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Preparing for the Regulation 23 Local Plan Content and Evidence Consultation

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NPPF Check

This briefing has been checked against the August 2026 NPPF, with particular regard to its plan making policies.

Why this Brief Matters

The Regulation 23 consultation is a key opportunity for parish and town councils to influence the emerging Local Plan.

The LPA is consulting on the proposed content and evidence that will shape the Local Plan, including its vision, measurable outcomes, strategy and growth.

The consultation material may be extensive. This briefing provides a simple way for parish and town councils to decide what matters locally, check the evidence and prepare a focused response.

We do not think a parish council needs to create a comprehensive evidence base or comment on everything. The aim is to help your parish council use its local knowledge and the evidence already available effectively. The important thing is to focus on what matters to your parish, what the evidence shows and what your parish council wants the Local Planning Authority to do.

Six Stage Approach

The 6 stages provide a practical sequence from understanding the consultation and establishing local priorities through to assessing the emerging Local Plan and preparing the parish response.

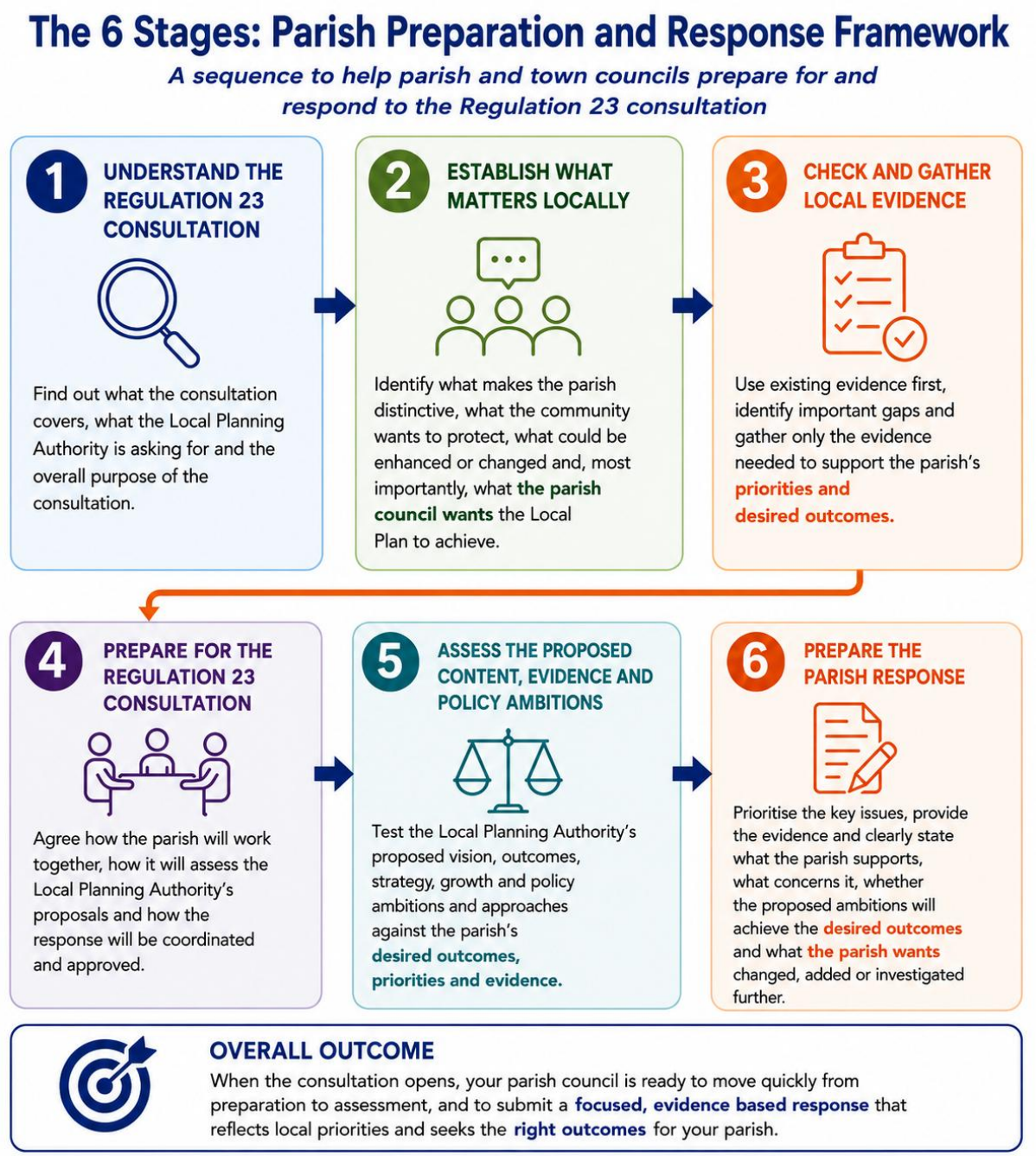
The sequence is intended to help your parish council move from understanding what the Local Planning Authority is proposing, to considering what this could mean for your parish, and then deciding what your parish council wants the Local Plan to achieve.

