Northumberland
County Council

Northumberland Local Plan update

Engagement with Town and Parish Councils

Recent Planning changes

8 October 2026

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Areas to be covered today

- New National Planning Policy framework
- What this means for decision making
- The Local Plan – update and next steps
- National scheme of delegation, Planning Committees

These all driven by purposeful and integrated **national** policy decisions

Collectively – huge changes

New NPPF

Reaction to new NPPF: ‘A seismic shake-up of national planning policy - the most significant overhaul since its introduction’

The planning and development sectors have been reacting to the government's updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which radically overhauls the previous framework and includes a series of significant changes compared to the draft version that was consulted

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CHANGES TO NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK THREATEN PROTECTIONS

Backbench Labour MP blasts NPPF as ‘reacting to land promoters’ speculative proposals’

A backbench Labour MP has called for the government to “rip up” the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and to “start again”, arguing that the document merely responds to "speculative" development by land promoters.

Northumberland County Council

August 2026 - new
Gov publishes National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

- Our **Local Plan** & **Neighbourhood Plans** need to comply with new policies
- **Planning applications decisions** informed by new national decision-making policies
- Builds on previous announcements, like **targets and spatial messages**
- Changes are **extensive, detailed and mandatory**



“Presumption in favour of sustainable development” - based on location

- Subject to technical details, all schemes **within** settlements* should be supported.
- Given significance of settlements and boundaries, will be key area for local plan
- Starting point for many minor applications is approve, unless significant reason not to

Green Belt, railway stations and decision making

- Support for housing “Within **reasonable walking distance of well-connected station”**
- Physically well-related to a station or settlement within which the station is located.

Implications

- Housing applications within **800 m/10 minutes’ walk** from **Prudhoe**, **Seaton Delaval** and **Newcastle Airport Metro stations** are supported by national policy. This **includes** land in the Green Belt.
- We expect **early** applications to come forward in these and other locations with stations.

Other matters

- Strengthens national policy in relation to climate change mitigation and adaptation

- De facto ban on new large onshore wind turbines in earlier version of NPPF removed.
  - Now weighted support for renewable energy ; supports economic development, energy security and transition to net zero.

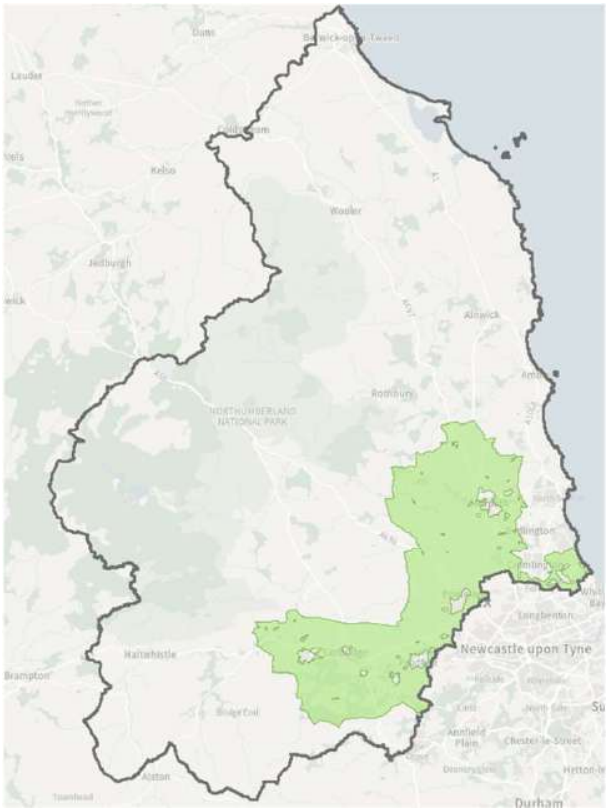
- Greater emphasis to design, garden city principles, health and enhancing natural environment

“Grey Belt” – extremely contentious changes

Green Belt and the Grey Belt

- Only area shown here is Green Belt – the extensive countryside outside of this area is not Green Belt.

- Grey belt does not relate to the quality of the land (despite this being the focus in the media). It only relates to the **purposes**.



