

Neighbourhood Plans: Common Question and Answers

Neighbourhood Plan Review

What is the Neighbourhood Plan Review?

This is a modification of the original Neighbourhood Plan, “made” in July 2021. It sets out a shared vision for the future of the Parish, including priorities on design, the environment, local character and community facilities. It forms part of the Development Plan and is used by Cheshire East when determining planning applications in the Parish.

The document is now 5 years old and is due for review but the principal reason for updating the document now is to include site allocations to shape where new housing is located and what infrastructure needs to be delivered alongside it, to ensure the parish does not grow beyond its sustainable limits.

Who has been involved in preparing the plan?

Neighbourhood Plans are community led planning documents. The original Plan was prepared by the Parish Council as the “designated body” and a local Steering Group including councillors and community members with input from residents.

Can the plan be used to help stop development?

No. National Planning Policy now requires all areas to plan for some level of growth. The Neighbourhood Plan cannot prevent development, but it can be used to help shape what it looks like, where it goes and how it benefits the existing community.

Does the neighbourhood plan mean new development will happen or is more likely to happen?

No. This is a great place to live! It’s attractive to developers and the current local and national planning picture means that the ‘tilted balance’ applies and planning applications are likely to be approved. If we do nothing, development is more or less guaranteed to happen anyway.

Additionally – even if we allocate sites in the plan, that doesn’t directly bring the site forward for development. The land owner or developer will still need to go through the usual planning application process and meet national and local planning policies, as well as the Neighbourhood Plan policies once made.

However, by including sites we can write a policy/policies about what those sites include and how they should be brought forward, giving the community much more influence over the final development.

Will the neighbourhood plan allocate land for development?

Yes we will, allocating sites in a neighbourhood plan is the strongest approach the community can take in deciding what type, where and how development comes forward.

What if I disagree with part of the plan or think something is missing?

That is completely fine, there will be several opportunities where you can review the plan (or specific ideas) and give your feedback. You can provide comments explaining what you think should be changed, included or excluded and why. All responses will be reviewed and considered as the Plan is updated.

Where can I read the full plan and supporting documents?

The current Plan and emerging documents are best viewed online:

Allocating sites how and why

Why is what's happening nationally relevant to planning applications in our area?

National and local planning policy is changing how planning decisions are made. Recently the government have made lots of changes from how Local Plans will be made to the updated content of National Planning Policy Framework, as well as to Planning Practice Guidance and the number of homes each area is required to build each year. This isn't unusual for new governments to make changes to how planning works but the changes over the last 18 months have been significant with an emphasis on unblocking the planning system, encouraging more development and making it easier to secure permission.

Why do we have to build so many houses now?

Housing needs change over time. If we look back on satellite images and historic maps, even places that have seemed to stay the same for generations show significant change every 50 years, or more often. Shavington has "new" developments that were built at various times through the 20th century as well as the considerable number of new builds since 2015; you might live in one yourself! These homes were new houses built on what was green fields at the time, and built to reflect changes in local employment, to recover from war, and to improve living standards. In Shavington and combination of its location and rural backdrop makes it an attractive place to live. The new by-pass,

opened in 2003, which made access easier and subsequent planned growth of the parish through the Cheshire East Local Plan which directed new development in and near Crewe, has made our parish a popular choice to live, work and bring up a family.

Whilst development is often perceived negatively, there are positives about thinking about what kind of new homes are needed as well. New homes can provide affordable homes for young people as well as accessible homes for downsizers. Future developments could be better than the ones you've had previously, they could have better access to public transport or greener streets, improved drainage, or create new facilities for the community... being part of the housing conversation early means having the chance to put these ideas into policy and giving that policy strong weight in future decisions.

What does the tilted balance mean?

When the 'tilted balance' applies it's more likely that speculative planning applications for homes will be approved, even if planning applications for the same area have been refused in the past.

This happens because more weight is given in the planning balance to the fact that new housing is being provided in the local plan area.

Under the new draft NPPF the tilted balance is replaced with 'the presumption in favour of development' but the principles behind it are similar.

When does the tilted balance apply?

It applies when:

- There is no up to date Local Plan or Neighbourhood Plan
- The five-year housing land supply figure is low (less than 5 years)
- Housing Delivery Test is less than 75% of the requirement

The tilted balance is currently applied in Shavington as the five-year housing land supply figure is below 5 – currently 3.8 years. With the new Local Plan being prepared to the new government 30-month timetable which starts this summer, a new Local Plan will not be in place until 2029. As such the Neighbourhood Plan has a very important role to play in filling the policy vacuum and “retilting” the balance.

