

Renfrewshire Council: Lessons Learned in Preparing the Evidence Report



Context

Renfrewshire Council submitted their Evidence Report to Gate Check in October 2025 and this was subsequently deemed sufficient in December 2025 allowing the Council to progress with preparation of their proposed Local Development Plan (LDP). This case study discusses the process the LDP team took in compiling the Evidence Report and the lessons learned through this.

What Happened

Following the publication of Development Planning regulations and guidance in May 2023, work commenced in earnest on the Renfrewshire Evidence Report in January 2024. Thinking around the structure of the Evidence Report evolved to a model replicating the structure and the topic policies of NPF4 with some additional topics such as education capacity included given its significance to Renfrewshire. The Evidence Report topic templates were based on the template set out in the



guidance. This approach allowed for topics to be assigned to different team members. Meetings were held with key agency and internal stakeholders to advise of the process being followed, with meetings with the development industry held on request. Presentations were also offered to all community councils to advise on the new LDP process and the opportunity to prepare local place plans. Early engagement was held with secondary school pupils supported by the Council's Youth Services.

Around August 2024, work commenced on 'working draft' Evidence Report templates. These were early drafts of some of the subject templates. These were shared as they were finalised with targeted stakeholders, with some of the more complex subjects (e.g. housing, transport, education) also shared with DPEA. Next, in March 2025, all draft templates were published collectively as a draft Evidence Report with comments invited from the community and all stakeholders. The templates and associated mapping were published on the LDP3 hub (<https://renfrewshire-ldp3-ren.hub.arcgis.com/>). Following that consultation, time was taken to identify and either resolve or record disputes, with the final Evidence Report submitted to the September 2025 meeting of Renfrewshire Council. The Evidence Report submission comprised: the Evidence Report; Position Statement; Consultation and Engagement Report; LDP2 Review; and the SEA Scoping Report, and along with supporting online mapping.

What probably added most time to the process was the summarising of national, regional and local evidence documents, and then the revision of separately authored topic templates to ensure consistency across the document. The summarising of responses to the draft Evidence Report consultation also took longer than expected owing to the number and detail of responses received.

Areas of Collaboration

DPEA

Our initial contact with the DPEA was to share thoughts around the structure of the Evidence Report which were received positively. We also had an early meeting with DPEA support staff to share our timeline and approach and to be advised of DPEA expectations. Working drafts of Evidence Report topic templates were then shared with Reporters. Some simple topics were shared first to get comments on structure, and then more complex topics for thoughts on content. The DPEA comments received were detailed and helpful, allowing templates to be reworked and improved to meet DPEA expectations.

Member/Officer Working Group

A cross-party member/officer working group (MOWG) has been established to enable councillor awareness raising and input to the LDP process. At the Evidence Report stage it was used to advise on the new LDP process and expectations and on the scope of evidence to be included in the Evidence Report. It was then used to advise of key aspects of evidence e.g. the local housing land requirement and site assessment process, and the possible requirement for additional



business/industrial land requirement. The group had an awareness raising rather than decision making purpose. It has allowed for a good working relationship between councillors and the LDP team to develop, highlighting to councillors at an early stage some of the challenges likely to be faced both in preparing the LDP and in taking decisions on the spatial strategy. The broad nature of the Evidence Report also allowed for some good general discussion about planning related issues. Following preparation of the Evidence Report, the MOWG has been used to advise councillors of sites that have been submitted for consideration to be included in the LDP.

Key Agencies

Early meetings were held with most key agencies to advise on the Council's approach, timescales and to hear about how key agencies were interacting with other planning authorities. Once the working draft Evidence Report individual topic templates were finalised, these were shared with relevant key agencies and offered the opportunity to discuss if requested. We found the involvement of key agencies helpful at this stage. Key agencies were engaged with again when the full set of draft Evidence Report templates were finalised. Again, key agency involvement at this stage was positive with detailed comments received on relevant topic templates and meetings held as required. For a few templates, updated versions were shared again to ensure key agency position had been captured correctly and that agreement or dispute was clearly recorded.

Overall Result

The Evidence Report was initially planned for submission in quarter four of 2024 (2023 DPS), however, this was delayed to October 2025 for the following reasons:

- Writing and reviewing of the Evidence Report took longer than expected.
- Reviewing emerging Gate Check reports to capture the expectations of Reporters and ensuring these expectations were addressed.
- Underestimating the required time to review and respond to comments received on the draft Evidence Report.

The Evidence Report was deemed sufficient at Gate Check, and we are progressing with preparing the proposed plan. The site assessment process is proving to be more time consuming than in previous LDP processes, particularly in relation to existing (LDP2) sites. Whereas previously the assessment of these sites was fairly light touch simply to agree if these sites would be carried forward or are removed from the proposed plan. Existing sites are now required to go through the same assessment process and new sites suggested for inclusion in the LDP.

Uncertainty has developed around the local housing land requirement to be met by the LDP. While the gate check report confirmed the LHLR suggested by the Council, Renfrewshire is one of several areas where population and household projections have increased significantly based on the 2022-based projections. Further change is expected from the 2024-based projections, so there is



uncertainty around the amount of housing land to be planned for and related infrastructure implications.

While housing site assessments and housing land requirement has dominated time spent on proposed plan preparation, there are several other workstreams that need to be progressed including aspects introduced by the new development plan process/NPF4 for example the identification of a nature network. Substantial levels of consultancy support is also likely to be necessary to meet requirements and expectations such as a transport assessment and a review of local nature conservation sites.

Lessons Learned

- Reading all emerging Gate Check reviews helped to understand what Reporters are looking for, not just content but format too.
- Running drafts past DPEA and taking on feedback was worthwhile even in instances where it added time to the process.
- Taking time to ensure the Evidence Report was as neat, tidy and logical as possible assisted in being successful at Gate Check.

This case study has been prepared in collaboration by Renfrewshire Council and the National Planning Improvement Team at the Improvement Service. We publish good practice case studies identified through our work on the National Planning Improvement Framework and the National Planning Hub. They aim to support the sharing of good practice and build collaboration across the sector in addressing common challenges. Please email us at npi@improvementservice.org.uk if your authority has a good practice case study to share.

