

A Guide to Drawing Settlement Boundaries

For Your
Neighbourhood
Plan

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Neighbourhood Planning
Guides and Templates for
Groups in South Oxfordshire

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1. Introduction

1.1 Executive Summary

- 1.1.1 This guide supports communities within South Oxfordshire District in preparing effective and locally appropriate settlement boundaries as part of their neighbourhood development plans, also known as neighbourhood plans. A settlement boundary is a planning tool that helps manage growth, protect the countryside and guide sustainable development. It is therefore important that a settlement boundary is clearly defined and justified.
- 1.1.2 This guide is designed to help communities establish a methodology for setting and reviewing settlement boundaries that reflect both local needs and planning policy. It will enable communities to make informed decisions by offering a structured approach to drawing boundaries that supports appropriate, plan-led development.
- 1.1.3 This guide provides practical advice and real-world examples from made neighbourhood plans to help neighbourhood planning groups develop locally relevant settlement boundaries.
- 1.1.4 By using this document, you will gain a better understanding of what a settlement boundary is, the advantages of identifying one, the planning context in South Oxfordshire and best practices for including a settlement boundary policy. Whether you are creating a new plan or updating an existing one, this guide aims to help you develop well-justified, policy-compliant settlement boundaries tailored to the specific needs of your community.

1.2 What is a Settlement Boundary Policy?

- 1.2.1 A settlement boundary in a neighbourhood plan defines the built limits of a village or town. It clearly distinguishes between the built-up area and the surrounding open countryside.
- 1.2.2 Within a neighbourhood plan, a settlement boundary can be used to inform decisions on the location and scale of development. It acts as a reference point for determining where certain types of development may be supported, depending on local objectives and evidence.
- 1.2.3 A settlement boundary is not a tool for identifying what is or isn't part of a geographical area, such as a village. It is a tool for identifying a single cohesive built-up area. This may mean that there are areas which are considered to be part of a settlement, such as a scattering of houses a short distance from a larger

village, which should not be included within the settlement boundary as they fall outside the cohesive built-up area.

- 1.2.4 While the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance do not offer a formal definition of settlement boundaries, they do support plan-led approaches to shaping development patterns. The NPPF (Paragraph 15) establishes that the planning system should be genuinely plan-led with plans providing a positive vision for the future of each area.
- 1.2.5 The approach to drawing a settlement boundary may vary depending on local context, including the scale, character and development pressures within a particular neighbourhood area. A clearly defined methodology is essential to ensure transparency and consistency when establishing or reviewing settlement boundaries.

1.3 Why Identify a Settlement Boundary?

- 1.3.1 There are many advantages to identifying and including a settlement boundary within your neighbourhood plan. The key benefits include:
 - Community benefits,
 - Planning benefits, and
 - Spatial and environmental benefits.

Community Benefits

- 1.3.2 Settlement boundaries provide local communities with greater certainty over how and where development might occur:
 - **Increased Community Confidence:** Clear settlement boundaries help residents understand which areas are likely to be appropriate for future development and which will remain protected as countryside, reducing fear of inappropriate development.
 - **Support for Neighbourhood Plan Objectives:** Settlement boundaries reinforce the community's vision by aligning growth with locally agreed priorities.
 - **Strengthened Local Identity:** Defining settlement edges can help maintain the distinct character of villages and towns, preserving the feel and sense of place that residents value.
 - **Greater Local Control:** Allows communities to influence where development might happen.

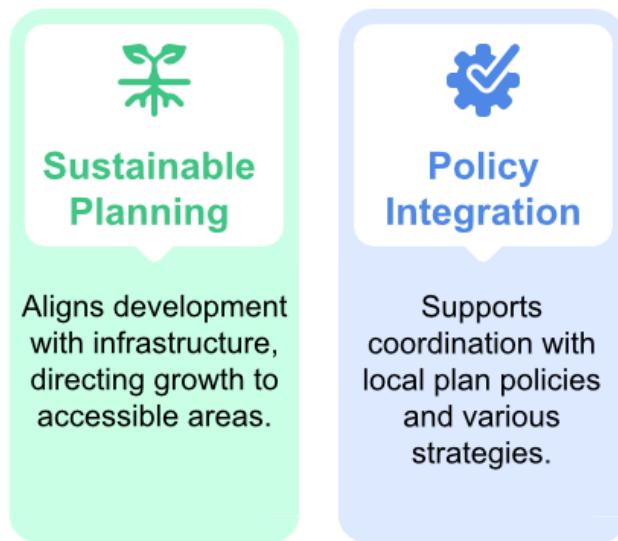
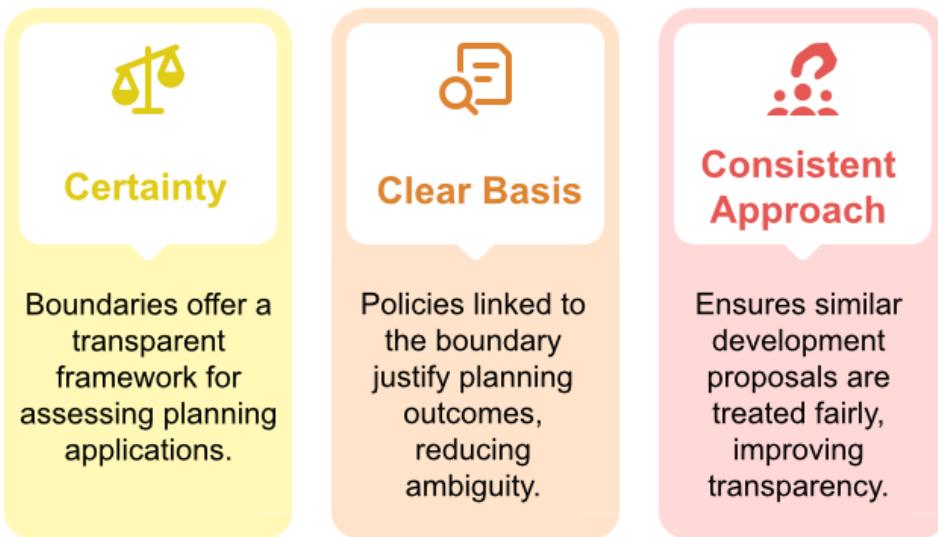
- **Housing Delivery Focused on Sustainable Locations:** Ensures new homes are built where they have good access to services and infrastructure.



