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# Advice Note on Neighbourhood Planning and the Historic Environment

Draft for Public Consultation November 2017

## Summary

This advice note is written to help neighbourhood planning groups, local planning authorities and other stakeholders when they consider the historic environment in neighbourhood plans. It assumes readers already have an interest in identifying what makes a local area special and offers more information about the potential role of heritage in achieving this aim.

This advice note is published for consultation and includes text only. Pictures will be added to the final version, which will be supported by further guidance, information, case studies and a summary checklist on our [website](#) (the checklist is reproduced on the next page).



## Checklist

The following checklist summarises some of the key points in the advice note and may guide you in tackling heritage in your neighbourhood plan:

1. Does your neighbourhood include any heritage assets (they don't need to be protected by designation to be of interest)?
2. Have you looked at your local Historic Environment Record?
3. Have you discussed your proposals for a Plan with your local authority historic environment advisers and the person at your local planning authority responsible for Neighbourhood Plans?
4. Does the Plan have a clear vision for the historic environment?
5. What are the key conservation issues?
6. How can the historic environment / heritage assets be used to help achieve your overall goals for development?
7. What are the opportunities for protecting or improving the heritage of your neighbourhood, or for developing a better understanding or appreciation of it?
8. Have you considered as part of your design policies local characteristics and how new development can be made locally distinctive?
9. What impact will your Plan proposals have on heritage assets or their settings or the local character?
10. Have you consulted Historic England's "Heritage at Risk Register" or any risk register held by your local authority - can your plan proposals make any use of heritage assets on these registers?
11. Have you consulted Historic England where you consider our interests to be affected? You should also consult us on all Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders.



## Contents List

1. **Why you should consider the historic environment in your plan**
  - 1.1 What is the historic environment?
  - 1.2 Why is the historic environment important?
  - 1.3 Help with neighbourhood planning
  
2. **Understanding the historic environment in your plan area**
  - 2.1 What information do you need?
  - 2.2 Using existing sources of information
  - 2.3 Additional evidence gathering
  
3. **Translating evidence into policy**
  - 3.1 Why policies are important
  - 3.2 Developing policies to deliver your heritage objectives
  - 3.3 Identifying opportunities
  
4. **Strategic environmental assessment (SEA)**
  - 4.1 When is SEA needed?
  - 4.2 What is involved?
  
5. **The role of Historic England**



# 1. Why you should consider the historic environment in your plan

## 1.1 What is the historic environment?

When you start to prepare a neighbourhood plan it is important that the plan's foundations are informed by a suitably broad understanding of what is meant by the historic environment. Box 1 includes the definition of the historic environment stated in the Glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The NPPF sets national planning policy that everybody has to abide by and requires planners to recognise and seek to sustain the significance of individual heritage assets. This advice note explores what this means in practice.

### Box 1: Some useful definitions (from the NPPF Glossary)

#### Historic environment

All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora.

#### Heritage asset

A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing)

#### Significance (for heritage policy)

The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.

At the national and local level Historic England, the Secretary of State and Local Planning Authorities apply rigorous criteria to decide which heritage assets should be designated. Not all



assets are designated in the same way; for example, conservation areas tend to be designated locally, whereas the Secretary of State is responsible for designating listed buildings and scheduled monuments. Heritage assets that are afforded the highest level of protection in planning policy are considered to have interests that are special on a national level.

There are also very many sites, monuments, buildings, places areas and landscapes that do not meet these criteria but do have significant interest that is locally valued and, therefore, also merit consideration in planning. Some of these are recorded by local planning authorities via 'local lists' or within the Historic Environment Record (HER). But these records provide only a partial record of the historic environment and it is possible that neighbourhood plan groups will identify other heritage assets during the plan-making process.

Heritage assets include more than just buildings and monuments; they also include sites, places, areas or landscapes. The unifying factor, as stated above, is that the asset has a degree of significance that merits consideration in planning decisions. As stated in the core planning principles in the NPPF (in paragraph 17 of the NPPF) planning should "*conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations*".

Understanding significance is therefore a key issue and has a bearing on decision-making in plan-making and policy use. Also this means that planning should encourage the 'enjoyment' of the historic environment and its positive contribution to new development, rather than taking a purely protective approach. This helps to ensure the historic environment will continue to be valued and remain 'viable' for future generations.

## 1.2 Why is the historic environment important?

Heritage highlights the unique character of a place and plays an important part in shaping how we perceive and experience a place. It is an important source of economic growth, whereby investing in the historic environment generates economic returns for local places. Research results on these themes are available on the [Heritage Counts website](#).

Local planning authorities should set out in their local plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment (as stated in the NPPF, paragraph 126). Getting the right strategic policies in a local plan, with which neighbourhood plans must conform, is an important priority for local authorities. Strategic priorities for local plans include the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment (see NPPF paragraph 156). Historic England does a lot of work to support local authorities in this area.



By its very nature local heritage is valued by its community and therefore it is important for it to be protected at the most local level by those who treasure it most. At its simplest this might mean identifying the features of the area's historic environment the community value and preparing policies to ensure the need for their conservation is given appropriate weight in decisions.

