

PAS Evidence for Plan Making

A focus upon proportionality

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Introduction

The majority of new development within England is governed by the ‘plan led principle’ and the production of development plans is enshrined in law. National policy and guidance clarify how such plans should be produced. Critically there is no single methodology of plan production. Each plan making body, most often local planning authorities, is required to assess its area and develop a plan appropriate to its own circumstances.

The necessary evidence to support such plans will therefore vary but is always subject to scrutiny; such supporting evidence is the responsibility of the plan making body. Professional judgements will need to be made on what is appropriate, with a vital focus on ensuring evidence supporting the local plan clearly justifies the strategy and policies in the plan. Much good practice abounds indicating how effective plan production can be undertaken. However, experience also shows that in some cases the production of plans can result in disproportionate and unfocused amounts of evidence which in turn can lead to confusion, delay and increased costs.

This note sets out advice and matters to be considered when collating evidence in support of a local plan. Regard has been had to national policy, existing available guidance and practical experience.

- **Section 1** summarises the legislative and policy background to plan making (particularly useful to less experienced readers/practitioners);
- **Section 2** addresses the importance and nature of evidence with case study examples; and
- **Section 3** provides a suggested methodology for proportionate evidence gathering to support plan production.

Overview and Background

1

1– Overview and Background

- 1.1 Plans are produced against a well-established framework of legal provision, national policy, national guidance and best practice. It is necessary for plan making authorities to have regard to all relevant factors when producing a new or revised plan for their area.

National Policy

- 1.2 Government policy in relation to planning is expressed primarily within the 2019 National Planning Policy Framework¹. This reasserts the plan led principle (paragraph 15):

"The planning system should be genuinely plan-led."

The Framework sets out the purpose of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. It is clear that the government's economic, social and environmental objectives should be delivered through the preparation and implementation of plans that are consistent with national policy.

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779764/NPPF_Feb_2019_web.pdf

- 1.3 The Framework states that (emphasis added):

- **Paragraph 31:** The preparation and review of all policies should be underpinned by relevant and up-to-date evidence. This should be adequate and proportionate, focused tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned, and take into account relevant market signals.
- **Paragraph 35:** Local plans and spatial development strategies are examined to assess whether they have been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements, and whether they are sound. Plans are 'sound' if they are:
 - a **Positively prepared** – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area's objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;

2 See paragraph 182 (second bullet point) of the archived 2012 Framework at: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180608095821/https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

3 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/contents>

4 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/767/contents/made>

5 <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/contents>

6 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted> (See Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017)

7 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2004/1633/contents/made>

8 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive. View at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32001L0042#PP4Contents>

9 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

10 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making>

11 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making#evidence-base>

- b **Justified** – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on **proportionate evidence**;
- c **Effective** – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
- d **Consistent with national policy** – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework.

A critical change to the evidential requirement of meeting the tests of soundness is provided by the revised soundness test b) 'Justified' in the 2019 Framework, which refers to 'an appropriate strategy', in contrast to the terms of the 2012 Framework, which referred to 'the most appropriate strategy'². Accordingly, this reinforces the principle that the evidence base can be more focused and proportionately reduced in scale.

Legislation

1.4 Against the context of national policy, plans in England are produced against a framework of legislation which includes:

- The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004³
- The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012⁴
- The Town and Country Planning Act 1990⁵
- The Localism Act 2011⁶
- The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004⁷

- European Directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment (SEA Directive)⁸

Planning Practice Guidance⁹

1.5 National policy is explained further within the online resource of the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This is an invaluable source of information which includes:

- **Plan Making**¹⁰
 - » The development plan is at the heart of the planning system with a requirement set in law that planning decisions must be taken in line with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise... It is essential that plans are in place and kept up to date.
 - » The development plan for an area is made up of the combination of strategic policies (... priorities for an area) and non-strategic policies (... detailed matters).
 - » All plans need to be as focused, concise, and accessible as possible.
- **Evidence Base**¹¹
 - » Policies need to be justified. Evidence to underpin policies can be taken from a wide variety of sources. Strategic policy-making authorities will need to consider carefully the need to commission evidence that will add delay and cost to plan production. Wherever possible, authorities may wish to prepare evidence in-house or jointly to speed up the process, and obtain best value for the taxpayer. Strategic policy-making authorities may wish to seek advice on this, for example, from the Planning Advisory Service as part of their ongoing plan-making support.

Planning Advisory Service Advice

- 1.6 The Planning Advisory Service is focussed on helping plan making authorities get an up to date local plan in place as soon as possible. A range of information and support services are available from its website¹².

Planning Inspectorate

- 1.7 The starting point for the examination is the assumption that the Council has submitted what it considers to be a sound plan¹³. The Inspectorate provides information on the question of evidence in its Procedure Guide for Local Plan Examinations¹⁴:

- Only evidence that informs the content of the plan is needed.
- Prior to preparing or commissioning evidence, Councils should be very clear about what they need it for, how they are going to use it and how much detail they need to go into.
- Local circumstances will be directly relevant.

- Evidence base documents, especially those relating to development needs and land availability, that date from two or more years before the submission date may be at risk of having been overtaken by events, particularly as they may rely on data that is even older.
- Conflicts within the evidence base must be explained.

Good evidence is critical to inform the production of a sound plan and its suite of policies.



¹² <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/pas-support/plan-production/plan-making-direct-support>

¹³ Section 20(2)
(b) Planning and
Compulsory Purchase
Act 2004.

