

General information on town and country planning, including neighbourhood planning to ensure voters have sufficient knowledge to make an informed decision.

The Planning System

Most new buildings or major changes to existing buildings or to the local environment need consent - known as planning permission. Without a planning system everyone could construct buildings or use land in any way they wanted, no matter what effect this would have on other people who live in, work in or enjoy the area.

Harborough District Council, as the local planning authority, is responsible for deciding whether a development - anything from an extension on a house to a new shopping centre - should go ahead within the District.

Planning involves making decisions about the future of our towns, villages and countryside. This is vital in balancing our desire to develop the areas where we live and work with ensuring the surrounding environment isn't negatively affected for everyone.

Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan for the local authority area, in this case Harborough District, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This development plan can comprise a number of documents including local plans (such as the Harborough District Local Plan), supplementary planning documents and neighbourhood plans. All such documents are required to be prepared in consultation with the local community and reflect national policy as set out in the national planning policy.

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (or Framework) was first published on 27 March 2012, revised in revised in July 2018, updated in February 2019 and July 2021 and December 2023 and December 2024. It sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be taken into account by communities when preparing neighbourhood plans and by local councils when drawing up local plans and making decisions on planning applications. At the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and this has to be reflected in plans, both at a district level and a neighbourhood level.

A new version of the NPPF was issued on 17 August 2026. This does not affect this examination since its Annex A paragraph states:

“Neighbourhood plans that have been submitted to the local planning authority under Regulation 15, on or before, the date of publication of this Framework should be prepared in accordance with the Framework published in December 2024.”

Local Plans

Local planning authorities, such as Harborough District Council, must prepare a local plan for their area which sets out the opportunities for development and clear policies on what will or will not be permitted and where. They must be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework. As part of the development plan, local plans are very important when deciding planning applications.

In Harborough District, the Local Plan was adopted on 30th April 2019. It sets out clear strategic priorities for the District and states where development should take place up to 2031. The Local Plan reflects the National Planning Policy Framework and includes site specific allocations for housing, employment and retail development where appropriate.

Harborough is preparing a new Local Plan which was submitted to the Inspectorate

Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood planning was introduced under the Localism Act to give members of the community a more hands on role in the planning of their neighbourhoods.

Parish councils or neighbourhood forums (community groups that are designated to take forward neighbourhood planning in areas without parishes) can now use neighbourhood planning powers to establish general planning policies for the development and use of land through the preparation of a neighbourhood plan (sometimes referred to legally as 'neighbourhood development plans').

The legislation, however, sets out that neighbourhood plans have to meet a number of 'Basic Conditions' to ensure they are legally compliant and take account of wider policy considerations.

The Basic Conditions are that the Plan must:

- have regard to national planning policy and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State (e.g. National Planning Policy Framework);
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- be in general conformity with strategic policies in the development plan for the local area (i.e. Local Plan); and
- be compatible with EU obligations and human rights requirements.

Once drafted, a neighbourhood plan is required to undergo an independent examination. The appointed examiner will check that the neighbourhood development plan meets the basic conditions before recommending that it proceeds to a local referendum. This is to make sure that referendums only take place when proposals are clear, deliverable and sustainable.

Great Bowden Review Neighbourhood Plan

The Great Bowden Review Neighbourhood Plan has been produced by Great Bowden Parish Council and the Great Bowden Neighbourhood Plan Group, in consultation with the local community.

The Examination Version of the Plan underwent a 6 week consultation ending on 21 August 2024 which was followed by an Independent Examination. As part of this process the appointed Independent Examiner, Mr Andrew Ashcroft, considered whether the changes to the Plan were significant as to change the nature of the Plan. The Examiner determined that an examination and referendum would be required. The examiner considered the changes against the Basic Conditions required by legislation and that the Plan should proceed to referendum. Mr Ashcroft also decided a Public Hearing into the Neighbourhood Plan was not required.

Harborough District Council received the Examiner's Report into the Neighbourhood Plan on 27 July 2026. In his report the Examiner concludes that the Plan, subject to some specified modifications, should proceed to a Referendum based on the Great Bowden Neighbourhood Area as approved 4 August 2016. The Director for Planning has approved the Examiner's recommended modifications to the Plan under delegated powers and determined that the amended Plan should proceed to Referendum.

The modified version of the Plan is now the subject of a Referendum which is to be held on 8 October 2026.

If the Plan receives a 'Yes' from more than 50% of those voting, the Great Bowden Review Neighbourhood Plan will be 'made' (or brought into effect) by Harborough District Council as soon as possible. This means it becomes part of the Development Plan and, as such, together with the adopted Local Plan will be the starting point for the determination of planning applications within the parish of Great Bowden.

Information in relation to neighbourhood planning is available on the following website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/make-a-neighbourhood-plan>