At the centre of the process is identifying what your parish council wants the Local Plan to achieve. These desired measurable outcomes can then be used to test the Local Planning Authority's proposed vision, strategy, growth and policies.

We consider it important that your parish council looks carefully at the proposed measurable outcomes. Your parish council should consider whether they are relevant to

your community, reflect local circumstances and are capable of being influenced through the Local Plan.

We recommend that your parish council prepares a focused, evidence based response that clearly identifies what it supports, what concerns it, what it would like the Local Planning Authority to change and where further evidence or assessment may be required.



1. Understand the Regulation 23 Consultation

Before deciding what to say, the parish needs to understand what the LPA is consulting on and what the consultation is intended to achieve.

The Regulation 23 consultation relates to the emerging Local Plan for the whole LPA area. Parish and town councils should therefore consider what each element of the emerging plan is seeking to achieve and what it could mean for their parish.

At Regulation 23, the parish should not approach the material as though it were reviewing a completed set of detailed Local Plan policies.

The LPA is seeking views on the proposed content and evidence that will shape the emerging Local Plan. The material may set out policy ambitions and proposed approaches and may also include initial draft policies, but it will not necessarily contain the full detail of the eventual proposed Local Plan.

What should the parish look for and check?

What the Local Plan proposes	What should the parish ask?
Vision and measurable outcomes	What is the LPA seeking to achieve, and are the proposed outcomes relevant to our parish?
Spatial and growth strategy	Where is growth proposed, why has it been directed there and what could it mean for the parish?
Policy ambitions and proposed approaches	What does the LPA want its policies to achieve and how could this affect the parish?
Supporting evidence	What evidence supports the approach and is anything important missing?
Environmental considerations	Could the proposed approach affect landscape, biodiversity, heritage, climate, settlement character, important views or other valued places?
Infrastructure considerations	Can water, wastewater, drainage, highways, schools, healthcare, community facilities and other services support the proposed growth?
Proposed development locations	Where is development being considered and what could this mean for the parish?

The parish does not need to comment on every part of the consultation material. Use local priorities to decide where attention is needed.

The key question is what the LPA is proposing, and what could it mean for the parish and its community?

The answer provides the starting point for Stage 2, where the parish establishes what matters locally and what it wants the Local Plan to achieve.

The Regulation 23 consultation must run for at least 6 weeks. The consultation material should set out the proposed content and evidence on which the emerging Local Plan is being developed.

2. Establish What Matters Locally

Once the parish understands the purpose and scope of the Regulation 23 consultation, it should establish what matters locally.

This should begin with local knowledge. Parish and town councils already know a great deal about the places they represent. The purpose is not to undertake a formal assessment of everything in the parish. It is to identify the characteristics, places and qualities that make the parish distinctive and decide which are most important.

The starting point should be the outcomes the parish wants the Local Plan to achieve. These measurable outcomes should provide the reference point against which the LPA's ambitions and proposed approaches can later be assessed.

What makes our parish distinctive?

Consider	Ask
Settlement character and identity	What gives our settlements their distinctive character?
Landscape and important views	Which landscapes, approaches and views are important to the identity of the parish?
Historic character	Which historic buildings, sites and monuments contribute to its sense of place?
Green spaces and valued places	Which spaces are important to residents and visitors?
Trees and hedgerows	Which trees and hedgerows contribute to local character and environmental quality?
Nature and environmental assets	Which wildlife, woodland and other natural features are particularly important?
Settlement separation	Which gaps help maintain the individual identity of settlements?
Community and visitor qualities	What places and features are valued by residents and visitors?