In some cases this might also mean identifying development that would be inappropriate due to its impacts on the historic environment (see NPPF paragraph 127). In others a plan could set mitigation measures such as design or conservation requirements that would help to make the development an acceptable use of land.

Remember that a neighbourhood plan should address the development and use of land. It can cover wider community aspirations, but non-land use matters should be clearly identifiable eg in a companion document or annex. (Some neighbourhood planning groups produce design guidance in support of their neighbourhood plan which can be adopted via the local authority as a supplementary planning document. For example, a Building Design Guide has been drafted by Hanley Castle Parish Council to accompany alongside its Neighbourhood Plan; relevant documents are available for download on the [Hanley Castle Parish Council website](#).)

Preparing a neighbourhood plan may also provide opportunities to repair, conserve or bring heritage assets back into use, especially those that are at risk. Including heritage in your neighbourhood plan can therefore help to protect those areas which are valued locally and ensure that they remain in productive use where appropriate.

The local plan may need to consider how objectives for the historic environment relate to a range of other objectives for the area, ranging from building a strong, competitive economy and supporting the health and welfare of residents to requiring good design (see our Good Practice Advice Note 1 for more information). This is also true of neighbourhood plans.

It is often a place's distinctive heritage that makes it special. That distinctiveness not only gives local people a sense of belonging or identity and a feeling of pride in a place, but it can help to attract investment to an area. Heritage can therefore be a powerful tool for delivering regeneration, influencing plans for growth, and providing space for business, community facilities and other activities.

Understanding and appreciating the local historic environment can help to ensure that potential new development is properly integrated with what is already there and does not



result in the loss of local distinctiveness. To inform this understanding, character assessment is an important tool in planning for local communities who wish to put into words what they value about their local heritage and is explored further in this advice note. Such assessment can also identify opportunities for improvement and the challenges that will need to be faced.

Addressing how best to integrate new development into an existing place can encourage people to be innovative. Taking into account what is special about a place often demonstrates that off-the-shelf design and construction might not be appropriate. It encourages sensitive development of historic buildings and places that can invigorate an area, stimulating investment, entrepreneurship, tourism and employment.

### **1.3 Help with neighbourhood planning**

Neighbourhood planning can be complex and its legal framework continues to evolve; but, as this section explores, help is available.

On 27 April 2017 the Neighbourhood Planning Act came into force. Alongside a range of measures, the Act requires local authorities to have regard to neighbourhood plans that have been through their examinations (and the local authority has decided that a referendum is to be held on them) when determining planning applications and it gives these emerging neighbourhood plans the same weight as a ‘made’ (adopted) neighbourhood plan.

The Act also outlines a ‘proportionate’ process for modifying neighbourhood plans or orders and makes the duty on local planning authorities to support neighbourhood planning groups more transparent.

The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) requires local authorities to take “*a proactive and positive approach, working collaboratively with a qualifying body particularly sharing evidence and seeking to resolve any issues to ensure the draft neighbourhood plan has the greatest chance of success at independent examination.*” Your planning authority’s conservation officer and archaeological advisor (often the County Archaeologist) should be your first port of call for queries relating to how your plan can or should respond to heritage assets and the historic environment.

We recommend getting in touch with the relevant local authority planning service at an early stage to scope issues and understand what their support can be. Information held by the local authority and used in the preparation of its local plan is often the starting point for neighbourhood plans.



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Support from heritage specialists may also be required; for example, to identify where the significance lies and its sensitivity to change, which can unlock viable uses for an asset and secure its long-term future.

Our experience has shown that when communities are considering the allocation of sites and need to consider the impact of heritage assets on and off-site, many struggle to assess significance without specialist advice. Potentially this would require more specialised knowledge than that offered by a general planning consultancy. Historic England's advice note on [Managing Significance in Decision Taking](#) includes more information on finding such expertise. This includes, for example, links to a register of suitably experienced heritage consultants maintained by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) and a register maintained by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA).

Other useful information may be available from local environmental and amenity groups.

Our role at Historic England is explained further in section 5 and on our [website](#).



## 2. Understanding the historic environment in your plan area

### 2.1 What information do you need?

As confirmed by the Government's Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), there is no 'tick box' list of [evidence for neighbourhood planning](#). "*Proportionate, robust evidence should support the choices made and the approach taken.*" In effect this means the evidence you need to collect will depend on what you want your plan to do.

For example, general policies to ensure the design of new development will protect local distinctiveness might require a study defining positive local characteristics of existing development design and form (for example, heights, roof shapes, windows, materials and architectural details) to inform the policy and its implementation. More site specific policies, such as site allocations or protection of locally valued heritage assets may require more detailed evidence such as site and local context assessments or review of proposed heritage assets against locally derived criteria.

There are various options to consider for presenting the information you gather on heritage. You may undertake specific site assessments that include consideration of the historic environment. Alternatively, or in addition, you may wish to collate more general information in a topic paper on heritage.

At the outset, and before determining exactly what your policies will do, it may be helpful to collect a very broad set of data to understand the plan area's heritage resources and any heritage issues or opportunities that your plan might address. Note: if you are required to undertake Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA), this information would be important when assessing the impacts of proposed policies – see section 4 for more on SEA.

