

Local Development Scheme (LDS)

February 2025

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) requires local planning authorities to prepare, maintain and publish a local development scheme (LDS) which sets out what development plan documents are to be produced, their subject matter and broad timetable for their preparation including consultation, examination and adoption.
- 1.2. Planning Practice Guidance on Plan-making encourages local authorities to include details of other documents in the LDS which will form part of the development plan, including neighbourhood plans. The LDS is made public on the council's website and kept up to date.
- 1.3. The timing of this LDS update responds to the requirement for all local authorities to provide an updated timetable for local plan preparation following the publication of the December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- 1.4. Following the publication of the NPPF, the government revised the method for estimating housing need. This has led to a significant increase in the number of homes needed across West Suffolk (an increase of 56.2% from 765 homes per annum to 1,195 homes per annum). As the housing requirement in the emerging local plan is less than 80% of the new local housing need, to address this, the local planning authority is expected to commence work on a new plan under the revised plan-making system as soon as the provisions are brought into force later in 2025.
- 1.5. This LDS, which supersedes all previous versions, establishes the local planning policy framework for West Suffolk and sets out:
 - A timetable for finalising the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan
 - When work will commence on a new West Suffolk Local Plan
 - An update on the preparation of neighbourhood plans.
- 1.6. The LDS also includes an assessment of identified risk factors that could affect the ability of the council to deliver the development plan in accordance with the indicated programme, and contingencies to address them.

2. Background to plan making

- 2.1. The NPPF establishes that local plans are a statutory requirement for each local planning authority area which must include strategic policies to address an authority's priorities for development and the use of land. Strategic policies can be set out in joint or individual plans and or in a spatial development strategy produced by an elected Mayor or combined authority, where plan-making powers have been conferred.
- 2.2. Non-strategic matters should be addressed in local plans and in neighbourhood plans. The development plan comprises the strategic and non-strategic policies in force at a particular time.
- 2.3. There are a number of supporting documents to a local plan, including;
 - **Local development scheme** – this document which sets out the timetable for the preparation of the local development plan.
 - **Statement of community involvement** – establishes the council's approach to engaging with local communities during plan preparation, the assistance given to communities in the preparation of neighbourhood plans and when consulting on planning applications.
 - **Authority monitoring report** – sets out the progress in terms of producing development plan documents and implementing policies.
 - **Supplementary planning documents and/or supplementary plans** – documents which add further detail to policies in a local plan. These do not form part of the LDS.
- 2.4. The local plan will also include a policies map which illustrates the geographic extent of policies and proposals on a map base.

3. Stages of local plan preparation

- 3.1. The Government does not set out precise details of how a local plan should be prepared, but rather considers councils are best placed to decide the exact process and how to engage with their communities. However, the regulations do prescribe certain stages where the public are to be consulted. The regulations are due to be revised in 2025 and this LDS will be updated to reflect any necessary changes.
- 3.2. The various stages of development plan document preparation are summarised in the table below:

| Development plan document stage | Stage |
|--|--|
| Early tasks | This stage involves the council gathering evidence, including concerns and proposals the community may wish to make regarding planning issues. This stage also involves consultation on the sustainability appraisal scoping report. |
| Pre-submission (regulation 18) | The council will have a minimum of one consultation on issues and options in the early stages of this process and will continue to engage with stakeholders and the community throughout the pre-submission stage. |
| Pre-submission consultation or publication stage (regulation 19) | This stage involves a formal consultation on the final version of the development plan document (DPD), when the council will invite all interested parties to submit representations. |
| Submission (regulation 22) | The council will formally submit the DPD to the Secretary of State for independent examination. |
| Examination | Interested parties can seek to make representations to the independent planning inspector. Following the examination the planning inspector will produce a report and may recommend changes. |
| Main modifications consultation | The council will hold a six-week consultation on any inspector's main modifications arising from the local plan examination. |
| Adoption | This is a formal process for West Suffolk Council to adopt the document as part of the local plan. |

4. West Suffolk Local Plan documents

- 4.1. From April 2019 St Edmundsbury Borough's and Forest Heath District's functions and services were transferred to West Suffolk Council. The emerging West Suffolk Local Plan will ultimately replace the adopted development plan documents of the former St Edmundsbury and former Forest Heath listed below.
- 4.2. On the publication of this local development scheme (LDS), the adopted development plan for West Suffolk Council comprises:

St Edmundsbury

- St Edmundsbury Core Strategy (2010)
- Bury St Edmunds Vision 2031 (2014)
- Haverhill Vision 2031 (2014)
- Rural Vision 2031 (2014)

