

INFORMATION PACK_13 May 2024

A neighbourhood plan for the town of Harrogate

Introduction

This document provides information on the neighbourhood plan process and how a neighbourhood plan could guide future development in the town of Harrogate. A neighbourhood plan has similarities to a 'local plan' produced by a local planning authority in that it is a statutory document containing a vision, objectives and planning policy which must be taken into account when determining planning applications for development. It differs from a local plan in two important respects: it is produced by the community or a parish council rather than a local planning authority and its scope may be less than a local plan with much more focus on local issues which matter to the community. Harrogate Civic Society and Zero Carbon Harrogate have been gauging public opinion for starting a neighbourhood plan process.

This information pack is designed to give you sufficient information to help you decide if you support the idea of our community producing its own Neighbourhood Plan and if you feel you want to get involved.

Summary

People who live and work in the town of Harrogate may have different opinions as to whether they think the town should change and how they would like the town to look in the future. The planning process calls this a 'vision' and it is included at the start of a local plan following a consultation process to find out what changes people want. Our local planning authority is now North Yorkshire Council. They have to reconcile a wide range of opinions across a large geographic area and the answer they come up with may not be specific to the needs of a particular place, like the town of Harrogate. A local plan process is led by a local planning authority and the end point is a plan which shapes a 'place' by identifying where and when future development should take place and including topics such as design, services and infrastructure to support that development. A vision forms the basis of that local plan and from this, a set of objectives are identified which may be realised through a set of planning policies. ***But how does a local planning authority reconcile a wide range of different visions?***

Harrogate Borough Council has been abolished and our local planning authority, North Yorkshire Council, covers a very large area with its diverse needs. There has been consultation on a potential town council for Harrogate but its creation could be a long way off. The Harrogate District Local Plan is to be replaced by a county-wide North Yorkshire local plan. ***Can we expect the new local plan to address issues local to the town of Harrogate and deliver a vision acceptable to our community?***

We will have various opportunities to engage in the local plan process via North Yorkshire Council consultations. The majority of people are likely to leave it to others to respond with comments. Those who do respond are likely to have different visions and objectives and the planning authority must reconcile those widely diverse opinions. North Yorkshire Council may well take more notice when consultation responses are co-ordinated through an organisation or body such as the Harrogate Civic

Society or the Harrogate Chamber of Commerce. They would certainly have to take more notice of responses by a lower tier of governance such as a town council. But we don't have a town council and there is currently no network in place to help co-ordinate responses to achieve a local vision which is specific to Harrogate's needs. ***There are benefits if we can find a way to work together to realise an acceptable vision for the town but how can we do this?***

The Localism Act 2011 gave power to local communities to produce their own 'neighbourhood plan'. This type of plan would contain a locally specific vision and objectives deliverable through planning policy. If accepted by the community the document would become a statutory document which sits alongside the new county-wide local plan to shape future development in the town of Harrogate. The neighbourhood planning process is similar to the local planning process and there are, of course, legal requirements to fulfil. The first stage is 'getting established' and then start to collate an evidence base which includes a vision appropriate for the town's future. To do this we need a core group of individuals – called a 'forum' - to move things forward and ensure there is strong support from the community. It may be many years before the town has its own neighbourhood plan and it may be that a new town council will complete the process. If so, they will have the support of a forum of people from the community. ***Do you think the neighbourhood planning process is a good idea for the town of Harrogate and do you want to get involved?***

How did this all start?

Harrogate Civic Society is committed to celebrating the spa town's architectural and social history and ensuring Harrogate retains the best of its historic character and embraces the future. Zero Carbon Harrogate has a vision for Harrogate to become a leading sustainable, carbon neutral place so that residents experience an improved and more equitable quality of life. These 'visions' appear different but there are complimentary aspects. Both seek to achieve a sustainable future for our beautiful spa town. However, turning these two visions into reality is a difficult task – more so when you consider people outside those organisations hold wide ranging opinions about the future direction of the town. This is something that has to be recognised. A neighbourhood plan is seen as a way of bringing those visions together. Representatives from the two organisations met and decided to find out if there was likely to be a sufficient level of support to start such a process.