### 2.2 Using existing sources of information

Many neighbourhood plan groups start by constructing a list of all the designated heritage assets in their area. We recommend using the [National Heritage List for England](#) to compile this information and enhancing this approach by preparing a map that shows where these features and other non-designated heritage assets are, as well as any issues they face. This will help you to consider whether the plan's spatial strategy needs to respond to heritage issues or opportunities in a particular way. If you note, for example, that the access road for a proposed development site would run through a tranquil conservation area you can quickly predict that



this may have an impact on a valued feature of the area. In this case you might need to consider whether an alternative access route could be provided to avoid this impact or another site is more appropriate.

The [PPG](#) requires that neighbourhood plans, where relevant, include “*enough information about local heritage to guide decisions and put broader strategic heritage policies from the local plan into action at a neighbourhood scale*”.

The same section of the PPG continues by stating that: “*Where it is relevant, designated heritage assets within the plan area should be clearly identified at the start of the plan-making process so they can be appropriately taken into account. In addition, and where relevant, **neighbourhood plans need to include enough information about local non-designated heritage assets including sites of archaeological interest to guide decisions***”. The latter point highlighted in bold is crucial and is one that can be missed.

Set in this context, you should check if your local authority has prepared a ‘local list’ of assets which having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions but which are not formally designated.

You may also wish to identify other previously unidentified heritage assets during the plan-making process, such as sites, areas, places and landscapes, which can be captured in a list of locally-valued heritage assets. For more information download an information sheet on promoting the protection of heritage assets that is available from our [website](#).

An area’s archaeological potential should be assessed by consulting the local Historic Environment Record (HER), as well as historical maps of the area. This can help to identify any non-designated heritage assets that could be affected by plan policies (including indirectly by effects on setting or viability). To explore the HER contact your local Historic Environment Record Officer (HERO) (their contact details are available at the Association of Local Government Archaeologists [website](#)) or visit the Heritage Gateway (see below).

### How do I find this information?

The Historic Environment Record (HER), normally maintained by your County Council, is a key resource, and local voluntary groups (such as the civic society, building preservation trusts and local history groups) may also hold supporting information. The HER will have historic mapping in its collections.



There is a wide range of information about the historic environment available online which could be useful for your neighbourhood plan, such as:

- [Heritage Gateway](#): gives remote access to many local HERs for information on historic buildings, archaeological sites and other features, although the information provided is only a summary of what is recorded by the HER. Other HERs may have their own online search facilities (search online using the County, City or Unitary Authority name and 'Historic Environment Record' for details).
- [Historic Landscape Characterisation](#): if you wish to see the bigger picture of the historic environment as a whole, Historic Landscape Characterisation is a long-established archaeological and historical method, using a comprehensive and systematic approach (informed by modern and historic maps or aerial photographs). Related data are available on a countywide scale from your local HER, which can provide a useful starting point by providing previously identified character areas and information about their past and present characteristics. You will need to make your own judgements about which of these are most valued, however, and you will probably wish then to focus down to character on a more local level.
- [The National Heritage List for England](#): provides descriptions of all nationally designated heritage assets including listed buildings, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields and protected wrecks. However, these descriptions vary in their completeness with only the most recent providing analysis of each asset's significance.
- [Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans](#): contact your local authority to find out if they have prepared these important documents to manage conservation areas in your area. An appraisal normally defines the area's special interest, identifies positive features of character or appearance and identifies any issues that are opportunities to enhance the area. If there isn't one, or it is out of date, this could be prepared or updated as part of the plan. This can also help to inform the content of the plan as well as be a material consideration in related planning decisions.
- [Local Heritage Listing](#): many local authorities hold a local list of buildings or places with locally valued heritage interest in their area normally, prepared using selection criteria. Your local planning department should be able to provide details of the records they hold.
- [Heritage at Risk Register](#): this national register records designated heritage assets that are considered to be 'at risk'. It does not include Grade II listed buildings or non-



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designated heritage assets; however, (though not required) your local authority may maintain its own buildings at risk register.

- [Heritage Counts](#): is the annual survey of the state of England's historic environment and looks at its wider social and economic role it may provide useful information about the wider social, economic and environmental benefits that heritage provides that you can apply to your plan.

Historic England heritage's advice by topic: guidance and advice on a range of subjects including [planning](#), regeneration, places of worship and heritage crime. Detailed, practical advice on how to implement national planning policy and guidance is included in a series of [Historic England Advice Notes](#). We have also produced Good Practice Advice (GPA) on local plan making, managing significance, and setting and views.



## 2.3 Additional evidence gathering

Once you have identified the information available, if it is not telling you all need to know, there are a range of further actions that you may need to undertake. Bear in mind that the more specific and detailed your policy, the more detailed your evidence base needs to be.

### Community consultation

At the outset (ie before starting to prepare a neighbourhood plan) it is useful to fully understand what it is the community values or would like to improve about their local area. In addition to the formal requirements for consultation (which are explained in the regulations and PPG) community consultation provides a way of identifying heritage issues for the plan to address and encouraging participation in the plan-making process. Steps to promote active engagement in the issues that you identify can also help to maintain interest and support for the plan (and its agenda or policies) as it progresses.

A consultation exercise might ask residents, amongst other things, to identify a feature of the area that should be given particular consideration for conservation in decision-making, or to identify an issue they feel has detracted from the area's historic character in the recent past.

