**Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is a Local Plan?**

A Local Plan guides decisions on where and how development takes place. Local Plans contain a set of policies, which are used to guide decisions on applications for development.

The Torbay Local Plan 2012-30 was adopted in December 2015. It sets out strategic polices and allocated a number of broad areas for housing and other development. It is prepared by the Local Planning Authority, and goes through several rounds of public consultation. Together with the Neighbourhood Plans (see below), it forms the “development plan”. The development plan is the legal starting point for determining planning applications.

**What is the difference between the Local Plan and the Neighbourhood Plans?**

There are three Neighbourhood Plans (for Torquay, Paignton and Brixham Peninsula), which provide more detailed polices for these towns. They are prepared by Neighbourhood Forums, made up of local volunteers.

The three Neighbourhood Plans came into force in Torbay in June 2019, after passing local referendums.

**What is the Local Plan Review? Why are you updating the Local Plan when it is only five years old?**

The Local Plan was adopted in 2015. Councils are required by law to “review” their plans every five years to see whether they reflect the changing needs of our area and reflect government policy.

Changing housing need figures are the most common reason why plans need to be updated.

Torbay Council reviewed its Local Plan in 2020 and resolved only to update its policies dealing with housing numbers and where new homes should be built.

Other policies, for example those dealing with employment, town centres, the historic and natural environment were considered to remain fit-for-purpose and in less urgent need of updating.

**What will happen to the Neighbourhood Plans?**

We fully support Neighbourhood Plans and these remain in force. The Council recognises the huge effort that unpaid individuals put into preparing the Neighbourhood Plans, and continuing to promote neighbourhood planning in Torbay.

Where policies in a Neighbourhood Plan conflict with the Local Plan, the most recently adopted document will take precedence.

The Local Plan Update is likely to require difficult decisions to be made about how many homes to build and where to build them. We will develop these plans in dialogue with the Forums and other stakeholders.

**Why do you need to keep building more houses?**

As our population continues to grow, we need to build more houses of different sizes to meet the varied needs of local people. Our housing need continues to grow as a result of smaller households, an ageing population (which reduces the turnover of available homes), and domestic migration.

There is also a pressing need to provide affordable housing for local people who cannot afford market house prices or rents.

National government has a Manifesto commitment to build 300,000 houses each year, and has set a formula for calculating the minimum number of houses each local authority in England should provide land for. This formula is known as the “Standard Method” and in Torbay is 586 dwellings per year.

**What would happen if you did not provide enough land for housing or did not build as many houses as the government wants us to do?**

If we do not allocate enough land for the number of houses that the national formula requires us to build, we are likely to have developers applying to build on other sites in the area. Because we would not have enough sites to meet our housing need, it would be difficult for us to refuse these applications. By allocating enough sites for housing, we have more control about where and how new development takes place.

**Where are you going to build new homes?**

Under the current Local Plan, 8,900 homes are planned for between 2012-30. Between 2012 and 2020 there were 2907 new homes provided, which means that about 6,000 homes need to be built by 2030.

In theory these are already planned for in the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans, but we need to review these allocations to see if they are still available and will provide the needed number on time. Over the past few years house building has not kept pace with the numbers planned for. We need to look at why this has happened and what can be done to remedy the matter.

**Why can’t you just build affordable housing**?

It costs a lot of money to build homes and provide the infrastructure needed to support them (roads, schools etc.). If all housing was offered as affordable housing then it would not be viable for developers to build. Therefore, we ask for a proportion of new houses to be affordable.

**Why do you build on greenfield land?**

The Local Plan and all the Neighbourhood Plans propose to regenerate town centres and make brownfield development a priority.

However, we don’t have enough brownfield land to provide all the homes we need. Brownfield sites tend to provide apartments rather than family housing. It is also very difficult to provide affordable homes on brownfield sites. This is because they tend to be more expensive to develop, and also because of government rules, intended to encourage brownfield development, that make it difficult for councils to get affordable housing on these sites.

**How are you going to provide/support more jobs?**

The Local Plan cannot directly provide jobs, but it can make land available and support business development. It seeks to provide at least 65,000 square metres of employment space by 2030. The Local Plan requires major sites to be developed as “mixed use” areas including 25% employment land.

**How do you make sure the Local Plan doesn’t have an impact on the environment?**

The Local Plan has policies that protect the built and natural environment. These remain in place, and are reinforced by policies in the Neighbourhood Plans.

It is a legal requirement that all Local Plans are accompanied by environmental reports, called the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal. The Local Plan Update will also have a Habitats Regulations Assessment. These reports consider the impact of the plan on the environment, people and the economy and set out how any negative impacts will be addressed.

**How will wildlife be protected from development pressures?**

A large part of Torbay supports rare species of plants, animals and habitats, which are currently protected under a combination of European and English law. The Local Plan includes various policies which require new proposals for development to protect existing wildlife and promote better networks for wildlife across and beyond Torbay.

**What are you doing to tackle the climate emergency?**

The Local Plan includes various measures to tackle the climate emergency, the biggest of which is to require all new development to minimise their carbon emissions. We are also requiring electric vehicle charging points in new developments, supporting renewable energy schemes and requiring all larger developments to show how the majority of trips can be made by walking, cycling or public transport.

Parts of Torbay are at risk of flooding. The Local Plan contains policies to ensure that flooding is taken into account when making planning decisions; and government policy directs new homes away from flood plains.

**What are you doing to make sure that new development has enough green space?**

We want all new development to be planned around people instead of the car. That’s why the policies in the Local Plan will require things like parks, playing pitches, play areas, tree planting, allotments and open green spaces to be planned into new development from the outset. The Local Plan and supporting documents have standards for the provision of open space.

Neighbourhood Plans also contain policies that protect open space- including a number of “Local Green Spaces”, which may only be developed where there are “very special circumstances”.