

Groups who are at the gathering evidence and drafting stages can apply for these packages :

Housing Needs Assessment
Site Options and Assessment
Master planning
Design including Design Codes

Housing Needs Assessment (HNA)

This assessment provides vital evidence to help you understand the expected demand for housing in your neighbourhood over your plan period. This includes generating policy options for housing, calculating a suitable housing needs figure¹ and the type and sizes of new dwellings, together with the need for affordable housing and addressing those with specialist requirements such as older residents and newly formed households.

Focus of Support and Advice

A robust housing needs figure is the foundation of all housing policy. As the local authority is required to provide this for all designated areas, it is expected that the HNA will not cover this. We will only provide this in exceptional circumstances where the local authority is unable to fulfil their duty.

The HNA, supported by a clearly set out method and data sources, drills down in to the particular requirements of the community, considering the need for affordable housing, and how this should be split into the different tenures; the type and size of dwellings required to develop a housing stock that is aligned with community needs; including the needs of specialist groups. AECOM has produced pioneering work looking at housing for the elderly, for example, and can help QBs where their area faces an aging population.

Typically the work will involve (depending on the amount of support your group qualifies for) :

- A robust, independent study providing clarity as to housing demand that is consistent with Planning Practice Guidance;
- Substantial Evidence base drawing on primary and secondary data sources; and
- Policy options suited to meeting community need relating to housing type and tenure.

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the support you can expect :

- A clear starting point for going on to look at availability of sites and justification for using the neighbourhood plan to allocate sites;
- Better understanding by the QB and the wider community on how to act upon the housing challenges facing you; and
- A firm basis for the QB and wider stakeholders to engage with a Local Planning Authority (LPA) developing a new Local Plan, and influence the housing number allocated to them.

Contact Points

The Housing Team at AECOM will be available through the course of the project to deal with client queries and concerns, either by email or phone. We will start with a thorough dialogue to understand the specifics of the neighbourhood's housing relating issues. Once an initial draft has been prepared, the QB will be asked to comment, and, where appropriate, modifications to the draft will be carried out. Please note, AECOM do not send the draft report to the local planning authority for review. If the QB do wish for the local authority to also comment on the draft, then the QB will be expected to liaise with the local authority directly on this and provide AECOM with one consolidated set of comments for AECOM to consider.

① The NPPF requires the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to provide each neighbourhood area with a housing requirement figure, or an indicative figure. Given this, we will only provide an estimated quantity figure as an exception if the LPA have been unable to fulfil their requirements. If they have not yet provided you with a figure, you should request this in the first instance.

Site Options and Assessment

This technical support package will provide advice to groups who are intending to assess potential sites with a view to allocating land for development in a neighbourhood plan. Support can include help with identifying, assessing and shortlisting sites to meet an identified need for housing, employment, community uses, local green space or other land uses. It will help to ensure that the sites that are selected for allocation comply with wider national and local planning policy as well as meeting the vision and objectives of the neighbourhood plan. The report will not usually include both site assessment and site allocation advice (e.g. which sites are finally included in a plan) as the preferred sites for allocation will often need additional investigation and discussion with landowners and the Local Planning Authority as well as consultation with the community before they are allocated through the plan.

Focus of Support and Advice

The package will provide independent, objective technical advice to ensure the process of site identification, assessment and selection is robust and defensible. This is usually in the form of a short report that can be used to guide decision making on site selection and, if you choose, as evidence to support the neighbourhood plan. The report will usually set out the Local Plan policy context and neighbourhood plan objectives, the identified housing requirement (or other development requirement) and a summary of the assessment of all known potential sites to establish a shortlist of sites that are suitable and available for the proposed development, or where additional investigation is necessary. It will help to ensure that the proposed allocations and policies align with national and local planning policy and therefore meet the Basic Conditions (legal requirements) that the plan must meet. Support can include one or more of the following depending on your development needs and the complexity of the neighbourhood area :

- Site identification (Local Plan evidence base, local knowledge, Call for Sites);
- Site assessment (based on a standard set of criteria which can be tailored to include local criteria);
- Site shortlisting based on the site assessment;
- Site selection, based on the outcomes of the site assessment and neighbourhood plan objectives;
- Advice on Local Green Space designation; and,
- Advice on whether sites might be suitable for NDO, Self-Build, Co-Housing or Community Right to Build and other alternatives to market housing;
- Advice on development density and site capacity;
- Advice on what a site allocation policy could include; and
- Links with other aspects of neighbourhood planning, including housing need assessment, SEA, development viability and neighbourhood master planning.

Please note, the AECOM site assessment experts undertake site visits. The site visits are an opportunity to better understand the development constraints and opportunities and to assess aspects of the site that cannot be done through the desktop study. The assessment is an entirely objective and independent exercise and relies solely on published evidence and survey findings. Anecdotal or unsubstantiated evidence will not be accepted and will not influence the conclusions.