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/examining-local-plans-procedural-practice>

The Evidence

2

2– The Evidence

Evidence Gathering and Analysis

- 2.1 Evidence is required to inform the plan production process. For plan making purposes, evidence can broadly be defined as a body of facts, information and analysis which support particular strategic and policy outcomes. This is commonly presented as a combination of data, statistical analysis and narrative reports leading to informed professional judgements on how sustainable development will be delivered within an area.
- 2.2 Evidence may arise from a number of different sources but commonly it is prepared or commissioned by a plan making authority. Evidence can be produced independently however and for a range of purposes, for example that from Natural England, Historic England, the Environment Agency and others. Such evidence should be used to support preparatory plan work, any draft plan and the submission version.

- 2.3 The preparation of a plan typically comprises 5 common stages, all of which will necessitate evidence:

- 1 **Early stages** – planning the production of the plan
- 2 **Preparation** – frontloading phase
- 3 **Preparation** – formulation phase
- 4 **Publication** – to enable representations to be made
- 5 **Submission** – preparation should cease upon submission to the Secretary of State/examining body

Critically, evidence will evolve in its detail and content over the course of a plan's production. Indeed, it is inevitable that the requirement for, and content of, evidence will be dynamic. For example, the iterations of a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) will show how policy options are refined between the inception of the plan and its adoption. Similarly, the evidence on housing land supply will constantly flux. Where such evidence is known to be routinely subject to fluctuations, this can be mitigated by adopting a range based approach. Upon submission, the evidence base should be complete.

2.4 A good evidence base should contain:

- **Baseline data** – what is the situation in the plan area at a given point in time (eg population figures);
- **Trend data** – what have been the trends within the plan area over a preceding time period (eg rates of migration);
- **Assumptions** – logical and transparent assumptions should be clearly identified within any evidence analysis (eg levels of economic growth);
- **Predictive data** – what are the anticipated outcomes of change over time (eg infrastructure requirements);
- **Descriptive data** – often narrative in style containing professional assessments of the subject matter (eg characterisation studies); and
- **Recommendations** – good evidence should incorporate recommendations and/or options for setting strategy or policy making.

The Purpose of Evidence

2.5 Evidence is essential for assessing the requirements and priorities of an area. When producing or collating evidence, plan making authorities should be clear as to its purpose. Critical questions should be:

- "Why is evidence required on a particular matter?"
- "What evidence is consequently necessary?"

The answers should be objective and clearly understood. Such evidence enables preferred strategies to be selected by the plan making authority in a transparent manner.

This will underpin a robust plan capable of effectively delivering sustainable forms of development consistent with national policy.

- 2.6 Good practice, from Examinations and subsequent implementation, illustrates that there are unsurprising benefits to be gained by ensuring that evidence is appropriately collated and targeted to the needs and circumstances of the plan area. Focused evidence will avoid the expenditure of undue resource on non-critical evidential matters and thereby reap benefits in producing effective plans and in minimising the length of their production process and cost.
- 2.7 Most plans will require similar elements of core evidence, particularly those containing strategic policies. Whilst evidence is the responsibility of the individual plan making body, Appendix 1 contains a list of frequently required documents and evidence sources.
- 2.8 As previously noted, and to reiterate, paragraph 31 of the Framework sets out the national policy requirements for evidence and serves as a helpful guide (emphasis added):

*The preparation and review of all policies should be underpinned by **relevant** and **up-to-date** evidence. This should be **adequate** and **proportionate, focused** tightly on supporting and justifying the policies concerned, and take into account relevant **market signals**.*

What is relevant?

SUMMARY: The plan making body should ensure that it is clear as to what is relevant evidence. Evidence should be directly relevant to both the planning topic and the plan making area. For example, collating evidence on demographic change and housing needs will be relevant to the housing strategies of most plan making authorities. In contrast, obtaining evidence relating to pressures on the Green Belt is likely to only be relevant to those authorities within proximity to established Green Belt areas.

2.9 Evidence can be integrated to inform a number of topic areas. For example, viability evidence pertaining to housing, town centres, economic growth and infrastructure can be considered concurrently in a single document. However, it will be helpful to ensure single evidence sources contain clear topic-based sections or analysis to inform specific policy content.

Evidence should be directly relevant to the:

- **planning topic**
- **plan making area**



Housing Land Supply Topic Paper: Accessible, focussed and clear

Milton Keynes Council
Evidence – Housing Land Supply Topic Paper



Context and priority

Milton Keynes Council was preparing its Local Plan. The city was planning for a significant increase in its housing requirement which was a priority for 'Plan:MK'.

Purpose

To synthesise and explain in summary form the range of evidence which informed its proposed housing land supply in the context of national policy.

Methodology

The topic paper was created by the Council policy team.

Outcome

The topic paper was a transparent and clear precis of the Council's housing land supply position which included appropriate references to the underpinning evidence base and key documents such as the SHMA and SA including strategic alternatives. This was relied upon at Examination where the Plan was subsequently found sound and adopted in 2019.

The Council's perspective:

"The Housing Land Supply Topic Paper enabled the Council to provide an up-front, detailed examination of each element of the housing land supply proposed within Plan:MK. Its aim was to assist the Inspector in reviewing this element of the submitted Plan and to outline why the approach of Plan:MK represented an appropriate strategy. The Inspector recognised the Topic Paper in his report stating that it provided 'compelling evidence' in relation to a number of specific elements of the housing land supply."