Grey Belt

'Grey Belt' is land **in the Green Belt** that does **not strongly contribute to**

- Preventing sprawl of **large built-up areas**,
- Preventing **towns** merging,
- Preserving the character and setting of **historic towns.**

Much of Northumberland's Green Belt will be grey belt as it does not relate to towns.

Green Belt, Grey Belt and decision making

Development in the Green Belt is considered **inappropriate** unless it meets an **exception** set out in national policy. One exception is:

- When a five-year housing land supply can not be demonstrated, housing proposals on **grey belt** land in sustainable locations which meet the 'golden rules' **will not be considered inappropriate.**

Implications

- It will be easier to secure planning permission on grey belt from March 2027 when we will not be able to demonstrate a five-year land supply.

All changes = significant implications for Local Plan review

- Plan needs to pass “Public Examination” – a public inquiry
- Must comply with NPPF, targets and allocate sufficient land
- Still genuine choices in designing Plan
- Retaining local discretion - current robust situation under threat unless tackled proactively
- Cross Party Local Plan Working Group

Local Plan timetable

- Published Local Plan Timetable.
- Scoping consultation completed.
- **Gateway 1-** the start of the 30-month plan making period.

Stages	Dates
Notice of intention to commence plan preparation available	16th April 2026
The scoping consultation will start and end	20th May 2026 – 1st July 2026[1]
The Gateway 1 self-assessment summary will be published	9th September 2026
The consultation on proposed plan content and evidence will start and end	28th April 27 – 8th June 27[2]
Observations and advice will be sought for Gateway 2	10th November 2027
The consultation on the proposed plan will start and end	29th February 2028 – 25th April 2028[3]
Observations and advice will be sought for Gateway 3	19th July 2028
Plan submitted for examination	14th September 2028
Adopt the plan	14th March 2029

Spatial Growth Options & 3 steps to sites..

Initial scoping consultation favoured Plan spatial strategy that will:

Direct growth to –

- Larger settlements with good sustainable transport options
- Well-designed schemes to address inequalities
- Areas where affordable housing need is greatest
- Ensure sufficient growth in rural areas to help sustain and enhance services/affordable homes.
- Coordinate with **timely delivery of infrastructure**

Spatial strategy will inform the distribution of housing and employment sites

Sites will be assessed and selected for allocation to accommodate housing and economic development.

Choosing sites/selection process

Stage 1 : Call for sites

- Interested parties can put forward sites for **consideration**

  Very large number put forward = **choice**

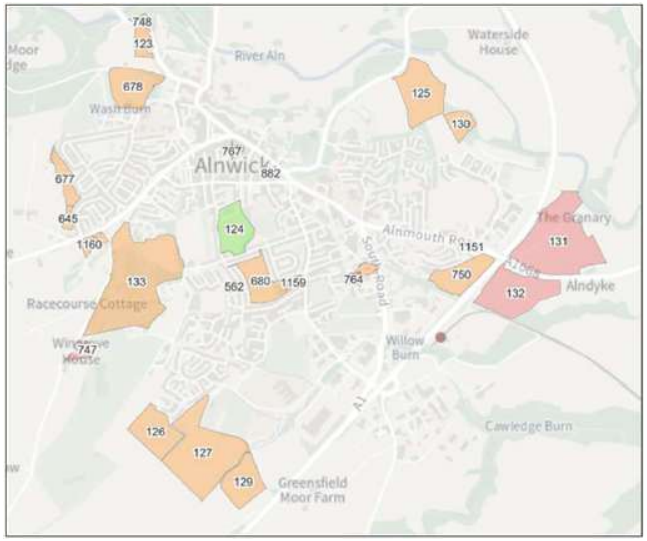
Stage 2 : Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)

- Initial high level technical assessment of sites put forward - housing and employment
- Policy neutral, constraints-based assessment.

- **HELAA does not allocate sites or indicate sites will be looked at favourably**
- **Similar policy neutral process will involve assessing infrastructure capacity**

Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)

- A HELAA will be **published this month**
- FAQs have been prepared.
- Map based using RAG system
- **Land submitted for consideration – not "draft sites"**
- You may get enquiries from constituents.
- Communications plan been prepared



90%+ of land suggested by **promoters** will not be needed in the eventual Plan

Site selection process

Stage 3: Selecting sites for draft allocation

- Selected on basis of spatial strategy and potential to deliver on priorities
- Further assessment of sites will be undertaken

- Vast majority of sites in HELAA will not be allocated **meaning we have choice**

Any sites proposed for allocation will be subject to consultation through the plan making process.