The two organisations began with the establishment of a small steering group which had the task of finding out if there would be sufficient support for a neighbourhood plan process. This was done by organising presentations to a cross section of people who live and work in the town of Harrogate and then getting their feedback. A large database of invitees was put together. This included individuals and people who represented larger organisations so that our message could be spread widely.

Next stage

The steering group has now evolved and increased in size. It represents more organisations and now is the time actively to develop the group so it represents a cross section of the community. People who attended the presentations expressed support for starting the neighbourhood plan process so a decision was made to organise a larger, public meeting on 4 June 2024 to validate that decision and establish a **Forum** of people to oversee the process.

There will be further updates as the process moves forward and more presentations to get more people involved. This information pack is one way to help people understand some of the issues, so they can decide if they want to get involved. It contains a list of organisations who have expressed an interest in the process, links to other sources of information, some of the key issues covered by the presentations, notes on how the Forum should be established and a guide to the potential scope of planning topics which the neighbourhood plan could address.

Please come along to the 4 June 2024 meeting at the United Reform Church on West Park and find out more about the process and how you can help if you decide to do so. We plan to start at 7pm. You may be asked to register by replying to an email so we can get an idea of numbers.

List of organisations showing an interest so far

Harrogate Civic Society, Zero Carbon Harrogate, Harrogate Residents Association, Harlow and Pannal Ash Residents Association, Knox Community Conservation Group, Bilton Community Centre, Knox Valley Residents Association, Stray Defence Association, Friends of Valley Gardens, Directions Planning Consultancy Ltd, Duchy Residents Association, Harrogate Theatre and Creative Harrogate, Harrogate BID, Harrogate Youth Council, Starbeck Library, Long Lands Common, Yorkshire Causeway, KCCG, Harrogate Town Association Football Club, Disability Action Yorkshire, Commercial Street Traders, Harrogate Chamber of Commerce, Yorkshire Soap, The Den and Thug Grub, McDonalds, Allotments Association, S+SA Architects, Blue Willow Heritage, Richard Eaves Architects, HG2 Architects, Harrogate District over-50's Forum, Harrogate and District Community Action, Harrogate Flower Show, Harrogate in Bloom, Harrogate Homeless Project, Red Kite Learning Trust, existing and retired local councillors, and a growing number of individuals.

Links to more information

Harrogate Civic Society will soon be hosting an information/link page on neighbourhood planning until a dedicated website is set-up by a Forum. Please visit and look at the documents if you need more information:

<https://www.harrogatecivicsociety.org/>

North Yorkshire Council web site also has a section on neighbourhood planning:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/planning-and-conservation/planning-policy/neighbourhood-planning>

There are also lots of sources of information on the internet. These links for example:

<https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/create-neighbourhood-plan-step-by-step-roadmap-guide/>

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/637/contents/made>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>

Neighbourhood Plan

An opportunity to influence planning and development in Harrogate

What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

A statutory document with similarities to a Local Plan (for example the Harrogate District Local Plan) but with a parish/town council or community-led emphasis to deliver a shared vision through local planning.

“A neighbourhood plan puts in place planning policy for a neighbourhood area to guide future development. A neighbourhood plan is about the use and development of land and may contain a vision, aims, planning policies, proposals for improving the area or providing new facilities, or allocation of key sites for specific kinds of development. It may deal with a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues (such as housing, employment, design, heritage and transport) or it may focus on one or two issues only. These may be issues that are relevant to the whole neighbourhood or just to part of the neighbourhood. It is for those producing the plan to decide on its scope and content as a planning document”

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A neighbourhood plan vision

Describes what you want your neighbourhood to look like at the end of the plan period (say, 15 years).

It can be aspirational as well as grounded in evidence and data – quantitative (facts and figures) as well as qualitative (community views about what’s important).

It might focus on our ‘unique selling point’ – why the area is distinctive and a desirable place to live – or the untapped potential for buildings and land that could be revitalised.

