

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape featuring a patchwork of agricultural fields in various shades of green and brown. A small village with several buildings is nestled in the center. The sky is clear and blue. A dark grey horizontal bar is positioned across the middle of the image, containing the title text. A yellow rectangular box is located below the title, containing the word 'RURAL'. In the bottom left corner, there is a circular logo for the Centre for Sustainable Energy, with the text 'centre for sustainable energy' below it.

How green is my plan?

RURAL

centre for sustainable energy

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energy

How green is my plan?

Neighbourhood plans offer communities the opportunity to develop a positive vision of their future.

Pioneering towns, villages and neighbourhoods are already mapping out ambitious plans that will improve quality of life and at the same time make the transition to a low carbon energy and transport system.

But how well is your neighbourhood plan really doing? Does it do enough to tackle climate change and address sustainability issues? Should you be more radical or ambitious?

This self assessment will help you work out where it could be improved and if there are issues you've missed. It could help you revise your plan if you're writing it, or could inform your response to a consultation.

Work through each section and tick all the descriptions that most closely describe your plan and the policies within it. Then total up your score for each section, and have a look at our suggestions for how things could be improved.

This document is for neighbourhood plans in rural areas. For urban or suburban neighbourhood plans, go to www.cse.org.uk/lcnp.

For examples of community projects that you could run in parallel to writing your neighbourhood plan, see our the new and updated edition of our popular guidebook, Low Carbon Neighbourhood Planning, downloadable from www.cse.org.uk/lcnpbg.pdf.



CSE has received funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for a three-year support programme that will encourage neighbourhood planning groups to make sure their area contributes to a sustainable energy future.



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1



Renewable energy

Our plan ...	Score
Has a policy supporting the general principle of renewable energy, but doesn't give any further detail.	1/2
Has a policy which gives specific support for community owned or led renewables.	2
Includes support for commercial or community scale renewable energy, e.g. significantly larger than domestic scale.	2
Has a policy giving support to renewable energy generation, and sets out specific criteria against which renewable energy proposals will be judged.	3
Has a policy which identifies specific sites as being suitable for renewable energy projects.	3
Our policy gives specific support to:	
Rooftop solar	1/2
Heat pumps	1
Micro-hydro	1
Cropping of woodlands for wood fuel	1
Ground mounted solar (inc solar farms)	3
Anaerobic digestion (often using riculture by-products)	3
District heating	3
Onshore wind (and identifies suitable areas for wind development)	4
Total (out of 27)	

Many neighbourhood plans include a policy which supports the principle of renewable energy, but which says nothing more. This is a starting point, but this isn't actually that helpful, as support is already given for the principle of renewable energy in many council plans and in national guidance.



So there's much more to say than this! You could aim to examine all the potential sources of renewable energy within your neighbourhood, consult on those to establish which could carry community support and then give criteria for how renewable energy applications will be assessed. Even better if you can identify specific sites for renewable energy, for instance suitable sites for micro-hydro projects, land where solar farms would be supported or suitable locations for onshore wind.

Typically, rural areas will have greater potential for renewable energy projects (with a greater range of resources and fewer constraints to prevent projects from going ahead). Your community might even be able to renewable generate more energy than it consumes, and be a net exporter of renewable electricity to urban areas where the options are often more limited.

If you scored less than 30 points, it might be worth reviewing your policy to see if it could be more thorough, setting out detail of what would be supported, where and under what criteria. Likewise if your policy only supports one type of renewable energy technology, it might be worth exploring whether there are other renewable energy resources which could be harnessed. More than one policy might be required!

It's highly unlikely that all the forms of renewable energy we've listed will be technically feasible or even appropriate in every community. We have weighted the scores for renewable energy taking into account the rough energy generation potential from each form of renewable energy. For instance, a large (2.5 MW) commercial scale wind-turbine will have the potential to generate 50 times the power that a typical (50 KW) micro hydro project. Rooftop solar panels and heat pumps only score half a point, because in many cases they will not need planning permission in the first place.



2



Energy efficiency and sustainability of existing and new development

Our plan ...	Score
Has a policy encouraging sustainable design and construction, e.g. the siting and orientation of buildings for passive solar gain, the use of thermally efficient and environmentally sustainable building materials.	1
Has examined the energy efficiency of our existing housing stock and fuel poverty levels in our community.	1
Has a policy encouraging new development to generate a proportion of its energy use on-site from renewable and low carbon energy sources (a so-called Merton Rule policy). The policy does not specify a minimum percentage.	1
Has a policy encouraging the retrofitting of historic buildings to improve their energy efficiency (whilst ensuring their heritage significance is protected).	2
Has a policy requiring minimum sustainability standards for new commercial developments (typically BREEAM Excellent).	2
Has a policy requiring new development to generate a proportion of its energy use on-site from renewable and low carbon energy sources (a so-called Merton Rule policy) and sets out a minimum percentage that must be achieved.	3
Total (out of ten)	

Often these policies will be set out by your local Council. If they are, and if the policies go far enough, there is no need to repeat them, but if not, you could fill the policy vacuum.

