

Frequently asked questions

Why do we need a Neighbourhood Plan?

The purpose of the neighbourhood plan is to guide future development in Sherfield in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for the village and the parish as a whole.

The concept of neighbourhood planning was introduced by the Localism Act 2011¹, as a way for communities to shape the future of the places where they live and work. It lets communities have more say in where new houses, businesses, shops and community facilities should go in their local area, and it can (though it does not have to) allocate sites for development. A neighbourhood plan may also include more detailed planning policies, for example to define how new development should look.

Once finalised, the neighbourhood plan becomes a legal document, to be used by the parish council to evaluate new planning applications and by the borough council to enforce changes to planning applications which do not conform to the plan.

What is included in the neighbourhood plan?

The neighbourhood plan includes a **vision statement** of what people would like the parish to be in 15 years' time, a number of **strategic aims**, and a number of **policies**.

The policies are the core of the neighbourhood plan. They are used by the parish planning committee to assess every planning application. Once the neighbourhood plan has been approved by the borough and accepted by the parish in a referendum, it has legal force, and can be used by the planning committee to reject or amend applications if they contravene the requirements of one or more of the policies. In this way, the policies give the parish planning committee greater control over planning applications than they have now and, importantly, the borough planning committee is also bound by them.

It is important that the policies reflect the strategic aims of the parish so that they can be used to shape applications according to the wishes of residents. Policies must be based on evidence collected during the preparation of the neighbourhood plan document; they must not contravene any existing borough, national, or EU planning rules; and they must not duplicate policies that already exist in higher planning rules such as the borough local plan.

Can we put in anything we like?

No. Whilst there is scope to specify policies unique to Sherfield, all neighbourhood plans must conform to the government's *National Planning Policy Framework*² and the borough council's *Local Plan*³. Thus there are limits as to what a neighbourhood plan can and can't do; for example, it cannot arbitrarily stop any new development. What it can do is give us the opportunity (perhaps our only opportunity) to influence the scale and nature of such development, and to ensure it is as good as it can be for our area.

1 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

3 See <http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/localplanexamination>

How have the policies been arrived at?

The present draft policies are the result of two years' work by local volunteers, with the help of planning experts and, crucially, input from Sherfield residents, through surveys, interviews and open sessions.

In addition, two supporting documents⁴ are available, and were/will be on show at our Open Sessions:

1. Details of the specially commissioned local Housing Needs Survey by Action Hampshire, and
2. The Sherfield on Loddon Character Assessment. This is an 80-page document that describes the distinct appearance and feel of the parish. This took four months to produce, all of the work done by volunteers, who recorded key features of the parish in a structured way.

Why doesn't policy CF1, 'Supporting Local Community Facilities' include requirements for GP and school services?

GP services, along with other NHS primary care services, are the responsibility of clinical commissioning groups on behalf of NHS England. Local authorities' planning powers do not extend to defining requirements for additional primary care services as a result of potential or actual increases in population that may arise from planning decisions. There is no automatic link between changes in local population and the provision of primary care services.

In a similar way, the provision of school services in our area lies with Hampshire County Council, and once more there is no link within the planning process between potential or actual changes in local population and the provision of school places.

It is of course possible for the parish or borough planners to make representations to the competent bodies in respect of an anticipated need for additional medical and education services, but it is not open to them to make such needs a requirement in the planning process.

Policy E2: Renewable energy from solar panel farms states that proposals to site farms of solar panels outside the settlement boundary will be considered favourably but what happens when the farm reaches its end of life?

Planning practice guidance for renewable and low carbon energy is included in the National Planning Policy Framework², and states that solar farms are normally temporary structures and that planning conditions can be used to specify that these installations are to be removed when no longer in use and the land is to be restored to its previous use.

4 Documents will be available at http://www.sherfieldonloddon-pc.gov.uk/Neighbourhood_Plan.aspx

Why isn't the 'strategic gap' mentioned in the neighbourhood plan?

The Sherfield on Loddon neighbourhood plan references the Basingstoke & Deane local plan which contains the following policy:

Policy EM2 – Strategic Gaps

In order to prevent coalescence of built up areas and to maintain the separate identity of settlements, the generally open and undeveloped nature of the following gaps will be protected:

- *Basingstoke – Oakley*
- *Basingstoke – Sherborne St John*
- *Basingstoke – Old Basing*
- *Basingstoke/Chineham – Bramley/Sherfield on Loddon*
- *Tadley – Baughurst*

Development in gaps will only be permitted where:

- a) It would not diminish the physical and/or visual separation; and*
- b) It would not compromise the integrity of the gap either individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development; or*
- c) It is proposed through a NP or Neighbourhood Development Order, including Community Right to Build Orders.*

This local plan policy therefore already restricts the development in these gaps. If we repeat or contradict the local plan policy in our neighbourhood plan, the neighbourhood plan will not be approved by the borough council.