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Current planning framework

- Harrogate Borough Council abolished
- New county-wide local authority – North Yorkshire Council
- A combined authority with York and a mayor
- Town Council for Harrogate 3rd consultation underway
- Harrogate’s planning determined through decisions led by North Yorkshire Council
- Ink not dry on Harrogate’s local plan but being replaced by a new, county-wide local plan



Will there be robust policy guidance specific to the town of Harrogate?

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Many Visions

Harrogate’s community has many ‘visions’

Are they compatible with North Yorkshire Council’s vision?

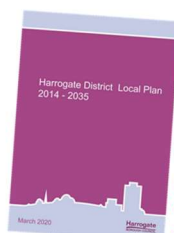
Will the new, county-wide local plan include a vision supported by the ‘whole’ Harrogate town community?

Is there something we can do to make a positive contribution to the future planning and development of our town?

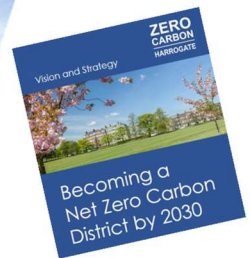
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“demonstrates how we will ... accelerate housing growth”



HBC LOCAL PLAN VISION 2035:
“Harrogate district will be a progressive, vibrant place to live, work and visit. The district will have a sustainable and resilient economy that features new, higher value jobs. The district’s high quality built and natural environment continues to be a defining feature.”



The visions represented here include the Harrogate Borough Council’s vision as set out in their local plan, the town centre masterplan (which most people are unaware of and is becoming dated), North Yorkshire Council’s Gateway scheme and their recently published housing strategy (which will inform the new county-wide local plan), press releases from the business community stating the town needs a vision and an example of a vision produce by a local organisation. Are they all compatible? Do you have different vision?

An opportunity

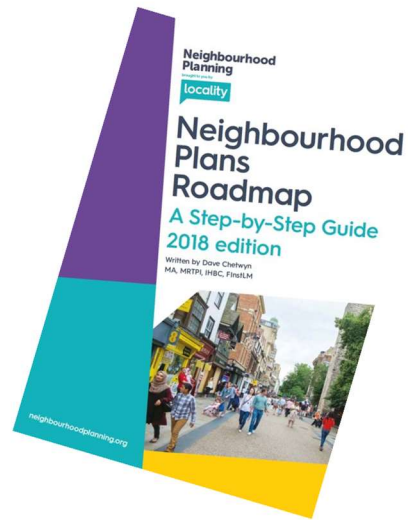
In the absence of a town council we can influence future planning in our town

We can try to establish a vision which has general support from the community of our town

We can do this by working with others to follow the neighbourhood plan process

A neighbourhood plan has the same legal status as a local plan so it can make a real difference

There is lots of guidance and help out there...



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Other Neighbourhood Plans

Since the Localism Act there have been **over 2000** plans started and many are now adopted and steer local planning decisions

Several plans have been 'designated' within the old HBC boundary. Ripon and Otley (includes parts of Harrogate District) are adopted. Knaresborough and Pannal & Burn Bridge are close to adoption

The town of Harrogate is **probably one of the largest unparished areas** by population to start the process for a neighbourhood plan



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As we move forward with our neighbourhood plan process there is much to learn from the experience of others. The neighbourhood plans shown in these images can be down loaded via a simple internet search.

Alternatives

'Do nothing' – leave it to others/apathy/what's the point

Respond to consultations on the new North Yorkshire Local Plan – but with differing visions and objectives

Respond to reviews of documents such as the Town Centre Masterplan

Wait for a new Harrogate Town Council to influence planning – but for how long?

Work together now to produce our own Neighbourhood Plan – but how?



Is it time for a Harrogate Town Council and what are the chances of it happening?

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A neighbourhood plan process and the new North Yorkshire local plan process is likely to be within the same timescale. This means it will still be essential to respond to the North Yorkshire local plan consultations and any other planning document proposed for the town and its environs. A Harrogate town council would hopefully wish to have a neighbourhood plan so there are advantages of starting the process now rather than wait and be playing 'catch-up' with the county-led plan.

