

Neighbourhood Planning Guidance Note 10

Evidence base and information requirements

April 2013 - Revised June 2015



The purpose of this guidance note is twofold; to explain the necessity of gathering evidence to support the preparation of your plan and to outline the steps that you will need to take, in order to ensure that the evidence base underlying your plan is both *relevant* to your Neighbourhood Area and *proportionate* to the job being undertaken in the plan.

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Evidence base and information requirements

The reforms to the planning system do not spell the end of a need for planning policy to be backed by solid evidence. In fact, any plan not supported by evidence could be challenged at the examination stage.

When your Neighbourhood Development Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order is examined, a series of tests will be applied including whether or not the content of your plan is justified by the evidence base/background information underlying it. Part of this will include considering the source of the information and how up to date it is. So it is essential that your evidence is fit for purpose – after all, these are powerful planning tools; the Neighbourhood Development Order grants planning permission for certain schemes and the Neighbourhood Development Plan will be used to determine planning applications.

Whilst the type of evidence that will be required for all Neighbourhood Development Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders is not prescribed, your evidence base must contain two elements:

Participation: evidence of the views of the local community and others who have a stake in the future of the area (for example, local businesses and employers).

Research/fact finding: evidence that the choices made by the plan are backed up by the background facts.

Information should be as up to date as possible. It is conceivable that things will change during the plan making process and so new evidence might be needed to address a new issue, or to strengthen an area where there is little existing evidence to support the plan.

You should take care to avoid an over zealous approach, as it is possible to have too much information which could over burden the steering/working groups time and resources at the start of the plan making process.

Before you plunge in...

It is important to note that Herefordshire Council is able to provide a substantial ready-made evidence base for your plan. The evidence base studies listed below informed the preparation of the Local Plan - Core Strategy and could be useful in shaping your proposals.

Affordable Housing Viability Study 2010 - provides the justification for the thresholds and targets set within the Core Strategy policy on affordable housing.

Local Housing Market Assessment 2014 - considers the need and demand for housing across each of Herefordshire's Housing Market Areas up to 2031.

Building Biodiversity into the LDF 2009 - identifies the biodiversity and geodiversity constraints and sensitivities to new development across Herefordshire.

Economic Viability Assessment 2014 - examines the economic viability of developments within Herefordshire over a twenty year period up to 2031.

Employment Land Study 2012 - examines the economic opportunities (and threats) of settlements across Herefordshire.

Rural Settlement Hierarchy Background Paper 2010 - identifies settlements that can accommodate balanced and modest growth within Herefordshire. This paper sets out a two tier system for settlements, identifying where the main focus of proportionate growth should be and a second tier which should consider growth but focus on development in keeping with the settlements distinctiveness.

Green Infrastructure Strategy 2010 - identifies the circumstances in which green assets (e.g. parks and public rights of way) can be incorporated into a multi-functional environment.

Sub-Regional Gypsy and Travellers Assessment 2013 - quantifies the need for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation on a range of sites across Herefordshire.

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Historic Townscape of Central Hereford

2010 - examines the townscape of central Hereford from an archaeological perspective, in order to determine what its historical components are, their state of preservation and their significance.

Landscape Character Assessment

- Landscape Character Assessment is an assessment to identify, describe, classify and map the distinctiveness of Herefordshire's landscape. This provides baseline information to monitor and guide changes to landscape, and informs planning decisions, policies and various land use strategies within Herefordshire.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) 2012

- identifies a range of potential housing sites with varying degrees of deliverability based on such as issues as the location of flood plains and the ease of highways access.

Herefordshire Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP) 2013-2015

- Sets out the council's strategy for supporting economic growth, social inclusion and reducing the environmental impacts of transport, as well as the program of investment for the period April 2013 - April 2015.

Open Space Study (PPG17) 2006 - assesses the levels of open space and outdoor sports and recreation facilities across Herefordshire in terms of the provision and opportunities for enhancement.

Play Facilities Strategy 2012 - identifies areas which need investment in outdoor play space. This document provides guidance and a framework for the development, delivery and continued sustainability of providing new and improved play facilities for children and young people in Herefordshire to 2031.

Rapid Townscape Assessments (Hereford, Ledbury and Ross) 2010 - describes the origins and development of these settlements, as well as looking at their current form, urban context, condition and relative significance. Provides a broad design framework for areas with development potential.