2.10 Evidence may be jointly commissioned, for example across more than one plan making area, which provides benefits for informed plan making and an effective means of resource management; this can cover areas such as affordable housing requirements, transport and biodiversity issues etc. For example:

- the Partnership for Urban South Hampshire has commissioned a range of studies to inform individual plan making by authorities which includes a Green Infrastructure Strategy to 2034¹⁵.
- South West Devon Joint Local Plan authorities (Plymouth City Council, South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council) commissioned a wide range of evidence base documents to inform its 2019 adopted Local Plan¹⁶.
- Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council have procured evidence for their Joint Local Plan, building on the joint evidence that supports the current Core Spatial Strategy¹⁷.

Evidence should be:

- sufficiently up to date
- Preferably newer than two years preceding the submission of a plan
- be able to be proportionately updated



¹⁵ <https://www.push.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/South-Hampshire-GI-Strategy-2017-2034-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/jointlocalplan/evidencebase>

¹⁷ <https://www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/all-services/planning/planning-policy/joint-local-plan/joint-local-plan-supporting-evidence>

What is up to date?

SUMMARY: The plan making body should be clear that its evidence is sufficiently up to date such that it robustly informs the plan under production. Evidence should include reliable and recent data. This will enable robust analysis which will inform plan and policy making. For example, developing a policy to maintain vibrant town centres is likely to require recent data on town centre uses, vacancy rates, floorspace costs and market signals. A plan, strategy or policy based on aged data, for example a town centre health check from 10 years ago, is likely to lead to less effective policy making and be challenged as being unjustified, ineffective and unsound.

- 2.11 Some evidence will be more time sensitive than others and may require consequential review and updates. For example, evidence relating to housing land supply is more likely to alter over a short time period and will require annual review as opposed to the slower rate of change normally affecting landscape character assessments, where trends/change is monitored over a longer timescale.
- 2.12 Evidence should be as recent as possible, albeit this may incorporate historic trends, which can consequently enable an appropriate 'forward look' for strategic policy making. As a rule of thumb, evidence should normally be no older, and preferably newer, than two years preceding the submission of a plan for Examination.
- 2.13 There is always scope to provide proportionate updates to core evidence sources as a cost effective means of maintaining an up to date evidence base. Iterations of documents such as Infrastructure Delivery Plans, SA and housing trajectories are cases in point.

What is adequate?

SUMMARY: Plan making authorities should be clear that their evidence adequately addresses the issue under consideration and the spatial area affected. Adequate evidence requires professional judgement but is often that which normally relates to a topic (eg housing needs of travellers) or a legal compliance matter (eg Duty to Cooperate). It will incorporate reliable data, illustrate an understanding of the breadth of issues within the subject matter in a proportionate manner and enable analysis to support a robust strategy or policy position.

2.14 Inadequate evidence may not be topic focussed, be incomplete/irrelevant in its subject matter coverage, be reliant on incomplete or historic data and incapable of enabling analysis to a robust strategy or policy position.

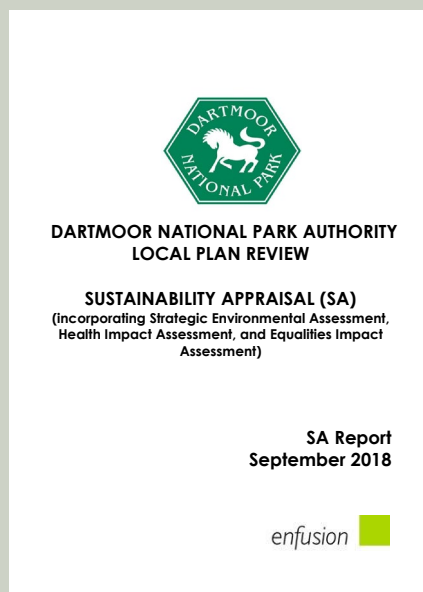
Adequate evidence:

- **Requires professional judgement**
- **Focused on the issue and spatial area**
- **Based on reliable data**
- **Covering the breadth of issues**



Sustainability Appraisal Report: clear, proportionate and robust

Dartmoor National Park Authority and Enfusion Evidence – Sustainability Appraisal Report



Context and priority

Dartmoor NPA is preparing its Local Plan. The Authority is particularly aware of actions affecting its environment.

Purpose

To ensure that the legislative requirements for Plan production are met and to ensure that the content of its proposed Local Plan will deliver sustainable forms of development.

Methodology

The SA report also included Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment. The iterative process of report production followed the established staged approach in parallel with progress on the Local Plan itself.

Process (and brief)

A competitive tendering process was undertaken on the understanding that the Park Authority had substantial environmental evidence already in place. This has kept the Authority's costs down, whilst maintaining the benefit of third party scrutiny. Incorporating the environmental appraisals has provided the benefit of clear feedback from the consultant, and a simpler contract management process. The Authority has wished to ensure the appointed consultants deliver the necessary iterations of the report to support the Local Plan stages and that they are sufficiently experienced to act as a 'critical' friend through to Examination.

Outcome

The SA has sought to set out a clear, proportionate and robust approach to assessing the potential effects of the proposed Local Plan upon Dartmoor and its people.

What is proportionate?

SUMMARY: Proportionate evidence is that which has been obtained with an understanding of the way in which issues arise within a plan area. Such evidence will be honed to focus on these matters. It will normally be area specific and not be generic in content. It should not be unnecessarily extensive in scope or scale. Only sufficient evidence should be produced to enable an understanding of the issue/topic in question thereby leading to clear analysis and a consequential strategic or policy position within the plan.

2.15 The collation of voluminous evidence from various sources may be disproportionate to the priority of the issue in question and should be avoided. A strategic plan should not be seeking to duplicate the development management process in its evidence requirements, for example detailed engineered highway solutions or design matters.