### Character assessment

Character assessment is an area or place-based assessment that sets out the area's defining positive characteristics as well as identifying the features that contribute to local distinctiveness. It can be an important building block in your evidence base, particularly if your plan is to include policies that inform the design of new development. Note that paragraph 58 of the NPPF, in the section on requiring good design, begins: "*Local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics*".

There are a range of sources of advice on preparing your own character assessment, depending on how much detail you require what sort of place it is and the types of policy that you plan to write.

Landscape Character Assessment (including assessment of landscape sensitivity) would be needed if development is proposed (in plan-making) that incorporates assessment of major expansion options, or where developments could affect a highly sensitive landscape, such as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (refer to NPPF paragraph 170).



Historic England also produced [guidance on Historic Area Assessment \(HAA\)](#) , which involves making a more detailed study of an area than character assessment but could be undertaken as a follow-on to character assessment in a part of your area subject to particular pressure for development or specially sensitive to the effects of change. HAAs typically give insights into how and why a place has come to look the way it does. They identify the range of landscapes and building types, their dates and forms, and relate them to the wider evolution of the area. They can identify whether individual buildings or places are subject to issues, as well as noting opportunities for enhancement. HAAs can be used to identify archaeological sites.

### Toolkits on character assessment

In terms of sources of guidance specifically designed for community use, "Your Place Matters" contains a [Community Planning Toolkit](#) that Historic England has published jointly with Worcestershire County Council; it assists particularly communities in rural areas and has been used extensively in the West Midlands. The [Oxford Character Assessment Toolkit](#) has now been used for a number of large neighbourhood plan character studies in suburban areas and conservation areas. [Know Your Place](#) and the [Our Place](#) toolkit are other options that work especially well at the street level.

Using this information to develop locally specific design criteria helps to ensure the plan will implement national and local policy at the neighbourhood level rather than just repeating higher-level policy.

### What next?

The evidence gathered from character assessment might also lead you to think about:

- Small scale improvements to the neighbourhood to enhance the appearance of the streets and public spaces
- Preparing guidance on the design of new development where it may affect a place's character, including specifying what mix of materials, scale, landscape and layout may be required to protect local distinctiveness
- Promoting the conservation and reuse of local heritage assets and their settings by creating a local heritage list or local buildings at risk survey
- Encouraging investment and enhancement of particular buildings and spaces especially those that are at risk
- Considering whether any buildings and spaces are worthy of protection through designation or preparing a list of locally-valued heritage assets



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- Undertaking a conservation area boundary review, suggesting new conservation areas, or developing conservation area management proposals with the local planning authority

Bear in mind that the neighbourhood plan policies may not be the most appropriate way to take all of these actions forward. Your local authority can advise you further on what you might include in an implementation plan or list of aspirations as an appendix to your plan.



## Undertaking a local building at risk survey

In addition to finding out about what people value in your area, you may wish to undertake a local building at risk survey to inform your plan.

Ideally your plan should address the needs of heritage assets most at risk of decay, neglect or other threats. Consulting the national [Heritage at Risk Register](#) may give you some information about what assets have previously been identified as at risk but this survey does not include information on Grade II listed buildings (which make up 93% of all listed buildings) and may be only a partial survey in other areas.

Making a detailed survey of every listed building in your area may require more resource than you have available to your plan. Undertaking a rapid walk-past survey is likely to identify any priority cases for recording. An initial assessment is likely to be sufficient for many of your local historic buildings to inform a general plan policy, only proceeding to full assessment if the condition of the building is very bad and justifies a policy relating directly to it.

Historic England has provided basic information on [how to assess the condition of historic buildings](#) on its website, looking in turn at each of the main building elements.

If an assessment concludes that the overall condition is poor or very bad, you may wish to record more detailed information:

- on the condition of the building;
- what is expected to happen to the building's condition (ie is the trend improving, stable, declining or unknown) based on local knowledge and information gathered;
- the owner type (the person/body responsible for the building/structure's repair).

A register of local buildings at risk is likely to look similar to the [Heritage at Risk Register](#) published by Historic England.

## Archaeological assessment

An archaeological statement would usually present an overview of the area's prehistory, history and archaeological potential. It does not necessarily need to be a standalone document and can, for example, be integrated within a heritage topic paper or wider site assessment.

Archaeological assessment involves using records, archive resources and published sources (books) to understand the potential of land to produce evidence of past human activity and



predicts how important that evidence might be. It doesn't normally require undertaking field survey beyond a visual assessment of the land.

The archaeological potential of the land will be assessed based on previous finds within the land and its surroundings, as well as understanding of the development of land use in the area. The likely importance of any remains is determined by considering the likely nature, extent and completeness of any remains using similar criteria to other heritage assets. The published [Regional Research Agendas](#) provide a helpful starting point for considering the academic value that archaeological remains might have, although neighbourhood fora may also wish to consider whether remains have particular local value for their interest to the community and educational value.

Whilst remains of national importance would be expected to receive the same level of protection in planning decision as scheduled monuments, neighbourhood plan fora should also consider locally and regionally important archaeological remains as heritage assets that they should conserve in a manner appropriate to their significance, seeking to avoid or minimise conflicts with their conservation and taking any loss to their significance into consideration when assessing the suitability of proposals for change.

