# Guidance for Communities Contributing to Local Planning Decisions with Reference to Environmental Impact and Sustainability

Paper written by **Greener Pocklington** with Checklist, to support communities reviewing planning applications for infrastructure and housing developments in support of environmental sustainability and to mitigate habitat loss.

# Guidance for Communities Contributing to Local Planning Decisions

## Developing this guide

This paper, written by community group **Greener Pocklington** (GP), provides detail for how communities can work with local authorities before approving planning applications for infrastructure and building developments in a local area. The paper highlights legislation and considers key elements of the most recent National Planning Policy that should be taken into account when development plans are scrutinised. The main focus is for assessing the environmental impact of such plans from the perspective of people living in the locality. A checklist is included for use as a guide by any community considering planning proposals.

The central premise of the approach is to take into account local support for environmental sustainability, mitigate the impact of climate change through respect for the land, and provide a net gain for the existing or future biodiversity of the site. This guide will be important in relation to the updated Local Authority, **East Riding Local Plan,** including the **Pocklington Neighbourhood Plan,** as proposed changes are approved and implemented.[1]

Although this document refers to Pocklington town and neighbourhood areas it is considered that the content will have relevance to other areas where large scale developments are planned. The checklist can be adapted appropriate to the plans for consideration.

## National Policies and Legislation

In considering how communities can support decisions being made by public authorities it is important to differentiate between guidance and objections. This paper draws on existing national policies that underpin planning guidance and highlights legislation of relevance to semi-rural towns and rural villages such as those surrounding Greener Pocklington. If the guide is used to scrutinise plans it will be useful for highlighting objections by local communities.

Developers and building contractors are required to consider the natural environment as guided by Central Government policies set out most recently in the **National Planning Policy Framework 2021** [2].

The Framework must be taken into account in preparing the development plan, and is a material consideration in planning decisions. Planning policies and decisions must also reflect relevant international obligations and statutory requirements. If planning applications do not meet the relevant criteria, then planning permission should be refused.

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[1] East Riding Local Plan Update (2023)
https://www.eastriding.gov.uk/planning-permission-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-the-local-plan/local-plan-update/

[2] National Planning Policy Framework (2021)
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005759/NPPF_July_2021.pdf

Elements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in particular can be drawn on to give guidance for communities to review planning submissions. This paper highlights sections of the NPPF considered most relevant. These include:

- Section 8: Promoting healthy and safe communities
- Section 12: Achieving well-designed places
- Section 14: Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding and coastal change
- Section 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment, habitats and biodiversity

**The Environment Act 2021** [3], requires that all development must contribute to the biodiversity value of the site (a 10% net gain at minimum) and is expected to become mandatory across England in November 2023.

The baseline pre-development habitats, including any and all existing trees and hedges, should be assessed using the latest DEFRA Biodiversity Metric and the UK Habitat Classification assessment required by the metric. The 'Biodiversity Duties' of local authorities have been strengthened by the Environmental Act and legal requirements are now in place that require planning authorities to deliver more than is captured in local planning policies.

**The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006** [4], provides a duty on public authorities, community, parish and town councils, police, fire and health authorities and utility companies to conserve biodiversity. Section 41 of the Act refers to a published list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England.

**Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**[5], gives protection to native species, controls the release of non-native species, enhances the protection of Sites of Special Scientist Interest and Rights of Way among other issues.

**National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949** [6], protects wild birds and endangered species.

**Hedgerow Regulations Act 1997** [7], it is against the law to remove most countryside hedgerows without first obtaining permission from the local planning authority. Consequently, if hedgerows bound the land earmarked for development the developers have a duty to discuss this with the approval planning authority.