What is a Neighbourhood Plan

The Localism Act 2011 – decision-making passed downwards to local communities

Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area

A neighbourhood plan must still support delivery of North Yorkshire Council's strategic policies **but also provides a local context for the things that matter to the Harrogate town community**

It is a document containing a vision statement, objectives and planning policies to shape future development in the town



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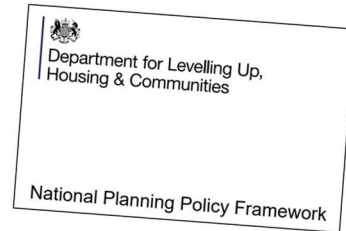
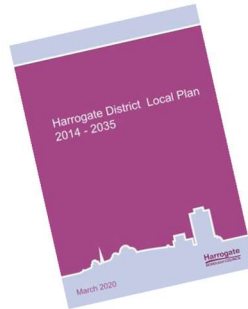
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The key message here is a neighbourhood plan cannot be in conflict with other planning policy documents. But it can deliver a local emphasis to planning policy to make a difference to how the town develops.

The rules

- Follow the statutory procedure
- Must meet basic conditions of delivering sustainable development
- Have regard to national policy and guidance
- Be in general conformity with adopted strategic local planning policies and not promote less development
- Be evidence based**



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A neighbourhood plan has the same statutory status as a local authority local plan. The same rules have to be followed.

The process

Three stages:

- Getting established
- Preparing the plan
- Bringing the plan into force

The first stage:

- Designation of the neighbourhood area and forum
- Building the evidence base
- Publicity and engagement

REALITY CHECK:
 Long and complex
 time consuming
 cost implications
 technically demanding

REQUIRES:
 Skills
 Compromise
 Communication
 Collaboration

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The three stages of the process are set out in the guidance but we should focus on the first stage for now. This is the most important stage to get right because a plan which is based on sound evidence and has involved a wide section of the community is more likely to be a success. The effort which must be put in should not be underestimated, but with a town the size of Harrogate there will be many people with the expertise and commitment to help.

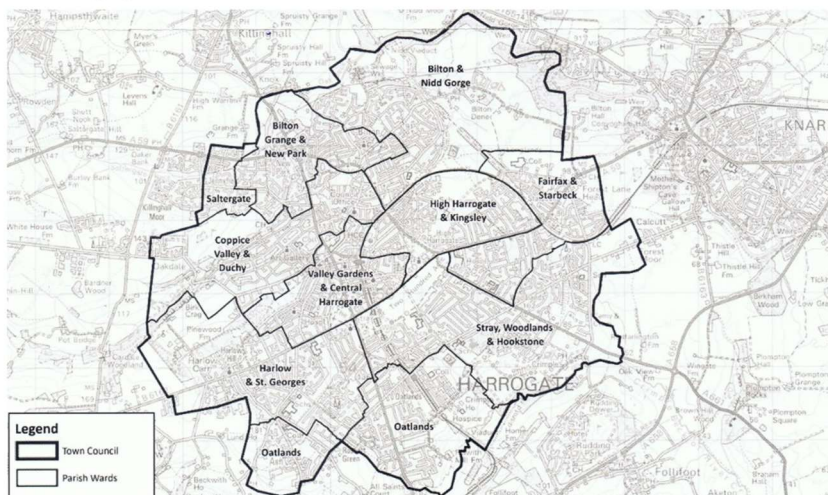
Neighbourhood Area

Decide if the area should include the whole or part of the unparished area of Harrogate town.

Cannot include parished areas

Justify the choice of area

Apply to NYC for designation



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A neighbourhood plan produced via a Forum of people cannot include parished areas. The slide above shows the boundary of the town of Harrogate. Inside that boundary there are no parishes but the town is surrounded by parishes. This means the neighbourhood area (the area covered by the plan) cannot be larger than shown but could be smaller. The steering group intend to recommend the above boundary line because it is the likely boundary of any new town council. Once we have decided to go with this area, there must be an application to have that area designated – but this should be a formality providing we have the correct justification.

Neighbourhood Forum

A legal requirement for **at least 21 members** to steer the process.

An express purpose to promote social, economic and environmental well-being

A purpose that **reflects the character of the area**

Membership open to people living and working in the area

Membership drawn from different places in the area and different sections of the community

Harrogate's character

a tourist destination,
famous for its spa heritage, floral displays and open spaces,
shopping experience,
entertainment, food and drink hub,
a conference and exhibition venue,
a place of many business,
a place where people live and work,
a place of many organisations and support groups,
Other...