Proportionate evidence is:

- **Honed and focused**
- **Area specific not generic**
- **Not unnecessarily extensive**



Sustainability Appraisal Report: proportionate, appropriate and clear

Harborough District Council and AECOM Evidence – Sustainability Appraisal Report

	1. Low	2. Low-medium	3. Medium	4. High
Natural Environment (SA Objectives 1 and 2)	–	?	x	x
Built and Natural Heritage (SA Objective 3)	–	x	xxx	xxx
Health and Wellbeing (SA Objectives 4 and 5)	?	✓	✓x	✓✓x
Resilience (to climate change) (SA Objective 6)	–	–	?	?
Housing and Economy (SA Objectives 7 and 8)	?	✓	✓✓/x	✓✓✓/?
Resource Use (SA Objective 9)	–	?	x	xx

Context and priority

Harborough was undertaking a substantial Local Plan Review. The District is characterised by a range of distinct spatial features including; close relationships with Leicester City, a strong distribution and logistics hub and transport links, historically rich market towns and many smaller settlements characterised by their rural nature and heritage value. The Council was keen to ensure that the Plan achieved sustainable growth, whilst taking account of these distinct spatial characteristics and reflecting the aspirations of different communities.

Purpose

To establish the sustainability implications of the Local Plan Review, with a particular focus on the importance of identifying proportionate and appropriate alternatives for the spatial strategy. The Council made it clear that the SA ought to heavily influence the plan-making process to help deliver sustainable growth. This iterative process is the way SA/SEA should be applied to get the most of out of this critical piece of evidence.

Methodology

The SA discharged legal requirements and helped to drive the plan-making process by front loading sustainability considerations and developing a bespoke approach to appraisal. To help local communities understand the implications for their particular areas, the appraisal was structured so as to describe the impacts of different spatial options (for housing growth and distribution) on a settlement specific basis. The cumulative effects of each option were then established. This allowed the identification of which communities might benefit most, and which might 'lose out'. In these instances it was possible to suggest measures to mitigate such impacts.

Outcome

The SA process helped to improve the sustainability credentials of the Plan. Importantly, it provided a clear audit trail of how the strategy developed through the consideration of realistic spatial options for growth. This helped the Council to move relatively smoothly through the Examination with little criticism or challenge to the SA. The Plan has since been Adopted.

What is an appropriate focused justification?

SUMMARY: Focussed and useful evidence should be tailored to the circumstances of the plan making area. It should justify the policy options chosen but should rarely be voluminous.

- 2.16 Evidence should be clear as to the topic under consideration. It should also be focussed on the matters affecting the plan making area. For example, a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for an inland area would not require undue consideration of coastal inundation issues. On a more detailed level, for instance, there may not be a need for town centre studies in smaller settlements.
- 2.17 It is useful and helpful to ensure that evidence on key matters is both proportionate and clearly set out. For example, with the application of the standard method¹⁸ for calculating the starting point for local housing requirements need, previous detailed methodologies for SHMAs, for getting to the overall figure, are not required. There should be a proportionate focus upon the needs for different types of housing within a plan making area as set out in national policy and the PPG and using the data sets recommended, including:

- Affordable housing
- Travellers
- Older people
- People with disabilities
- Private rented sector
- Self-build and custom housing
- Student housing

It should be noted that the standard method's local housing need number should not be considered as a final requirement figure and the actual housing need may be higher (as set out in the PPG) than the minimum.

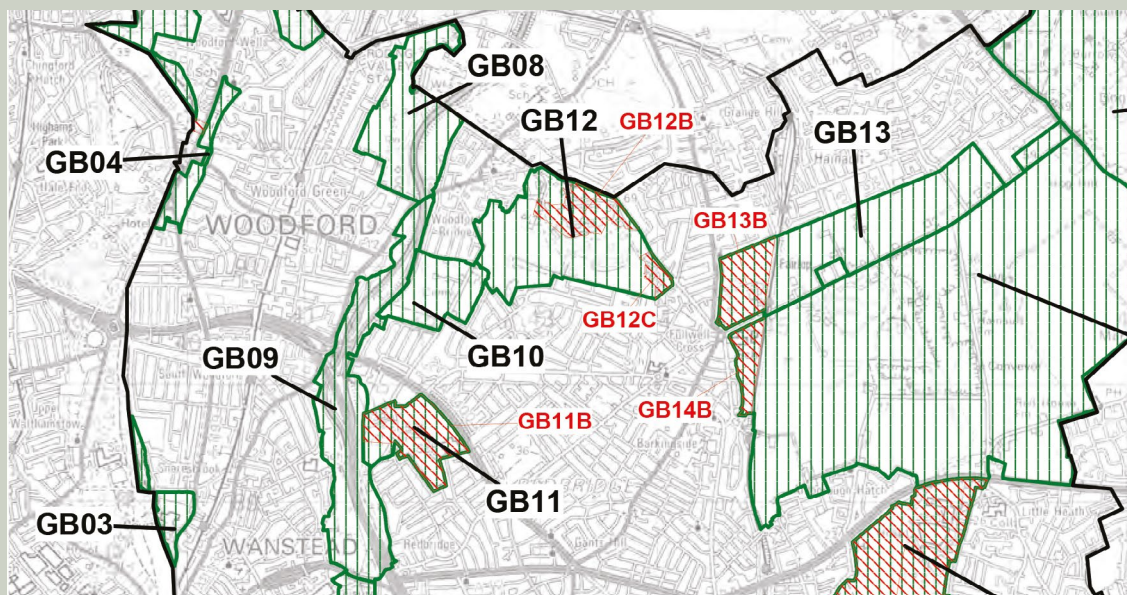
- 2.18 New evidence, whether commissioned or produced 'in-house', will always benefit from a considered and tailored brief. This should set out the scope of the evidence study and the required outputs.