Planning Benefits

1.3.3 Settlement boundaries offer clarity and consistency for decision-makers, developers, and local authorities:

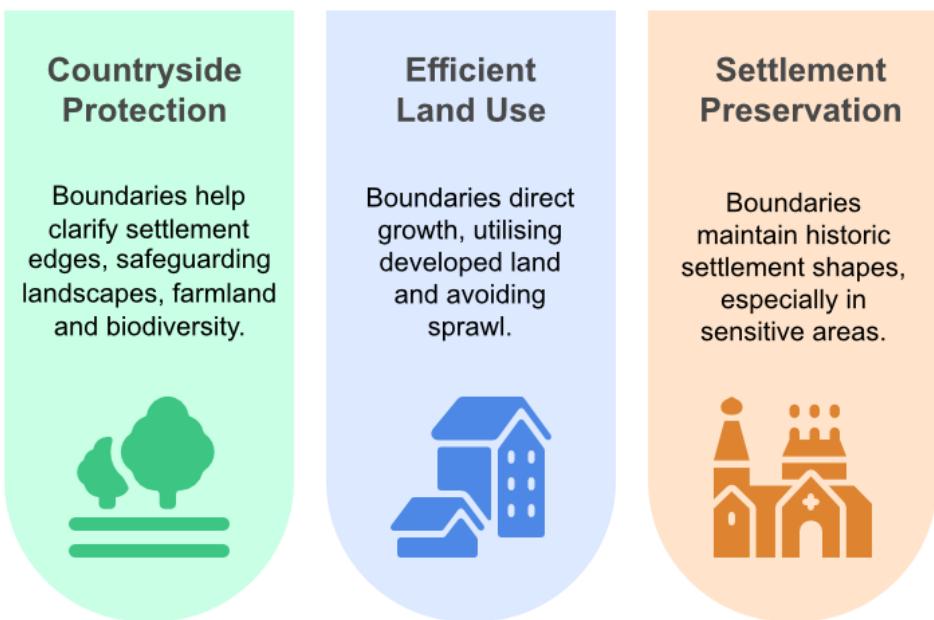
- **Certainty for Developers and Decision-Makers:** Settlement boundaries provide a transparent framework to assess planning applications and can guide site selection.
- **Clear Basis for Approval or Refusal:** Policies linked to the settlement boundary can justify expected planning outcomes, reducing ambiguity.
- **Enables a Consistent Approach:** Helps ensure similar development proposals are treated consistently across the neighbourhood area, improving transparency and accountability.
- **Supports Sustainable Planning:** Settlement boundaries help align development with available infrastructure and services, directing growth to more accessible and connected areas.
- **Facilitates Integration with Wider Policy:** A well-defined settlement boundary supports coordination with local plan policies and will be used alongside housing, environment and infrastructure policies.



Spatial and Environmental Benefits

1.3.4 Settlement boundaries can contribute to better spatial planning and countryside protection:

- **Protection of Open Countryside:** Settlement boundaries help clarify edge of settlements, which can aid in preventing inappropriate encroachment into rural areas, safeguarding landscapes, farmland and biodiversity.
- **Efficient Land Use:** Directing growth within defined settlement boundaries makes better use of previously developed or underused land and avoids unnecessary sprawl.
- **Preservation of Settlement Form:** Settlement boundaries can help maintain the historic shape and pattern of settlements, particularly important in areas with heritage value or environmental sensitivity.



1.4 Considerations and Limitations

1.4.1 While settlement boundaries offer a clear spatial framework and many planning benefits, it is important to consider their potential limitations. Neighbourhood planning groups should be aware of the following challenges when proposing or reviewing a boundary:

- **Reduced Flexibility:** Settlement boundaries can create a binary division between areas where development is considered acceptable and areas where it is not. This may limit the ability to apply nuanced, site-specific judgement, particularly in borderline cases.
- **Potential Land Value Disparities:** Can create differences in land values between sites within and outside the boundary, affecting property markets within a local area.
- **Housing Supply Restrictions:** If not carefully managed and appropriately aligned with strategic policies in the local plan, boundaries may constrain the amount of land available for housing, potentially impacting affordability or the ability to meet local housing needs and resulting in the neighbourhood plan not meeting the Basic Conditions.
- **Administrative Burden:** Establishing and justifying a settlement boundary requires careful evidence gathering, stakeholder engagement and ongoing review as part of the neighbourhood plan process.
- **Potential for Increased Development Pressure:** Designating a settlement boundary can focus development interest on land within the boundary, which may lead to more dense development proposals that risk altering the character of a settlement.

- **Opposition from Landowners:** Landowners whose land/sites fall outside the settlement boundary may object during consultation or examination stages of the neighbourhood plan, particularly if they perceive a loss of development potential.
- **Risk of Outdated Boundaries:** Settlements evolve over time. Without regular review, settlement boundaries can become misaligned with local needs, infrastructure improvements, or policy changes, leading to planning conflicts or missed opportunities.
- **Legal and Procedural Challenges:** Poorly evidenced or inconsistently drawn boundaries may face challenges during the neighbourhood plan examination or be subject to challenges if decisions are appealed.



1.4.2 Neighbourhood planning groups are encouraged to consider these factors when defining a settlement boundary. A flexible, evidence-led approach, supported by regular review and clear communication with the community, can help mitigate these risks and ensure the boundary remains effective over time.

2. Policy Conformity

2.1 Compliance with Planning Documents

2.1.1 Settlement boundary policies within a neighbourhood plan must meet the basic conditions set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). This means they must:

- have appropriate regard to national policy,
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the adopted Local Plan,
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, and
- be compatible with EU obligations and human rights requirements.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

2.2.1 The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) sets the national planning context which every neighbourhood plan must have regard to. While the NPPF does not provide a specific definition or direct requirement for settlement boundaries, several of its policies are highly relevant to decisions about their use and purpose. Below are the most relevant NPPF sections and paragraphs, together with practical pointers on how neighbourhood planning groups can consider these points in their local settlement boundary approach.

The Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

2.2.2 [Paragraph 11](#) sets out that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Specifically relevant to neighbourhood plans is paragraph 11.a) which sets out that all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects.

Promoting Sustainable Rural Communities (Section 5)

2.2.3 [Paragraph 83](#) supports sustainable development in rural areas by locating housing in locations that enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.



- 2.2.4 This is particularly relevant to groups preparing settlement boundary policies, as it reinforces the importance of directing housing growth to locations that can sustain local services and contribute to a thriving village or rural centre.
- 2.2.5 **Paragraph 84** discourages isolated homes in the countryside, barring in exceptional cases such as essential housing for rural workers or the reuse of heritage assets.
- 2.2.6 For neighbourhood planning groups, this provides national policy justification for drawing settlement boundaries in a way that prevents scattered, ad hoc development in the open countryside, instead promoting a more consolidated and coherent pattern of growth.

Supporting the Rural Economy (Section 6)

- 2.2.7 **Paragraph 88** of the NPPF supports the conversion of existing buildings, the development of well-designed new rural buildings and diversification of rural businesses.
- 2.2.8 This paragraph highlights the need for settlement boundary policies that do not unduly constrain appropriate economic development. A clearly defined boundary can help distinguish between areas suitable for concentrated growth and those where smaller-scale rural enterprise may still be appropriate.
- 2.2.9 **Paragraph 89** requires planning policies to recognise that sites to meet local business needs in rural areas may be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements. It also recognises the need for employment sites beyond settlements in areas not well served by public transport.
- 2.2.10 For those writing a boundary policy, this underlines the need for flexibility, acknowledging that while most development will fall within the boundary, there may be justified exceptions for employment use that serve wider rural economic objectives.
- 2.2.11 In this context, settlement boundary policies should aim to support the rural economy without being overly restrictive. Boundaries should be drawn in a way that provides certainty for developers while allowing scope for community-supported rural enterprise.

Promoting Sustainable Patterns of Development (Section 9)

- 2.2.12 **Paragraph 110** emphasises that significant development should be focused on locations that are, or can be made, sustainable through limiting the need to travel.

2.2.13 This aligns closely with the purpose of settlement boundaries, which help concentrate growth in accessible locations with existing infrastructure, rather than allowing dispersed development that increases car dependency.

Making Effective Use of Land (Section 11)

2.2.14 [Paragraph 125](#) encourages the effective use of land, giving substantial weight to using suitable brownfield land within existing settlements for homes and other needs.

2.2.15 This makes a strong case for boundary policies that encourage infill and redevelopment opportunities, ensuring land within settlements is used efficiently before considering outward expansion. By doing so, neighbourhood plans can contribute positively to national land-use efficiency goals.

Green Belt and Protected Landscapes (Section 13 and Section 15)

2.2.16 [Paragraphs 154 and 155](#) provide guidance on acceptable forms of development in the Green Belt, which often overlaps with rural locations.