What should be preserved, enhanced or changed?

The parish now needs to consider its future, not simply record what exists today. The key question is: what does the parish want the Local Plan to achieve?

The parish should now turn this discussion into a small number of clear priorities and desired measurable outcomes.

Priority	Desired outcome
Local housing need	Housing should meet identified local needs, including affordable and social housing, and be located where it can be appropriately accommodated and supported by infrastructure.

Local character	New development should respect and reinforce the character of the parish.
Landscape and environment	Important landscapes, views and environmental assets should be protected and enhanced.
Settlement identity	Development should maintain the individual character and appropriate separation of settlements.
Infrastructure and community needs	Growth should be supported by the infrastructure and community facilities needed by existing and future communities.

The parish does not need a long list. Agree a small number of clear priorities that can be used to test the emerging Local Plan.

3. Check and Gather Local Evidence

Your parish council does not need to start by gathering new evidence. First, find out what is already available. The evidence should then be considered against the parish's desired outcomes and priorities.

The important question is whether the available evidence supports the priorities and outcomes the parish wants to achieve.

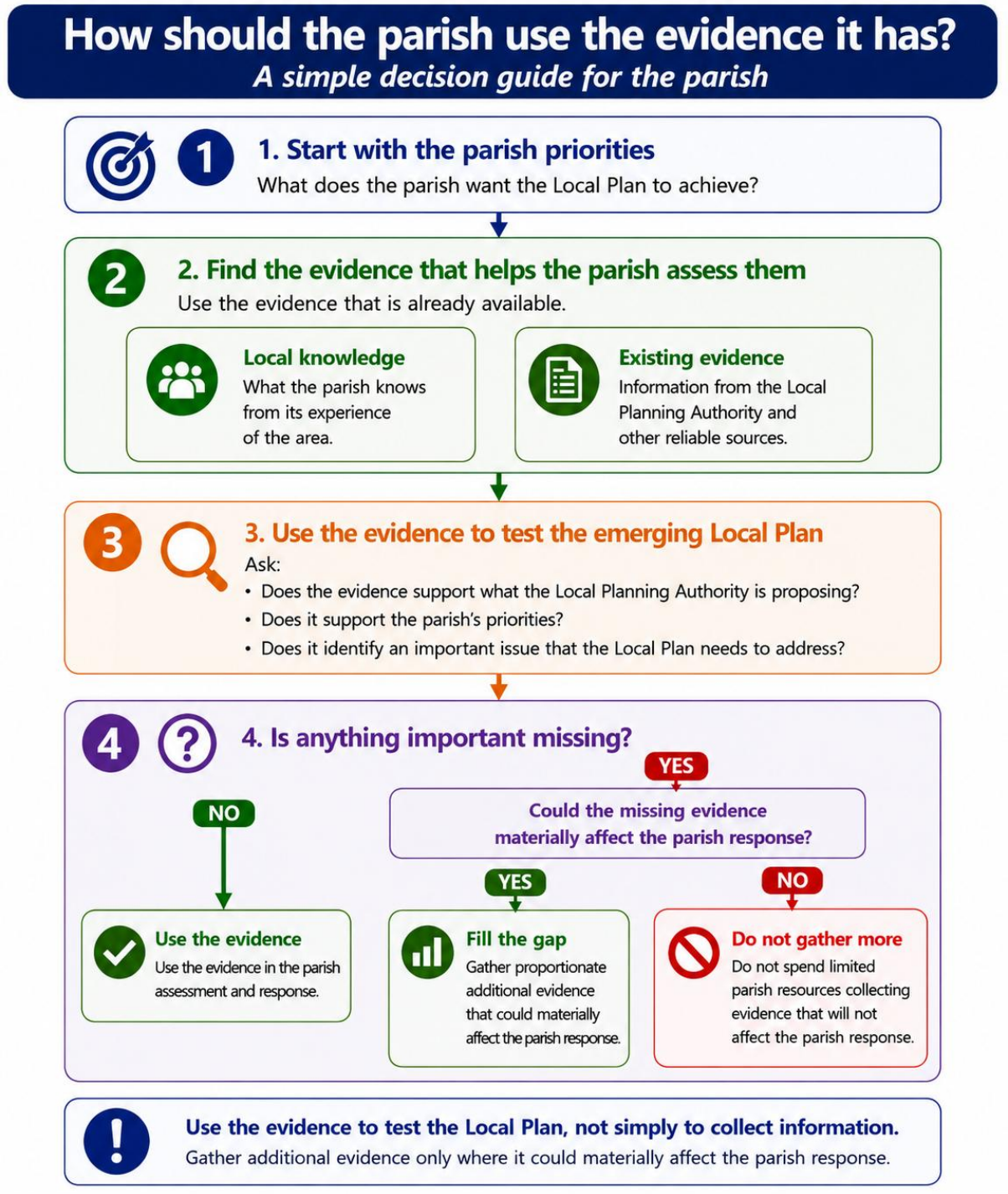
Relevant information may already be available from the LPA's evidence base, planning records and published studies, as well as from the parish or town council, Kent County Council, community organisations and other public bodies.