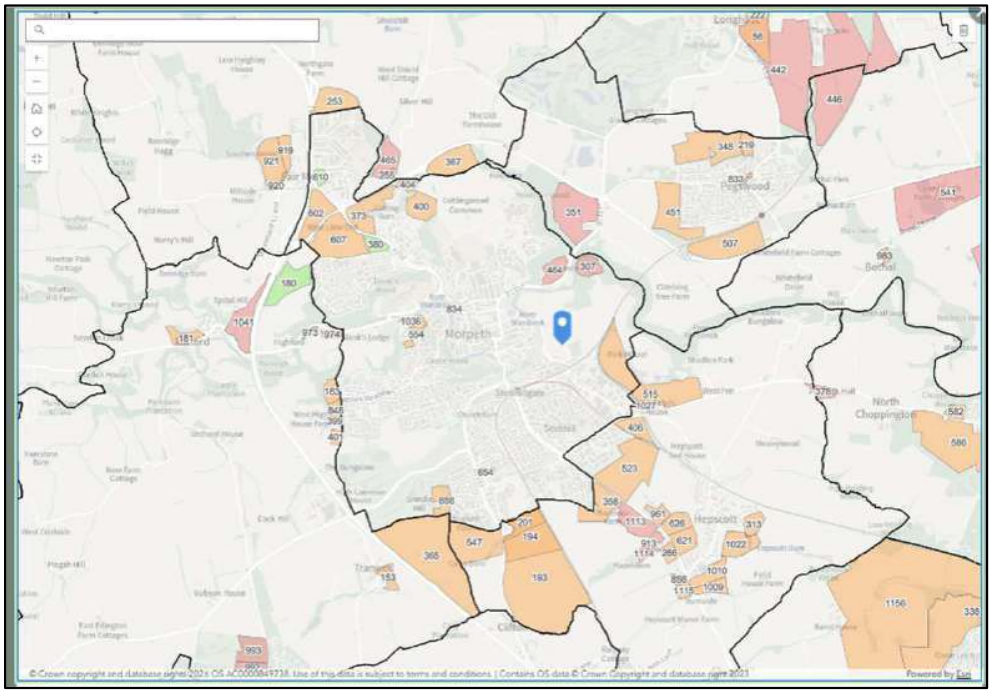
Town & Parish Council involvement

Mixture of views emerging

While most areas will see a degree of growth, T & PCs will be able to express their preferences and potentially suggest other sites

Town and Parish Council Local Plan Engagement

Allows T&PCs to select preferred HELAA sites for development and drop a pin on a map if an alternative site is preferred. Free text box too.