2.2.17 For groups working in or near Green Belt areas, this provides essential guidance for defining settlement boundaries that respect Green Belt purposes while still enabling appropriate growth within existing constraints.

2.2.18 [Paragraph 187](#) refers to establishing coherent ecological networks that can cross settlement boundaries.

2.2.19 This has direct implications for boundary-setting as it encourages the protection and integration of green infrastructure and wildlife corridors into settlement edge planning, avoiding fragmentation of habitats.

2.2.20 [Paragraphs 189 and 190](#) addresses development within protected landscapes and the setting of protected landscapes, with implications for settlement edges.

2.2.21 These principles are vital when establishing the outer extent of a settlement boundary, ensuring that the visual character and natural qualities of surrounding landscapes are not compromised by poorly located development.

2.3 National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

2.3.1 The National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides detailed support for applying national planning policy and offers useful direction for neighbourhood planning groups when considering how to manage development, housing needs and sustainable growth. While it does not prescribe or define settlement boundaries directly, several areas of the guidance contain principles that settlement boundaries can help implement effectively at the local level.

2.3.2 **The Rural Housing section (Paragraph: 009 Reference ID: 67-009-20190722)** highlights the importance of locating rural exception housing sites adjacent to existing settlements. This reflects a wider emphasis on ensuring new rural housing contributes to the vitality of rural communities while remaining sensitive to the surrounding environment. By clearly identifying the limits of a settlement, a well-defined boundary provides a transparent spatial context for assessing whether a proposal is appropriately located in relation to the built form of the village or town. This clarity can support the delivery of rural exception sites in line with national guidance.

2.3.3 **In the Housing for Older and Disabled People section (Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 63-012-20190626)**, the PPG advises that accessible housing for these groups should be provided in locations with good access to local services and facilities. Drawing a settlement boundary that prioritises areas with walkable access to shops, health services, public transport and social infrastructure can help ensure new development for older or disabled residents is located where it supports independence and reduces reliance on private vehicles. This aligns with the national objective of inclusive and sustainable community development.

2.3.4 **The Housing Needs of Different Groups section (Paragraph: 020 Reference ID: 67-020-20190722)** underlines the importance of delivering housing in suitable locations that reflect the needs of different segments of the community and contribute to sustainable patterns of development. Settlement boundaries, when informed by evidence of local housing needs, can serve as a spatial planning mechanism to direct growth to the most appropriate and sustainable locations. This helps ensure that new development is both plan-led and responsive to demographic and social priorities, such as the needs of families and younger people.

2.3.5 Taken together, these sections of the PPG offer a clear rationale for the use of settlement boundaries in neighbourhood planning. While not mandatory, boundaries can support the practical delivery of national guidance by providing a spatial framework that enables appropriate growth, protects the countryside and responds to diverse local housing needs. Referencing these principles in the preparation of a neighbourhood plan can strengthen the evidence base and help demonstrate alignment with national policy at examination.

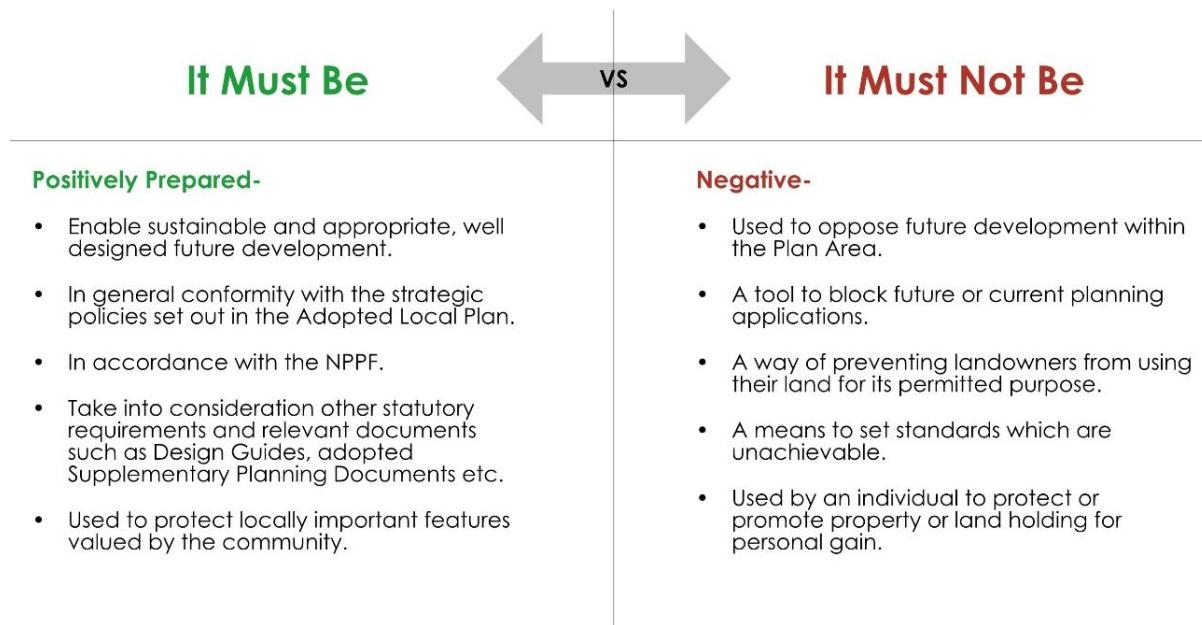
2.4 Conformity with the Local Plan

2.4.1 It is important to remember that the policies included in your neighbourhood plan should be specific to the local area and should meet the basic conditions set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). Neighbourhood planning policies should avoid directly copying and

repeating the same policy from the Local Plan¹. Instead, they should be tailored and crafted to fit the specific needs and demands of the neighbourhood area according to your evidence.

2.4.2 A neighbourhood plan must be positively prepared² and not a vehicle for preventing future development. This is not to say that you cannot protect elements, merely that it needs to be a balanced approach. The diagram below illustrates this.

When Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan



South Oxfordshire District Council Adopted Local Plan 2035

2.4.3 The currently adopted Local Plan for South Oxfordshire does not include a policy that defines or indicates the settlement boundary for any of the settlements classified as either Towns, Larger Villages, Smaller Villages and Other Villages. However, neighbourhood plans have been successfully introducing settlement boundaries across the district for several years. In adopted neighbourhood plans where settlement boundaries have been drawn, they have aided decision making within that area, alongside other development plan policies.

2.4.4 It is important to consider the overall spatial strategy for South Oxfordshire when determining where to draw a settlement boundary. The current spatial strategy is in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035. You should consider the implications of any

¹ Paragraph 16(f): <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/3-plan-making>

² Paragraph 16(b): <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/3-plan-making>

relevant strategic policies on your settlement boundaries, such as designated/allocated sites, landscape and biodiversity policies and heritage policies.

2.4.5 Below is a list of some of the relevant strategic policies you should consider in the adopted [South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035](#). Please be aware that there may also be other policies which are specific to your area.

- STRAT1: The Overall Strategy.
- STRAT2: South Oxfordshire Housing and Employment Requirements.
- STRAT3-14, HEN1, TH1 and WAL1: The strategy for each area (as applicable to the area you are in) – including Green Belt.
- EMP1: The Amount and Distribution of New Employment Land.
- EMP5-9: The employment strategy for each area (as applicable to the area you are in).
- ENV1: Landscape and Countryside.
- ENV2: Biodiversity – Designated Sites, Priority Habitats and Species.
- EP5: Minerals Safeguarding Areas.
- TRANS3: Safeguarding of Land for Strategic Transport Schemes.
- ENV7: Listed Buildings.
- ENV8: Conservation Areas.
- ENV9: Archaeology and Scheduled Monuments.
- Policy ENV10: Historic Battlefields, Registered Parks and Gardens and Historic Landscapes.
- H1: Delivering New Homes.
- H3: Housing in the Towns of Henley-on-Thames, Thame and Wallingford.
- H4: Housing in the Larger Villages.
- H8: Housing in the Smaller Villages.
- H16: Backland and Infill Development and Redevelopment.