Where should the parish look for evidence?

Source	What to look for
Local Planning Authority	Local Plan evidence, housing studies, settlement assessments, landscape assessments, heritage information, environmental assessments, infrastructure evidence, maps and previous consultation material
Parish or town council	Housing needs surveys, Neighbourhood Plan evidence, parish or village character work, previous consultation responses and local records
Kent County Council	Relevant environmental, transport, heritage, landscape or community information
Community organisations	Local knowledge, records, surveys and information about valued places and environmental features
Other public bodies	Relevant environmental, heritage, nature or landscape information

Then start with the parish priorities and look for evidence that supports them. Do not collect evidence simply because it is available.

Consider local knowledge, existing evidence and any important evidence gaps.



Only fill gaps that could materially affect the parish response.

The aim is not to create an inclusive parish evidence base. It is to ensure that important local priorities are supported by enough evidence to inform the parish response.

Where useful, bring the most important information together on a simple working map. The map does not need to be professionally produced. Its purpose is to provide a simple visual baseline that can be used when the Regulation 23 consultation material is published, particularly when considering proposed development locations and whether they are consistent with the parish's agreed priorities or local evidence.

Show	Why it matters
Important views	Helps identify landscape and visual priorities
Heritage assets	Shows the historic character of the parish
Local Green Spaces	Identifies valued community spaces
Important trees and hedgerows	Shows important landscape and environmental features
Environmental designations	Identifies recognised environmental assets
Settlement edges	Helps understand the relationship between development and countryside
Important gaps between settlements	Helps consider settlement identity and separation
Areas of landscape or environmental sensitivity	Helps identify areas where development may require particular care

Local Green Space nominations

If the Local Planning Authority is also inviting nominations for Local Green Space, the parish should identify any potential sites at this stage and note why they are particularly important to the local community.

4. Prepare for the Regulation 23 Consultation

The work undertaken in Stages 2 and 3 should now be brought together before the Regulation 23 consultation material is published.

The parish does not need to predict exactly what the LPA will propose. It needs to make sure that it is ready to assess those proposals when they are published.

What should be ready?

a) Agreed desired measurable outcomes and priorities
b) Identified local matters and what should be preserved, enhanced or changed
c) Checked relevant evidence held by the parish, the LPA and other bodies
d) Organised the relevant evidence and identified important gaps
e) Agreed who will coordinate the parish response
f) Agreed how the response will be considered and approved

All councillors involved in preparing the response should understand the agreed priorities and the assessment approach.

This does not mean deciding in advance whether the Local Plan is acceptable. It means agreeing the framework that will be used to assess it.

The parish should be ready to assess the emerging Local Plan against its agreed priorities, desired measurable outcomes and available evidence.

The key question is does the emerging Local Plan provide a credible framework for achieving the outcomes the parish wants for its community?

Governance and Delegation

Parish councils should not rely solely on their normal meeting cycle when responding to Local Plan consultations. A consultation may open shortly after a scheduled council meeting and close before the next one.

The parish should therefore agree its arrangements for considering and approving consultation responses before the consultation begins.

Where appropriate, the council could establish an Ad Hoc Planning and Local Plan Response Committee with clearly defined delegated authority to consider and approve consultation responses.

The committee could meet when required and, during a major consultation, at regular intervals agreed by the Chair of the Council in consultation with the Clerk.

This allows the parish to respond within the consultation period without having to wait for the next Full Council meeting.

The committee should work within the priorities, desired measurable outcomes, evidence and assessment approach previously agreed by Full Council. It should not create a new policy position outside that agreed framework.

