



Frequently Asked Questions

Why have a neighbourhood plan?

Blewbury's Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the Vale of White Horse's Local Plan, so the policies it contains will be central to the planning decisions in our area. This kind of influence on planning decisions has not been available to communities before. While many groups have prepared or contributed to parish plans, community plans or supplementary planning documents in the past, none of these have the same legal clout as a neighbourhood plan.

What is the relationship between the Vale's Local Plan and Blewbury's Neighbourhood Plan?

Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Vale's Local Plan. Locally, this means that Blewbury's Plan must be in general conformity with the Vale's Local Plan 2031, which is currently under examination by an expert Inspector as part of its approval process. If that plan has not been adopted before our plan has been finalised, we have to conform with the saved policies of the Local Plan 2011.

Can neighbourhood plans contain less development than is allocated in the Vale's Local Plan?

No! Neighbourhood planning is about shaping the development of a local area in a positive manner. It is not a tool to stop new development proposals; it must also reflect local and national policies. Neighbourhood plans and orders may not promote less development than set out in the local plan or undermine its strategic policies.

What makes a good policy for inclusion in the Plan?

The government's guidance states that: *'A policy in a neighbourhood plan should be clear and unambiguous. It should be drafted with sufficient clarity that a decision-maker can apply it consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. It can only relate to the development of land, and should be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence. It should be distinct to reflect and respond to the unique characteristics and planning context of the specific neighbourhood area for which it has been prepared.'* The golden rule is that the policies in our Plan should be clear, positive, relevant and capable of being delivered. They need to be based on evidence – our policies cannot conflict with government policy, or challenge the strategic elements of the Vale's planning policies.

Why are there not policies on every possible topic?

The Plan working parties have looked at lots of different planning issues in Blewbury, and attempted to shape our policies according to those needs. We welcome your feedback where you think there might be omissions or insufficient clarity. However, the finished policies must be evidence-based and capable of being delivered – they cannot be based solely on our aspirations. While there is no limit to the number of objectives or policies that can be included, we have been advised that it is best to focus on the issues where our Plan can add most value.

How will the Plan work in practice to prevent a development?

Whilst the plan cannot prevent any particular development on its own, it adds considerable weight when planners come to make their decisions.



Blewbury Neighbourhood Development Plan

Some examples of what a neighbourhood plan can (and can't) do...

Can it influence the design of new houses? Yes!

Can it influence the location of development? Yes!

Can it influence the nature of those houses? Yes!

Can it improve the local bus service? No! You will have to lobby our bus company, Oxfordshire County Council and our local MP.

Can it introduce a 20mph zone? No! – speed limits are a matter for the Highways Authority, but traffic management in relation to new development is for planning policy.

Can it control the conversion of an existing shop into another business? No! This is currently 'permitted development' and so not subject to planning policy.

How would the plan work in practice to prevent a large unwanted edge-of-village development such as Woodway or Chailey House?

It will further strengthen the existing statutory planning policies – including those on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in which Blewbury is located – that guide the Vale in their decision-making. The proposed Plan is clear on what we currently believe is – and isn't – acceptable: there are specific policies protecting the landscape, views and green space within the village and on its edge. The Plan would undoubtedly add weight to counter any unwanted development.

Is our Plan already influential?

Until the Plan is adopted by the village, it cannot be used to counter applications by developers anywhere in Blewbury. However, the Plan has increasing influence as soon as it is submitted for examination by the Inspector.

Why can't the Plan require zero-emission homes such as the Passive House?

A Neighbourhood Plan is only able to deal with planning matters. Carbon emissions arising from energy use in buildings are dealt with under the English Building Regulations, over which our plan has no influence.

How will we be able to use our Plan to ensure new housing is in keeping with the existing village?

Blewbury is architecturally unique, and a large number of houses and other features are already nationally protected (through listing and our conservation area). The policy in the Plan relating to building materials and styles takes into account the preferred use of vernacular materials, and asks for high-quality design that respects the scale and character of existing and surrounding buildings. However, being too prescriptive about the style of new buildings will not encourage interesting, good-quality new architecture in the village. *'Planning policies and decisions should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes'*. (From National Planning Policy Framework, paragraph 60.)

