



Town and Parish Councils
(sent via email)

30th September 2026

Dear Clerk

Important planning changes following the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

We are writing to make Town and Parish Councils aware of important changes introduced by the Government's new [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#), published on 17th August 2026. The new framework replaces the December 2024 version and came into effect immediately. These changes will affect how planning applications are considered and have important implications for development and the application of neighbourhood plans both within and outside settlements.

Whilst the current development plan for Babergh and Mid Suffolk remains in place, national planning policies will now carry significant weight where local policies are inconsistent with the new NPPF. The current development plan for Babergh and Mid Suffolk districts is made up of the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Part 1 (November 2023), saved policies from historic local plan documents, the Suffolk Minerals and Waste Local Plan (July 2020) together with adopted (made) neighbourhood plans.

The Councils have arranged an in-person Town and Parish meeting for each district in October to discuss the NPPF in more detail and invitations have been sent out. The meeting in Mid Suffolk is taking place on Monday 19th October and the meeting in Babergh on Tuesday 20th October.

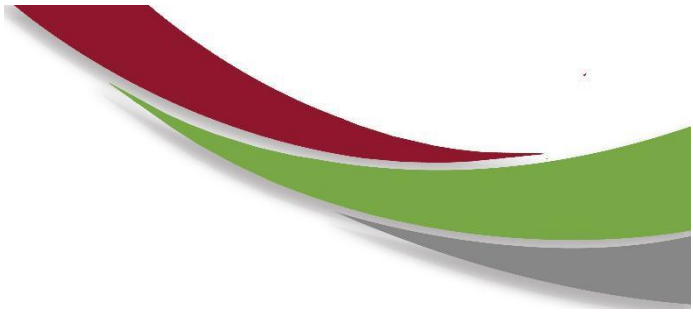
Particular matters we would like to highlight include the change to the definition of a settlement; the effect of the NPPF for neighbourhood plans; and the approach to development outside settlements. Changes to delegated planning decision-making are also being introduced.

1. Changes to settlement definitions

One of the most significant changes is the new national definition of a **settlement**. The NPPF now defines settlements as towns, villages and other predominantly built-up areas, including land that already has planning permission and will become part of the built-up area once developed. Hamlets and scattered groups of houses are not generally considered settlements unless specifically identified in the development plan. Settlement boundaries are currently defined on the development plan [policies map](#), which includes settlement boundaries from historic local plan documents, some of which have not been updated for 20 years and those that have been updated or introduced through neighbourhood plans.



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Settlement boundaries will be reviewed through the new Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan, which is planned for adoption in 2029 following two rounds of public consultation in 2027 and 2028, and an examination in 2028/29. A new settlement hierarchy for Babergh and Mid Suffolk districts will also be proposed, and we will be in contact as we update our information regarding services and facilities.

What this means

Under Policy S4 of the NPPF, development proposals within settlements should generally be approved unless any adverse impacts would significantly outweigh the benefits. We recognise that this represents a different approach from some existing Joint Local Plan policies.

2. Neighbourhood Development Plans

The Councils remain committed to supporting communities that are preparing neighbourhood plans. We have provided financial and technical support for neighbourhood planning over many years and will continue to do so where appropriate under the new planning framework. Funding currently remains available in Mid Suffolk, although all available funding in Babergh has already been allocated.

The NPPF now expects neighbourhood plans to:-

- Help plan positively for future development.
- Allocate land for development where appropriate.
- Address local priorities through planning policies.
- Support infrastructure, community facilities, design quality, environmental improvements and heritage conservation.

Importantly, neighbourhood plans **cannot reduce the amount of development required by the wider development plan (see Policy PM5).**

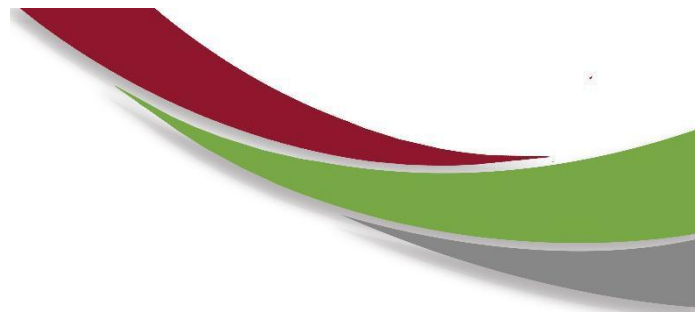
A key message for communities preparing a Neighbourhood Plan

Neighbourhood plans should not repeat or conflict with national planning policies. In addition, neighbourhood plans that allocate sufficient land to meet identified housing requirements will receive stronger protection in planning decisions for up to five years after being made.

The key point is that neighbourhood plans which do not allocate enough land to meet identified housing needs may face difficulties at examination and may carry less weight when planning applications are determined.



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Without allocations which meet the identified housing requirement of a Parish there is a risk that a plan may not pass examination and even if made will be of limited weight in planning decisions. We recommend groups give this expectation serious consideration.

There is an expectation that local district councillor engagement and support is crucial to delivering a successful neighbourhood plan.

3. Development outside settlements

The new NPPF also sets out (Policy S5) circumstances where development outside defined settlements may be supported. These include:-

- Rural businesses and services.
- Redevelopment of previously developed land.
- Limited infill within groups of houses.
- Development that addresses an identified unmet need, such as a shortage of housing land supply, where it is well-related to an existing settlement and supported by available infrastructure.

Where existing local or neighbourhood plan policies conflict with these national policies, the NPPF will carry greater weight in planning decisions. We will discuss this topic during the October briefing events.

4. Changes to planning committee and delegation arrangements

The Government has also introduced national changes to planning committee procedures and delegated decision-making arrangements. These changes were announced in June 2026. The new arrangements will affect when planning applications can be referred to committee and the circumstances in which councillors can request applications to be considered by committee. The Government expects these changes to take effect by the end of October. The Councils will consider necessary amendments to their Constitutions to reflect the new national requirements.

We appreciate that these are significant changes and may raise questions. The forthcoming briefing sessions will provide an opportunity to discuss the new NPPF and its implications in more detail.



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Yours faithfully

Dee O'Rourke
Director of Place



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