

Local Development Plans

Proposed Plans

Action Plan and Advice

CONTEXT

Local development plans are a key tool for planning authorities to be clear with the public, investors and the wider council in decisions about the future development of our places.

Plans should focus on what we are planning to deliver, and where development should and should not happen– shown primarily through maps, illustrations and diagrams. They should be accompanied by a delivery programme which sets out a credible and up-to-date plan to support delivery.

To make the system as simple as possible, local development plans are designed to work alongside the National Planning Framework, and so **additional policies within the Local Development Plan should be the exception rather than the rule.**

Local development plans will have a 10-year lifespan. They can, and should where appropriate, be updated between full reviews to ensure the system is able to respond in real time to the fast-paced world we live in today. **The current priority is to have adopted plans in place as soon as possible.** The Act includes provisions that allow plans to be amended and further levels of detail added throughout the 10-year period.

The [March 2026 Chief Planner](#) letter indicated Proposed Plans, including site allocations, should carry significant weight in decision-making. Proposed plans provide a strong indication of the Council's view of where new development should take place and where it should not, based on comprehensive evidence.

This action plan and 'essentials advice' aims to make the process of preparing new plans as simple, fast, efficient and transparent as possible.

ESSENTIAL CONTENT AND POINTS ON KEY TASKS BETWEEN GATE CHECK AND PROPOSED PLAN

Place-Based

Site appraisal and selection

All sites should be assessed using a clear, transparent staged approach. The Improvement Service 'site assessment checklist' is available.

Authorities should explain what is considered to be an unreasonable alternative site, providing clear justification, including what relevant criteria have been applied. It is not necessary to continue to assess 'unreasonable' alternatives.

Preferred sites as well as reasonable alternatives should be fully assessed. The Strategic Environmental Assessment of sites and planning site assessment should be integrated to avoid double handling.

- **Identify allocations**, including to meet the local housing land requirement
- **Engage across sectors** to inform housing allocations
- Undertake appropriate and **effective transport appraisal** in line with guidance
- **Align with SEA requirements** – engage with consultation authorities

Spatial strategy first

The spatial strategy should signal the direction of growth, it should actively guide development to locations that create and shape places. It should identify deliverable allocations that cover the first ten years, and may identify broad areas with potential for longer term development.

- **Support infrastructure coordination and developer contributions.**
- **Be proportionate.** Focus on significant, sensitive or complex sites/growth areas.
- Use the Delivery Programme to **identify where further work will be undertaken to support implementation** of the plan's proposals e.g. future masterplans.

Place based - Minimal Policy

Written policy content should be minimal, as plans should be place based and focus on the question of where different types of development is supported. Re-iteration of NPF4 principles and policies is not required, in fact nuanced local changes are likely to make the decision making environment more complex.

Policy requirements for particular places, such as design, layout, landscaping, access, infrastructure and developer contributions can be set out more effectively through allocations, masterplans or development briefs, providing greater clarity and reducing reliance on lengthy policy wording.

Policy on developer contributions should be embedded within the plan. Whilst this may be challenging, given the significant sums of money involved and importance of infrastructure to delivery, it is considered appropriate to give this proper scrutiny in the Examination. Policy should therefore be included in the proposed plan, bearing in mind that if the need arises, a revised policy could be introduced as an early amendment to the adopted plan.

Planning Guidance

Where authorities wish to set out more detail for development management purposes, this can still be done in guidance. Whilst not part of the statutory development plan, guidance can be adopted by local authorities as a statement of their policies. Where relevant to a decision, matters in adopted guidance are a material consideration and should be afforded such weight as determined by the decision maker (whether officers, elected members, reporters or Ministers).

Whilst it is understood that some parties may prefer to have policies embedded in the plan, as part of our discretionary planning system all material considerations must be considered, including relevant matters set out in guidance.

Typically guidance could focus on more detailed, technical and locally-specific matters which can be applied in development management. It may be helpful, but is not essential, to include a high level 'hook' for this guidance in the plan itself. This will provide more flexibility for authorities to respond to, for example, new types of development or to tackle emerging pressures.

People Centred

Community engagement

- **Engage communities**, including children and young people.
- Take account of **Local Place Plans**, to incorporate and support the delivery of spatial elements through the plan.