Where a response is approved under delegated authority, the submission should be reported to the next Planning Committee or Full Council meeting. The report should explain the main issues considered, the evidence relied upon and the response submitted.

This ensures that all councillors are aware of the response and provides transparency to the community while allowing the parish to respond within the consultation period.

The parish should also ensure that the consultation deadline is recorded and that sufficient time is allowed for the response to be considered, approved and submitted.

The objective is to have the governance arrangements, evidence and assessment framework in place before the consultation opens, so that the parish can concentrate on assessing the Local Planning Authority's proposals rather than organising its response process at the same time.

5. Assess the Proposed Content, Evidence and Policy Ambitions

The purpose at this stage is to assess what the LPA is proposing, the evidence supporting it and the policy ambitions and approaches that will shape the emerging Local Plan.

Start with the proposed vision, measurable outcomes, strategy, growth and policy ambitions rather than focusing first on individual development proposals.

The parish should first ask whether the proposed vision, outcomes, strategy and policy ambitions provide a credible framework for achieving the outcomes the parish council wants for its community and the wider area.

Do the proposed vision, outcomes, strategy and policy ambitions provide a credible framework for achieving the outcomes the parish wants for its community and the wider area?

Use the parish vision, priorities and evidence prepared in Stages 2 and 3 to assess the proposals.

Use The NPPF Soundness Tests as an Assessment Framework

When assessing the emerging Local Plan, the parish should consider whether it is:

a) Positive: Does it take a positive approach to meeting identified needs?
b) Appropriate: Is the proposed strategy justified by proportionate evidence and consideration of reasonable alternatives?
c) Effective: Is there a reasonable prospect that policies, allocations and infrastructure can be delivered?
d) Consistent with national policy: Does the emerging Local Plan reflect the requirements of the NPPF?
e) Conformity: Where relevant, does it align with the adopted strategic planning framework?

At Regulation 23, the parish is not being asked to make a formal judgement on whether the Local Plan is sound. The soundness tests can nevertheless provide a useful framework for asking whether the emerging Local Plan is supported by evidence, capable of delivery and consistent with national policy.

The parish should also consider whether reasonable alternatives have been identified and assessed where they could materially affect the proposed strategy, growth pattern or development locations.

A simple assessment framework

Parish assessment	**What should the parish record?**
Desired outcome	What does the parish want the Local Plan to achieve?
What is proposed?	What is the LPA proposing?
Does it deliver the outcome?	Does the proposed approach achieve the desired outcome?
What does the evidence show?	What evidence supports or challenges the proposed approach?
What is missing?	What evidence, infrastructure requirement, environmental consideration or other matter has not been adequately recognised?

What should change?	What should the LPA retain, amend, clarify, evidence or assess further?

Infrastructure and delivery

Growth should not be assessed simply by asking whether development is proposed. The parish should ask whether the necessary infrastructure and services can support the proposed growth at the right time and in the right place.

Consider:

- Water supply and wastewater
- Drainage and flood risk
- Highways and transport
- Public transport and active travel
- Schools and healthcare
- Community facilities
- Utilities and essential services

For each, ask: Is existing capacity sufficient, or is additional infrastructure required to support the proposed growth?

The key question is whether the proposed growth can be supported by infrastructure that is sufficient, deliverable and appropriately timed.

Proposed development locations

Where the Regulation 23 material identifies potential development locations or sites, the parish should identify which locations require more detailed assessment**.**

