



BRIEFING NOTE

NEIGHBOURHOOD PRIORITY STATEMENTS (NPS)

A Neighbourhood Priority Statement (NPS) is intended to be a 'simpler and more accessible way' (than a Neighbourhood Plan) for communities to set out their key priorities and preferences for their local areas. The idea is that the NPS will summarise the principal needs and views of the community in respect of 'local matters'.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) (2023) establishes the role and purpose of a NPS (see Schedule 7, Part 15k of the Act). In terms of what constitutes a 'local matter', it says this can include:

- development, or the management or use of land, in or affecting the Neighbourhood area,
- housing in the Neighbourhood area,
- the natural environment in the Neighbourhood area,
- the economy in the Neighbourhood area,
- public spaces in the Neighbourhood area,
- the infrastructure, facilities or services available in the Neighbourhood area, or
- other features in the Neighbourhood area.

It is unclear what comprises 'other features'

A NPS can be prepared by a 'qualifying body'. These are the same as defined for a Neighbourhood Plan – so a Parish or Town Council, or a Neighbourhood Forum. It is not clear though whether an application needs to be made to the local authority to become a qualifying body for the purpose of a NPS if the Parish or Town Council (or Forum) already benefits from that status by virtue of having been designated as such through the Neighbourhood Plan process.

The production of the NPS must be subject to consultation. The LURA only refers to consultation on a draft version of the NPS. However, if the NPS is to 'summarise the principal needs and views of the community' then it will need to be informed by feedback and comments from the community at an early stage in order to draw out those needs and views.

Once prepared and submitted to the local authority, the authority 'must have regard' to the NPS when preparing a Local Plan.

Beyond the above, the LURA offers little by the way of further guidance on the form and content of a NPS, and the weight it has. However, and until such time as more information has been provided, it seems fair to assume the following:

- The NPS is more of a visioning and objectives setting exercise as opposed to a policy document.
- As such, it does not establish policies to be used to inform and determine planning applications (though could potentially be considered as part of that process).
- It is to be informed by consultation with the community to identify projects and aspirations for the area.
- The NPS might be used as a precursor to production of a Neighbourhood Plan, where ideas might be further developed and translated into policies (where appropriate).
- Production of the NPS should be quicker than for a Neighbourhood Plan (there is no need for Examination for example, nor screening or carrying out of a Strategic Environmental Assessment).
- It represents a publicly available statement of key issues in the area for consideration by the local authority in their plan-making process (and although not clear, there may be scope for the NPS to be used in discussion with developers on emerging proposals for development projects).
- Ideas identified within the NPS may raise the profile of projects within the area with other funding partners (e.g.: service providers) and thus where efforts to address infrastructure deficits or other challenges may be directed (similar to the way in which many Neighbourhood Plans include projects and aspirations as distinct from policies).

Based upon the above, the process for production of a NPS could look something like this:

- Confirm 'qualifying body' status with the local authority for the purpose of preparing a NPS (and make an application for this status if necessary).
- Initial engagement with community and stakeholders as appropriate to identify views on local matters. As a precursor to this, analysis of the local area and challenges faced may be undertaken to help inform the engagement process, allowing for more targeted discussions and feedback on key issues.
- Analyse and present outcomes of the consultation.
- Identify key themes and prepare draft NPS, supported by evidence of the issue(s).
- Consult on the draft NPS with the community and stakeholders (including the local authority).
- Prepare a Consultation Statement summarising the process undertaken and key messages from this.
- Update the NPS based on consultation feedback.
- Issue the NPS for publication by the Local Authority.



The LURA says the Local Authority must publish the NPS if it has followed the Regulations which, at this stage, appear to relate primarily to (i) the NPS being prepared by a 'qualifying body', (ii) the NPS covering 'local matters' and (iii) consultation having been undertaken. It is not currently specified how long the consultation should run. However, in line with Neighbourhood Plans and other similar documents, one might expect that consultation on the draft NPS should be undertaken for a minimum period of six weeks.

Based on the above assumptions, we consider an overall timeframe for production of the NPS may be around six months (subject to applications for qualifying status).