2.4.6 The table below sets out the policy position in relation to the settlement hierarchy in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035.

Settlement Type	Policy Position
Towns	Accommodates a significant proportion of planned growth. Development primarily within existing built-up areas or on allocated sites.
Larger Villages	Can accommodate a moderate level of housing and employment growth. Development should be proportionate to the size and character of the settlement.
Smaller Villages	More limited development. Neighbourhood plans will need to demonstrate that the level of growth planned for is commensurate to the scale and character of village. Relies more on infill development and rural exception sites.
Other Villages	More limited development. Relies more on infill development and rural exception sites.

3. Policy Writing

3.1.1 Planning policies should be formulated and presented in a way that clearly communicates their intentions to readers. They must align with evidence gathered and community engagement, while supporting the vision and objectives established in the neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood plan policies should also be accessible through the use of digital tools, such as publishing the plan on a dedicated neighbourhood plan website where residents can comment and engage with draft content.

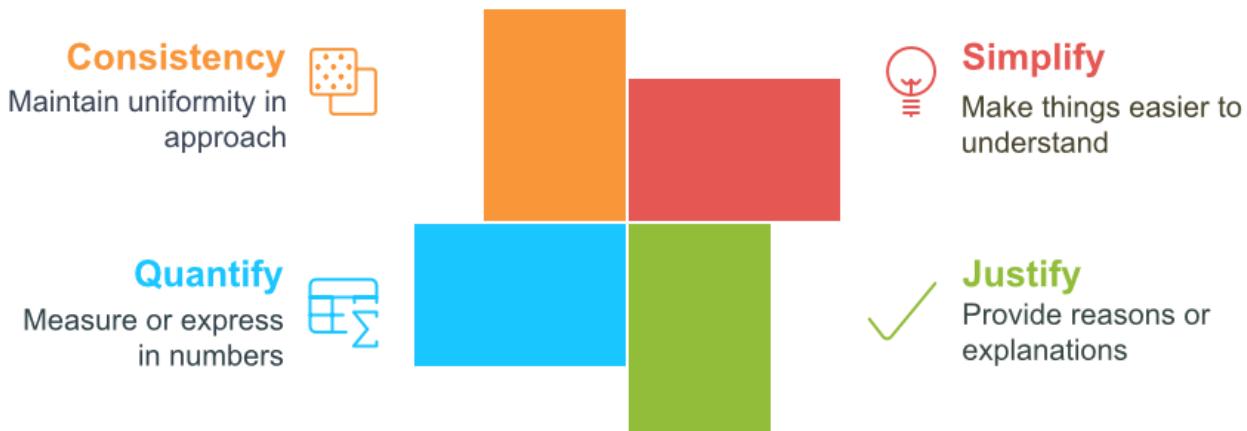
3.1.2 Policies must be clear, concise and fit for purpose as they will be used to determine planning applications.

3.1.3 The wording of planning policies must be precise and unambiguous. An individual should be able to understand the policy's intentions without confusion.

3.1.4 When writing policy, try to always follow these principles:

- **Simplify:** Use plain, accessible language. Avoid overly complex or technical wording that may confuse users of the plan.
- **Justify:** Ensure that each policy is supported by clear evidence, such as landscape assessments, survey data or community engagement findings. Refer to this evidence directly where relevant.

- **Quantify:** Where possible, include measurable criteria. This can help reduce ambiguity and make it easier for development proposals to be assessed consistently.
- **Consistency:** Maintain uniform terminology throughout the plan and across policies. This helps avoid confusion and ensures that the plan reads as a coherent whole.



3.2 Policy Wording and Implications

“Must” vs “Should” vs “Could”

Must – This creates a mandatory requirement. If a policy states that something “must” be done, there is no discretion; planning applications that do not comply should be refused.

Example: Sustainable design features in new developments must be sensitive to their location.

Should – This introduces a strong expectation but allows some flexibility. A decision-maker could approve a proposal that does not fully comply if there are justifiable reasons.

Example: New developments should incorporate green infrastructure to improve biodiversity.

Could – This makes policy requirements optional and therefore weakens the use of the policy in determining applications. However, it can be used to explore options.

Example: This could include, where appropriate, double glazing in Conservation Areas or secondary glazing in listed buildings.

"Encourage" vs "Require"

Require – This sets a firm obligation. A planning application should comply or risk refusal.

Example: All new housing developments are required to include energy-efficient design features.

Encourage – This suggests an aspiration rather than a firm requirement. Development proposals are not obliged to comply with it.

Example: The use of local materials is encouraged in new developments.

"Will Be Supported" vs "Will Be Permitted"

Will be supported – This provides support for a type of development and means it is likely to be approved unless it conflicts with other policies.

Example: The development of new community facilities will be supported where they meet identified local needs.

Will be permitted – Neighbourhood Plans cannot permit development and therefore this terminology should not be used. Local authorities must have the opportunity to properly consider proposals, ensuring they align with wider planning objectives and regulations.

4. How to Develop a Settlement Boundary Methodology

4.1.1 A sound methodology for defining settlement boundaries is essential for producing a robust and defensible policy within your neighbourhood plan. A consistent and transparent process helps ensure your boundary aligns with planning principles, supports sustainable development and stands up to scrutiny. The approach outlined below offers a practical, step-by-step guide that neighbourhood planning groups can adapt to their local context. While not exhaustive, it highlights the key components of an effective methodology.

Step 1: Research and Preparation

4.1.2 Begin by gathering relevant information to inform your approach. This includes reviewing any existing boundaries set out in the South Oxfordshire District Council Adopted Local Plan 2035 and emerging policy documents (if relevant), consulting guidance from South Oxfordshire and collecting up-to-date base mapping data (such as aerial photography or Ordnance Survey maps). Identifying key stakeholders, including landowners, local businesses and residents, is also vital for early engagement and ongoing consultation.

Step 2: Establish Clear Objectives

4.1.3 Define the purpose of the settlement boundary early in the process. Your objectives should reflect the unique characteristics and aspirations of your community and may include goals such as:

- protecting rural character and distinctiveness,
- focusing growth in sustainable locations,
- preventing settlement sprawl and coalescence, and
- supporting specific community development needs (e.g. housing or services).

4.1.4 These objectives will provide the foundation for subsequent decision-making and should be clearly documented.

Step 3: Define Core Principles

4.1.5 Set out consistent criteria for what types of land and development should be included or excluded from the boundary. While flexibility is important, applying principles systematically helps improve transparency.

4.1.6 Please note that the below lists are not exhaustive and will vary depending on location.

4.1.7 Typically included:

- existing built-up areas;
- sites with planning permission (committed development);
- allocated sites within Local or Neighbourhood Plans, considering potential green spaces and green buffers and, if it is appropriate to include, the whole allocation in the boundary;
- community facilities and their curtilages; and

- employment sites that are integral to the settlement.

4.1.8 Typically excluded:

- isolated development separated from the main settlement,
- agricultural buildings or farmsteads on the fringe,
- large gardens or paddocks that extend into open countryside,
- open recreational or sports facilities with limited built form,
- designated green gaps or local green spaces on the fringe of the settlement, and
- buildings where the use is more closely associated with the countryside.

