

West Suffolk Council position statement on housing land supply

Following the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 12 December 2024 and the change to the standard method for calculating housing need, the council's housing land supply has reduced to 3.6 years. As a consequence, the presumption in favour of sustainable development in decision-taking and the application of the tilted balance is now triggered for certain development proposals.

However, this is an interim position with the housing land supply anticipated to be 6.1 years when the emerging West Suffolk Local Plan (WSLP) is adopted in July 2025. Following adoption, the council will have an up-to-date local plan with a 6.1 year housing land supply and the presumption will not apply.

Whilst the presumption test in the NPPF is triggered for some developments for an interim period only (until the WSLP is adopted in July), the council has sufficient supply of sites to meet its housing needs, as identified in the emerging local plan which given its advanced stage in preparation is accorded considerable weight.

It is also important to note the changes to the presumption test in the NPPF have been strengthened.

The interim operation of the tilted balance is not an outcome. It is a test to be applied. Nor does the operation of the tilted balance mean that all the policies most important for determining the application are necessarily out of date. Policies are deemed to be out of date but the assessment of whether they are out of date or not is one to be made by the decision maker who will assess those policies for their consistency with the NPPF. Even where certain policies are deemed to be out of date, they can still be attributed weight and are not excluded from decision-making.

The council urges caution to those developers considering submitting speculative development proposals, as considerable weight can be applied to emerging policies of the West Suffolk Local Plan and there is no need for new sites to be identified to meet future needs. Further, it is a very substantial material consideration that the emerging local plan is at an advanced stage and that, when adopted, the council will have a housing land supply of 6.1 years.

Many local authorities will be in a similar position, where they are no longer able to demonstrate a sufficient housing land supply. However, due to the council's proactive approach to plan making, will soon see a reversal of this situation as it adopts its local plan setting out the future growth of the district to 2041.

For further details, see full statement set out in the housing land supply section of the website.