¹⁸ See Framework para 60/61 et al

Green Belt Review: robust, relevant, appropriate and clear

London Borough of Redbridge and Wardell-Armstrong
Evidence – Green Belt Review 2016/2017



Context and priority

Redbridge was preparing its Local Plan. The Borough has significant GB designation and a considerable pressure to accommodate additional development, particularly housing and infrastructure.

Purpose

To assess whether designated GB land fulfilled the purposes/objectives of National Policy and thereby inform consideration of potential GB release to accommodate development.

Methodology

The GB Review reassessed and updated earlier GB work that supported the development plan (2010/2013/2015). This consisted of desk-based analysis and site appraisal.

Process (and brief)

A robust methodology was produced which assessed each of the borough's green belt parcels against the five purposes set out in the NPPF (2012). A description of each parcel followed by clear recommendations on whether the parcel could be released.

Outcome

The Review produced clear recommendations which were actioned by the Council and taken forward in its Local Plan. The evidence was relied upon at Examination and proved robust in terms of its Green Belt conclusions which included partial release of designated land for housing and infrastructure.

Council perspective

"A consolidated assessment which provided the Council with clear and relevant recommendations on green belt. The review and addendum were robust and logical in their approach and provided us with a strong policy basis for inclusion in the Local Plan".

What are relevant market signals?

SUMMARY: The Framework requires consideration of market signals in establishing the content of a plan although these are not specifically defined in national policy or legislation. Such signals can manifest themselves in different ways. Market signals most frequently affect considerations of housing supply and the economy. These can include local land and property prices, rent levels and occupancy rates. It is important that any evidence base obtains and analyses market signals where they may impact upon the base data which may be collected. The effect of such considerations will vary from area to area.

- 2.19 Housing evidence should ensure that appropriate regard is had to 'market signals' as advised in national policy and may incorporate particular housing sector trends, eg specialised housing.
- 2.20 The PPG incorporates specific advice on how market signals may be used to forecast future needs, eg sectoral change, innovation and labour supply¹⁹.

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments#economic-need>

What does 'good' evidence look like?

SUMMARY: Good evidence should contain a well-defined focus, reliable, objectively collected recent data and cogent analysis. It should support intelligent plan making. It will be clearly presented, contain a summary and use plain English as far as possible. It will often contain recommendations based on an understanding of the data collected and the characteristics of the plan area.

- 2.21 It will not contain repetition, unjustified assumptions, unstructured presentation, inconsistent conclusions and unsupported assertion.



Economy Topic Paper: specific, appropriate and proportionate

Dartmoor National Park Authority
in collaboration with Transform Research Ltd.
Evidence – Topic Paper 8 Economy



Context and priority

Dartmoor NPA is preparing its Local Plan. The Authority has a range of unique issues relevant to plan making, including how to maintain a vibrant and sustainable economic base in its national park context

Purpose

To gather evidence for developing planning policies related to economic development.

Methodology

The topic paper sought to review the economic context of the Authority, collect historic and trend-based data, examine the business and workforce baseline, analyse the role of tourism and recommend policy approaches to be contained in the Local Plan.

Process

The Authority recognised that a standard approach to employment and economic analysis could be unnecessarily complicated and burdensome and that such an approach may have masked the more complex and nuanced economic and employment situation. It therefore was appropriate to draw on a range of different evidence, and seek professional input into interpreting and analysing that, and drawing reasonable recommendations from it.

Outcome

The Topic Paper produced clear recommendations which were considered by the Authority and are being taken forward in its proposed Local Plan.

Project Planning and Risk Management

2.22 The production of a plan is a considerable undertaking that benefits from the application of project management techniques. Establishing the links between evidence base documents early on rather than viewing each as isolated tasks will save considerable time and expense. As such, particular consideration should be given to the sequencing of the evidence production and ensuring it is effectively and efficiently prioritised. For example, an Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) will provide data on completions and commitments which will inform any Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), which in turn will inform the Housing Land Supply Trajectory. Consideration should be given to how the work will be completed in a timely fashion (ie funding, in-house/externally/partnership with other authorities).

2.23 Developing an evidence base requires professional judgements to be made about what is required, why, when elements should be produced and how they should ultimately be used to inform and support the production of a plan. Such judgements require an acknowledgement of potential risks to the success of bringing such a plan to adoption.

2.24 This in turn requires an appreciation of the risks involved in, for example, not updating an evidence source or commissioning a partner to provide evidence. The risk of legal challenge to the plan under preparation should be assessed in guiding the content of evidence, eg the adequacy of the SA/SEA. Plan making authorities should be alert to how best to manage risk, balancing the timely delivery of a Plan and its objectives with resources. Questions to be considered will include:

- What are the authority objectives and timescale for the Plan and its overall risk appetite?

- How does the authority manage risk – risk register and methodology?
- How is the quantifiable level of risk for the Plan production to be gauged and managed?
- What reasonable mitigation/contingency is available?
- Is there a need for a Risk Management Plan? How is risk to be reviewed and reported?

Evidence Base Costs

2.25 In preparing this advice note, discussions with a very small sample of plan making authorities around total costs for preparing a local plan evidence base revealed a range from around £200,000 (a local plan review) to in excess of £1,000,000. Clearly overall costs are going to be highly dependent on the nature of the plan making authority, its area and the local circumstances. There are also a number of variables in terms of how plan making authorities calculate and apportion overall costs, including:

- whether in house staffing and legal costs are included;
- where consultants are retained, they may be used for multiple evidence pieces that might not be exclusive to the local plan, for example transport modelling in a unitary authority; and
- where the evidence can go through several iterations with successive local plans.