How much is our Plan costing?

We received £10,000 from the Vale, and £12,000 from an organisation called Locality (www.locality.org.uk), which is a national network of community-led organisations.. We do not expect anything will have to be paid from village funds.



Blewbury Neighbourhood Development Plan

Will the plan be used as a reference document in considering planning applications by the Parish Council or by the Vale, or both? How will this work in practice?

Both organisations will be required to refer to our Plan when considering planning applications. The Plan will form a legal part of the Vale's Local Plan. On a number of occasions neighbourhood plans have been challenged by local authorities, and the neighbourhood plan has normally prevailed. However, a neighbourhood plan does not give any powers to force a change in statutory designation, such as getting a building listed or extending the conservation area.

Why does it take so long to produce a neighbourhood plan?

Neighbourhood plans take between two and four years to complete. Having formally commenced in February 2014 it is estimated that Blewbury's Plan will be ready by summer 2016. It takes this long because it can only be produced by frequent consultation with the community; its pace is determined by the involvement of local volunteers and their own commitments. There are statutory phases of the plan such as a formal endorsement of the plan area, a village consultation, an examination by an independent inspector and finally a referendum.

How have residents been consulted for their views of what the Plan should include? Have village organisations and businesses been consulted?

The neighbourhood plan process provides numerous stages for consultation. Residents were initially consulted via the launch meeting on 8th March 2014 and the community Housing Needs Survey in the autumn of 2014. A public meeting for feedback on the Housing Needs survey and the Landscape Assessment was held on 28th February 2015. We also consulted different focus groups, including a group of teenagers. Comments and feedback have been received through the website and personal contact throughout the process. There will be a full six-week consultation on the draft Plan during which everyone will be entitled to comment, and as a result of these comments it is almost certain that changes will be made to the Plan. Finally, following the examination by an independent expert, there will be a referendum (see below).

How does the referendum work?

Community support is essential before any neighbourhood plan is adopted and used in planning decisions. If our Plan is found to be satisfactory at examination then the Vale will arrange for a referendum to take place. At referendum, members of the community will have the final say by voting for or against the Plan. If the majority of those who vote support the document, the Plan is 'made' and the Vale is required to adopt it.

What is an examination, and who examines the plan?

All neighbourhood plans are submitted to an independent examination. The examination determines whether the plan meets the necessary criteria and accords with national and local policy. The inspector will be a person with a good understanding of the planning system, such as an academic, a planning officer from a different planning authority or a planning inspector appointed by the Vale. Examinations are only expected to consider whether a plan complies with basic conditions and legal requirements, and aligns with national and local policy. Any significant problems should have been resolved through the support offered by the Vale before the examination begins. The examination process is likely to take at least six weeks.



Blewbury Neighbourhood Development Plan

What role do the Parish Council and the Vale have?

The legislation in the Localism Act stipulates that a neighbourhood plan must be the subject of a request by a qualifying body – in our case Blewbury Parish Council – to the district or county council (in our case the Vale), for permission to carry out a neighbourhood plan. Local volunteers, with the full support of the Parish Council, formed the steering group. The Vale has been very supportive in assisting throughout the process.

How long will the Blewbury Neighbourhood Plan last?

Our Plan is intended to last until 2031, the same time-frame as that covered by the Vale's new Local Plan. A neighbourhood plan can and probably would be reviewed within that period.

How will the presumption in favour of sustainable development relate to our Neighbourhood Plan?

The presumption in favour of sustainable development is principally a means of ensuring that local plans and neighbourhood plans are put together in a way that reflects an evidence-based assessment of the social, economic and environmental needs of an area. Recent planning reforms strengthen the role of neighbourhood plans and local plans in decision making. The presumption makes clear that planning applications that are in line with both local and neighbourhood plans should normally be approved.