Collaboration

- **Collaborate across council services and with delivery partners**, including key agencies, and the Scottish Government's Planning Directorate to allow input into the development of the plan and Delivery Programme. Can use **existing forums** to inform the emerging spatial strategy.

Infrastructure First

Focus on how the plan can support Delivery

- Take an **infrastructure first approach to inform the emerging spatial strategy**, for example site allocations, directions of growth and phasing of sites.
- Identify what are the **infrastructure priorities**, what is needed, when and how it will be funded and delivered.
- **Work with partners** and agencies to establish clear, **committed pathways to delivery**. Consider upfront how delivery groups can support delivery of the spatial strategy and allocations.
- **Ensure a realistic and deliverable approach and set this out in the Proposed Delivery Programme.**

Delivery programmes

Delivery programmes should identify the infrastructure required to support delivery of the plan. It is recognised that this will evolve for some sites as infrastructure requirements and

costs become clearer. They can be reviewed and refreshed over time, updated at least every two years.

AGREED ACTIONS

Following the summit held on 10 August 2026, we have agreed a number of actions to simplify and expedite the process of preparing new local development plans. These are being taken with immediate effect:

All parties (as named below):

- Promote a culture of open communication and collaboration, working together to address challenges, develop solutions, and share learning across Scotland.

The Scottish Government Planning Directorate will:

1. Promote timely preparation and adoption of local development plans, championing their role in delivering sustainable places and wider national and local outcomes.
2. Continue to support the National Planning Hub and National Planning Improvement Champion over 2026/7, to support timely adoption of local development plans.
3. Support a shared understanding of plan progress by regularly monitoring and communicating timescales, and engaging senior leaders, including Chief Executives, on the importance of corporate commitment to maintaining progress towards plan adoption.
4. Proactively engage with planning authorities as they prepare and draft new plans, fostering open dialogue and offering helpful feedback and advice throughout the process.
5. Make connections across portfolios in Scottish Government on infrastructure requirements from emerging plans.

The Division for Planning and Environmental Appeals will:

1. Provide ongoing support to planning authorities, helping them to prepare for the Examination.
2. Engage with authorities prior to the Proposed Plan being submitted for Examination.
3. Take a rigorous but proportionate approach to the Examination, focusing on unresolved issues.
4. Avoid intervening to improve plans or undertake a test of its soundness – this is the responsibility of the planning authority.
5. Minimise Further Information Requests as far as possible at the Examination stage – focusing only on essential information.
6. Continue to offer training events.
7. Update Reporter Guidance Note on DPEA Examinations by the end of 2026.

Heads of Planning Scotland/Planning Authorities will:

1. Provide Key Agencies, Planning Directorate and DPEA with accurate information on plan timelines and expected submission dates.
2. Seek and welcome feedback from Key Agencies, Planning Directorate and DPEA throughout the plan-making process, using this to help shape and strengthen emerging plans.
3. Maintain a focused and proportionate approach throughout.
4. Bring together council services to support preparation and delivery of the plan.
5. Be clear about their spatial strategy and the evidence underpinning it. Keep evidence up to date.
6. Minimise the policies which are included in the plans.
7. Prepare and keep Delivery Programmes up to date to support delivery of the plan.
8. Develop developer contributions methodology based on robust evidence and following good practice examples.

The Key Agencies will:

1. Set out and promote their own [guidance](#) on how to engage with them as effectively as possible.
2. Give views throughout the plan-making process to help shape and strengthen emerging plans.
3. Support sharing of datasets with planning authorities.
4. Advise on meeting SEA requirements in line with their statutory functions.
5. Cooperate with planning authorities on the preparation of Delivery Programmes.

The National Planning Improvement Champion and National Planning Hub will:

1. Set out a refreshed programme for the National Planning Hub and National Planning Improvement Champion to provide support, and to act as a critical friend to help planning authorities progress local development plans towards timely adoption.
2. Convene further meetings to develop a shared understanding of the content of Proposed Plans.
3. Work with authorities to identify and support provision of surge capacity to accelerate the preparation of local development plans.
4. Share good practice examples, including around site assessment.
5. Connect authorities with shared challenges to provide peer-to-peer support.
6. Explore scope for digital solutions including data sharing across organisational boundaries.
7. Facilitate deep dive learning sessions focusing on the experiences of volunteer planning authorities.
8. Work with planning authorities through the National Planning Improvement Framework process to help deliver existing and new improvement actions that will help to expedite local development plan adoption.