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WKPS Parish Planning Brief 4 | October 2026
Assessing Proposed Local Plan Sites

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About the WKPS Parish Planning Briefing Series

The WKPS Parish Planning Briefing Series provides independent, evidence based guidance to help parish and town councils understand strategic planning issues and engage effectively throughout the planning process.

Why this Brief on Assessing Proposed Local Plan Sites Matters

Local Plans determine where future development will take place. Once potential sites have been identified, parish and town councils can help assess whether they are appropriate locations for sustainable development.

A site being submitted through a Call for Sites exercise does not mean that it is suitable for allocation. Local knowledge can help identify opportunities, constraints and infrastructure issues that may not be fully reflected in strategic evidence.

This Brief builds on Edition 3, Preparing for the Regulation 23 Consultation, by applying the local evidence gathered by the parish to the individual sites being considered for development. It provides a practical framework for assessing proposed development sites and identifying the local opportunities, constraints and concerns that should be brought to the attention of the Local Planning Authority.

The purpose is not simply to support or oppose individual sites. Parish and town councils can provide valuable local evidence to help determine whether proposed development represents sustainable development and whether sites can be successfully integrated with existing communities.

1. Supporting Sustainable Development

The planning system seeks to achieve sustainable development by ensuring the right homes are delivered in the right places, at the right time, supported by the necessary infrastructure, while protecting the environment.

The August 2026 National Planning Policy Framework identifies 3 overarching objectives for achieving sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. The objectives are interdependent and should be pursued in mutually supportive ways. When considering a proposed development site, the 3 objectives should therefore be considered together, taking account of the particular characteristics and circumstances of the site.

<u>Economic objective</u>

To support a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time, including through the identification and coordination of infrastructure.

Social objective

To support strong, vibrant and healthy communities by ensuring that a sufficient range of homes can be provided for present and future generations, with accessible services, facilities, open spaces and well-designed places.

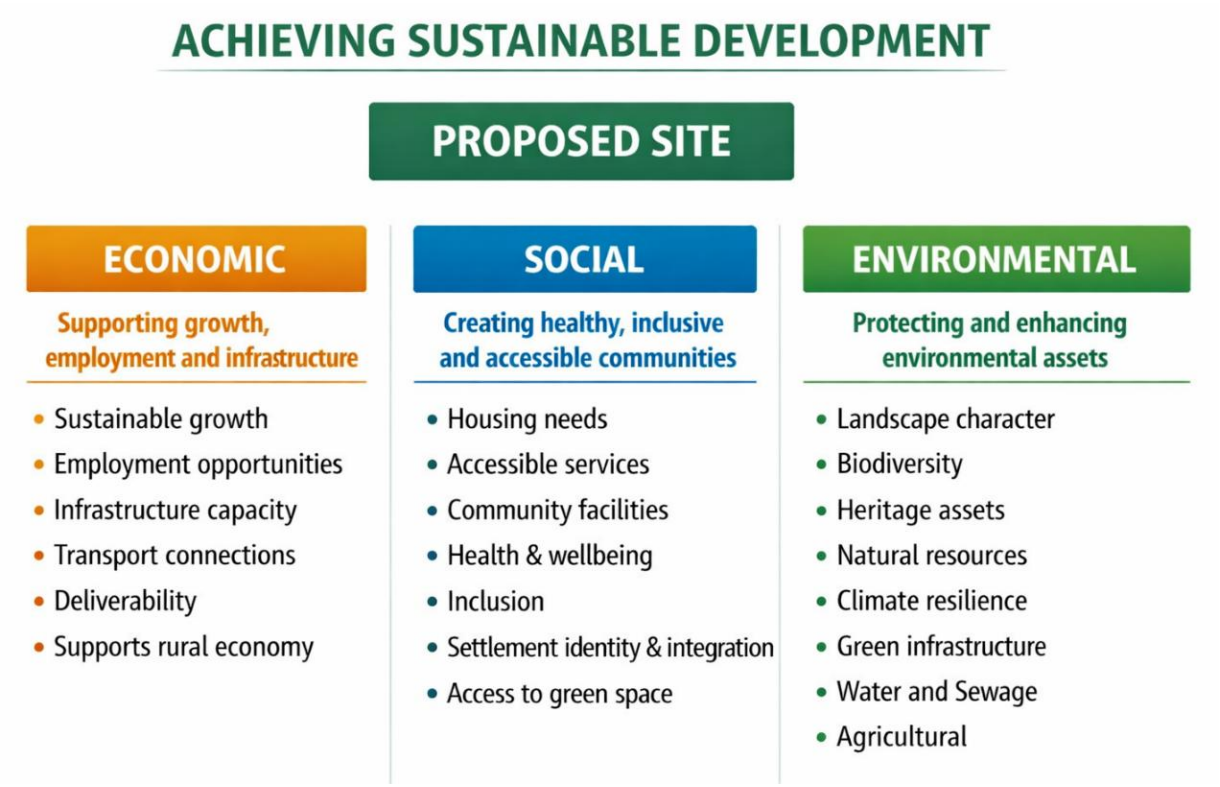
Environmental objective

To protect and enhance the natural, built and historic environment, including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently and responding to climate change.