If your plan scores less than 4 stars, it's probably worth reviewing whether these policies are provided by your local authority, and if they are strong enough. If they're missing or lack detail or ambition, you could provide them instead. A particularly common policy omission, in both local and neighbourhood plans, are policies promoting energy efficiency improvements to existing buildings, including historic properties and listed buildings. We only know of four local plans and 12 neighbourhood plans which have including this type of policy, and newly built housing will only ever be a small proportion of our housing stock.



3



Transport, service provision and patterns of development

Our plan ...	Score
Encourages cycling and walking and public transport in principle, but doesn't say much more.	1
Considers how people access key facilities such as local schools, community facilities and shops.	1
Seeks contributions from new developments to fund specific infrastructure improvements, for instance adding critical links to better 'join' up networks, or uses money from the Community Infrastructure Levy to subsidise a community bus service.	3
Has considered the range of shops and services available in our community and has designated key facilities as assets of community value (this happens through a parallel process to your neighbourhood plan).	3
Examines air pollution levels in your neighbourhood against legal standards.	2
Includes policies to promote local employment.	3
Considers improvements to the walking and cycling environment around key destinations, such as train or bus stations, schools, employment areas and your high street.	3
Includes policies to revive key public spaces by dedicating more space to cyclists and pedestrians.	3
Includes policies to develop electric vehicle infrastructure, for example charging points.	3
Has considered the accessibility of proposed housing sites to shops, services and employment on foot, by bike and by public transport. (This will only be relevant if your neighbourhood plan is proposing to allocate sites for housing.)	4
Looks at physical and psychological barriers to increased cycling and walking (for example, unsafe junctions, traffic speed, inconvenient cycle routes), and sets out how to break down these barriers and how to improve the permeability of the area for cycling and walking (e.g. improved cycle crossing point at this point, new cycle-track into town centre from here to here).	4
Total (out of 30)	

Often have the greatest challenges in rural communities revolve around access to facilities, both due to a lack of shops, services and employment within walking distance, and also unsafe or unattractive walking or cycling conditions, for instance roads lacking pavements. This can mean that day to day activities are entirely reliant on having car access. Your Neighbourhood Plan can help solve these problems. If your plan scores less than 6 points it may be worth looking at whether these policies could be strengthened.

4



Wildlife and biodiversity

Our plan ...	Score
Designates Local Green Spaces in order to protect them from development.	2
Requires new developments to use native planting in landscaping schemes. (Non-native landscaping is of little wildlife benefit, whilst native plants provide food and habitat).	3
Has mapped our wildlife and range of habitats and our "green infrastructure" links. Green Infrastructure is the network of green spaces and waterways serving as habitat for wildlife, including parks, streams and rivers, hedgerows, trees, back gardens, railway corridors, drainage ditches, road verges and disused land.	3
Includes a policy requiring development to improve the connectivity of green infrastructure and enhance biodiversity.	4
Includes a policy requiring Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) to use natural features such as drainage ditches and ponds, which can offer wildlife habitat and be integrated into public spaces. (As opposed to hard engineered solutions such as underground tanks and stores which offer nothing for wildlife).	4
Includes in our renewable energy policy a requirement for biodiversity improvements to be planned in from the start, targeting an overall enhancements to habitats.	4
Total (out of twenty)	

If your plan scores less than 6 stars in this section, it's probably worth reviewing whether your policies are strong enough. It's a fallacy that "green" rural areas are always rich in wildlife and that urban areas are always low in biodiversity. Areas in intensive agricultural use can have very low biodiversity levels; and equally some urban areas (including networks of gardens and derelict "brownfield" sites) can have a surprising variety of wildlife and habitats. Neighbourhood plans can include policies to help protect the wildlife and the habitats we have, link them together better and incorporate habitat provision in new developments.



5



Flooding and extreme weather

Our plan ...	Score
Includes a policy that requires developments to incorporate sustainable drainage design features to manage the risk of flooding. (Ideally sustainable drainage features should serve multiple purposes. For example, designed properly, a drainage pond can help flood waters to infiltrate into the ground whilst also providing wildlife habitat and moderating the surrounding air temperatures in the summer, and can be incorporated into the green space serving the new development.)	2
Has examined the potential for flood risk within our neighbourhood now and in the future, both from surface water flooding, and flooding from rivers and the sea, and the potential for sea level rise.	4
Has examined the potential for urban heat island effects within our neighbourhood now and in the future.	2
Includes a policy encouraging the incorporation of green roofs and walls and street trees, which can help mitigate both flooding and heat waves and can also offer wildlife habitat.	2
Total (out of ten)	

The latest predictions are that climate change will result in more extreme weather events in the UK, with heavier rainfall events an increased risk of flooding, more and longer-lasting heat waves and higher sea levels. Your plan can help to improve the resilience of your neighbourhood to these changes. If your plan scores less than 6 stars in this section, it's probably worth revising these sections.



