

**TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
TUESDAY 28th APRIL 2026**

**BRIEFING NOTE
PLANNING POLICY/NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN
& RELATED MATTERS**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Briefing Note is prepared to be read in conjunction with the provisions of the recommendation as included in Minute No 358 of the Meeting of the Development Management and Licensing Committee held on 31st March, 2026.
- 1.2 That Meeting followed a presentation to Council by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) on 24th March, 2026 where there were both areas of agreement, and some difference, as between some of those Town Councillors in attendance and representatives of the LPA. In short:

General Consensus

- a) Timeline for review of the Local Plan by the LPA and status of those (now) outdated policies;
- b) Adverse impacts of the lack of a 5 year land supply and application of the 'tilted balance';
- c) Development pressures arising;

Areas of potential difference

- d) What a new National Planning Policy Framework might/might not contain;
- e) Whether or not a review of the Neighbourhood Plan intended to resist or direct development in certain areas would/would not require site allocations to direct new growth, associated opportunities and risks associated with the accompanying target that would be needed for the Town;
- f) The extent to which a review would/would not be impacted inasmuch as its ambitions were concerned by extant strategic allocations deriving from the Joint Local Plan;
- g) The extent to which a review of the Neighbourhood Plan could be limited to setting criteria and constraints for development (the view of some Town Councillors), or necessitate a call for sites/assessment/consultation on allocations/drafting of policies/evidential justification etc (the view of the LPA).

- 1.3 The view of the LPA being that such a piece of work might be capable of being achieved by 18 months but that it would necessitate a re-write and not amendment to the existing Plan in applicable areas.
- 1.4 There was also reference to, but not a focus on, infrastructure at the meeting.

2. CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1 In summary - the Town Council had expressed material concerns regarding the possibility that there might be an unaddressed gap in the current policies of the District Local Plan ('Joint Local Plan'), and there is a degree of consensus with the LPA regarding the nature of the challenges those pose.
- 2.2 However there are, as indicated by the discussion with the LPA, also areas – whether nuanced or more significant, where there is a lack of clarity and/or consensus regarding the benefits, scope, options and outputs any review of the Neighbourhood Plan for Tavistock (NP) might achieve in current circumstances, alongside what work it might meaningfully undertake. Council will be aware the former NP Steering Group is discontinued. Furthermore the LPA has observed that if the aim of a review were to achieve short term protection from paragraph 14¹ of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) the timelines are likely to preclude that as an option. The LPA also notes that the new Local Plan (LPA wide) which it is obliged to now prepare will need to identify housing requirements for all designated Neighbourhood Plan

¹ Paragraph 14 states that: 14. In situations where the presumption (at paragraph 11d) applies to applications involving the provision of housing, the adverse impact of allowing development that conflicts with the neighbourhood plan is likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, provided the following apply: a) the neighbourhood plan became part of the development plan five years or less before the date on which the decision is made; and b) the neighbourhood plan contains policies and allocations to meet its identified housing requirement (see paragraphs 69-70).

A neighbouring local authority to West Devon has interpreted that provision as follows (however, it should be noted all LPA's are currently struggling with this):

'Our interpretation of this position is that:

- where a NDP is less than 5 years old at the time a planning decision is made (this will change over time, but at a minimum it requires a plan to be made after 13th December 2019); AND
- where that NDP contains policies that seek to identify and address housing need in the neighbourhood area; AND
- where that plan has policies and / or site allocations that seek to address that need. Where a plan has either left space to build within development boundaries to support new housing, or where a plan has allocated specific sites for new homes, we consider that it meets these criteria. Plans where development boundaries have been drawn tightly around existing developed areas are unlikely to comply.

If a plan meets these criteria, we will continue to apply the housing policies in that NDP until the plan reaches 5 years old. We have identified a small number of plans where we believe that this paragraph applies. Those plans are set out in table 1, along with an explanation of how we think that they meet the criteria. These plans will continue to have full weight applied to their housing policies in planning decisions made by Cornwall Council, unless appeal decisions indicate otherwise.'

areas and that figure will, in any event, need to be developed by it in the next 18 months or so. Thereby raising the question as to whether any review of the Neighbourhood Plan sits best either in advance of, or consequent upon, identification of that figure for the higher level Local Plan. The alternative being for the Neighbourhood Plan to seek to try and justify its own requirement ahead of the Local Plan with attendant risks in the view of the LPA. Namely those for the Town Council to come up with its own housing requirement figure would be that it would need to convince an Examiner that both the figure and methodology it had used was robust – and this would likely attract objections from developers who typically argue the figure should be higher. By the time of Examination, there could also be an emerging housing requirement that the LPA itself had consulted on in its emerging local plan that was different to the figure identified in the Neighbourhood Plan work:- either higher or lower.

- 2.3 However, the LPA had noted that if the Neighbourhood Plan were to review infrastructure mapping as a basis to inform the new Local Plan that could align well with the timetable for that document and afford meaningful community input into the higher level policy.
- 2.4 What is clear is that a review of the Neighbourhood Plan would require clarity of goals, the constitution of a community based Neighbourhood Plan Group to progress those goals and (in the absence of Government grant schemes) full funding by the Council over a period of not less than 18 months. That means, in practice at least amongst others – a cohort of Councillors and community committed to attributing some (potentially hundreds of) hours to the project, alongside a wider group of volunteers from the community and the potential re (or new) allocation of Council priorities and resources to supporting the project.
- 2.5 In view of the circumstances it is therefore recommended that in the interests of both clarity and probity, if Council is minded to endorse Minute No 358, that it adopts a robust and sequential approach appropriately (in view of the differences of perspective between the bodies concerned, and the technical nature of the matter at hand) contingent on having first sought an independent professional view from a suitably qualified Planner as to, in particular:
 - the options available and associated merits and drawbacks of changes to/review of the NP at this time;
 - in light of recent and anticipated changes to national planning policy, and with particular regard to loss of land supply and the tilted balance and major development pressure, the options through review of the NP for meaningful mitigation (or not) – settlement boundary, site

allocations, other and whether they would recommend them - benefits and drawbacks;

- a view on what could be done in any review to support infrastructure identification and allocation;
- the resource implications of a review of the NP in the round. ie how significant finance, people, communications etc - how long, how difficult, how much.
- a reasonable estimated timeline for a review;
- their associated observation(s)/recommendation(s) in the circumstances.

2.6 So doing will enable the Council to make an appropriately informed decision as to how best to proceed and to test, through use of independent professional resources, the areas of difference and agreement with the LPA and provide a level of assurance regarding procedure and probity to both Council and community.

2.7 Accordingly the recommended course of action is to re-engage the services of the Planning Advisor previously engaged by the Council to provide planning advice and support to the Neighbourhood Plan. That reflects their unique knowledge of the Town, its current Neighbourhood Plan, and the wider planning arrangements for the area.

3. RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Should the Council be minded to endorse Minute no 358 in due course
- then it do so contingent on the outcome of a review undertaken by Stuart Todd Associates as outlined above, in particular in para 2.5; accordingly
 - Stuart Todd Associates be commissioned to undertake the review accordingly at the earliest opportunity.

**CARL HEARN
TOWN CLERK
TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL
APRIL, 2026**