

General information about the planning system and neighbourhood plans

The Planning System

The planning system manages the use and development of land and buildings with the purpose of creating sustainable places to live and work.

The planning system has two main parts:

- Plan making – setting out policies to guide development over a period of time.
- Development management – where planning decisions are made through the assessment of planning applications.

Not all forms of development require planning permission. For development proposals that do require planning permission Somerset Council are responsible for deciding whether the development should go ahead.

Decisions on planning applications are based on national planning policy and the Local Development Plan, taking other material considerations into account. Once “made” the Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the Local Development Plan.

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) first published in March 2012, revised in July 2018, updated in February 2019, revised in July 2021, updated in September 2023, revised in December 2023 and revised in December 2024 sets out the Government’s planning policies for England . It sets out how these are expected to be applied both in terms of plan making and determining planning applications.

The framework gives guidance to local planning authorities. It makes clear that the purpose of planning is to help achieving sustainable development, which balances economic, social and environmental goals.

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) supports the NPPF and provides further guidance on planning issues such as neighbourhood planning.

The Development Plan

Planning decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Somerset Council came into being on **April 1 2023**. The new unitary council brought together the services previously provided by the four district councils in Somerset (Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton, and South Somerset) alongside the services provided by Somerset County Council.

Until we adopt the Somerset Local Plan, existing Local Plans remain in place for the individual geographical areas of the former district councils.

Once 'made' neighbourhood plans will also form part of the development plan for the neighbourhood area they relate to.

More details about the development plan can be found at
www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/adopted-local-plans/

Mendip Local Plan Parts I and II

The Planning policies for the Mendip area are in the Mendip Local Plan Part I and Part II which cover the period from 2006 to 2029.

Local Plan Part I was adopted in December 2014 and Local Plan Part II in December 2021. Local Plan Part II was adopted in December 2021 identifying additional housing and employment sites.

You can view the Local Plan and current Policies Map below.

- [Mendip area Local Plan Part I](#)
- [Mendip area Local Plan Part II – Sites and Policies, Post Judicial Review Version](#)
- [Policies Map](#)

Mendip Local Plan Part II – Limited Update

Following a Judicial Review into Local Plan Part II, the following site allocations were deleted from the plan on 16 December 2022 – MN1, MN2, MN3, BK1 and NSP1. They were remitted to the council for reconsideration. The remainder of adopted Local Plan Part II is not affected. A related Judicial Review into the changes made to the Mendip Policies Map was dismissed on 14 July 2023. More information on the Judicial Review can be found at www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/adopted-local-plans/.

The Council is currently undertaking the process required (under paragraph 6 of a High Court Order made on 16 December 2022) to consider where to allocate 505 units consequent on the judgement. This may result in new allocations and amendments to development boundaries once complete.

The Council submitted the Limited Update proposals for examination on 30th September 2024. The Examination hearings took place between 11th March 2025 and 13th March 2025. The Inspector's Report is awaited.

Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood Planning provides an opportunity for communities to take a leading role in planning their local area. This can be done through a Neighbourhood Development Plan, often referred to as a Neighbourhood Plan, a Neighbourhood Development Order, or a Community Right to Build Order.

Neighbourhood Plans

A Neighbourhood Plan is a community-led framework for guiding the future development, regeneration and conservation of a parish (or group of parishes).

A Neighbourhood Plan may contain:

- a vision
- aims
- planning policies
- proposals for improving the area or providing new facilities
- allocation of key sites for specific kinds of development.

It can deal with a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues (such as housing, employment, heritage and transport) or it may focus on one or two key local issues only.

A Neighbourhood Plan must comply with European and national legislation such as Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulations Assessment. It must also have appropriate regard to national policy and be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan.

The local community can decide what to include in a neighbourhood plan, but it must meet a number of 'Basic Conditions' to ensure they are legally compliant. They are:

- Having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State, it is appropriate to make the neighbourhood plan
- The making of the neighbourhood plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development
- The making of the neighbourhood plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area
- The making of the neighbourhood plan does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, retained European Union (EU) obligations
- Prescribed conditions are met in relation to the neighbourhood plan and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the neighbourhood plan

The Neighbourhood Plan Process

There is a statutory process that must be followed for the making of a neighbourhood plan. The boundary of the neighbourhood area to which any neighbourhood plan relates must be designated by the council, and there can only be one neighbourhood plan for each neighbourhood area. The neighbourhood plan must also set out what time period it will apply for.

The draft neighbourhood plan must be prepared through a process of consultation with local residents and businesses. The final draft of the plan must also be subject to a consultation period of a minimum of 6 weeks, where interested parties are given

the opportunity to submit representations on it. An independent examiner reviews these comments and checks whether the neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions and other requirements set out in the regulations. The examiner then reports whether any modifications should be made to the plan and whether it should proceed to referendum.

Somerset Council then decides, having regard to the statutory criteria, whether to accept the Examiner's recommendations and proceed to referendum. If the neighbourhood plan proceeds to referendum, the council is responsible for organising the referendum.

The referendum will determine whether the council should use the neighbourhood plan for the area concerned to help it decide planning applications. All those registered to vote in the election of Councillors within the neighbourhood area are entitled to vote in the referendum.

At a referendum, a neighbourhood plan needs to gain a 'Yes' vote from the majority of voters (more than 50%) to enable Somerset Council to formally 'make' the neighbourhood plan. If the neighbourhood plan is made, then it will become part of the statutory development plan and will be used in the determination of planning applications.

Further guidance on Neighbourhood Planning can be found at;

- [Locality website](#)
- [Local Government Association – neighbourhood plans FAQs, advice and toolkit](#)
- [My Community – Neighbourhood plans roadmap](#)
- [Government guidance on neighbourhood planning – GOV.UK](#)
- [Royal Town Planning Institute – Planning Aid guidance on neighbourhood planning](#)