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[3] Environment Act (2021)
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted

[4]Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/contents

[5] Wildlife and countryside Act (1981)
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69

[6]National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949)
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo6/12-13-14/97

[7] The Hedgerows Regulations (1997)
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1997/1160/contents/made

## Local Policies and Legislation

**East Riding Local Plan** [8] [9]

The East Riding Local Plan was recently updated and submitted to the Planning Inspectorate who examined the documents in line with national planning policy. The Planning Inspectorate appointed a planning inspector to hold an examination in public. The Local Plan Update includes policy approaches to the environment (Section 5) that aims to promote good quality design and protect and enhance the area's valuable landscape, heritage, biodiversity, and blue/green infrastructure assets. It also establishes an approach to managing environmental hazards.

**Pocklington Neighbourhood Plan**[10]

Policy 5: Environment

In achieving biodiversity net gain and supporting nature recovery, development proposals, changes in land use, public realm and infrastructure projects should:

A. Protect and enhance Pocklington's existing biodiversity assets including watercourses, wildflowers, existing hedgerows, woodlands, street trees, grass verges and green frontages.

B. Protect and enhance Pocklington's local wildlife corridors including those outlined by Pocklington Green Corridors.[11]

C. Support Pocklington's role as a regional biodiversity hub, helping to strengthen ecological networks at the landscape scale, improving connectivity between individual habitats and enabling wildlife to increase and spread through the wider countryside.

D. New housing developments should include structural features that enable birds, bats, and declining species to live alongside people, such as integrated bird and bat boxes/bricks and hedgehog highways through gardens, to help reverse wildlife decline.

E. Landscape and planting schemes for new developments should use native and wildlife friendly trees, shrubs, and plants to enhance local biodiversity.

[8] East Riding Local Plan https://www.eastriding.gov.uk/planning-permission-and-building-control/planning-policy-and-the-local-plan/east-riding-local-plan/

[9] https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e3993c50c0f44314a853c6455f116762

[10] Pocklington Neighbourhood Plan 2022-39 https://www.pocklington.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan/documents

[11] https://greencorridors.co.uk/

## Community contribution to assessing development plans

This guidance takes into account the National Framework under four main themes:

1. New building developments should take into account how local people and groups interact with the natural environment.
2. Local development should take steps that are more likely to succeed in mitigating habitat loss by enhancing the existing biodiversity - consideration of the plants, trees and animals that already exist in the area, and support specific species counteract the effects of climate change.
3. Design of the built environment should help sustain existing wildlife and not create obstacles or barriers to trees, plants, animal and insects.
4. New developments should provide innovative approaches to conserve and provide net gains for biodiversity and geodiversity. Development should consider sustainable energy needs.

## The four themes

### 1. New building developments should take into account how local people and groups interact with the natural environment

Greener Pocklington has been working to improve the greening of Pocklington and local areas in recent years. We consider there is a lack of green spaces and places where trees and sustainable plant life are established and where local people can be outdoors enjoying the natural world. With our partner in Pocklington Green Corridors, we have been supporting the work in mapping out the Green Corridor around Pocklington. It is apparent there is a need to enhance the network of habitats around the town and link species in order for wildlife to thrive.

We consider that the local Green Corridor should be recognised and further developed in any new developments as this provides a space for local people to access nature.

Any development should take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community. We consider cycle paths and walkways and places to sit and observe the natural life in trees and planting, are integral to any plans. These ideas should be central to any new developments providing measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhancing public access to nature.

We consider that there is a need for the development of a Local Green Space plan that will highlight how sustainable development can recognise and enhance the local area.

### 2. Local development should take steps that are more likely to succeed in mitigating habitat loss by enhancing the existing biodiversity

Any new building development should consider the plants, trees and animals that already inhabit the area and support specific species counteract the effects of climate change. Plans should take account of the proximity of existing habitat corridors and provide stepping stones for species to move around the area. These may be through existing drains, becks and ponds where amphibians such as frogs and newts breed or hedging and trees that provide for birds and wildflower/grassed areas that support insects. We are fortunate in the local area to host swifts, swallows, curlews, yellowhammers and bats that are

threatened species as well as fox, deer, badger, hares and otters. We consider the resident wildlife should be respected in plans.