2.26 From the small sample surveyed there are no patterns in terms of the indicative costs of individual evidence base documents, such as those set out in Appendix 1. PAS will be undertaking further work to gain a better understanding of the costs involved in order to assist plan making authorities in budgeting for their local plan preparation.

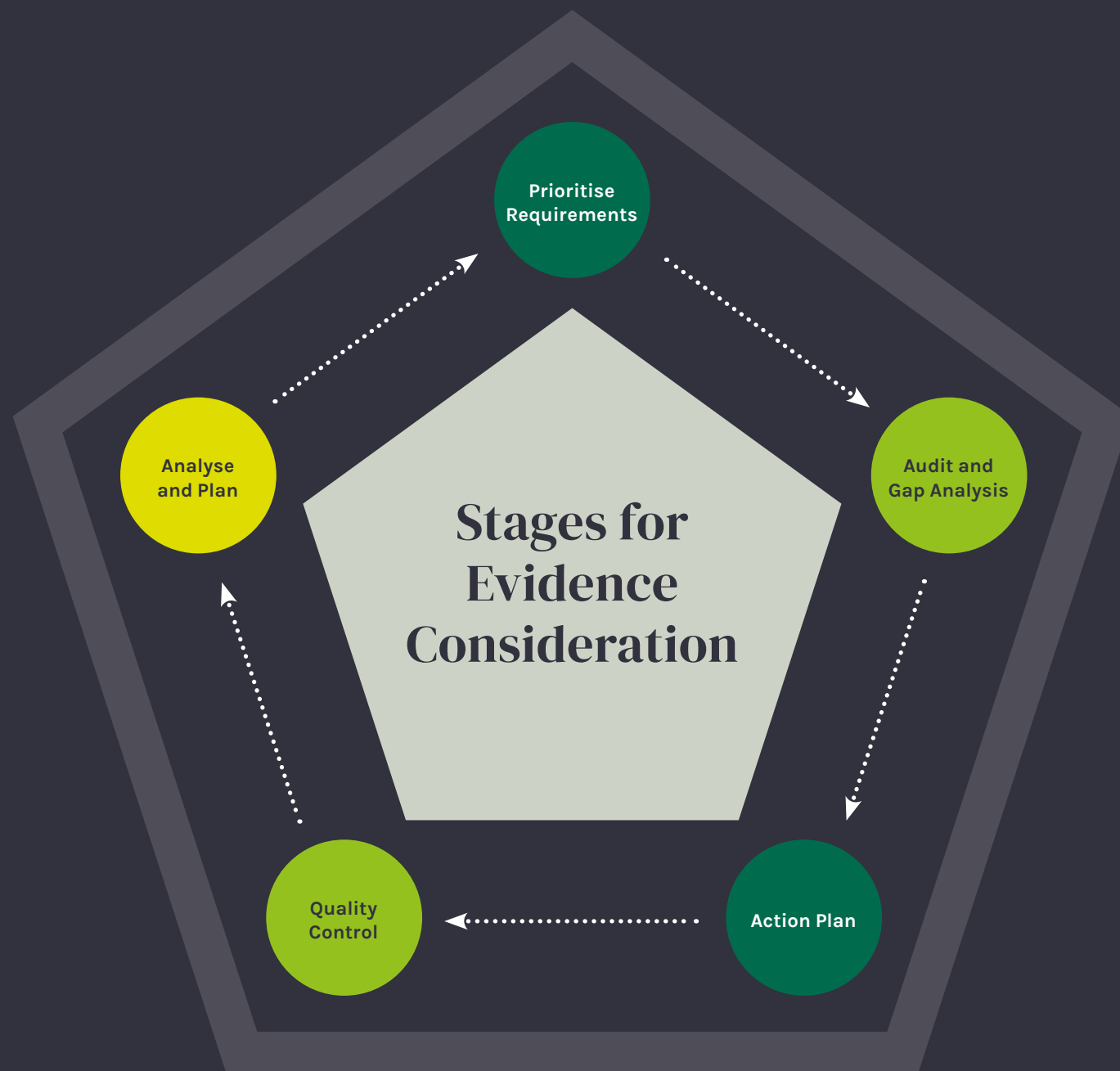
Stages for Evidence Consideration

3

FIGURE 1

Process diagram

- i Prioritise evidence gathering requirements relevant to the plan under production
- ii Evidence audit
- iii Develop action plan for evidence gathering
- iv Seek to quality control evidence sources
- v Analyse evidence to inform plan options/ content



3– Stages For Evidence Consideration

i Prioritisation

3.1 **It is imperative that an up-to-date Local Development Scheme²⁰ (LDS) is in place.** The Chief Planner's *Planning Update Newsletter* of July 2019 reminded all local planning authorities of the need to keep their own published plan timetables fully up-to-date²¹. This LDS will provide clarity as to the nature of the plan(s) proposed and to what timescale. It should identify the scope of any such plans, for example whether they are new documents or formal updates of those which exist and their geographical limits. The evidence requirements will logically flow from this high-level scheme.

