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## Site allocations

This is an aspect of the Neighbourhood Plan that was not anticipated when the project was launched early in 2016. The situation then was that Mid Suffolk District Council allocated sites for housing development, based on an evaluation of parcels of land submitted by local landowners in response to the Call for Sites. Now, neighbourhood plans must assume the task of allocating sites.

You are probably aware that the Local Plan currently in preparation (to replace that of 1998) is taking a surprisingly long time to emerge. In the consultation document, published last August, four options for new housing growth were identified: county town focused, a market town / rural area balance, transport corridor focused, and a new settlement option. MSDC have not told us which of these they have chosen, but the grapevine suggests that it is the transport corridor option. As Woolpit is one of the larger villages close to the A14, this is the worst-case scenario as far as we are concerned.

Equally, MSDC have not yet given us — nor to any other community — a precise target for housing growth over the next 20 years (the lifetime of the Local Plan). Nevertheless, we have made our own calculations — as have other neighbourhood planning groups — based on the options published in the consultation document. Our estimate is that Woolpit may be expected to grow by some 250 houses, but as at least one of our assumptions (how the housing is to be distributed between villages) may be incorrect, it must be accepted that there could be a considerable margin of error.

Allocating sites is a potentially explosive issue. Residents might complain if sites were allocated near their homes; landowners might contest decisions if their land was not chosen for development. Following advice, we have decided to commission an independent consultant to do this work. It is in any case technical and difficult. Government funding is available, so we will apply for a grant to cover the costs. This is the route most neighbourhood plans are following in order to resolve this thorny problem; it will, however, result in some delay to the completion of the Plan, probably an extra 2-3 months.

## Draft Environment policies

The Policies working group has largely concluded its work by drafting policies covering environmental issues. These policies have been reviewed and approved by the Steering Group, and cover the following matters:

- Designation of Local Green Space
- Designation of Sport and Recreational Areas
- Designation of Areas of Special Environmental and Landscape Value
- Green Space and Landscaping
- Settlement gaps and key views
- Footpaths and cycleways
- Renewable energy
- Protection of roofscape
- Public charging points for electric vehicles

The last newsletter expanded a little on protective designations. We have taken very seriously the protection of green space, insisting that larger development proposals have a plan for conserving and managing green space. We also feel that housing should not be allowed to encroach on the gap between the village and the hamlets, and the important views — identified in the Key Views survey — should be protected. The Sensitivity Study has provided the expert advice needed to give these policies a robust foundation. Finally, as the Neighbourhood Plan is to ensure that development over the next 20 years is sustainable, policies responding to emerging energy technology have been devised.