Renewable Energy Study 2010 - calculates energy demand within Herefordshire and recommends the types of renewable and low

carbon energy technologies that would be worth installing across the county.

Urban Fringe Sensitivity Analysis 2010

- classifies the level of sensitivity of the urban fringe landscape of Hereford and the five market towns.

Water Studies 2014 - includes two components: Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Water Cycle Study. Investigates the availability of water supply, treatment and infrastructure across Herefordshire and identifies the areas of the county which are prone to flooding.

We have also prepared the following evidence based studies, though these are strategic in their approach and may not bear much relevance to your aims and objectives as a consequence:

- Economic Viability Assessment
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA)
- Relief Road Studies

Some of these studies will be more relevant to towns rather than smaller villages. Other studies are place specific and only relevant to Neighbourhood Areas that fall within the studied area.

- Malvern Hills AONB Management Plan 2014
- Wye Valley AONB Management Plan 2014
- Town Centres Study 2012
- Hereford Streetscape Design 2009

If in doubt about the usefulness of any of these studies, please ask a member of the Neighbourhood Planning team. All of the evidence base detailed can be downloaded free of charge from Herefordshire Council's website.

Also of importance is previous research undertaken by other departments across the Council. Information on such issues as housing need and the demographic profile of your community can be obtained from the facts and figures website. Links are available on the Neighbourhood Planning web pages.

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What is the evidence for?

The evidence will be used to inform your plan and underpin its objectives. For example, if one of your objectives is to *'meet the housing needs of all sections of the community'* then you will need evidence as to the up to date requirement, this can be found in the Housing Needs Survey. In general, evidence will help:

Define the issues currently existing within the area - such as the demography of the parish, housing need and other issues that are deemed to be important

Find the solutions - by underpinning the generation and testing of a range of options

Identify what policies you need - you know what you've got to address and what you are trying to do. Policies can be drawn up to highlight your parishes distinctiveness, character etc that would not be drawn upon in detail within the Local Plan - Core Strategy.

Identify who is going to help - a range of service providers will be able to assist with the delivery of your plan, including the development industry, statutory agencies (for example, Highways England) and other bodies which hold useful evidence (for example, Welsh Water)

Shape the kind of plan you want - in answering some of the questions around objectives and problems to solve, your evidence might point you in a particular direction - the best outcome might be a Neighbourhood Development Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order, or it might be best dealt with in your Parish Plan or Village Design Statement

Plan for infrastructure and investment - this includes infrastructure at a neighbourhood level

Set targets - any numbers or percentages aspired to in the plan will need to be justified by evidence for instance the number of homes required and the ratio of market to affordable homes on an allocated site.

Putting together your evidence base

Herefordshire Council can share its evidence on a number of themes ranging from landscape

character and biodiversity to affordable housing and employment. Using this evidence is one way to reduce the time taken to prepare your Neighbourhood Development Plan, and to minimise costs. It may be that you will need to gather your own evidence to address the key issues raised by the local community and others who have a stake in the future of your parish.

Evidence gathering can be time consuming and cause delays in getting a plan finished, so you ought to ask the following questions:

- Do you really need it to inform your choices?
- What would happen if you didn't have it?
- Is it relevant to your area and objectives?
- If so, what is the best way of getting it?

All service providers need to be fully engaged in the process, and it is worth noting that they are now under a 'duty to cooperate'. This means that they have to work with each other to help you address key issues. It is possible that housing, employment and business development will be key issues in many parishes, and so developers, local business organisations, and possibly the Local Enterprise Partnership may wish to be engaged in identifying key issues and building the evidence base.

Step 1: List the types of evidence required to support your plan

Step 2: Go back over your plan and ask the questions about each item on the list.

Step 3: Ask yourselves what is definitely required and what may be required

Step 4: Order the evidence required by stage of plan preparation - when do you need what?

Step 5: Ask yourselves what evidence will be required in order to develop and test options at an early stage; ensure that this evidence is largely complete before reaching decisions on preferred options.

Step 6: Identify and initiate early on those evidence based studies which might result in land coming forward for

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development (SHLAA, employment land) and, conversely, those which might exclude land from development (Habitats Regulations Assessment, Flood Risk Assessment)

need, think about where you might obtain it. What do you need to get from such stakeholders as utilities companies and infrastructure providers?

