Planning policy

Local Plan policies provide an important framework to guide development proposals and aid decision-making for garden communities.

Planning for garden communities using the Local Plan

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is the main policy document for planning and development.

See the NPPF information on GOV.UK paragraph 72 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2)

Paragraph 72 relates to the provision of new homes in new settlements or significant extensions to existing villages and towns and considerations to take on board.

You can also find Information on the Local Plan development process on the GOV.UK website (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-making)

Cross-boundary communities

Where a garden community crosses one or more local authority boundaries, it will need to be integrated into all relevant Local Plans.

A coordinated approach, including a common and robust evidence base, and a consistent approach to policy content is a good way to support a holistic vision for a garden community.

Creating planning policies for garden communities

Policies relating to a garden community can be contained in joint or individual Local Plans and/or a spatial development strategy produced by an elected mayor or combined authority (where plan-making powers have been conferred).

Local plan policies drafted in support of the garden community are required meet the tests of soundness as set out in the new National Planning Policy Framework.
Read the National Planning Policy Framework information on GOV.UK website.

**How to create a planning policy framework for garden communities**

- use clear language that avoids overly technical terms
- ensure policies are fully supported by a strong evidence base
- set out the main components that the garden community is expected to deliver - like infrastructure, mix of uses, housing mix and tenure, green space typologies and stewardship ambitions
- include clear criteria and/ or targets against which development proposals can be tangibly measured. Describe the subsequent guidance to be developed to inform the garden community proposal
- if delivery of the garden community depends on certain provisions or infrastructure being in place, reference these in the policy and ensure there’s evidence to support their inclusion and ability to be delivered

**4 different approaches to creating a spatial framework**

Below is a list showing the advantages and disadvantages of different types of spatial frameworks to consider when planning garden communities.

1. broad location identified in a local plan
2. strategic site allocation in a local plan or allocations development plan document
3. development plan document - such as an area action plan
4. site-specific supplementary planning documents (SPDs)

**Summary**

Allows for a broad area for a garden community to be identified on a diagram, with boundaries and more detail to be developed at a later stage, subject to further assessment.

It is common for the local plan policy to reference the need to develop a more detailed policy framework for the garden community

**Advantages**

- where details of a garden community are not yet established, it enables well considered strategic planning principles at a high level. It allows for further work to establish parameters for development and resolve technical issues affecting delivery
- major sites are given credibility through the need to appraise all viable options and testing through examination
- a comprehensive framework can be set where a range of different landowners exist but are not working together or to the same timeframes
- enables engagement with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the strategic vision reflects local views

**Disadvantages**

- less suitable for sites that need to be delivered early, or where a little further work could provide sufficient evidence to support a strategic site allocation
should not be used as alternative to strategic site allocation to avoid dealing with significant infrastructure or technical issues, like flooding, major highway infrastructure, environmental designations.

2. Strategic site allocation in a local plan or allocations development plan document

Sites are allocated for development with boundaries shown on the proposals map and have a related policy in the local plan specifying the type and amount of development.

**Advantages**

- provides a clearer policy framework for delivery including identification of critical infrastructure
- enables engagement with a wide range of stakeholders to set a vision and objectives that can achieve political and community buy-in
- saves time long-term by reducing the need to prepare substantive additional policy framework documents later
- addresses difficult and strategic issues up-front, which can save time at application stage
- gives clearer indication of development costs, land value and viability
- inclusion in an allocations development plan, timing may be favourable if the Local Plan is well progressed
- the level of detail provided at this stage is dependent on the status of the proposal - a concept masterplan can be a useful to test capacity and impact of the proposal.

**Disadvantages**

- takes time to prepare and adopt, particularly as the evidence base is necessarily more in depth than for a broad location
- requires a boundary for the garden community to be identified, including any land required for, like environmental mitigation

3. Development plan document - such as an area action plan

Provides detailed policies relating to developments that have been the subject of a strategic policy in a Local Plan. Can also include principles, development specifications and a masterplan.

**Advantages**

- where multiple sites are likely to come forward over a long timescale
- where there are many land owners and developers who are not working collaboratively
- useful for establishing infrastructure requirements and testing their viability
- can be used when development crosses administrative boundaries where there’s a common policy approach

**Disadvantages**

- must accord with higher level policy
- can be time and resource intensive to prepare

4. Site-specific supplementary planning documents (SPDs)

These provide more detail on how policy for a garden community should be implemented.
Advantages

- covers a range of topics specific to the garden community. This includes layout, scale, design, land use, landscape, sustainability, transport, infrastructure, phasing of delivery and implementation
- best to produce collaboratively with stakeholders including landowners and developers
- can be relatively quick to prepare and adopt
- where multiple sites are likely to come forward over a long timescale
- where multiple land owners and developers are not working collaboratively
- good for establishing infrastructure requirements and testing their viability
- can be used where development crosses administrative boundaries where there is a common policy approach

Disadvantages

- cannot expand on the relevant Local Plan policy
- must conform to, and supplement policy - so cannot allocate new sites
- can lose focus and take a long time to prepare unless carefully project managed

Further information

- read more about policy and legislation on the Planning Portal website (https://www.planningportal.co.uk/info/200136/policy_and_legislation)
- read more about plan-making on the GOV.UK website (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making)
- read more about planning guidance on the GOV.UK website (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2)
- see a local plan checklist on the local.gov.uk website (https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/pas-topics/local-plans/local-plan-checklist)