Whilst it is important to refer to the HER as a key resource for all plans, a detailed archaeological assessment is less commonly required as evidence for a neighbourhood plan. They are only likely to be required during a site allocation process to determine whether there is high potential for (below ground) archaeological remains and it is necessary to demonstrate that a proposed development site is deliverable, or when groups wish to add to a list of locally valued heritage assets.

You do not need to survey the whole plan area when doing such an assessment; but you will need to assess not only the sites proposed for allocation (including the sites rejected) but also the settings of identified heritage assets that may be impacted by the proposed development. An information note on [site allocations in local plans](#), available to download from the Historic England website, provides more guidance on site allocations.

### Assessing the significance of heritage assets

When writing a neighbourhood plan that promotes new development, it is important that you have a clear understanding of the significance of heritage assets that could be affected by your proposals – not only those on-site (ie directly linked with a proposal) but also assets that are 'off-site' and whose setting may be affected.

That said, this does not mean that you will need to identify and assess the significance of all the heritage assets in your plan area. The focus of such work will tend to be on the development you're considering and its relationship with identified heritage assets and the level of detail applied should be proportionate. If the significance [of the assets] and the impact on that significance are high then much more information may be necessary than otherwise would be the case.

Steps you may take when assessing the significance of a heritage asset are shown in Box 2. To learn more about the underlying context and rationale for assessing significance refer to Historic England's [Conservation Principles](#).

Having understood the significance of affected assets and the impact of the proposed development on that significance, subsequent options to consider include:

- Avoid, minimise and mitigate impact [through neighbourhood planning policy criteria] in a way that meets the objectives of the NPPF
- Look for opportunities to better reveal or enhance significance as part of the approach to the development
- Justify any harmful impacts in terms of the sustainable development objective of conserving significance and the need for change
- Offset negative impacts on aspects of significance by enhancing others through recording, disseminating and archiving archaeological and historical interest of the important elements of the heritage assets affected.



## Box 2: Assessing the significance of a heritage asset

### 1. Examine the asset and its setting

The NPPF defines significance in terms of an asset's value to this and future generations. Does it contribute to the beauty of the place? Is it an important symbol of the community's historic identity? Historic England's [guidance on Historic Area Assessments](#) (see in particular paragraph 2.6.8) includes some useful examples of the sorts of questions one needs to answer when judging the significance of any given area or group of heritage assets.

Setting must also be considered. Its importance, as stated in Historic England's [Good Practice Advice Note on Setting](#), "*...lies in what it contributes to the significance of the heritage asset. This depends on a wide range of physical elements within, as well as perceptual and associational attributes pertaining to, the heritage asset's surroundings*". An asset's setting may evolve over time and the potential for appreciation of the asset's significance may increase once it is interpreted or mediated in some way, or if access to currently inaccessible land becomes possible.

### 2. Check key sources of information

Sources include the Local Plan, evidence base and policies, the main local, county and national records including the HER, statutory (these can be accessed via the National Heritage List for England) and local lists, the [Heritage Gateway](#), the Historic England Archive, and other relevant sources of information such as historic maps, conservation area appraisals, townscapes studies or the urban archaeology database.

### 3. Is expert assessment required?

Consider if the nature of the significance of the affected assets requires an expert assessment to gain the necessary level of understanding. In our experience specialist advice may be particularly useful in considering the setting of a heritage asset ie 'offsite' impacts on setting. Note that where there is archaeological interest (including buildings, areas and wreck sites), a desk-based assessment may be appropriate to understand the significance of the affected assets. It is good practice to use professionally accredited experts when preparing a desk-based assessment and to comply with relevant standards and guidance.



## 3. Translating evidence into policy

### 3.1 Why policies are important

Development decisions in the neighbourhood are made in accordance with the Development Plan unless 'material considerations' suggest otherwise. Material considerations are those that are relevant to planning and the development proposed; examples may include the NPPF, appeal decisions and case law.

The Development Plan comprises all the policies that apply to the area or kind of development, such as those in an adopted local plan for that area (including any 'saved policies' carried over from a previous plan adopted by the local authority) and any neighbourhood plans that cover the area and have been made or are recommended to proceed to referendum.

When decisions are made the formal **policies** in the plan are given greater weight than any supporting text or diagrams.

The [PPG](#) provides guidance on the content of neighbourhood plan policies as follows: “A policy in a neighbourhood plan should be clear and unambiguous. It should be drafted with sufficient clarity that a decision maker can apply it consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. It should be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence. It should be distinct to reflect and respond to the unique characteristics and planning context of the specific neighbourhood area for which it has been prepared.”

### 3.2 Developing policies to deliver your heritage objectives

The policies in your plan should be focused to deliver the vision and objectives you have set for the plan area. The vision and objectives should be based on an understanding of the plan area and its needs (informed by community consultation) and show how sustainable development will be delivered over the plan period. Whilst the vision and objectives may be very general they should encompass any more specific issues or opportunities that you have identified as needing action through your plan.

Your plan may contain a mixture of general policies, setting broad principles to be applied across all or part of the area, and more focused, site specific or thematic policies, possibly relating to a single type of heritage asset (such as historic agricultural or industrial buildings). Box 3 offers some tips on policy writing.