Step 4: Apply a Consistent Assessment Approach

4.1.9 Evaluate each section of the proposed boundary using a structured and consistent method. This usually involves:

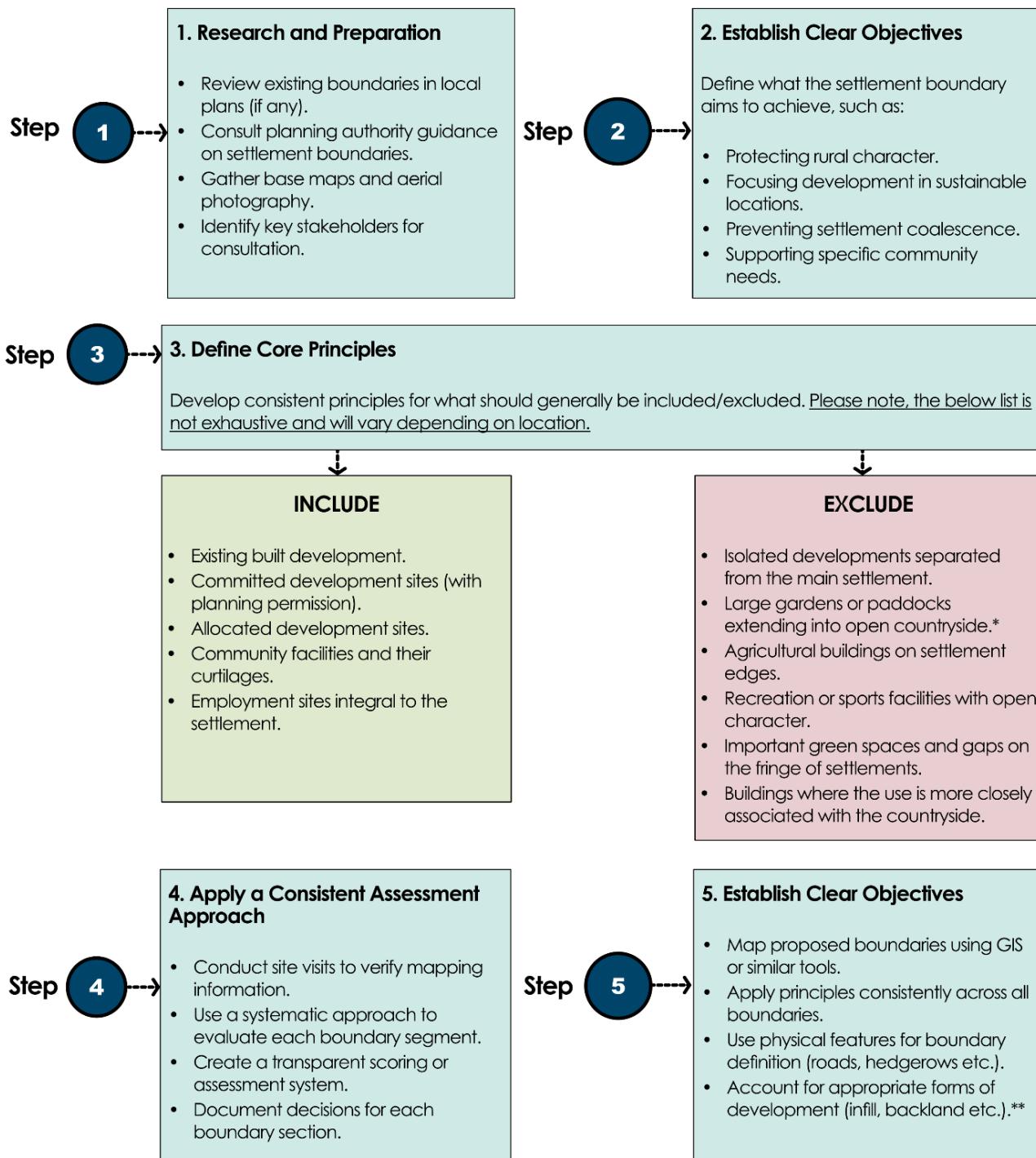
- conducting site visits to accurately map data,
- using a scoring or assessment system to apply your core principles fairly,
- mapping boundary segments using GIS or digital tools, and
- clearly documenting the rationale behind inclusions and exclusions.

4.1.10 This step ensures that the resulting boundary is evidence-led and can be defended during plan examination.

Step 5: Finalise and Map the Boundary

4.1.11 Once each boundary segment has been assessed, consolidate your decisions into a final mapped boundary. Use physical features such as roads, tracks or field boundaries (where possible) to reinforce clarity and defensibility. Where appropriate, account for appropriate forms of development (infill, backland, etc.).

How to Develop a Settlement Boundary Methodology



* In cases where properties have large gardens, it may be appropriate to draw the settlement boundary through the garden, rather than include it in full, to avoid the unnecessary incorporation of excessive land. This approach has been applied in locations such as Benson and Wallingford.

** The Local Plan sets out appropriate forms of development, including where backland development is considered appropriate. Your neighbourhood plan settlement boundary policy should refer to, and work within, this framework.

5. How to Test a Settlement Boundary Methodology

5.1.1 Once a draft settlement boundary has been developed, it is essential to rigorously test and refine the methodology to ensure it is robust, justified and deliverable in planning terms. The following stages offer a structured approach to testing the proposed boundary:

Step 1: Consultation and Refinement

5.1.2 Early engagement with the local planning authority is vital to ensure the draft boundary aligns with wider strategic objectives and emerging policy frameworks. Involving the wider community, including residents, local organisations, landowners and developers, can help identify areas of concern or support and provide valuable local insight. Feedback from these engagements should be used to refine the draft boundary and improve its defensibility.

Step 2: Documentation and Evidence

5.1.3 A transparent and well-documented process is essential for demonstrating how the settlement boundary was defined. This includes preparing a written methodology report that sets out the rationale for inclusion or exclusion of specific areas. All decisions should be supported by clear, reasoned justifications and mapped evidence. This documentation should show how the boundary contributes to the neighbourhood plan's wider spatial strategy and objectives.

Step 3: Testing and Review

5.1.4 Before finalising the boundary, test it against a range of development scenarios to understand how it may perform over time. This includes ensuring it does not unintentionally restrict appropriate growth or contradict other neighbourhood plan policies. Review the draft boundary for unintended consequences, such as cutting off key community facilities or allowing for fragmented development, and make adjustments as needed.

5.1.5 Finally, confirm that the settlement boundary aligns with the Local Plan and complies with national planning policy principles.

Testing a Settlement Boundary Methodology

Step

1

1. Consultation and Refinement

- Consult with the local planning authority early.
- Engage with the wider community on draft boundaries.
- Seek input from landowners and developers.
- Refine boundaries based on feedback.

Step

2

2. Documentation and Evidence

- Create a settlement boundary report explaining your methodology.
- Document all decisions with clear reasoning.
- Include maps at appropriate scales.
- Reference the relevant Local Plan policies.
- Link decisions to wider Neighbourhood Plan objectives.

Step

3

3. Testing and Review

- Test boundary proposals against likely development scenarios.
- Ensure compatibility with other neighbourhood plan policies.
- Review for unintended consequences.
- Verify alignment with strategic planning policies.

6. How to Display a Settlement Boundary

6.1.1 There is no single "correct" way to display a settlement boundary in your neighbourhood plan, but clarity, consistency and justification are essential. Maps should make it easy for both planning officers and members of the public to identify the boundary and understand why it matters.

Key Mapping Requirements for Settlement Boundaries

6.1.2 Below is a list of key mapping requirements for settlement boundaries. This list represents best practice examples and is not exhaustive.