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More details about setting up a Forum are included later in this information pack

Evidence and publicity

Start gathering evidence early by using existing sources– HBC local plan/town centre masterplan/NYC local plan/other

Concentrate on evidence relevant to the scope of the plan and which supports the vision and objectives

Evidence should help paint a picture of the neighbourhood area– particularly its social, economic and environmental characteristics

Find out what people think is good/bad about the town and its qualities as a place to live and work

What are the issues facing the town now and in the future and what changes would people like to see?

Now starting to understand the potential scope of the plan...

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“a citadel famous for its springs”



A Spa Town?



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There are many sources of information but the key is to focus on the evidence base which will inform and support the vision and objectives decided for the plan. As stated at the beginning of the presentation, evidence can be qualitative and quantitative. The evidence gathering exercise will help to understand the scope of the plan – meaning what it will contain and hope to achieve.

Progress to date and next stage?

Various presentations made to different sections of the community with strong consensus to take things further.

Make a decision to proceed and start Forum set-up process (4 June meeting)

Continue to spread the word and increase publicity.

Contact NYC planners and involve democratically elected representatives

Bring the community together to produce a neighbourhood plan

Continue to work together to respond to NYC Local Plan consultations

If we get a Town Council carry on the work with them to produce a neighbourhood plan

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED

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Over the next few months it is hoped neighbourhood planning in Harrogate will receive more publicity and there will be plenty of opportunities to get involved. If a town council comes into being sooner than expected there should be opportunities to help that council continue the neighbourhood plan process.

How to establish a neighbourhood planning forum

The summary below has been extracted from a Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit provided by 'Locality'
See this link for the full document:

<https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/establish-neighbourhood-planning-forum/>

In an area that does not have a town or parish council, a neighbourhood forum must be established in order to produce a neighbourhood plan. The neighbourhood forum once established will be the legal qualifying body for plan production. The Forum set-up process must meet legislative requirements and the 2012 neighbourhood plan regulations so that it can be designated by the local planning authority as the qualifying body to produce a neighbourhood plan for its area.

Basic requirements of forming a neighbourhood forum:

- Established for the express purpose of promoting or improving the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of an area that consists of or includes the neighbourhood area concerned
- A purpose that reflects the character of the area in general terms
- Membership open to people living and working in the area, and elected members for the area (reasonable steps must be taken to secure at least one of each)
- A minimum of 21 members from above groups
- Membership drawn from different places in the area and different sections of the community.

A prospective neighbourhood forum is not required to have a member from each membership category in order to be designated. It must have an open membership policy, but it cannot force people to be a part of something they may not wish to be a part of. The local planning authority must consider whether the prospective neighbourhood forum has secured or taken reasonable steps to attempt to secure membership from each category and from different places and sections of the community in that area. All of this is not difficult, but each neighbourhood planning area is different. Ensuring that the processes of a forum are clear – through the agreement of a constitution for the forum - may require some discussion about how to balance interests and views and still include as many people and organisations as possible.

It is good practice to try to make sure the membership of the neighbourhood forum reflects the character and diversity of the local population, with people from different places in the area and different sections of the community. For example, it could include elderly and young people, different ethnic groups, residents of different economic means and small business owners. This could include:

- intrinsic characteristics: for example young, elderly, men, women, LGBT+, disabled, ethnic groups;
- socio-economic characteristics: for example tenants, owner-occupiers, low income, small business owners, larger firms, creative industries, not-for-profit sector, public sector, private sector, non-car owners, parents, single people, unemployed, students;
- interests/knowledge/expertise: for example housing, employment, transport (including public transport), urban design, retail, built heritage, natural environment, sports and recreation,

education/skills, culture, city or town centres, night economy (e.g. food, drink, entertainment), communications, health, knowledge economy, crime and anti-social behaviour, play, waste and recycling.