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the support you can expect to have received specific tailored advice in the form of a technical report that is relevant to the stage of the site selection process you are at. This could cover the site identification process and 'Call for Sites', a full site assessment that can be used as evidence to support the site selection process, or an independent review of the site assessment and selection process you have undertaken to ensure it is sound and will meet Basic Conditions and be supported by your Local Planning Authority (LPA). It could also include specific advice on aspects of the site allocation process included on the list above.

Contact Points

You will receive an initial phone call to discuss the support required and the information requirements. There may also be a meeting with the neighbourhood planning group, as well as a site visit. The primary means of contact will be via e-mail and telephone/conference calls (provided by AECOM).

Masterplanning

The masterplanning package provides a high level spatial plan for part of your neighbourhood area, setting out how you would like to see development or regeneration come forward.

Focus of Support and Advice

Masterplanning provides an opportunity for you to look at the bigger picture for a part of or your entire neighbourhood and proactively influence how it changes and which parts of it stay largely as they are. It allows you to map out the scale and nature of development that could occur in your area, whilst taking into consideration the needs and wishes of the community.

Masterplanning takes a bird's eye view of a neighbourhood to understand its future development, assessing how an area will evolve based on established thematic areas and policies. Its focus can include town or village centres, parts of a neighbourhood, parks or mixed use area – or sometimes a whole settlement.

Themes that could be tackled include how best to make linkages between parts of your neighbourhood and surrounding areas, how to help local centres to flourish, how to bring life back to tired employment areas, how to strategically focus growth in the most appropriate places or how to make the most historic assets.

Outputs will be tailored to meet the specific needs of the Qualifying Body (QB), but may include :

- Neighbourhood masterplans;
- Public realm improvement schemes, where these can be influenced by neighbourhood planning;
- Community regeneration plans;
- Land use plans;
- The results of any community planning engagement exercises carried out; and
- Plans, drawings, illustrations and mapping.

All outputs will be produced with a view to then being able to be directly included in Neighbourhood Plans, as policies, supporting text or evidence base documents.

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the support you can expect:

- A community-led visionary masterplan, with options for to provide a starting point for a sub-neighbourhood or site(s) specific spatial objectives;
- Clearer understanding of challenges and opportunities relating to a given site, a part of your neighbourhood or series of sites depending on scenario; and
- New ideas and perspective for your group, and any development partners.

Contact Points

Depending on the amount of support your group qualifies for, you can expect one or two meetings with the technical specialists, including an initial site visit. QBs qualifying as 'complex' will see their consultant three or four times, possibly including workshops and design exercises.

Design including Design Codes

Urban Design seeks to understand, shape, improve and plan for our places and spaces, ensuring that our neighbourhoods work well and look great. In this package, AECOM's professional urban designers will work alongside Qualifying Bodies (QBs), harnessing their ideas and local knowledge, to produce bespoke urban design guides or codes for potential development or regeneration sites.

Focus of Support and Advice

It is sadly too easy for bad development to take place. This package is designed to ensure that any development is influenced by and reflects the views of the local community – for example, that homes are designed in the local vernacular and respect existing assets, that schemes encourage walking and cycling and reduce the impact of traffic, and that open space is provided to benefit the wider neighbourhood and its biodiversity. To make sure that development in your neighbourhood is attractive, interesting and in-keeping; something local people are proud of.

This is a flexible package of support with a tailored approach to suit the particular requirements of your group, but we include a range of hands-on engagement techniques to establish a high level vision and start to detail up the designs that would be welcomed.

The focus of this package (as opposed to its sister Neighbourhood Masterplanning package, which considers the wider area) is usually a single site or set of sites.

Outputs will be tailored to meet the specific needs of the QBs, but could include:

- Site development briefs;
- Design guidance and codes;
- Site feasibility studies;
- Land use plans;
- The results of any community planning engagement exercises carried out; and
- Plans, drawings, illustrations, 3D sketches and mapping.

All outputs will be produced with a view to then being able to be directly included in Neighbourhood Plans, as policies, supporting text or evidence base documents.

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the support you can expect:

- Quality and viable design advice that can be embedded into your neighbourhood plan as expectations;
- Proposals enabling you to shape, and for potential development to be more acceptable to local stakeholders;
- Proposals that put the community at the heart of the development and regeneration process relating to specific site(s);
- Proposals allowing you to engage with the full range of stakeholders as appropriate: the wider community, landowners, developers, local planning authority, housing providers, utility companies, neighbouring communities; and,
- Proposals that facilitate and guide development that is of community benefit.

Contact Points

Depending on the amount of support your group qualifies for, you can expect one or two meetings with the technical specialists, including an initial site visit. QBs with more complex situations will see their consultant three or four times, including any workshops and design exercises.