Any new developments should take time to assess the wildlife already existing and how further development in the building fabric such as built-in swift or bat boxes can enhance biodiversity.

Species-rich hedgerows should be planted for their year-round value for wildlife. They can also make effective boundaries and do not take up too much space. Any existing hedgerows should be protected and not grubbed out as has happened in recent times. Planting one-species hedgerow does not compensate for the biodiversity loss, as has happened locally. This is about keeping long-established features and complementing them with planting that gives all-year round interest for people and resources for wildlife.

Mature trees, hedgerows and long-established meadows/grassed areas harbour immense biodiversity. They have historical value and cannot be quickly replicated, so retain them as far as possible on site.

The National Policy Framework recognises the importance of trees in contributing to the character and quality of local environments and can also help mitigate and adapt to climate change. We consider that in new developments, streets should be tree-lined, as well as spaces around play areas or vacant areas be planted up with native trees/shrubs. Existing trees should always be retained where possible. Too often locally in recent times, trees have been removed without considering the effects on local wildlife. Mature trees take many years to become established- we should respect the years taken to reach maturity by working around them as much as possible.

Developments should provide a balance of native and horticultural plants that can adapt to future climatic conditions, yet provide an attractive and distinctive landscape.

### 3. Design of the built environment should help sustain existing wildlife and not create obstacles or barriers to trees, plants, animal and insects

Housing should be designed and built so residents can have gardens or green roofs/walls, balconies and window boxes. Greener Pocklington has held (with Pocklington Town Council) an annual Plant my Street competition, illustrating the need for every street corner to have planting opportunities. Instant and seasonal splashes of colour can be implemented on new sites by planting quick growing nectar-rich flowers, spring and autumn bulbs within planting borders and meadows. Local people have knowledge of the value of various plant species as wildlife food during the growing season and also for sheltering and breeding during the dormant times of the year and they should be consulted on.

Gardens should be fenced with hedges or fences of sustainable wood. Hedgehog highways should be built into the estate.

Community facilities should be planned and designed with wildlife areas in mind so they can provide benefits and not barriers to the use of the site. Play spaces, with natural materials such as logs and “living” tunnels, should be built close to areas of value for wildlife.

Safe natural ponds and planting mature trees in areas where they can be appreciated on a regular basis should be created. Habitats (such as native scrub and hedgerows) are often

best positioned along site boundaries. Edible plants, fruiting trees and shrubs should be planted for people to share in the cultivation and harvesting as well as benefiting birds such as song thrush.

Residents could be invited to help build and monitor a range of habitats such as hedgehog houses or bug hotels.

### 4. New developments should provide innovative approaches to conserve and provide net gains for biodiversity and geodiversity and sustainable energy needs

There are opportunities in any new development that encourage a creative/innovative approach for the community's interaction with the natural environment. People should be encouraged to get enjoyment from nature through providing safe well-lit spaces to walk, play and interact with each other. Seating by trees and shrubs, or providing bird feeders or a local wifi hotspot, can all encourage people to sit and develop a sensory awareness of nature.

Information boards should be provided explaining the planting design, what wildlife may be seen, or the historical relevance of certain trees planted. New residents should be encouraged to become involved in local environmental issues by providing, welcome packs with information about volunteering with e.g. local gardening groups, Greener Pocklington, Incredible Edible, Community Garden, allotments.

Development plans should include sustainable energy options to reduce the carbon footprint of the site such as housing/buildings with solar, heat pumps and points for electrical vehicles.

It is important to protect and enhance valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity and the geological value of local soils. Developers should be discouraged from bringing non-local top soil onto sites but work toward planting up the existing soils.

Drainage and opportunities for mitigating flood risk are important. We consider tree planting and careful planning of housing sites to prevent soil run off into the local drains and becks play a key part in this. Too often attention has been given to car parking near houses without consideration of the rain runoff and washing away local soil into nearby water courses. We consider attention should be given to the balance between cars and the local environment at the design stage.

