the capacity they need to serve.

Approach to parks, amenity open space and greenspace – This also includes play areas, natural greenspace, cemeteries, churchyards and allotments. Quality and access standards are to be applied to all, and provision of country parks is being considered. These are to provide a range of facilities and for car borne visitors, managed by statutory bodies. This will be in addition to the one at Lepe, with Moors Valley and Avon Heath on the other side of the boundary with Dorset.

Approach to equipped play areas – These areas are also currently being assessed for quality and access. Standards will be informed by national benchmarks, policy and local consultation. Where they

are proposed they should fully engage users with a full range of equipment and be fully inclusive, and existing equipment should meet existing accessibility standards.

Historic Environment - Heritage assets are any monument or building, site, archaeology below ground, area or landscape that has the significance to affect consideration in planning decisions. Designated heritage assets are listed buildings, scheduled monuments, conservation areas and registered parks or gardens. These lead to further significance to the unique character of the plan area, are irreplaceable and sensitive to change. There is a need to identify whether there are opportunities to enhance significance for some. NPPF requires the local plan to form strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of these environments. The new plan will continue to give great weight in protecting these assets and the setting. Any development impact must be minimised and mitigated if not completely avoided.

7. **PROSPERITY**

Economy - The New Forest is the fourth largest economy in Hampshire based on the Economic Profile of the District (published 2022). This is based in land-based activities, marine, hospitality and leisure, manufacturing and care sectors.

Current policies may need updating due to changes in retail floorspace, tourism and marine based businesses. Studies will be included to look at demand for new employment space in areas outside of the town centres. A clear vision for the economy has been placed on the Local Plan shoulders by the recent NPPF, so it creates sustainable growth in an area.

Need for employment land/floorspace – The amount of floorspace and land required will be set by spatial strategy in regards distribution of development. Consideration of protecting existing employment land will also be needed.

The Partnership for South Hampshire published a study in 2021 which has information relevant to the area, but NFDC will be commissioning their own needs study for the Local Plan evidence base.

Where can employment land /floorspace be delivered? – New mixed-use communities could have employment allocation land to provide jobs close to dwellings. The evidence base should provide suitable information to show demand in these locations and may include smaller scale industrial units.

Protection of Employment Land – Any sites that are not considered suitable for continued employment use may be allocated for housing. It is important however that the local economy still functions, grows and adapts in these circumstances.

Town and local centre uses – Retail continues to decline in the traditional format of high street shops, swapped out for online ordering and home deliveries. Local centres on the other hand, continue to provide a good range of facilities and services to the residents living close by. The existing local plan has separate policies for town centres, primary and secondary shopping frontages plus local shopping frontages. This approach will be assessed to ensure it is still appropriate.

Tourism – With the National Park being such a major draw for the area, businesses and residents from the outside area also benefit. Some tourism related pressure cannot be absorbed within the park area and the area outside of the park has plenty of visitor draw in its own right.

Transport - This is a key component of the plan area for all aspects of life. Location of development is paramount and residents should be considerably less reliant on cars if able to access other travel modes. The census in 2021 stated that 12% of residents didn't own a car, with number increasing to 17% in Ringwood and 20% in Totton. Lower density and/or poorly located development is associated with lack of viable public transport so results in increased car use. Consideration will be to increase density levels in developments near to transport corridors and close to facilities. Achieving connectivity through sustainable travel is to be identified through the local plan, as is a priority in the Hampshire Local Transport Plan 4. Green infrastructure, walking and cycling routes will provide shifts to those

modes with most main towns being close, with reliance on public transport being important for longer distances. Designing and delivering high quality places includes moving to 'Healthy Streets' an initiative to integrate public health in transport, planning and public health. Poor road access or parking provision can have negative environmental impact whereas residents use of the environment can have positive effect at design stage with more spaces for tree planting and landscaping.

Roads – The NPPF states that development should only be refused on highway grounds if safety is impacted, or impacts on the network are severe. Any specific development that shows significant impact to capacity, congestion or safety should be effectively mitigated.

Public transport – Parts of the area have excellent rail links whereas Avon Valley and the Waterside do not. Towns and villages are relatively well served by buses connecting towns to larger settlements such as Christchurch and Southampton. Other community bus services run and provide a vital service but are outside of NFDC remit and the future of public subsidy is unclear. Improvement to the wider transport network is totally reliant on investment by both public and private sector. Residential development with higher densities should be ideally located close to existing services or capable of supporting new routes.

Active Travel – This is walking and cycling and offers both zero carbon solution and of health and wellbeing importance. Design and layout of new development is to encourage active travel with larger sites offering convenient routes with cars not dominating design. The County Council, NFDC, National Park Authority and Forestry England have been working on Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan expecting to be adopted in 2025, identifying an extensive network of cycleways and walking zones for settlements.

Viability - Viability evidence will be provided as the reasoning for requirements from development, such as affordable housing levels. Securing developer contributions for infrastructure and affordable housing is the same now as the previous NPPF version, via Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy. Robust evidence is needed to ensure the proposals for development created is sustainable. The full document gives information on how viability is calculated and makes the point that nutrient neutrality rules have now significantly impacted scheme viability.

8. Next steps

It is stated that no views have been cast on any sites, locations, policy adjustments or scale of growth as the evidence base is still being formed. Draft policies will be worked on once this consultation ends, in time for the next stage (Regulation 18) later this year.

The following pages contain draft responses to the consultation questions booklet. Please take a look as these will form the basis of response unless altered during debate at the meeting 25 March 2025.