2. How the Framework is Used

The WKPS Site Assessment Framework brings these 3 objectives together to provide a structured assessment of proposed sites.

It considers:



The assessment is intended to help parish and town councils identify what is suitable, what may be suitable subject to mitigation or further evidence, and where significant constraints may make development unsuitable.

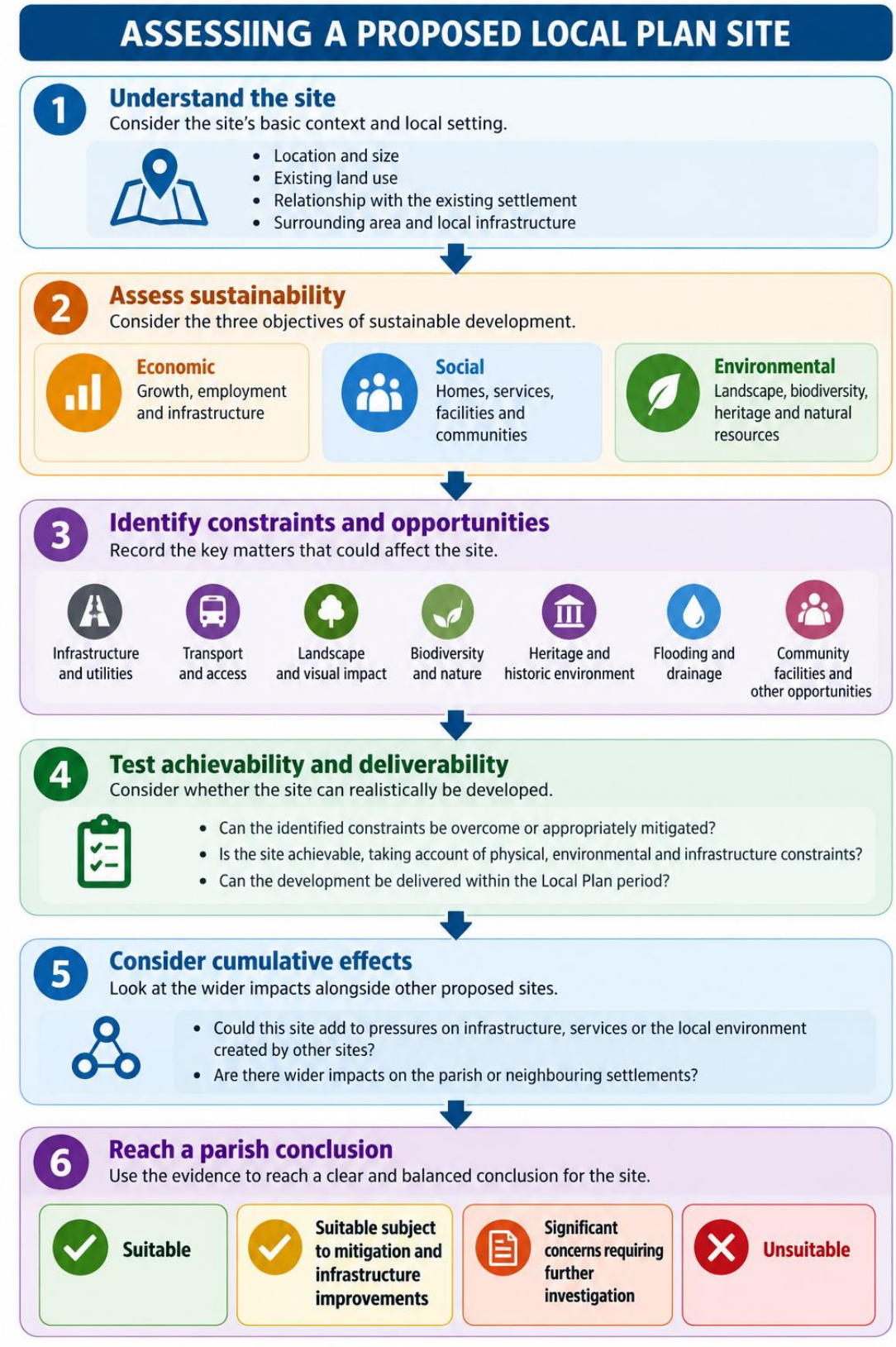
The completed assessment can then provide evidence for the parish response to the emerging Local Plan and help ensure that local knowledge is properly reflected in decisions about future development.

How to use this Brief

Use the assessment template to assess each proposed site consistently. Start with the site's basic context, then consider its economic, social and environmental sustainability, infrastructure requirements and deliverability. Record the evidence supporting the assessment and finish with a clear overall conclusion.

Use the findings from each site assessment to identify wider infrastructure issues that can be considered in the parish's infrastructure assessment.