- **Define the Boundary Clearly and Consistently:** The boundary line should be drawn with a distinct colour or style (e.g. solid red or black line) that is easy to identify on the map.
- **Justify Inclusion and Exclusion:** Areas included within the boundary should be consistent with your methodology and supported by evidence, such as existing development, allocations or planning permissions. Conversely, land excluded from the boundary, such as open fields or isolated plots, should reflect your stated criteria.
- **Link to Supporting Descriptions:** The map should be cross-referenced to relevant sections of your neighbourhood plan, including written policies and any supporting reports or assessments. This reinforces transparency and helps demonstrate how the boundary aligns with wider plan objectives.

Map Elements to Include

6.1.3 When designing your settlement boundary maps, use a clear, consistent cartographic style. The following components can help present the settlement boundary effectively:

- **Base Map:** Choose an up-to-date, clear, appropriately scaled base map that provides a good level of detail. Ordnance Survey maps, parish boundary maps, or aerial imagery are commonly used.
- **Settlement Boundary Line:** Clearly mark the proposed settlement boundary using a bold, distinct line style. If the map includes multiple types of boundaries or designations, ensure each is clearly differentiated and explained.
- **Legend and Key:** Always include a key that explains all symbols, line styles and colour codes used on the map. This helps ensure the map can be interpreted correctly without additional explanation.
- **Labels and Annotations:** Identify clearly notable features such as built-up areas, site allocations, community facilities and key infrastructure within the neighbourhood area. Labelling these can help justify why certain areas are included or excluded from the boundary.
- **Scale and North Arrow:** All maps should include a scale bar and north arrow for orientation and measurement purposes.
- **Policy Cross-Referencing:** Where appropriate, include references to policy numbers or evidence documents that relate to specific sections of the boundary. This supports transparency and helps link the map to the rationale behind the boundary line.

Examples of Effective Settlement Boundary Mapping

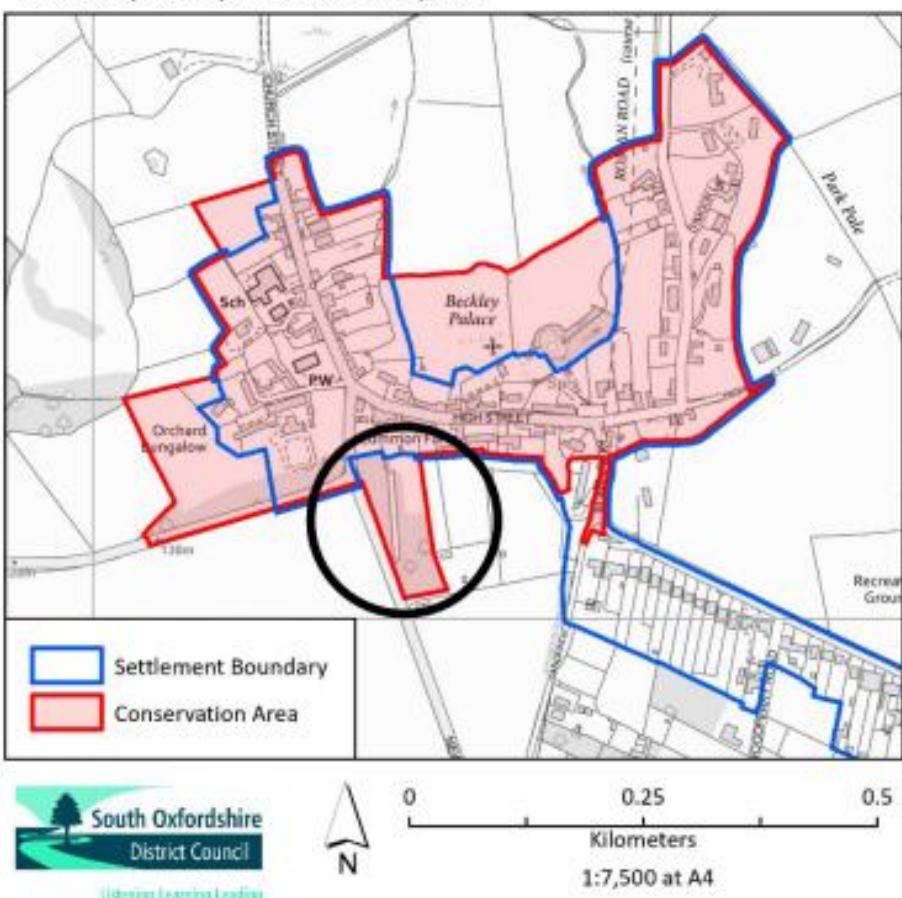
Beckley and Stowood (October 2024)

6.1.4 The Beckley and Stowood Neighbourhood Plan offers a strong example of effective settlement boundary mapping through a combination of Ordnance Survey mapping, aerial imagery and GIS mapping. The plan provides a transparent and well-justified boundary that reflects both historical development patterns and current land use. This approach helps ensure that development is concentrated in appropriate areas, preserving the character of the countryside while allowing for sustainable growth.

6.1.5 The mapping in the Beckley and Stowood Neighbourhood Plan uses circles to highlight certain features within the neighbourhood area, as shown below in Map 5. The associated image which relates to this area circled is shown in Map 6 below, and in this case shows a wooded garden and extensive garden associated with a property. This method of circling particular areas of the settlement boundary and offering further explanation is done multiple times.

Beckley and Stowood Settlement Boundary

Produced by the Corporate GIS Team July 2024





Map 6. Settlement Boundary – Aerial view showing gardens of Grove House and another along New Inn Road

6.1.6 The mapping approach demonstrates best practice through the following features:

- **Use of Multiple Map Types:** The plan employs a multi-layered approach, using a range of map formats including aerial imagery, historic Ordnance Survey maps (e.g. [Map 8 from 1937](#)) and modern GIS mapping.
- **Clear and Consistent Cartographic Presentation:** The settlement boundary is delineated using a bold, distinct line style on high-resolution base maps, supported by a clear legend and key. Conservation areas and other designations are differentiated with appropriate colour coding.
- **Annotation of Local Landmarks and Features:** Maps such as Map 6 identify notable features including gardens and nearby fields.
- **Integration of Historical Land Use Evidence:** The use of historical mapping, such as references to old quarries and Roman sites.

6.1.7 Why this approach is effective:

- **Use of Multiple Map Types:** Combining aerial imagery, historic Ordnance Survey maps and modern GIS data provides temporal and spatial evidence which strengthens the justification for the boundary, supports defensible decision-making and increases the credibility of the plan at examination.
- **Ensures Technical Accuracy and Usability:** Consistent with best practice in map readability and design, the final mapping includes essential cartographic components such as a scale bar, north arrow, legible labels and an explanatory legend. This makes the maps effective not only as

technical planning tools but also as accessible, user-friendly documents for consultation and examination.

- **Protects Key Landscapes and Prevents Sprawl:** The mapping helps preserve the integrity of the settlement by excluding areas such as isolated fields, large garden plots or wooded edges that fall outside the established built form. This reinforces a clear and defensible boundary between the village and open countryside. By aligning the boundary with identifiable landscape features and landmarks, the approach supports transparency and strengthens the justification for the inclusion or exclusion of specific parcels of land.
- **Provides Robust Historical and Contemporary Justification:** The integration of historic and current mapping allows for a clear, evidence-led rationale behind the boundary line. This layered context, illustrating both the evolution and current form of the settlement, enables decision-makers to defend the boundary at examination or planning appeals with confidence.

Benson Neighbourhood Plan (March 2023)

6.1.8 The Benson Neighbourhood Plan Review provides a compelling example of effective settlement boundary mapping, using a clear, modern cartographic approach combined with strong boundary justification. The plan incorporates the use of Ordnance Survey mapping and integrates current housing allocation data to create a boundary that reflects both the existing village structure and planned future development. This should ensure that any expansion remains well-contained within the development boundary, promoting sustainable growth while maintaining the rural character of surrounding areas.