It is for the local community to decide on the scope and content of a neighbourhood plan. You may wish to set out a specific historic environment section within the plan, drawing on the evidence from sources of information on the historic environment, including the HER, and/or more detailed assessments where they have been carried out. There are benefits from consolidating related information in a clear, focused way.

That said, it is important not to treat heritage in isolation, but consider whether policies for housing and economic development, transport, community infrastructure and other facets of the environment could affect conservation of heritage assets or benefit by making better use of their special qualities. This might include appropriate guidance to avoid or minimise harm and capitalise on opportunities for heritage benefits.

The evidence you gather on what people value about the area, the condition of its historic buildings, the neighbourhood's character and its archaeological potential, contributes to the direction taken when writing the neighbourhood plan. Work on the underlying evidence base will help you to establish a clear vision for the historic environment and to appreciate the key conservation issues affecting the plan area.



## Box 3: Tips on policy writing

Questions that you may wish to consider when writing a policy include:

- When or where should this policy be applied?
- Do you envisage any exemptions to the policy? If so, in what circumstances?
- How rigorously will it be applied?
- What will applicants need to do?
- What will the decision-taker need to know and take into account?

So, if a policy is intended to apply to proposals for all new development, the policy is likely to refer to all new development. But it may only apply in certain circumstances, in which case those circumstances should be made clear in the policy, as should any exemptions.

Policies can offer a degree of flexibility, whereby they encourage or discourage an applicant to do something. For example, using the word 'should' indicates that a requirement will normally apply but that there may be occasions where other consideration would allow an exception. Where exceptions would only be acceptable under specific circumstances, such as the fulfilment of measures to avoid or minimise harm to a heritage asset, these should be clearly set out in the policy. Alternatively, if a preferred course of action is clear and the supporting evidence is sufficiently robust, the policy can set an approach whereby a proposal must comply with the policy or an element of it.

For example, a policy could require an applicant to do one or more of the following (the action(s) specified will vary from policy to policy – there is no 'one size fits all' approach):

- Provide information about an asset's significance (for example, by undertaking pre-application investigation and assessment)
- Demonstrate that they have avoided or minimised harm to the significance of an asset through the design of the development
- Conserve the asset or a particular part of it that could be threatened
- Conserve the asset's setting or an aspect of it that contributes to its significance
- Undertake repair and conservation work to an asset
- Include elements of design or promotional material to enhance enjoyment of the historic environment



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For further information, also refer to Historic England Note 3 (HEAN 3) on site allocations and Good Practice Advice Note 1 on Local Plan making, both available for download from: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/planning-system/>



### 3.3 Identifying opportunities

As outlined already in this advice note, preparing a neighbourhood plan can provide opportunities to enhance your area and conserve its heritage. For example, the plan might seek to ensure that when development takes place it contributes to the renovation and beneficial reuse of historic buildings that would be affected or that its location and quality enhances physical or visual access to a heritage asset for local people.

Conservation of the historic environment often presents opportunities to improve the attractiveness of an area for the community, business and visitors. When understanding of local character is used successfully it can help to inform the design of new buildings and spaces which in turn can stimulate economic development, with the potential to influence town centre viability. The neighbourhood plan could also reflect and positively support strategic heritage policies in the local authority's adopted local plan, such as policies for heritage focus tourism and employment.

Our webpages include information sheets on some of the key aspects of neighbourhood planning policy writing on heritage, including:

- Design policies: identifying and promoting local character
- Tackling heritage issues and identifying positive ways to make use of the historic environment
- Promoting the protection of heritage assets
- Site allocations

Of these, we have found that the consideration of the historic environment during site allocations presents particularly important challenges to get right. As stated in Historic England's Good Practice Advice Note on [Site Allocations in Local Plans](#) (which is relevant to neighbourhood plans too, as both form part of the Development Plan): *"A positive strategy for the historic environment in Local Plans can ensure that site allocations avoid harming the significance of both designated and non-designated heritage assets, including effects on their setting."*

Box 4 presents a few case studies, showing how some neighbourhood planning groups have tackled these issues in 'made' neighbourhood plans. More case studies with direct weblinks are included on our website.



## Box 4: Case studies

*These six mini case studies from ‘made’ neighbourhood plans give a glimpse into the range of approaches taken across the country. Hyperlinks are included where possible. More case studies are included on our [website](#).*

### [Denstone Neighbourhood Development Plan](#)

Historic England particularly commended the use of historic characterisation when developing this neighbourhood plan. The recognition in the Plan of the importance of the local historic environment and the need to retain and enhance heritage assets and Denstone’s sense of place, both of which contribute to the well-being of the community, was highly commendable. The emphasis on the conservation of local distinctiveness and the protection of locally significant buildings and landscape character including archaeological remains and important views is equally to be applauded.

### [Odiham and North Warnborough \(ONWARD\) Neighbourhood Plan 2014-2032](#)

This neighbourhood plan steering group brought design guidance set out in conservation area appraisals into the plan as dedicated design policies for each area. These were rephrased to provide robust design principles for applicants and decision makers to guide proposals in each area. Matters covered included the suitability of particular materials, set-back of buildings from road frontages, boundary treatments and the desired scale and form of new buildings. Similar requirements were set out for individual site allocations. The Neighbourhood Plan examiner described the approach as “exemplary”.