What could be prepared jointly with other parish councils? And what could you do by yourselves or with help from Herefordshire Council's Neighbourhood Planning team? Some of your options are discussed in Table 2 below.

Step 7: Gather the evidence

Once you've established what evidence you

Table 1 - How to determine the evidence required for your plan

Objective	How will this be met?	What types of evidence are relevant?	Is this needed?		
			Yes	No	Maybe
To meet the housing needs of all sections of the community, including those in need of affordable housing (for sites 11 houses or more)	Allocate sites for affordable housing	Housing Needs Survey	✓		
		Housing Land/Urban Capacity Study'	✓		
		Affordable Housing Viability Study		✓	
		Habitat Regulations Assessment	✓		
		Flood Risk Assessment			✓

Option	Pros	Cons
Use your community	<i>This is compulsory: outputs from community engagement exercises and the views of the local community are part of the evidence base.</i>	
Liase with statutory bodies (e.g. Highways England)	<i>This is compulsory: statutory bodies need to work with you to resolve any issues that might impinge on the deliverability of your plan.</i>	
Liase with utilities companies and infrastructure providers	Identifies potential show stoppers from the outset (e.g. whether or not there is sufficient capacity in the existing sewerage system to accommodate housing allocations)	None although liaising with utilities companies and infrastructure providers may seem like hassle, it should help to identify key issues from the outset, thereby reducing needless delays further down the line
Use the Council's evidence base	Free of charge Available now Covers a wide raft of spatial issues	Certain studies are highly complex and may be irrelevant or difficult to tailor to your requirements
Prepare evidence in-house	You are in control More cost effective than using consultants Evidence will be directly relevant to your proposals	May be a lack of expertise in the right areas (e.g. no planner, surveyor or architect within steering group, therefore unable to prepare housing land study without assistance)
Commission evidence from consultants	Evidence tailored to your brief Expertise available across most sectors	Securing value for money
Seek the input of third parties (e.g. developers and local businesses)	Could assist with preparing the plan	Ensuring that any advice and help is completely impartial

Table 2 - Where to obtain your evidence

Managing evidence

You will write your plan whilst things are still evolving, so the evidence base may need to be augmented as the plan develops, as new sources of evidence come to light, some becomes out of date, and new issues arise to be addressed. But still aim to keep it relevant and proportionate, and try to avoid introducing new evidence just before or during the examination.

It is important to document your evidence as it evolves, as the Inspector will be interested in the trail and you ought to review the evidence for timeliness (is it up-to-date, or at least the latest available?), relevance and completeness in terms of coverage of the parish. A simple evidence base tracker can be created in Excel and updated in accordance with progress.

Using consultants

The following should be borne in mind in the event that you decide to commission evidence from consultants,

- Write a clear brief with clear objectives
- Make sure you meet the main individual(s) who will be working on the project
- Identify who will be responsible for managing the contract with the consultant
- If you want a steering group be clear about its role and don't be afraid of challenging if the work isn't good enough or the brief isn't kept to.

Evidence base and information requirements

Neighbourhood Planning guidance notes available:

Deciding to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan

1. Which is the right tool for your parish
2. What is a Neighbourhood Development Plan
3. Getting started
4. A guide to procedures
5. Funding

Plan Production

6. Developing a Vision and Objectives
7. Generating options
8. Writing planning policies
9. Environmental Assessment
10. Evidence base and information requirements
11. Implementation and Monitoring
12. Best practice community engagement techniques
13. Statutory consultees
14. Writing a consultation statement
15. Planning and other legislation
16. Web enabling your plan
17. Using OS based mapping
18. Glossary of planning terms

Topics

19. Sustainable Water Management in Herefordshire
20. Guide to settlement boundaries
21. Guide to site assessment and choosing allocation sites
22. Meeting your housing requirements
23. Conservation issues
24. Recreational areas
25. Renewable energy
26. Transport issues
27. Community Infrastructure Levy

Additional Guidance

28. Setting up a steering group
29. Creating a questionnaire
30. Community facilities
31. Conformity with the Local Plan (Core Strategy)
32. Examinations of Neighbourhood Development Plans
33. Guide to Neighbourhood Development Plan Referendums
34. Tourism
35. Basic Conditions
36. Your plan - Contributing to sustainable development