Figure 7 – Settlement Boundary for Benson



6.1.9 The mapping approach demonstrates best practice through the following features:

- **Clear and Defined Settlement Boundary:** The boundary of Benson village is clearly delineated using a bold purple line.
- **Detailed Cartographic Presentation:** The map uses high-quality, legible Ordnance Survey base mapping.
- **Housing and Development Allocation Clarity:** Allocation land parcels within the village boundary are included.

6.1.10 Why this approach is effective:

- **Clear and Defined Settlement Boundary:** The bold purple line clearly delineates the village from surrounding countryside, providing a strong visual and functional separation between developed, to be developed and undeveloped areas. This ensures the boundary is defensible in planning discussions and protects open spaces and rural landscapes.
- **Ensures Technical Accuracy and Usability:** The map is clear and simplistic. It could be improved by including cartographic elements such as a scale bar, north arrow and legible labels. The clear and consistent mapping ensures the boundary is accurately represented and understood by all users.
- **Supports Sustainable Development and Growth:** By including areas allocated for housing and development, this approach helps focus growth within defined boundaries. It prevents urban sprawl by limiting development to specific areas, ensuring that the character of the surrounding countryside and rural environment is maintained.

7. Reviewing a Settlement Boundary

7.1.1 Settlement boundaries should be reviewed periodically to ensure they remain effective and relevant as development and local circumstances evolve. Regular updates to the settlement boundary help maintain clarity around areas suitable for development, protect important open spaces and ensure that land use aligns with current planning policies. Any changes to the settlement boundary will only be implemented through a formal review of the Neighbourhood Plan, ensuring a transparent process for stakeholders.

7.1.2 While there is no statutory requirement for a specific review timeline, here are some general recommendations to guide the process:

- **5-Year Review Cycle:** A regular five-year review cycle is advised to maintain an up-to-date boundary. This ensures that the settlement boundary accurately reflects the current development trends, infrastructure changes



and land availability, providing clarity for stakeholders and managing future development plans.

- **When the Local Plan is Updated:** Settlement boundaries should be reassessed whenever there is an update to the Local Plan. This ensures consistency with any new strategic policies.
- **Following Significant Development Completion:** Major developments, such as large housing schemes or new infrastructure projects, may alter settlement patterns. Once these developments are completed, it is advisable to review the settlement boundary to reflect any changes in the built environment and land use.

Triggers for Earlier Review

7.1.3 In addition to the regular review cycle, there are specific circumstances that may trigger an earlier review of the settlement boundary:

- **Housing Delivery Shortfalls:** If housing targets are not being met, the settlement boundary may need reconsideration to accommodate additional development or to better align with strategic housing allocations.
- **Unexpected Demographic Changes:** Significant population changes, such as an increase or decrease in the local population, may require adjustments to the settlement boundary to ensure the area remains suitable for future housing or community needs.
- **Economic Shifts:** Major changes in local employment patterns, such as the opening or closure of significant employers, may impact the need for housing or commercial development in certain areas, necessitating a boundary revision.
- **Infrastructure Developments:** The development of new transportation links, utilities or other infrastructure projects can alter the sustainability of settlement patterns, requiring a review of the boundary to ensure it accommodates or aligns with these changes.
- **Environmental Factors:** Changes in flood risk assessments, habitat designations or other environmental factors may impact the suitability of certain areas for development, requiring boundary adjustments to reflect new environmental protections.

Practical Considerations

7.1.4 The below list outlines practical considerations for managing and reviewing settlement boundaries within a neighbourhood plan:



- **Monitoring Framework:** It is recommended to include a monitoring framework within the neighbourhood plan that specifically addresses settlement boundaries. This will help track any changes in local conditions and highlight when a review may be necessary.
- **Partial Reviews:** If the boundary is the primary focus of the review, it may be appropriate to consider a partial review of the neighbourhood plan, rather than a full review. This can be more efficient and targeted, ensuring only the relevant elements are updated.
- **Documenting the Rationale:** It is essential to document the rationale for your chosen review period within the plan itself. This will provide transparency and help explain why the chosen timeline and triggers are appropriate for your specific settlement.
- **Establishing Thresholds:** Establish indicators in the plan that would trigger an earlier review if certain thresholds were met, such as significant population growth, housing delivery shortfalls or infrastructure changes. These indicators will help ensure that the settlement boundary remains responsive to evolving conditions.

7.1.5 By following these recommendations, neighbourhood planning groups can ensure that settlement boundaries are effectively managed, supporting sustainable development while protecting the community's character and the surrounding countryside.

Settlement Boundary Reviews

Recommended Review Timeline

- 5-year review cycle -** Creates a definitive line between built-up areas and surrounding countryside, providing clarity for all stakeholders.
- When the Local Plan is updated -** Settlement boundaries should be reassessed for consistency with any new strategic policies.
- Following significant development completion -** Major developments may change settlement patterns and warrant boundary adjustments.

Triggers for Earlier Review

- Housing delivery shortfalls -** If housing targets aren't being met, boundaries may need reconsideration.
- Unexpected demographic changes -** Significant population changes may necessitate boundary adjustments.
- Economic shifts -** Major changes in local employment patterns may require boundary revision.
- Infrastructure developments -** New transportation links or utilities may change settlement sustainability.
- Environmental factors -** New flood risk assessments or habitat designations may impact boundary suitability.

Practical Considerations

- Include a monitoring framework in your neighbourhood plan that specifically addresses settlement boundaries.
- Consider a partial review focused only on boundaries rather than a full plan review if appropriate.
- Document the rationale for your chosen review period in the plan itself.
- Establish indicators that would trigger an earlier review if certain thresholds are met.

8. Conclusion

8.1.1 Settlement boundaries can be a vital spatial planning tool for communities creating neighbourhood plans. When carefully designed and properly implemented, they offer clear guidance on the types of development appropriate within the boundary, while preventing unsuitable development outside of it.

8.1.2 The effectiveness of settlement boundaries relies on a thorough analysis of local conditions, as outlined in this guidance. Key considerations include:

- **Robust Methodology and Evidence:** A strong methodology supported by clear evidence is essential to demonstrate to both the community and external stakeholders, including the Examiner, how the boundary decisions were made. Engaging with stakeholders through transparent consultation is crucial in shaping your decisions.
- **Well-Defined Physical Boundaries:** The settlement boundary should be based on physical markers that are easily identifiable on the ground or referenced in an Ordnance Survey map of the area. This ensures clarity and consistency in defining and using the boundary.
- **Alignment with the Community's Vision:** The boundary must reflect the community's long-term vision for its growth and development, ensuring that the future of the area aligns with the shared aspirations of its residents.
- **Managing Development:** Remember, settlement boundaries are not intended to stop all development but to guide appropriate development towards suitable locations. They help steer development to areas that can sustainably accommodate it, supporting the community's needs while protecting valuable countryside and natural features.
- **Facilitating Sustainable Growth:** A well-placed settlement boundary ensures growth is appropriate in scale and can foster the development of vibrant, sustainable communities with essential local facilities. They assist in striking a balance between enabling development and preserving the area's unique character.
- **Adaptability Over Time:** As your community evolves, so too should the settlement boundary. A boundary that does not adapt over time may no longer reflect the changing needs of the community or the area's development requirements.
- **Ongoing Monitoring and Review:** Regular monitoring and review are essential to ensure that settlement boundaries remain relevant and responsive to changing circumstances. This will help the boundary adapt to new opportunities or challenges as they arise.