3.2 It will frequently be useful to rely on the clear structure of the Framework in prioritising evidence collation. Sections 5 to 17 can be considered to be topic-based themes of equal importance: ie

- Homes
- Economy
- Transport
- Communications ... etc

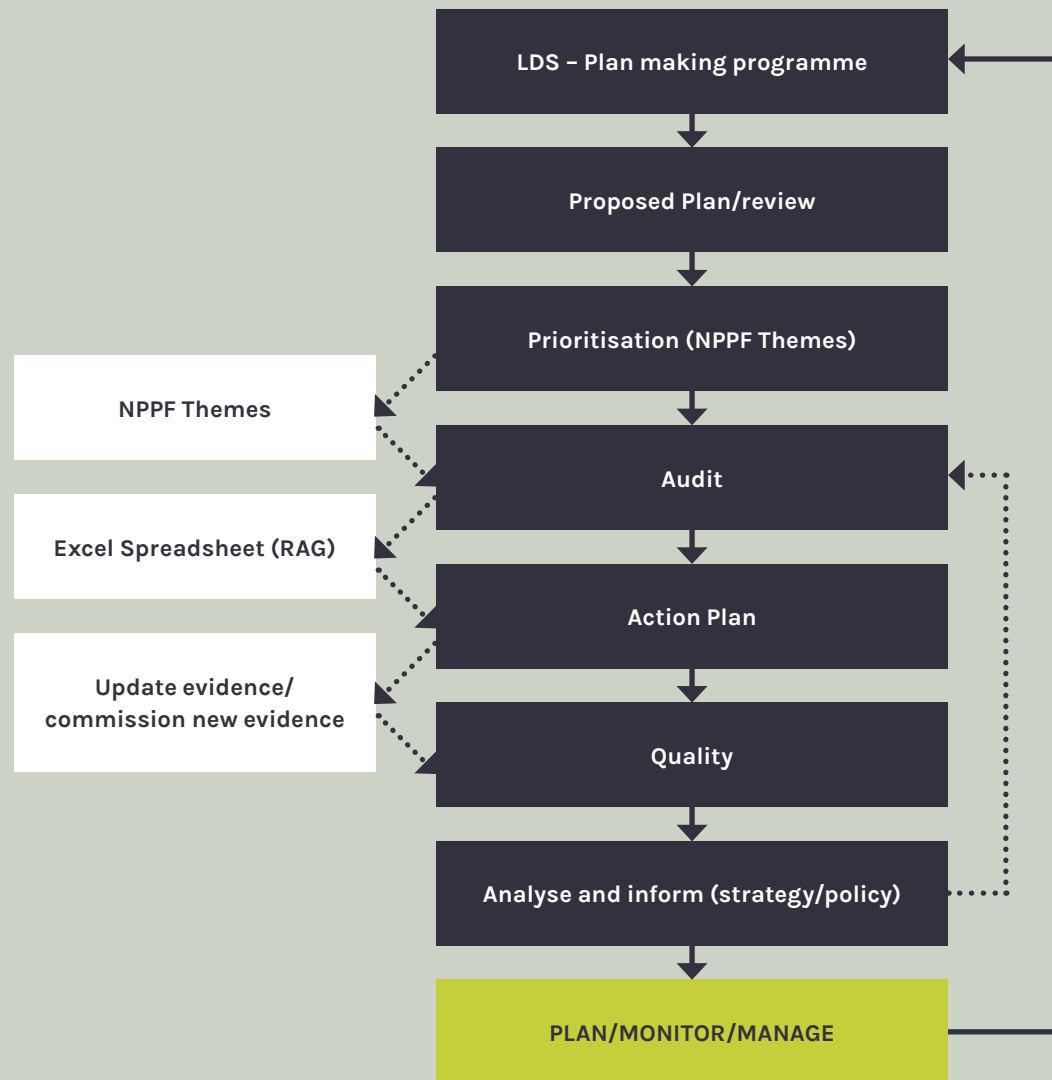
It is therefore logical to link the nature of the Plan and its evidence requirements to these themes.

3.3 If the plan under production is to contain both strategic and non-strategic policies then it is more likely that all topic themes will require some degree of evidence to inform the comprehensive nature of the intended plan and show consistency with national policy. Nevertheless, the scope and depth of the evidence required will be influenced by the characteristics of the plan area and the intelligence gathered by the authority, such as from its AMR. For example, an urban borough will require evidence relating to its economic activity but rarely will this extend to considerations, as described in the Framework, of the rural economy. The plan making authority should always be clear as what purpose the existing or required evidence will serve, how it links to plan making for its area and how it relates to national policy. Such clarity will assist in the scoping required for producing proportionate evidence (ie what is required, why, the options and resources for its production and the risks associated).

²⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/15>

²¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/822194/190723_Chief_Planners_Newsletter_July_2019.pdf

FIGURE 2:
Evidence Flow Chart



- 3.4 If the plan is to address either strategic or non-strategic matters in isolation then it is possible that the evidence required to inform its content will be notably reduced in certain themes. For example, a plan addressing the strategic provision of housing may not necessitate undue evidence on town centre vitality.
- 3.5 Thus, there is scope for the plan making authority, through its knowledge of the issues affecting its area, to undertake a broad prioritisation of the Framework themes as they would apply to the evidence requirement for the intended plan. A partial review of an extant plan focussed on the strategic issue of homes and housing will consequently prioritise its housing evidence whilst other themes, for example communications, will likely be a lower priority necessitating proportionately less evidence.
- 3.6 This prioritisation process can follow a simple traffic light system where green represents the highest priority, amber a moderate priority and red representing a nil or low priority. Appendix 2 is a suggested tool in order to identify and prioritise evidence sources. Such prioritisation will aid an appropriate focus on the necessary evidence and avoid wasted effort on unnecessary evidence production.

ii Evidence audit

3.7 Having undertaken the broad prioritisation, the areas requiring a focus for evidence will be clearer. It will then be necessary for the plan making authority to undertake an audit of available evidence sources as illustrated in Appendix 2. To assist in ensuring the evidence collated meets the requirements of the Framework and legislation, a simple list of available evidence sources can be made, linked to the themes of the Framework. This list can then be categorised in relation to the extent that the evidence supports the soundness of the plan by asking the question: "Is the evidence:

- **Necessary** – essential evidence without which the content of the plan cannot demonstrably meet the tests of soundness;
- **Desirable** – useful evidence that can provide support and additional localised context for the approach of the plan;
- **Unnecessary** – evidence that adds nothing new or supportive to the content of the plan and the necessary/desirable forms of evidence."

