



# Neighbourhood Planning Environment: understanding the environmental baseline and plan context



Your Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is an important opportunity to protect the environment and to look for opportunities to enhance the environment in your plan area. This guide note addresses this in two sections:

1. **The environmental baseline - As part of the information gathering stage, it is important to conduct an audit of designated sites within your area. This is a key part of the context in which your plan will be developed.**
2. **How your NDP can protect and enhance the environment – This section looks at how your NDP can protect the environment and promote positive change.**

## 1. The environmental baseline

### Introduction

There are a number of statutory designations protecting Cornwall's natural environment under national and international law. It is important to understand what kind of protected sites there are within (or in close proximity to) your Neighbourhood Area. Understanding this will help you develop appropriate policies and provide an evidence base. Establishing what designated sites are in your area is largely a desk-top exercise, although it would be good practice to make site visits or arrange a walk around to appreciate the special features of your area.

### Why assess the environmental baseline?

- Evidence base
- Guidance for setting objectives and making informed policy decisions; once you establish what designated sites are in your area, you need to understand more about them and what this means for your NDP.
- Legal compliance and conformity with local and national planning policy and with national and international law.

### Resources

There are a number of free online resources you can use. These include, but are not limited to:

- Cornwall Council mapping<sup>1</sup>
- MAGIC<sup>2</sup>
- Heritage Gateway<sup>3</sup>
- Environment Agency website<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cornwall Council Mapping - please contact the Neighbourhood Planning Team for access to this free resource [neighbourhoodplanning@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:neighbourhoodplanning@cornwall.gov.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Magic <http://www.magic.gov.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> Heritage Gateway <https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/>

<sup>4</sup> Environment Agency <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency>



## Biodiversity and ecology designations

- *Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)*
  - Status - International
  - Resources – Cornwall Council mapping or MAGIC
- *Special Protection Area (SPA)*
  - Status - International
  - Resources – Cornwall Council mapping or MAGIC
- *Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)*
  - Status – National - SSSIs can be designated for reasons of biodiversity and/or geology
  - Resources – Cornwall Council mapping or MAGIC
- *National Nature Reserves (NNR)*
  - Status – National
  - Resources – Cornwall Council mapping
- *Local Nature Reserves (LNR)*
  - Status – Cornwall
  - Resources – Cornwall Council mapping

## Landscape designations

- *Area of Outstanding Natural (AONB)*
  - Status - National
  - Resources – Cornwall Council mapping or MAGIC
- *Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV)*
  - Status - Cornwall
  - Resources – Cornwall Council mapping
- *Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)*
  - Status - Cornwall assessment – this isn't a designation, but is important baseline information. LCA descriptions outline the landscape and heritage features of the area, the pressures on the landscape, distinctive features, guidelines etc. This information will be extremely useful in considering what kind of development might be acceptable in terms of the landscape.
  - Resources – Cornwall Council mapping

For more information about any of the above you can contact the Cornwall AONB team<sup>5</sup> or the Tamar Valley team<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Cornwall AONB team <http://www.cornwallaonb.org.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> Tamar Valley team <http://www.tamarvalley.org.uk/>



## Historic environment and heritage designations

- *World Heritage Site (WHS)*
  - Status – International
  - Resources - Cornwall Council mapping or MAGIC
- *Scheduled Monuments*
  - Status – National
  - Resources - Cornwall Council mapping or MAGIC
- *Listed Buildings*
  - Status – National
  - Resources - Cornwall Council mapping
- *Conservation Area*
  - Status – National
  - Resources - Cornwall Council mapping
- *Registered Parks and Gardens*
  - Status – National
  - Resources - Cornwall Council mapping or MAGIC

For more information about any of the above contact Historic England<sup>7</sup> or Cornwall Council's Strategic Historic Environment Service<sup>8</sup>.

## Geology designations

- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
  - Status – National - SSSIs can be designated for reasons of biodiversity and/or geology
  - Resources – Cornwall Council mapping or MAGIC
- County Geology Sites (formerly Regionally Important Geological Sites or RIGS)
  - Status – Cornwall
  - Resources – these are not available in map form, but if you are aware of any in your plan area, the Cornwall Geo-conservation Group will be able to provide advice.

## Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

You will need to write to Cornwall Council for a formal screening opinion on SEA and HRA once you have some draft policies. The likelihood of SEA or HRA being required will depend largely on what designated sites you have within or in close proximity to your area and the nature of the policies in your plan.

<sup>7</sup> Historic England <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/>

<sup>8</sup> Cornwall Council's Strategic Historic Environment Service <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/strategic-historic-environment-service/>



## Locally important sites and features

There will no doubt be other sites, assets or features that are valued in your community, but that may not be designated. It is important to include these in your plan.

Cornwall has a wonderfully diverse landscape, from wooded steep sided valleys, open windswept moorland with isolated farmsteads, to dunes with sandy beaches. Understanding what defines and makes up the character of your local landscape will allow you to recognise these special elements and retain and enhance them whilst positively planning for future development.

Cornwall Council's 2007 Landscape Character Assessment provides general landscape character information. A Local Landscape Character Assessment (LLCA) which specifically describes the character of your area can form an important part of the evidence base to underpin your NDP (a guidance note is available on the neighbourhood planning toolkit to explain how to prepare your own LLCA).

## Community assets and open spaces

In addition to the environmental features in your parish, it will also be useful to carry out an audit of, and map, community assets such as post office, shop, pub, library, village hall and open spaces such as playing field, footpaths, parks etc.

## Flooding

Refer to the Environment Agency's online flood map for planning which will show whether any potential development sites are in flood risk areas.

## 2. How your NDP can protect and enhance the environment

Cornwall Council have produced a number of more detailed Neighbourhood Planning Guide Notes which expand on this overarching Environment Guide Note, these can be found on the toolkit.

The following questions are some suggestions to include in your detailed questionnaire to help understand what local people consider important, as designated sites are not the only marker of value.



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The following questions may help identify how your plan could help.

- What positive changes do you think could be made to improve the landscape and environment of your area?
- What changes have happened to the local landscape and environment which you did not like?
- Looking to the future, what changes do you envisage would have the greatest negative effect on the landscape and environment of your area?
- Which aspects of the landscape do you consider the most important to conserve? *(you could ask the community to rank in order of preference between 1 – 10, 1 being the most important)*

The farming landscape character  
Small and medium field patterns  
Cornish hedges and hedgerows  
Rivers, streams and creeks  
The undeveloped coastline  
Other *(Please state)*

Trees and woodland  
Beaches  
Ridges and skylines  
Dark skies  
Historic and cultural features

- Where in your local area would you take a visitor to enjoy the landscape and why?  
Where can you go for a great view? If you could capture the landscape of your area for a postcard, where would you take the picture and what would be in the view?
- Is there a place where you get the feeling of being 'away from it all'?
- Which of the following do you consider important to conserve in your area? *(Please rank in order of preference between 1 – 9, 1 being the most important)*

Green open spaces within the settlement e.g. village green  
Sport/recreation/playing fields  
Footpaths  
Coast path  
Graveyards

Woodland  
Cycleways, bridleways  
Parks and Gardens  
Other

- Where in your local area would you go for outdoor recreation and why?
- Which historic and cultural aspects do you consider important to conserve in your area? *(Please rank in order of preference between 1 – 5, 1 being the most important)*

Mines and quarries  
Churches & chapels  
Mile stones and way signs

Harbours & quays  
Scheduled monuments  
Other historic features

- Where in your local area would you take a visitor to see a heritage site?
- Are there any folklore tales still told about your area?