

Allocating Sites in your NDP 1: An Overview

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Introduction

This guidance is the first of three sets of guidance relating to the allocation of sites for future development in a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP). *'Allocating Sites in your NDP 1: An Overview'* provides an introduction to and overview of site allocations and factors to consider in deciding whether it is appropriate to allocate sites within the policies of your NDP. Where your group decides that it is appropriate to allocate sites, we recommend that groups refer to the further guidance notes: *'Allocating Sites in your NDP 2: A Methodology for Site Selection'* and *'Allocating Sites in your NDP 3: Site Allocation Policies'*.

What is site allocation?

Site allocation is simply a process through which land within your neighbourhood area can be identified, assessed and prioritised as being potentially suitable for development, with the aim of setting out the community's preferred sites to accommodate future growth. Once identified, these sites are usually then included as policies within your NDP. Including policies to allocate sites can stop development taking place outside of these allocations, if this is something that your NDP wants to achieve. The process encourages sustainable development to be directed to the most appropriate locations; it does not block development, which would be contrary to the principles of Neighbourhood Planning. Site allocation policies can also specify what type of development (residential / commercial/ industrial / mixed) should be permitted on each site and go into further site specific detail if required.

Deciding whether to allocate sites in your Neighbourhood Plan

There are two main aspects to consider when determining whether it would be appropriate for your NDP to allocate sites for future development - whether it is important to your community that they help decide where future development should occur (and not occur); and the scale of developments required.

1. Do you want future development to be community or developer led?

As part of your NDP, you will need to decide whether you want to specify sites for development and/or protection whilst excluding others. Essentially, choosing to allocate sites provides your community with control over what is developed where. This is a powerful part of any NDP.

Remember a NDP is your community's opportunity to set out how and where future development should take place, rather than leaving this to developers and other parties to determine.

2. Scale of future developments?

Site allocations are not usually made for small scale¹ developments, which would normally be dealt with through the normal planning application process (which would include consideration of other policies set out within your NDP).

Sites can be allocated for a variety of uses, most commonly **housing**, including 'Exception sites' (these are sites which can be used to deliver affordable housing – they would not normally be granted planning permission and so the land is often considerably cheaper than elsewhere. The cheaper land means that the houses built are more affordable – these exception sites can be identified in your site allocations); **Employment**; and/or, **Mixed Use**.

¹ The appropriate scale for site allocations will vary across towns and parishes. Whilst anything below 30 dwellings may be considered small scale for one settlement, only developments of 1-2 may be considered small scale in smaller settlements – it is up to your community to determine what scale of development will warrant a site allocation, if this is an approach a community would like to adopt).

In assessing whether Site Allocation is appropriate for your group, you need to consider the likely scale of development your area may accommodate through to 2030 (housing figure targets can be provided upon request). We would advise that Site Allocations should be considered by all communities that are likely to experience significant housing growth over the plan period. If your community decides not to allocate sites or plan for larger developments, developers will seek to build on the sites that are most attractive to them and you will relinquish your community's control.

If your community decides not to allocate sites, but places strong value on the local landscape, you could consider building a strong evidence-base, via a Local Landscape Character Assessment (LLCA). Developers would then need to consider the impact that any development would have on the local landscape. However, as the Neighbourhood Plan would not then demonstrate how local housing needs can viably be met in your community's preferred locations, developments are more likely to be proposed in undesirable locations.

In considering the scale of future development, it will be important to consider whether your area has high affordable housing or other infrastructure needs. If so, your community will almost certainly need larger developments of open market housing to fund the affordable housing needs and/or infrastructure costs. Then, if your community wants spatial control over where such development happens – whether that's small or large developments – you'll need to allocate sites, and evidence how these areas have been chosen above other land and, equally importantly, why other areas have not been allocated.

Diagram 1: Considerations when deciding whether to allocate sites in your NDP.



Diagram 1, summarises the questions posed in deciding whether site allocations are likely to be beneficial to your NDP.

The Site Allocation process can be quite complex and is not necessary for all communities. For larger settlements and areas where higher growth is expected, we would advise that site allocation is essential to maintain control of development in your area. However, for smaller settlements where there is unlikely to be any significant development, site allocation may be unnecessary. We are happy to advise on this, but ultimately the decision on whether or not to allocate sites is one for your community.

How should preferred sites be chosen?

The process of allocating sites is an active and interesting stage in the development of your NDP and a stage which is likely to gain interest from your community. This can help NDP Steering Groups who are struggling to gain much interest from the wider community!

When allocating sites, it's not just a case of identifying land your community believes is best for development: it's also justifying why this has been chosen and, importantly, why other land is less suitable to build upon. This evidence base to your NDP should demonstrate how (via a clear methodology) and why land has been ruled out of being allocated for development, as it is this evidence that will help support any challenge to future development proposals in these areas.

This is why it's important to start looking at all potential areas, then to remove those with too many obstacles, and finally to engage landowners and agents to identify which plots of land might be available for development (or those which may be less viable). The more economically viable a site is, the greater the potential returns for the community - a site which has less cost associated with it for the developer may mean that there is more scope to provide high volumes of affordable housing and infrastructure (e.g. open space). A site which is difficult to develop will have additional cost associated with it which may make it impossible to generate the levels of affordable housing or deliver wider community benefits.

This does not mean that development in your area will stop. If, over time, more housing need is identified, then developers will continue to submit planning applications which will go through the planning process. If the allocated sites in your plan have all been developed then you should review your NDP and allocate more sites to ensure that your community retains control.

'Allocating Sites in your NDP 2: A Methodology for Site Selection' provides detailed guidance on determining which sites show greatest potential to accommodate future development. It sets out a 9 step process starting with the identification of all potential development areas and working through stages until the most appropriate sites are arrived at.

Once you have collated the evidence needed and identified potential site allocations, *'Allocating Sites in your NDP 3: Site Allocation Policies'* will help you in drafting policies.