3.8 Careful consideration should be given as to what evidence is necessary but also what may be desirable or unnecessary. The latter categories provide an opportunity to ensure the evidence gathered is focussed and proportionate to the plan being produced (or not gathered at all).

iii Action Plan

3.9 The audit exercise should be accompanied by consideration of what actions, if any, arise from the available evidence sources (eg refresh existing evidence).

3.10 In parallel, consideration should be given to any critical evidence gaps in the prioritised topics (eg commission new evidence).

3.11 Both considerations should lead the plan making authority to an 'action plan' for evidence gathering. This should be tailored carefully to the nature of the plan and the needs of the area which it covers. Such an action plan should contain clear timescales for the production and analysis of the evidence linked to the stages of plan production; it also provides an opportunity to indicate the focus of the evidence that is required. A suggested template is provided at Appendix 3.

3.12 In-house or out-house? The PPG advocates the need to consider carefully whether to commission evidence and indicates that wherever possible, authorities may wish to prepare evidence in-house or jointly to speed up the process, and obtain best value for the taxpayer. If consultants are to be used it is helpful to ensure that there is:

- a clear brief with identified time dependent deliverables/outputs;
- a clear 'owner' of the contract and its day to day operation; and
- clarity in terms of how the commissioned work will contribute to the overall production of the plan.

iv Quality control

3.13 Good evidence should inform a sound plan. It is therefore imperative that the evidence gathered is clear and of credible quality. It will be helpful to consider the following:

- **Responsible owner** – ‘ownership’ of the evidence process and the commissioning of new evidence should be clear and effective;
- **Project plan** – a ‘project plan’ will often be valuable to organise effectively the evidence collation;
- **Peer review** – by colleagues, PAS or consultants, can play a proportionate role in ensuring any evidence collected is of suitable quality and reliability;
- **Transparency of process** – unless commercially sensitive, early consideration should be given to ensuring the evidence collected in support of a plan should be publicly accessible. This can be linked to the content of any Statement of Community Involvement; and
- **Sign off considerations** – the authority needs to be satisfied that it understands the work; it provides a robust justification for the plan; and that the content is accurate. If prepared externally, consider whether the authority’s officers will be defending the evidence in examination or the consultants will be retained.

v Analyse, inform and present

3.14 Having obtained good evidence the process of analysis should then inform the policies of the plan. It is possible that evidence based on the themes of the Framework may produce conclusions that require reconciliation in the way in which they inform the content of the plan, for

example increased levels of development and biodiversity considerations. In such instances, a brief additional explanatory note or summary paper may be helpful.

- 3.15 ‘Topic papers’ are a helpful means by which a range of evidence sources relevant to a plan theme/topic can be distilled and presented. They should explain in a concise way how the evidence has been used to support the plan. Please note the Milton Keynes and Dartmoor NPA examples provided above.
- 3.16 All evidence should be compiled and recorded into an iterative, public and readily accessible ‘evidence list’. This ensures clarity and transparency for all those engaged in the plan production process and will also prove invaluable at Examination. As an example, Milton Keynes Council has its evidence base under themed headings upon its website²² which is supplemented by an effective Excel spreadsheet suitably tabbed by the themes of the Plan:MK.



²² View at: <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-policy/evidence-base-documents>

Conclusion: Good evidence is the key to a robust plan.

The Framework provides the national policy context and structure for plan production. Mindful of this structure, best practice illustrates the successful way in which good, focussed and relevant evidence can inform the content and policies of a sound plan. The effective delivery of sustainable forms of development within a plan making area will be the result.





Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Supporting documents and evidence sources
most frequently required

APPENDIX 2

Evidence Prioritisation and Audit – an example
(a Council Strategic Plan Review)

APPENDIX 3

Evidence Action Plan Template

Appendix 1

²³ This list is not exhaustive. See PPG Evidence Base <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making#evidence-base>

²⁴ Note NPPF paragraph 60/61 and the standard method of housing need assessment and PPG <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

²⁵ Note NPPF paragraph 65 which requires strategic policies to set out a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas. See PPG on Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-land-availability-assessment>

Supporting documents and evidence sources most frequently required²³:

- The extant development plan
- Local Development Scheme
- Statement of Community Involvement
- Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating scoping and SEA)
- Evidence of regulatory compliance – eg, Regulation 18/19 consultation, Reg. 22 statement
- Duty to Cooperate statement(s)
- Statement(s) of Common Ground
- Authority Monitoring Report(s)
- Housing types assessment²⁴
- Housing Land Supply trajectory²⁵

- Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) or Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA)
- Traveller Sites Assessment
- Economic/Business/Town Centre Assessment
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)
- Whole Plan Viability Assessment
- Appropriate Assessment – re Habitats Regulations
- Policies Map
- Local Transport Plan
- Transport Assessment
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Landscape Assessment
- Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- Open Space/Sport/Recreation Assessment



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