Morpeth

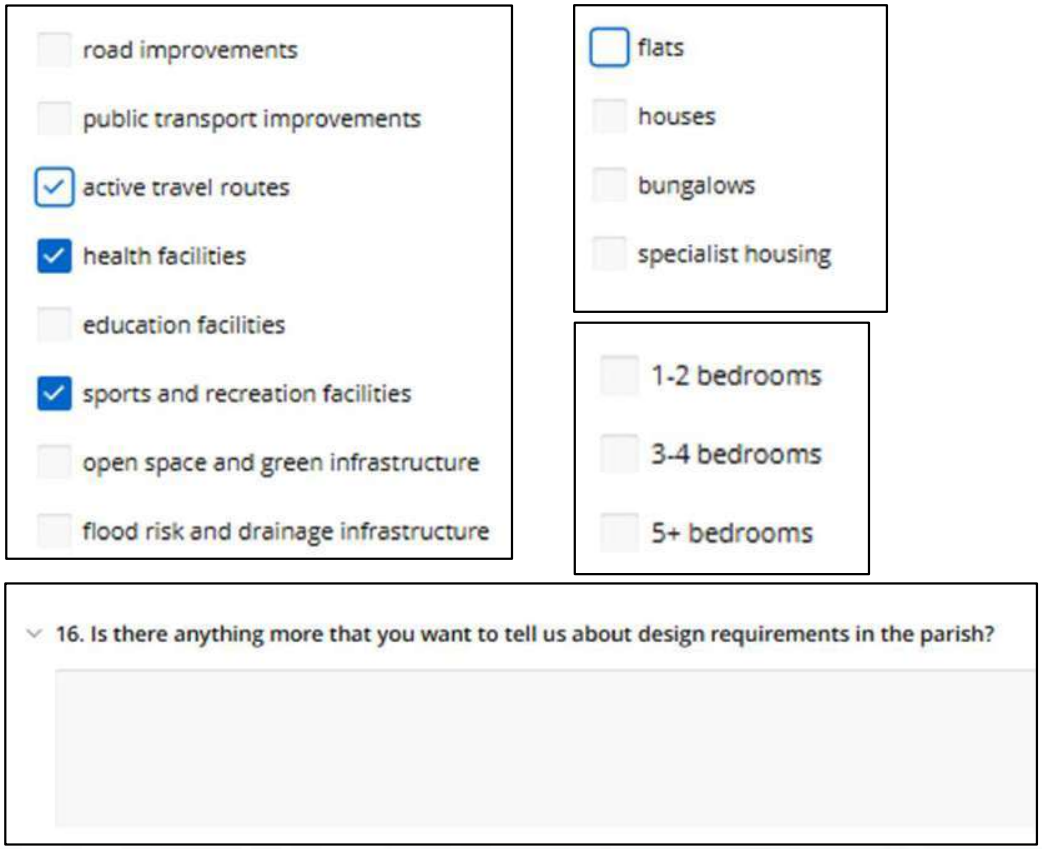
- [ ] NCC-0156 - Land west of Hollon and St Marks St, and North of Emily Davison Avenue. Morpeth
- [ ] NCC-0307 - Ford House, Quarry Woods, Whorral Bank, Morpeth
- [ ] NCC-0373 - Land at East Lane End Farm, Morpeth A
- [ ] NCC-0380 - Land at East Lane End Farm Morpeth B
- [ ] NCC-0400 - Morpeth Northern Bypass, Morpeth
- [ ] NCC-0404 - Morpeth
- [ ] NCC-0464 - Whorral Bank, Morpeth
- [ ] NCC-0554 - Land north of Emily Davison Avenue, Morpeth
- [ ] NCC-0602 - Land North of Lancaster Park Site B
- [ ] NCC-0607 - Land North of Lancaster Park Site A
- [ ] NCC-0610 - Land East of A192 at Fairmoor, Morpeth
- [ ] NCC-0654 - Merley Croft, Loansdean
- [ ] NCC-0834 - Telephone Exchange
- [ ] NCC-0888 - Land west of Loansdean, Morpeth
- [ ] NCC-1036 - Garden land of Newminster Abbey House

Town and Parish Council Local Plan Engagement

Sets out questions about:

- Types, sizes and tenure of housing required or preferred,
- Local infrastructure improvments required to support more housing
- Design of new housing

Uses a mix of drop down options to select and free format boxes



Changes to Elected Member role in Planning Decisions

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Mayors to get powers to overrule local councils on planning decisions



Fewer applications to be decided by councillors in latest Planning shake-up

BREAKING NEWS!

EAST HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

More Government changes to the Planning system will m
be decided by councillors.

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Government changes to how planning permission is granted will mean residents have no say in how decisions are made says Reform UK chief

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Planning Committees and Member role

- Statutory “National Scheme of Delegation”
- Planning Committees will focus on strategically important or contentious proposals
- Gov states it’s to ensure “greater clarity and consistency” in decision making.

- Committees become exceptional, and it represents move away from locally schemes, such as current model at NCC.

Mandatory change



Schedule 1 – **Mandatory** officer decisions

- Householder applications
- Minor residential (**Less than 9 units**) and commercial schemes
- Non-material amendments
- Certificates of lawfulness
- Some reserved matters applications

To emphasise – cannot go to committee

(is a scheme for 8 units in a small village *really* minor?)

Schedule 2 – Officer-led decisions, with **limited** referral

- Major planning applications.
- Outline major planning applications.
- Retrospective planning applications (and weighting).
- Large Reserved Matters applications.
- Listed Building, Advertisement Consent and Tree Preservation Order applications.
- Certain Section 73 and Section 106 applications


Q & A