Forest Heath

- Forest Heath Core Strategy (2010)
- Single Issue Review of Core Strategy Policy CS7 Single Issue (2019)
- Site Allocations Local Plan (2019)

West Suffolk Council

- Joint Development Management Policies Document (2015)

Made neighbourhood plans

- Newmarket Neighbourhood Plan (February 2020)
- Great Barton Neighbourhood Plan (June 2021)
- Worlington Neighbourhood Plan (November 2024)
- Hargrave Neighbourhood Plan (December 2024)

5. Development plan documents under preparation

Emerging West Suffolk Local Plan 2041

- 5.1. West Suffolk Council is nearing the completion of a new local plan. The plan covers the period 2021-2041 and contains strategic and local policies. It sets out the vision, objectives and strategic policies for the whole of the West Suffolk administrative area. The **strategic policies** set out the overall strategy for the pattern, scale and quality of development and make provision for housing and employment and other commercial development, infrastructure, community facilities and the conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment. There are also policies to mitigate the impact of climate change.
- 5.2. The plan also includes **non-strategic policies** which set out more detailed policies on issues such as climate change, design, the natural and historic environment and other development management policies.
- 5.3. A policies map accompanies the plan and illustrates all of the site allocations and key designations.
- 5.4. The West Suffolk local plan was submitted for examination in May 2024, and hearings closed in December 2024. A main modifications consultation is scheduled to commence in March 2025, with adoption of the plan programmed for summer 2025. These key milestones set out in the LDS timeline in Annex 1. The timeline is a 'live' document and will be updated on the West Suffolk Council's website as necessary.

New West Suffolk Local Plan

- 5.5. Under the requirements of the NPPF (December 2024), the local planning authority is expected to commence work on a new plan under the revised plan-making system as soon as the provisions are brought into force later in 2025. This is to ensure the shortfall in the identified housing needs referred to in the introduction are addressed.
- 5.6. It is anticipated that the format of the plan will be similar to that described in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.3 above.
- 5.7. The commencement of work on the new local plan is scheduled for autumn/winter 2025, with detailed milestones for its preparation to be outlined once the new planning provisions are established. The initial milestone of commencement for the new plan is set out in the LDS timeline in Annex 1.

Neighbourhood plans

- 5.8. A number of neighbourhood plans are under preparation across the district by local qualifying bodies and their communities. Their timescales are not set by the local planning authority and are not included in the

LDS timeline. The table below sets out details of each plans' current stage as of the date of publication of this LDS.

| Neighbourhood Plan Area | Status as at February 2025 |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Barningham | Regulation 14 consultation July to September 2024 |
| Barrow cum Denham | Under examination |
| Barton Mills | Area designation March 2022 and plan under preparation |
| Chevington | Area designation June 2024 and plan under preparation |
| Exning | Area Designation June 2018 (plan no longer under preparation) |
| Freckenham | Referendum set for February 2025 |
| Horringer cum Ickworth | Area designation March 2022 and plan under preparation |
| Ixworth and Ixworth Thorpe | Referendum set for May 2025 |
| Lakenheath | Area designation February 2021 and plan under preparation |
| Mildenhall | Area designation January 2023 and plan under preparation |
| Newmarket | The neighbourhood plan was 'Made' on 25 February 2020. The plan is currently under review. |
| West Row | Area designation May 2021 and plan under preparation |
| Wickhambrook | Regulation 14 consultation November to December 2023 |
| Withersfield | Regulation 14 consultation November to December 2022 |

6. Risk assessment

- 6.1. An assessment has been carried out of the factors that could affect the ability of the council to deliver the development plan in accordance with the indicated programme. Actions to manage these risks have been identified.

| Risk | Risk/implications | Mitigating measures |
|--|---|---|
| Timescales | Potential delay to timetable as a result of many factors which could include evidence gathering, high response rates to consultations. | Robust scoping. Sound project planning. The progress made on plans prepared to date provides increasing confidence. Preparation of statement of common ground with key partners. |
| Available resources and skills | Pressure on financial resources with implications on service budgets. | Continued cooperate commitment of the council to resourcing this statutory function. Robust management of staff resources and cross service and partnership working. |
| Evidence base | Inadequate or incomplete evidence risk to soundness. Financial risk to evidence gathering. | Early and thorough assessment of available evidence and need. Prioritise further work. council wide commitment. |
| National guidance /legislation changes | Abortive or inappropriate progress due to change in guidance and/or legislation. | Awareness of key changes to national policy and guidance. Liaison with MHCLG and Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to address potential issues. |
| Political change | Potential changes in political support for all or elements of the local plan. Local government reforms slow the process of local plan preparation. | Ongoing engagement and ownership of local plan preparation and progression with Portfolio Holder for Planning and members of the council. Close working with neighbouring authorities/organisations to enable issues to be identified at an early stage. |
| Tests of soundness | Risk of being found unsound and the | Continuous soundness self-assessment. |