In recent developments, residents appear to be held back from contributing ideas for ways to improve and enhance their new housing estate. This seems to be because of the way the construction company and the future management of the site do not communicate. This should be incorporated into the initial planning with details of how the landscape/planting will be maintained, especially in the early years. A well-developed Landscape and Ecology Management Plan would include these details including a maintenance contract that respects the local environment and wildlife and details of how local residents will be consulted/involved. The costs of long-term maintenance should be included in the plan and applied across all areas of the development. The maintenance should include planting and developments that recognise the habitats and species that are characteristic to our local landscape and town.

## Checklist for Communities Assessing Development Plans

| Theme | Checklist | Yes | No/comment |
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| **1. New building developments should take into account how local people and groups interact with the natural environment.** | Does plan indicate green spaces within the development | | |
| | Are walkways/cycle paths indicated near to tree/planting areas | | |
| | Are local health and well-being strategies recognised in the plan | | |
| **2. Local development should take steps that are more likely to succeed in mitigating habitat loss by enhancing the existing biodiversity - consideration of the plants, trees and animals that already inhabit the area, and support specific species counteract the effects of climate change** | Does the plan recognise existing trees, hedgerows planting areas and how these will be incorporated or if necessary, replaced by similar | | |
| | Is there recognition of existing wildlife on the sight e.g., birds, bats, insects, mammals, amphibians through careful assessment and avoidance of disturbance in bird breeding season | | |
| | Are there any specific threatened species recognised as living on the site and how they will be protected | | |
| | Will there be space for natural water resources on the site | | |
| **3. Design of the built environment should help sustain existing wildlife and not create obstacles or barriers to trees, plants, animal and insects.** | Do the conditions in the plans show buildings designed to support wildlife e.g., bat/swift boxes | | |
| | Do houses and apartments have spaces to grow plants and flowers and are bordered with natural materials or hedgerows | | |
| | Do streets have growing spaces and places for people to sit and enjoy nature | | |

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| | Are proposed play areas built with sustainable materials with trees and shrubs nearby | | |
| | Is there a safe communal area for edible plants and ponds | | |
| **4. New developments should provide innovative approaches to conserve and provide net gains for biodiversity and geodiversity and sustainable energy needs to reduce carbon footprint** | Are building materials proposed for constructing the site that add to the sustainability of the site | | |
| | Do plans include options for sustainability energy for residents | | |
| | Are plans in place that will mitigate flooding and soil run off as outlined in Schedule 3 of Natural Flood Management Act 2010, with wildlife and native planning in mind | | |
| | Do the plans identify creative approaches to how the development can improve wellbeing and be aesthetically pleasing for people and nature | | |
| | Will there be information for new residents about the history and natural life on the site and how will they be encouraged to participate in its future maintenance | | |
| | How will local soils and biodiversity be enhanced by the site | | |
| | Is there a maintenance plan for the new planting, especially in the early years, funded by the developers and including details of resident's involvement | | |
| | Is there a Landscape and Ecology Management Plan included and how will this protect existing natural features | | |

**About Greener Pocklington**

Greener Pocklington (GP) is a community group based in Pocklington. Started in 2019, the group has now expanded and undertakes activities with partners within a 10-mile radius of Pocklington.

The main aim of Greener Pocklington is to work together with local communities to help combat climate change, species decline and habitat loss. This is done through projects, that involve communities, parish councils, schools, businesses, and local clubs, mainly involving planting trees and providing plants, giving advice and resources to support wildlife.

The group is a non-affiliated community group with a formal constitution and committee to oversee projects. GP is self-funded with support of various individuals and organisations in the locality.

This paper was written by committee members and volunteers from the Pocklington community who contribute to the work of Greener Pocklington. Copies are available to download by email from: Greenerpock@gmail.com