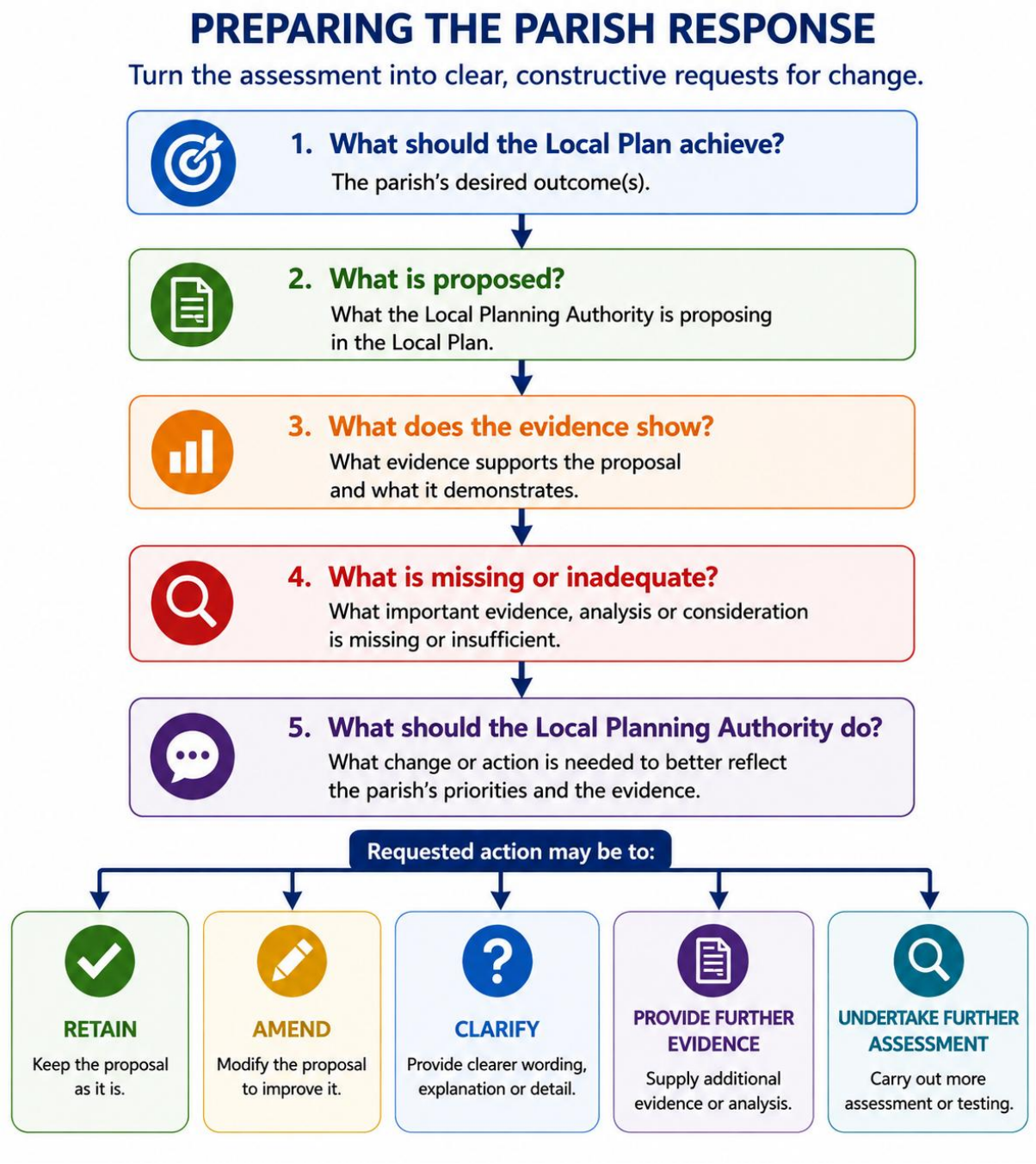
What should the assessment achieve? The objective is not to produce a detailed alternative Local Plan.

It is to identify:

a) Where the LPA's proposed direction is appropriate
b) Where it needs strengthening
c) Where it conflicts with the parish's desired measurable outcomes
d) Where further evidence is required
e) Where further assessment is needed before detailed policies are developed

This assessment should provide the basis for the parish's Regulation 23 response.

6. Prepare the Parish Response



These principles provide the structure for the parish's consultation response.

Each significant response point should show the connection between the parish's desired outcome, the Local Planning Authority's proposal, the evidence and the action requested.

<u>Possible Parish Conclusions</u>

a) Retain: The parish supports the proposed approach and considers that it should be retained.

b) Amend: The parish supports the objective but considers that the proposed approach should be strengthened or amended.
c) Clarify: The parish considers that the proposed approach requires greater clarity before detailed policies are developed.
d) Provide further evidence: The parish considers that additional evidence is required before the approach can be justified.
e) Undertake further assessment: The parish considers that further assessment is necessary before the Local Plan proceeds.

8. Next in the WKPS Series

Edition 4 will provide guidance on assessing proposed Local Plan sites.

Edition 5 will provide guidance on preparing a Parish Infrastructure Delivery and Priorities Assessment.