| Risk | Risk/implications | Mitigating measures |
|--|--|--|
| | potential resultant major delay to the implementation of the policies and proposals. | Consultation with the Planning Inspectorate before and during publication of a document. Self-assessment using Planning Advisory Service Tool Kit. |
| Joint working and duty to cooperate issues | Key partners not engaging in process due to lack of resources. | Close working with neighbouring authorities to enable issues to be identified at an early stage. |
| Introduction of significant changes | The inspector may suspend the process should there be significant changes made to the local plan which may have not been consulted upon. | Consultation on significant changes made following publication in accordance with the inspector's requirements. |

7. Further information

7.1. For further information on this local development scheme, or any of the documents mentioned, please contact the planning policy team using the contact details below. Information on the existing and emerging local plans is also available on the council's website at [Supporting information](#)

- By email: planning.policy@westsuffolk.gov.uk
- By telephone: 01284 757368

Annex 1: Local Development Scheme Timeline

The local development scheme timeline below is a live document and will be kept up to date on West Suffolk Council's website.

West Suffolk Local Plan 2041

| Milestone | Date |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Issues and options consultation (regulation 18) | Completed October to December 2020 |
| Preferred options consultation (regulation 18) | Completed May to July 2022 |
| Submission consultation (regulation 19) | Completed January to March 2024 |
| Submission of local plan for examination (regulation 22) | Completed May 2024 |
| Examination in public (regulation 24) | Ongoing |
| Consultation on main modifications | March to April 2025 |
| Inspectors' Report | May 2025 |
| Adoption of local plan (regulation 26) | July 2025 |

New West Suffolk Local Plan

Note: This is an interim timetable with key milestones which will be updated upon publication of the revised regulations in 2025.

The milestones relate to the system provided for under the Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023 and as set out in the July 2023 consultation on implementation of plan-making reforms.

| Milestone | Date |
|--|--|
| Scoping and participation, including a minimum four-month notification of plan commencement | March 2026 to July 2026 (4 months) |
| Plan visioning and strategy development including the first public consultation | August 2026 to April 2027 (8 months) |
| Evidence gathering and drafting | May 2027 to January 2028 (8 months) |
| Second public consultation, proposing post consultation changes and the submission of the plan | February 2028 to July 2028 (5 months) |
| Examination of plan including main modifications consultation | August 2028 to March 2029 |
| Adoption of plan | April 2029 |

Annex 2: Glossary of terms

Adoption: The formal approval by a council of the final version of a development plan document once the inspector has found it sound.

Allocation: Land identified as appropriate for a specific use.

Authority monitoring report (AMR): A report prepared by the council setting out progress on the local plan and the effectiveness of the policies it contains.

Core strategy: The key development plan document, setting out the long term spatial vision for the area, the spatial objectives and strategic policies.

Development plan: An authority's development plan consists of the adopted local plans, made neighbourhood plans and published spatial development strategies neighbourhood plans that have been approved at referendum are also part of the development plan, unless the local planning authority decides that the neighbourhood plan should not be made.

Development plan document: a planning document which is part of the local plan, subject to extensive consultation and independent examination.

Issues and options: an informal early stage of the development plan document preparation, aimed at engaging the public and stakeholders in formulating the main issues that the plan should address and the options available.

Local development document (LDD): A document that forms part of the local plan and can be either a development plan document or a supplementary planning document.

Local development scheme: A document setting out the timescales for the production of the development plan documents.

Local plan: The plan for the future development of the area drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community. In law this is described as the development plan documents adopted under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. A local plan can consist of either strategic or non-strategic policies, or a combination of the two.

Neighbourhood plans: A plan prepared by a parish council, a town council or a neighbourhood planning forum for a particular neighbourhood area.

Publication draft: First full draft of the development plan document prepared for formal consultation.

Spatial vision: A brief description of how an area will change by the end of a plan period.

Statement of community involvement (SCI): A document which informs how a council will involve the community in the preparation of planning documents and on all major planning applications.

Strategic policies: Policies and site allocations which address strategic priorities in line with requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA): A procedure (set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) which requires the formal environmental assessment of plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Submission draft: Final draft of the development plan document submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination by the Planning Inspectorate.

Supplementary planning document (SPD): Documents which add further detail to the policies in the development plan. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites or can be topic based for example, design. SPDs are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan.

Sustainability appraisal (SA): Examines the social, environmental and economic effects of strategies and policies in local development documents from the outset of its preparation.

Sustainable development: National planning policy defines this as being meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.