### [Milland Neighbourhood Development Plan 2016-2030](#)

Milland is a rural parish in West Sussex with a ‘dispersed’ pattern of settlement common in many parts of South East England. The authors of the neighbourhood plan wanted to identify non-designated heritage assets across the plan area. Their list is divided into several categories (landscapes worthy of protection, cottages and houses including estate cottages, hamlets, other sites and cart ponds) within these categories they identify 27 sites or places which included archaeological remains and structures used to manage waterpower for the area’s historic ironworking industry in addition to more ‘normal’ historic building types. The categories and resultant list of non-designated heritage assets protected by the plan stands out for the way it responds to the local distinctiveness of the parish, as well as helping to raise awareness of its history and archaeological interest.



### [Bredon Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2016-2030](#)

Policy NP9 of this Neighbourhood Plan focuses on local heritage assets and identifies certain buildings, boundary walls and other structures (referenced in an appendix) as being worthy of protection as non-designated heritage assets due to the important contribution that they make to the distinctive local character of the parish. In parallel with the policy, the Parish Council proposed that these buildings and structures are considered by Wychavon District Council for inclusion in the Local List, though the Neighbourhood Plan makes clear that inclusion of any building or structure on the Local List is not necessary for the application of policy NP9.

### [Newport Pagnell Neighbourhood Plan](#)

Policy NP3: Tesco (former Aston Martin Works) Site Specific Policy

*(b) The three historical buildings shall be retained and made ready for occupation prior to the occupation of 50% of any housing permitted on site.*

The former site of the Aston Martin Car Factory (founded as Salmon's Coachworks in 1830) had become too small for its historic use of car manufacturing and was considered suitable for redevelopment to meet the town's housing need. Whilst many of the factory buildings were not considered to be of particular historic or architectural interest, a small number, including a three storey factory building of 1910 were identified as positive buildings that were at risk due to ongoing lack of use and development pressure. The Neighbourhood plan identified these as locally important historic buildings and included a policy requiring policies for new development to retain these structures and, to make sure they were not neglected within a larger development scheme, to ensure they were made ready before 50% of any housing permitted was occupied. This provides a strong incentive for a developer to take care of these buildings but also ensure they will continue to serve a purpose whilst providing evidence of the town's proud manufacturing heritage.

### [Lavant Neighbourhood Development Plan 2016-2031](#)

In Lavant Neighbourhood Development Plan 2016-2031, a site containing part of the Iron Age Chichester Entrenchments (an extensive monument dating from the 1st century BC) was identified as desirable to allocate to meet the village's housing need. Whilst the earthworks (designated as a scheduled monument) would not be directly affected by the development, there was potential that related archaeological remains might be located elsewhere in the site.



A criterion was added to the site allocation policy during examination, requiring that any application should be informed by a programme of archaeological survey and investigation agreed by the council's archaeological advisor and that the development be designed to preserve any remains of national significance in situ. The policy also required proposal to include a robust justification for the loss of any remains that couldn't be avoided. An additional clause required the creation of views from the earthwork to the 'Trundle' a large Iron Age hillfort located a few kilometres to the north east.

## 4. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is used to assess the impact a land use plan may have on the environment. SEA originates from the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive, brought into UK Law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (2004). This identifies cultural heritage (which includes archaeological, built and landscape heritage) as an issue that should be considered.

If your neighbourhood plan could have effects on these aspects of the historic environment and this should influence your choices of plan options it is likely that an SEA (according to the law or national or strategic local plan policy) will be required to demonstrate you have made these choices in a consistent manner.

Where it is necessary, completing an SEA is one of the obligations under European Union legislation that form one of the basic conditions that an examiner will test your plan against.

Where a local authority considers that a SEA is required, they have a duty to consult Historic England on its scope and content.

SEA only considers environmental impacts and so is a narrower process than Sustainability Appraisal (SA). SA is a mechanism to assess the extent to which the emerging plan promotes sustainable development (economic, environmental and social objectives). SA of every local plan is required by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. As stated in our [advice note 8 on SA and SEA](#) *"Its role is to apply a holistic assessment of the likely effects of the emerging plan by testing its potential impacts on economic, social and environmental outcomes. It also incorporates the requirements of the SEA Directive and therefore requires an assessment of the likely effects on the historic environment."*



In certain circumstances SEA can be required in isolation from SA. Usually this relates to emerging plans (which could include neighbourhood plans) that have not been through the SA assessment process and may have significant effects on the environment.

## 4.1 When is SEA needed?

Whether SEA is required for a neighbourhood plan will depend on what is proposed in the plan and the environmental sensitivity of the area.

With the majority of neighbourhood plans the likelihood of generating significant environmental effects will be the determining factor in whether an SEA is required. Case law has determined that the threshold for determining whether any effects will be significant is actually quite low. Even modest impacts on heritage assets could therefore be deemed significant and trigger the need for an SEA.

It is important to bear in mind too that “effects” is a neutral term. Impacts on assets could be interpreted as positive but an SEA might still be required.