What is 5-year Housing Land Supply and the Housing Delivery Test?

5-year Housing Land Supply is about how many homes are expected to be built over the next five years based on *deliverable* sites in the local area (eg it has to be realistic that the site will be built in the next five years).

The Housing Delivery Test is about how many homes have been built 'delivered' over the last three years.

What is paragraph 14/paragraph S5/S6?

Paragraph 14 (NPPF 2025) states that even where the tilted balance applies if “a) the neighbourhood plan became part of the development plan five years or less before the date on which the decision is made; and b) the neighbourhood plan contains policies and allocations to meet its identified housing requirement” that “the adverse impact of allowing development that conflicts with the neighbourhood plan is likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits...”

Paragraph S6 (proposed NPPF 2026) the phrase used becomes ‘Presumption in favour of development. In the case of neighbourhood plans: where “a. The neighbourhood plan became part of the development plan five years or less before the date on which the decision is made; and b. The neighbourhood plan contains allocation to meet its identified housing requirement (see policy HO2).” This applies “the benefits of approving development are likely to be substantially outweighed by the adverse effects where a proposal would conflict with a neighbourhood plan...”

In both cases having an up-to-date neighbourhood plan that allocates sufficient housing is a strong reason for refusal of speculative development as it reinstates the plan-led system.

Settlement Spatial Plans

What is a Settlement Spatial Plan?

Settlement Spatial Plans are a way of thinking about the possible future of an area – they are not predictions but logical and distinct scenarios which imagine a settlement developing in a particular way. Those scenarios are then tested; what would the infrastructure requirements of each be? Where would a new primary school be best located? What are the environmental or climate change impacts? What would the positives and negatives be?

The scenarios are published for residents and stakeholders to comment on, giving everyone the opportunity to make their own decisions and views. This process typically leads to a clear preference – a scenario that most people agree is the best way for the settlement to develop in the future.

What are Settlement Spatial Plans used for?

They can be used to:

- Respond to planning applications
- To respond to Local Plans
- To allocate sites in Neighbourhood Plans

Will all of the land identified in each Scenario be allocated in the neighbourhood/local plan if we choose that Scenario?

Not necessarily, each Scenario is figurative, not a literal line on a map. It's about whether development in that particular area would be suitable, not a specific site. There may be reasons why some sites cannot be included in the final allocations.

Can I choose none of the scenarios?

If none of the scenarios make sense to you, you can suggest a different combination of land that you think are more logically and would suit the future development of the area better.

For all of the reasons we have explained previously, no development isn't a realistic option for the future, so the best way to contribute is to think in detail about each scenario and what you do or don't like about each of them. Is there anything (apart from not building any houses) that would make the scenario better?

How can I respond to the consultation?

You can respond by attending one of the drop in sessions or reading the presentation pack on line and then complete the survey from the link on our website or by requesting a paper copy from the Parish Council.

Regulation 14 and formal consultation

What happens next?

This engagement is an early and informal stage of the Plan making process. It gives residents, landowners and key stakeholders the chance to comment on the scenarios before a preferred scenario is chosen and developed or indeed a new scenario emerges, based on the comments made. All feedback received will be reviewed and used to indicate a preferred scenario before further engagement with land interests and a technical environmental assessment is undertaken to refine the preferred scenario into a site allocations policy for the modified Neighbourhood Plan.

The first formal stage of the consultation process is called Regulation 14 and it is anticipated that this will follow in early summer this year. This is a statutory consultation which runs for 6 weeks and asks the planning authority and key identified consultees such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, utility providers etc.. for their comments on the proposals. Alongside this residents and interested parties and local organisations will also be asked for their views.

What about the other policies in the Neighbourhood Plan?

The parish council has indicated that the focus for the modified plan are the site allocations. This is in order to engage §14 NPPF once the Plan has been through examination and referendum and allow for Cheshire East to use the modified Neighbourhood Plan, as it progresses through the various stages, as a material consideration in determining planning applications (this is once it has passed through the first two formal consultation stages.)

As such, the intention is to review the existing policies in the neighbourhood plan and only amend them where necessary to comply with current national policy which has changed since the original plan was made. The government are clear that neighbourhood plans should not duplicate local or national policy, so where a matter is adequately covered by either of these, then the policy may be withdrawn unless it specifically provides local detail, in which case only minor tweaks may be required. This is to ensure the neighbourhood plan continues to work well as part of the development plan and can be applied appropriately when considering planning applications.