6



Climate change and sustainability

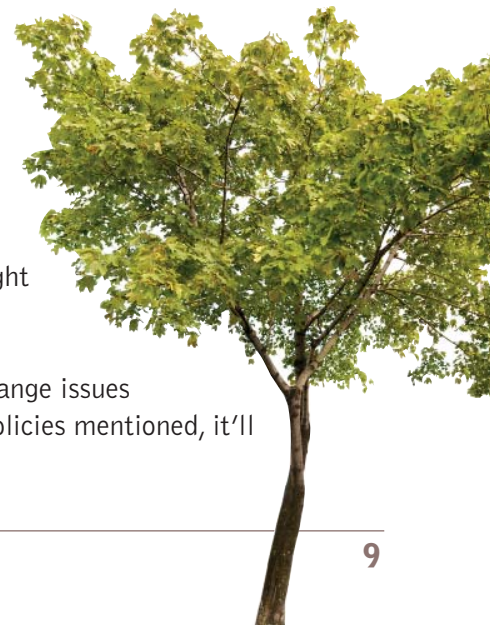
Our plan ...	Score
Doesn't discuss climate change or environmental sustainability.	0
Refers to climate change or sustainability but doesn't detail what these issues and concepts might mean for our neighbourhood.	0
Discusses climate change and sustainability, but only narrowly (e.g. in the context of flooding) or only in the environment chapter of the plan.	1
Discusses and promotes the issue of sustainability and climate change vulnerability and resilience, as a lens for all other issues: how much housing and employment is provided and where it would go, access to services and public transport, being able to walk and cycle safely, the energy efficiency of new and existing development, maximising renewable energy, making your community resilient to flooding and heatwaves.	4
Total (out of five)	

Including policies to adequately address the over-arching issue of climate change is really challenging, but it highlights some of the big questions that the planning system should be facing, and arguably, is not. Nationally, we're committed to cutting carbon emissions by 80% in the next 30 years, but in order to stabilise our climate we will eventually need to stop emitting carbon dioxide altogether, and this requires radical thinking.

In thinking about these issues and in view of the challenges climate change will pose in the coming decades, all communities should promote renewable energy, high standards of energy efficiency, sustainable patterns of development (and sustainable transport), habitat provision and look at flood resilience. However, these issues will play out differently from community to community.

Dense inner city neighbourhoods might choose to address heat stress, improve cycling and walking infrastructure to tackle congestion and air pollution and could promote district heating networks and rooftop solar panels. In suburban neighbourhoods, the challenges and opportunities will be slightly different, with greater challenges around reducing car dependency and enabling access to services, but greater opportunities around habitat provision. Neighbourhoods with large numbers of historic or traditional buildings or high levels of fuel poverty might include policies encouraging the responsible retrofitting of older homes.

We won't have come close to capturing the full range of resilience and climate change issues that could come up across the country, but if your plan includes the majority of policies mentioned, it'll have made a good start!



Add them all up ...	
Renewable Energy	
Energy efficiency and sustainability of existing and new development	
Transport, service provision and patterns of development	
Wildlife & biodiversity	
Flooding and Extreme Weather	
Climate Change and Sustainability	
Grand total (out of 100)	

If you scored:

0 to 30 points ★

Whilst your plan might be really excellent in other terms, it's yet to really engage meaningfully with the potential impacts of climate change, or include adequate mitigation and adaptation policies. Or it might be that it does ok in one particular area, but doesn't address other sustainability or climate considerations. Could you review it to see what issues you might have missed or what detail you could add?

30 to 50 ★★

Your plan has begun to engage with climate change and sustainability issues, but could probably be more ambitious in its policy objectives, or more thorough in the range of issues it addresses. Or it might be that it addresses one or more particular areas really well, but doesn't address other relevant considerations.

50 to 65 points ★★★

Your plan is ambitious, detailed and thorough, with policies that cover a wide range of sustainability and climate considerations in some depth.

65 points or more ★★★★

Your plan is probably a case study in how to embed climate and sustainability considerations into a neighbourhood plan. We'd like to see it! Please get in touch with us so that we can learn from you and share the policies you've developed, and how you've built support for them.

Please see the new edition of our Low Carbon Neighbourhood Planning Guidebook (pictured) which contains much greater detail on potential policies.

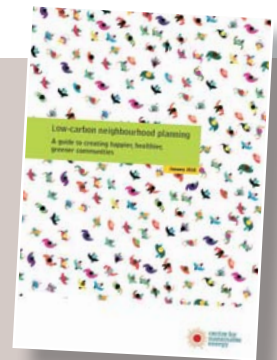
Download it from www.cse.org.uk/lcnpg.pdf

Contact Dan or Ellie for more detailed advice on how your plan could be improved. Subject to capacity, we can help with:

- Helping you plan and deliver your initial consultation events and build support for sustainability measures.
- Helping you identify relevant sustainability and climate issues in your area.
- Supporting you to developing and draft planning policies.
- Reviewing your draft neighbourhood plan.
- Supporting the delivery of public events.
- Research for developing an evidence base.

We will tailor the support we offer depending on the resources we have available, what is needed and the progress your neighbourhood plan has already made.

We also have direct experience of developing community owned renewable energy through and alongside your neighbourhood plan – a potential source of income for your community.



Dan, Ellie,
Mark, Megan



This 3-year programme to support neighbourhood planning groups in developing low carbon neighbourhood plans that address climate change and work towards a sustainable future, is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