The most likely circumstances that could result in significant effects on the historic environment are when you are considering allocating sites for development that would affect heritage assets. This might relate to sites that contain one or more assets on the National Heritage List for England or other statutorily designated heritage asset such as a conservation area, a local list or sites that affect the setting of such assets. Whether the effects of the plan are significant or not will depend on the significance of the assets affected and the relationship of the site allocation to the asset(s).

Note that the SEA provides an effective way to demonstrate how the proposed sites were selected ie the reasonable alternatives that were considered and the justification for rejecting the sites that were rejected (such as, for example, negative impacts to heritage assets that would have resulted from a particular type of development). This is a reason in itself for doing an SEA as it helps to demonstrate that a robust, defensible process has been undertaken. The SEA process can therefore also help provide evidence to demonstrate conformity with the statutory provisions for the historic environment in the NPPF and local plan.

SEA also helps to identify where the impacts of developing a proposed site on a heritage asset merit the inclusion of clauses in the allocation policy to protect its heritage interest.

Screening to determine whether an SEA is required relies on sufficient clarity in policy formulation or potential site allocations to allow for the likelihood of significant environmental



effects to be determined. Screening at early stages in the plan formulation process may not provide sufficient evidence for an informed decision. Screening at a more advanced stage in the preparation of the plan when relevant details are known may therefore be necessary. Introducing new site allocations during the plan-making process, particularly during its latter stages, without undertaking an SEA is not recommended as it would add to the project risks by missing the opportunity to assess potentially significant environmental effects.

It is important to remember that even at the Screening stage of an SEA a decision needs to be based on an appropriate level of evidence. This will vary from plan to plan depending on content and the heritage interest of the area. Assertion of a lack of impact on heritage assets is not in itself evidence.



## 4.2 What is involved?

The first stage in SEA is screening ie the process of determining whether or not SEA is required for a plan. Guidance is available from Historic England on what to include when consulting us (as one of the ‘consultation bodies’) on a screening opinion for SEA, as well guidance on the stages that follow screening (see our advice note 8 for more information).

We would not expect to be consulted with a screening opinion for all neighbourhood plans as not all neighbourhood plans will have significant effects on the environment. From Historic England’s perspective, if you do not allocate sites and/or do not include policies that will impact significantly on heritage assets then an SEA is less likely to be needed.

This process is evidence-led, whereby the evidence gathered informs not only the options available but also the assessment of those options. This can be useful in drafting your policies where you may explore whether it is possible to prevent harmful impact to heritage assets that might result, for example, from a site allocation, by the inclusion of particular design requirements for proposals on that site.

It is important to gather evidence that describes the baseline characteristics of the area ie the existing situation. Informed by reference to the HER, the baseline explores the existing issues affecting the plan area. Identifying existing or recent issues affecting heritage assets via the baseline is an important means of identifying issues for the area’s heritage that should be addressed through the plan policies or that policies should avoid exacerbating. Early in the assessment process, whilst gathering this data (referred to as the ‘scoping stage’) you should also identify any gaps in the evidence base that need to be filled to ensure the plan policies have a firm foundation. For example, where a conservation area exists the absence of an CA appraisal could be a significant gap in the evidence base as well as an issue which the plan might wish to address.

Ultimately the SEA will report what impacts to heritage assets or the historic environment might be expected and whether or not these can be mitigated by the proposed planning policy wording or whether there are any residual negative impacts that cannot be avoided but may be justified by other benefits that plan would provide. As a result, the SEA will also consider the future baseline and draw conclusions about whether the plan will have any cumulative impact on existing issues or help to resolve any issues specific to the area.

The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is also a useful resource when undertaking SEA.



## 5. The role of Historic England

As well as being the Government's advisers on the historic environment we can offer local advice too on a range of local historic environment issues, in relation to historic places, heritage assets and plan-making. By virtue of the Localism Act 2011 we have a statutory role in the neighbourhood development plan process and in most cases we are consulted at Regulation 14 and Regulation 16 stages.

Notwithstanding our statutory role, experience has shown that we can be most helpful to you early on, especially if you envisage including site allocations. So it's helpful for us to be consulted earlier in the process, even before the statutory stages.

local authorities are encouraged to notify Historic England when neighbourhood areas have been designated and this helps to promote engagement at an early stage.

By consulting us early in the plan-making process we can assist by:

- Providing best practice examples from other neighbourhood plans
- Highlighting opportunities to benefit the historic environment through the plan and maximise the benefits that can be obtained from the historic environment
- Advising whether your ideas for a plan fully reflect the historic environment requirements set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Highlighting environmental assessment issues that may need to be undertaken with regard to impacts on the historic environment.

With neighbourhood plans being prepared by many communities across England, we will target our resources on proposals with the potential for major change to nationally important heritage assets and their settings. However, our local offices may also advise communities where they wish to engage directly with the plan's development subject to local priorities and capacity.

For more information on engaging with statutory consultees in neighbourhood planning, we have contributed to a toolkit prepared by Historic England, the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission, which should be available to download from the Locality website this year.

If you require an alternative accessible version of this document (for instance in audio, Braille or large print) please contact our Customer Services Department:

Telephone: 0370 333 0607

Fax: 01793 414926

Textphone: 0800 015 0516

E-mail: [customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:customers@HistoricEngland.org.uk)