Putting together a neighbourhood forum is a challenging process. Often it is led by community organisations or local community activists, who take the first steps to get people involved. Different activities can include:

- publicising the proposal to put together a neighbourhood forum and prepare a neighbourhood plan, using local media, social media, or existing circulation lists;
- holding local events to explain neighbourhood planning and invite people to become involved;
- identifying key local stakeholders and inviting them to become involved;
- identifying potential partner organisations and inviting them to become involved, including organisations with local memberships or mailing lists;
- liaising with the local planning authority.

A key objective of the 4 June 2024 open meeting is to formally start the process of setting up a Forum.

Possible topics to be considered for inclusion in a neighbourhood plan

There will be an early opportunity for you to get involved in a topic area of particular interest to you - perhaps in a smaller topic sub-group. For example, do you have an interest in transport issues or the built environment or sustainability? The following table is taken from the North Yorkshire Council website which has started to look at the existing evidence relating to a number of spatial themes for their new North Yorkshire Local Plan due for adoption in 2028.

Some, but probably not all, of these spatial themes will be relevant to our neighbourhood plan and it is up to us to decide which specific themes and topics need to be addressed at a local level through our plan (there will be others not listed below).

North Yorkshire Council Spatial themes

General development principles	may include development / locational strategy, the location and scale of new development, settlement hierarchy, sequential approach to development, settlement boundaries, green belt designation, development in the open countryside, general design principles and sustainability criteria such as flood risk, erosion, land instability, pollution and contaminated land. These general overarching policies will often apply to all forms of development and can cut across all the other spatial themes.
Housing	may include overall housing land supply provision, housing land allocations, housing mix & density, previously developed land, provision of affordable housing, provision for gypsies and travellers, provision of specialist housing e.g., or older people, residential development in town, district & local centres, conversions, existing housing stock, extension and alterations to existing housing.

Economic development and tourism	may include overall employment land supply provision, employment land allocations, cultural and tourism development, visitor accommodation including camping and caravanning, tourist attractions, the rural economy and farm diversification.
Retail and Town Centres	may include distribution of growth in retail floorspace and other town centre uses, vitality and viability of towns and villages centres, retail hierarchy, primary and secondary shopping areas, edge-of-centre and out-of-centre retail or related development, town centre development opportunities, underused floorspace in retail areas, open air retailing and farm shops.
Built environment	may include historic and built environment, conservation areas, listed buildings, archaeology, other heritage assets (scheduled monuments, parks and gardens, battlefield sites etc), public realm and public art.
Natural environment	may include countryside & landscape relating to sites of international and national importance for nature conservation, sites of local or regional nature conservation significance, protection of species, biodiversity and geodiversity sites, wildlife networks, green infrastructure networks, green wedges, Local Green Space designations, landscape character, areas of high landscape value, best and most versatile agricultural.
Design	May include design guides and design codes, general layout and design principles, sustainable design and construction, ensuring development is accessible, designing out crime, shop fronts and advertisements etc.
Recreation and open space	may include parks and gardens, provision of new open space, sport and recreational facilities, children's play, strategic open spaces, golf courses, countryside activities, recreational footpaths, cycleways, bridleways and waterways.
Transportation	may include road network, road schemes and major road improvements, minor road improvements, traffic management, rail services, and freight, provision for buses, cyclists and walking, traffic implications of new development, parking standards and highway directional signage.
Community facilities and infrastructure	may include community centres, meeting halls, educational establishments, public houses, religious buildings and libraries, healthcare facilities, utilities infrastructure such as electricity, sewerage, gas and water supplies, telecommunications development and planning conditions and obligations.
climate change, flooding and coastal change	may include flood risk, drainage and sustainable drainage systems, water resources & supply, water quality and ground water, land and air quality, renewable and low carbon energy, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, coastal changes, risk of overheating from rising temperatures,
Minerals-	may include strategy for minerals development, environmental protection, coal, aggregate minerals, sandstone, peat, clay, oil and gas, site management and operations, reclamation and reworking of mineral wastes-
Waste	may include strategy for waste, type and volume of waste to be managed, waste management facilities, environmental protection, waste minimisation and reuse, recovering waste, disposal, other waste issues such as scrap yards, power station ash, special waste and anaerobic digestion, site reclamation and site management.