3. Suitability and Deliverability



A proposed site should be considered as a whole, taking account of its location, sustainability, constraints, infrastructure requirements and deliverability. The assessment should draw together local knowledge and available evidence rather than considering individual issues in isolation.

The above assessment journey provides a simple way for parish and town councils to work through the main questions and reach a balanced conclusion about each proposed site.

A proposed site should be considered against 4 basic questions:

- Is it suitable?
- Is the location appropriate for the proposed development?
- Is it achievable?
- Can the site's constraints realistically be overcome?
- Is it deliverable?
- Can the proposed development realistically be delivered within the Local Plan period?
- Can the necessary infrastructure be provided?
- Can the infrastructure, mitigation and other requirements realistically be provided at the appropriate time?

Infrastructure is an essential part of this assessment. Water, wastewater, drainage, highways, utilities, schools, healthcare and community facilities should be considered alongside the proposed development.

A site should not be considered sustainable simply because it is capable of accommodating development. The assessment should consider whether the necessary infrastructure, mitigation and other requirements can realistically be provided at the appropriate time.

The parish is not expected to calculate infrastructure capacity or demand. Its role is to identify where proposed development may create additional pressure and ensure that this is considered by the Local Planning Authority and relevant infrastructure providers.

4. Using Local Knowledge

Parish and town councils can provide evidence about matters that may not be fully captured in strategic assessments. Local knowledge can help identify existing conditions, pressures and opportunities that may not be apparent from technical evidence alone. This can include:

- settlement character and important views
- local infrastructure pressures
- flooding and drainage
- landscape, biodiversity and heritage
- access and transport
- community facilities and services
- the relationship between neighbouring settlements
- shared infrastructure and services
- local effects that extend beyond the parish boundary

The assessment should record evidence, not simply opinion. Local observations should be supported by photographs, plans, published evidence, records of local conditions or other relevant information wherever possible.

Where several proposed sites are being considered, parish and town councils should also consider whether infrastructure pressures or other impacts could be increased by development across the parish or in neighbouring settlements. This can help identify cumulative effects that may not be apparent when individual sites are assessed separately.

The findings from individual site assessments can therefore provide evidence for identifying wider infrastructure pressures and other parish wide issues. These findings can subsequently be brought together through the parish's infrastructure assessment.

5. The WKPS Site Assessment Framework

The WKPS Site Assessment Framework provides a consistent structure for considering each proposed site. The framework assesses each site against:

1. Sustainable Location, Employment and Growth
2. Infrastructure Capacity and Deliverability
3. Healthy Communities, Housing and Accessibility
4. Community Impact and Settlement Character
5. Landscape, Biodiversity, Heritage and Natural Environment
6. Land and Water

The WKPS Parish Site Assessment Template is a separate document designed to be completed for each proposed site. It provides a practical record of the assessment undertaken using the framework in this Brief.

Parish and town councils should complete a separate Site Assessment Template for each site being considered. The level of assessment should reflect the characteristics and circumstances of the individual site, using local knowledge and available evidence. Where a matter is not relevant to a particular site, it need not be completed.

The completed templates should be retained as part of the parish's evidence base and used to inform the parish or town council's response to the Local Planning Authority.
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6. Using the Site Assessment in the Parish Submission

The completed WKPS Site Assessment Checklist can provide supporting evidence for the parish or town council's response to the Local Planning Authority on each proposed site.

The completed assessment should provide a clear record of:

- the site being considered
- the parish's assessment of its economic, social and environmental sustainability local opportunities and constraints
- infrastructure requirements
- deliverability considerations
- the evidence supporting the assessment
- the parish's overall conclusion.

The Site Assessment Template should therefore be completed carefully and supported by relevant evidence wherever possible.

The Parish or Town Council Overall Conclusion provides the council's position on the site:

- Suitable for further consideration
- Suitable subject to mitigation and infrastructure improvements
- Significant concerns requiring further investigation
- Unsuitable due to environmental, infrastructure or sustainability constraints

The assessment should provide reasons for the conclusion and identify the evidence supporting it.

7. Using the Template to Consider Planning Applications

Although the WKPS Site Assessment Template has been designed primarily to assess proposed Local Plan sites, it can also provide a useful starting point for a high level assessment of a planning application.

The template can help parish and town councils consider whether a proposal is appropriate for its location, how it relates to the existing settlement, and what its potential implications may be for local infrastructure, community facilities and the natural and built environment. It can also help identify issues that may require closer examination and questions that the council may wish to raise in its consultation response.

However, the template is intended to support an initial assessment, not to replace the detailed consideration required for an individual planning application. That assessment must take account of the specific proposals, relevant planning policies, supporting application documents and any necessary technical evidence. The level of scrutiny should reflect the scale, nature and potential impacts of the development.

Used in this way, the template provides a consistent framework for identifying the principal planning considerations, recording local knowledge and highlighting matters that may need further investigation.