Planning policies are an important way to make sure that your neighbourhood development plan (NDP) is delivered. They must be taken into account in planning decisions. The Planning Acts require that 'decisions are made in accordance with the Local Plan (and neighbourhood plans) unless material considerations indicate otherwise'. In practice this means that most of the time planning policies will be used to determine planning applications.

This guide note seeks to help you write planning policies.

What are policies?

Policies are a way of ensuring that planning decisions are consistent and are created to set out requirements for new development. In particular, they are designed to help:

• Guide applicants on how to put together their planning application; and

• Guide decisions on planning applications.

What sort of policies are there?

General policies: These will usually be applied across the whole plan area and are generally quite simple in scope. They could deal with such issues such as design, landscape impact or sustainability. They would not deal with a site specific proposal.

Criteria based policies: These set the criteria that the development must meet. A good example of this would be setting out standards for a particular issue, such as ensuring that affordable housing is provided. The plan must be clear as to whether the criteria are *'either or'*, or whether they must *all* be met to make the development suitable.

Site specific policies: This applies to a specific area of land or a site. This will usually set out the conditions for how a specific piece of land will be used or treated. This could range from allocating local open space to setting out standards and mix of uses for a particular site. Where your plan will impact on how land is used we would always advise you to discuss your proposals with the landowner from the earliest stage.

Writing policies: There are many ways of writing policies but there are four key things to bear in mind.

• The things that you are seeking to do through the policy are reasonable and are things that can be controlled by planners when a planning decision is made;

• Policies must be a clear instruction to the decision maker (Cornwall Council) so they must state simply but clearly what needs to be achieved and how, what's acceptable and what's not;

• You need evidence of why the policy is needed (the supporting text) and a mandate for imposing it (generally from your community); and

• Policies should be positively expressed - put simply, they should state when permission will be granted rather than stating what isn't wanted (more about this later).

What can't policies do?

• They cannot remove 'permitted development rights' – if an action doesn't require planning permission, it cannot be prevented by a policy;

• You cannot extend or alter a conservation area or list buildings;

• You cannot include policies about minerals, waste or 'nationally important' decisions;

• Your policies must be in general conformity with the Local Plan and have appropriate regard for national policy. They can add further detail or make certain changes to how the policies are interpreted but cannot ignore them or completely change their purpose.

Things to think about when writing policies:

• **Be clear**

   Don't assume that people will always know what you're trying to say. Planning can often be difficult to understand and the wording that you use needs to be understood by a wide range of people. If in doubt, use plain English to get your point across. If you think that something is difficult to understand or is likely to be misinterpreted – it probably will be!

• **Don't duplicate**

   Don't duplicate the Local Plan or the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). If what you want to say has already been said, don't say it again. These plans will also be used to determine planning applications in your area.

• **Add value**

   Use your policies to add local value to the Local Plan and Government guidance. Link them back to the objectives for your plan and use them to explain the local situation.

• **Think deliverability**

   Make sure that what you want to achieve can be delivered – use policies to help this, but most projects will need other help to be delivered, not just planning permission.

• **Keep it simple**

   Don't over-complicate your plan. Often more can be said by a few well written policies that cover your community's key issues than a plan that sets out policies for every conceivable situation.

2

Policy writing –top tips

1. For each policy, there should be a policy justification (stating why the policy is needed), policy intention (what the policy seeks to achieve) and then the policy wording itself.

2. Make sure you have clear evidence for the policy and reference this in the policy justification. The evidence can be summarised with a cross reference to an appendix or a supporting document.

3. Ensure that all policy statements that relate to the development and use of land are included in the policy wording itself (not just the policy justification or policy intention).

4. Policies should be worded in a positive way, for example, instead of saying "development will not be permitted unless they reduce flood risk …" you could phrase this as "development will be permitted where it would not increase flood risk ..."

5. If you refer to sites, a village boundary or designated features, make sure you include a map that clearly shows what you are referring to.

6. Be clear what you mean, be concise and avoid ambiguity

7. Clearly number your policy so that it can be referenced in decisions, for example you could use 1, 2, 3 or separate policies by subject e.g. for housing use H1, H2 etc. If using subsections and criteria within your policies, use numbering not bullet points

8. Make sure that the policy wording stands out from the policy justification and policy intention – for instance, put the policy wording in a text box, bold text or a different font so that it stands out;

9. Seek advice from Cornwall Council Planning on how your proposed policies may be used or interpreted and consider taking advantage of the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service (NPIERS) 'Heath Check' of your neighbourhood plan (see their website for details).

Example Policy

Good Quality Design

Policy Justification:

We already have a rich variety of architectural styles in the area and we would like to see new development contribute to this variety, while at the same time being sympathetic to the existing character of the area. Our policies do not restrict development; instead they challenge developers to deliver innovative development of high quality design that responds to its surroundings and is appropriate for our area.

This Neighbourhood Plan supports the NPPF's objective to achieve excellence in design, especially design that will help establish a "strong sense of place" and create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit" (NPPF para 58).

Policy Intention:

To encourage new development to deliver a creative and high quality standard of design, that sits comfortably with the existing built and natural environments. To ensure new development, especially that intended for family occupation, includes ample garden areas, to serve the future residents and to reflect the current character of the area.

Policy D1.   All new development should demonstrate good quality design and respect the local character, appearance and quality of the surrounding area. Development should respond to and integrate with local surroundings and landscape context as well as the built environment through:

 i.   **Using good quality materials that complement the existing palette of materials used within the area;**
 ii.   **Using green hedging and/or trees for highway boundaries wherever possible and in keeping with the existing streetscape;**
 iii. **Ensuring safe access for pedestrians, cyclists and road users;**
 iv.   **Providing adequate refuse and recycling storage incorporated into the scheme to minimise visual impact;**
 v.   **Innovative design that is sustainable in its design, construction and operation;**
 vi.   **Promoting high quality interior spaces and light; and**
 vii. **Adopting the principles of sustainable urban drainage.**

Policy example adapted from one included in the Ascot, Sunningdale and Sunninghill Neighbourhood Plan