- **Positive Framework for Development:** The neighbourhood plan should offer a clear and positive framework for development, meeting both present and future needs while balancing growth with preservation of the area's character.

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Policy Examples in Made Neighbourhood Plans

9.1.1 The tables below list a number of settlement boundary policies found in made neighbourhood plans from across South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Districts. These tables serve only to provide examples, for an up to date list of the policies across the districts please refer to our [Neighbourhood Development Plan Policy Table](#).

Beckley and Stowood (October 2024)	Policy VB 1 – Settlement Boundary
Binfield Heath (October 2024)	Policy BH2 – Setting of Settlements and Coalescence
Brightwell-cum-Sotwell (Reviewed October 2023)	Policy BCS1 - Brightwell cum Sotwell Village Boundary
Chinnor (Reviewed November 2023)	Policy CH H7 – Development Boundary
Lewknor (December 2023)	Policy SS1: Settlement Boundaries – Lewknor and Postcombe
Sonning Common (Reviewed March 2023)	Policy RSB1 Policy RSB2
Tiddington with Albury (June 2023)	Policy TwA2: Village Boundaries and Infill Development
Towersey (December 2023)	Policy TOW1 – Village boundaries and infill development
East Hanney (May 2024)	Policy EHNP 2 – Settlement Boundary

9.2 Appendix 2: Policy Examples Expanded

9.2.1 The table showcases a number of made neighbourhood plan settlement boundary policies in their entirety.

Policy Title and Detail
<p>Policy VB 1. Settlement Boundary Beckley and Stowood (October 2024)</p> <p>To view the neighbourhood plan: Click here</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Plan defines the settlement boundary as set out in Map 10.</p> <p>Proposals for limited infill and the redevelopment of previously-developed land within the</p>

defined settlement boundary will be supported provided they accord with development management policies.

Development proposals outside the settlement boundary and outside the land north of Bayswater Brook strategic allocation will only be supported where they are appropriate for a Green Belt location as identified in Section 13 of the NPPF and have regard to the principles of sustainable development. Proposals for inappropriate development will not be supported except in very special circumstances.

Policy BCS1: Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Village Boundary

Brightwell-cum-Sotwell (Reviewed October 2023)

To view the neighbourhood plan: [Click here](#)

The Neighbourhood Plan defines the Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Village Boundary, as shown on the Policies Map.

Proposals for development within the boundary will be supported, provided they are of a use that is suited to the village and they have full regard to the local design code of Policy BCS6 and other relevant policies of the development plan including this Modified Neighbourhood Plan.

Proposals for development outside the boundary, including within the settlement of Mackney, will only be supported if they are appropriate to a countryside location and they are consistent with other relevant policies of the development plan including Policies BCS9 and BCS10 of this Modified Neighbourhood Plan.

Policy SS1: Settlement Boundaries - Lewknor and Postcombe

Lewknor (December 2023)

To view the neighbourhood plan: [Click here](#)

i. The Neighbourhood Plan defines settlement boundaries at Lewknor and Postcombe, as shown on Maps 2 & 3 which distinguish between the built-up areas of the Parish and the surrounding countryside.

ii. Within the settlement boundaries housing infill development will be supported where it contributes positively to local character and reflects the scale of the village.

iii. Within the Conservation Areas infill development should conserve or enhance the special architectural and historic character of these areas.

iv. Development within settlement boundaries will be supported subject to other Neighbourhood Plan policies provided that the development, individually or cumulatively, would not result in an extended linear form of development along a geographical feature, such as a road or watercourse, which would be out of keeping with the historic nucleated development form of the relevant village.

v. Proposals for development outside the boundaries will only be supported if they accord with policies of the Local Plan that manage development in the countryside.

9.3 Appendix 3: Settlement Boundary Assessment Sheet

9.3.1 This assessment template can be used by the neighbourhood planning group to help develop a settlement boundary.

Instructions

- Score each criterion below using the scale: Yes (Y) / Partial (P) / No (N) / Not Applicable (N/A).
- Provide brief comments to justify your assessment.
- Attach supporting evidence (photos, maps, planning history etc.) to this sheet.
- Use this assessment alongside site visits and mapping tools.

Scoring Guidance

9.3.2 How to score:

- Y (Yes): The criterion is fully met/appropriately addressed.
- P (Partial): The criterion is partially met/requires minor adjustment.
- N (No): The criterion is not met/requires significant adjustment.
- N/A (Not Applicable): The criterion does not apply to this boundary segment.

Settlement Boundary Site Information

Settlement Name:	
Boundary Segment Reference:	
Date of Assessment:	
Assessed by:	
Location Description:	

Settlement Boundary Objectives

9.3.3 Does the proposed boundary achieve the following objectives?

Objective (examples provided below)	Score (Y/P/N/N/A)	Comments/Evidence
Protect rural character and distinctiveness		
Focus growth in sustainable locations		
Prevent settlement sprawl and coalescence		

Support specific community development needs (e.g. housing or services)

9.3.4 Overall Assessment:

- Achieved
- Partially Achieved
- Not Achieved

Typically Included Criteria

9.3.5 Does the proposed boundary include the following?

Criterion	Score (Y/P/N/N/A)	Comments/Evidence
Existing built-up areas		
Sites with planning permission (committed development)		
Allocated sites within Local or Neighbourhood Plans (considering green spaces/buffers)		
Green Spaces		
Green Buffers		
Community facilities and their curtilages		
Employment sites		

9.3.6 Overall Assessment:

- Appropriate
- Requires Adjustment
- Inappropriate

Typically Excluded Criteria

9.3.7 Does the proposed boundary include the following?

Criterion	Score (Y/P/N/N/A)	Comments/Evidence
Isolated development separated from the main settlement		
Agricultural buildings or farmsteads on the fringe		

Large gardens or paddocks that extend into open countryside		
Open recreational or sports facilities with limited built form		
Designated green gaps or Local Green Spaces on the fringe		
Buildings where use is more closely associated with the countryside		

9.3.8 Overall Assessment:

- Appropriate
- Requires Adjustment
- Inappropriate

Summary Assessment

Section 1 (Objectives):	<input type="checkbox"/> Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Partially Achieved <input type="checkbox"/> Not Achieved
Section 2 (Inclusions):	<input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Requires Adjustment <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate
Section 3 (Exclusions):	<input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> Requires Adjustment <input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate

9.3.9 Making your recommendation:

- A settlement boundary should be progressed if it meets the objectives and has predominantly "Yes" scores for inclusion criteria and all "Yes" scores for exclusion criteria.
- A settlement boundary should be reconsidered if it fails to meet the objectives and has predominantly "No" scores for inclusion criteria and "Partial" or "No" scores for exclusion criteria.
- If scores are mixed (several "Partial" scores), consider whether boundary adjustments could address concerns.

9.3.10 Rationale and Justification – provide a clear explanation of your recommendation, referencing the scores above:

10. Glossary of Technical Terms

This section presents a list of technical terms and phrases frequently used in planning policy and neighbourhood planning. Each entry includes a brief definition to support understanding and promote clarity. Where possible, definitions have been sourced from the [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) Glossary (2024).

B

- **Built Edge** -the existing physical extent of built development forming the basis for settlement boundary definition.

C

- **Community Facilities** – social, recreational and cultural facilities that the community needs such as schools, local shops, meeting places, sports venue, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship
- **Conservation Areas** – an area designated by the Local Planning Authority under Section 69 of the Planning (listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 as an area of special architectural or historical interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.
- **Countryside** - areas outside settlement boundaries, subject to policies that resist development unless specific exceptions apply.

D

- **Development Plan** – is defined in section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, and includes adopted local plans, neighbourhood plans that have been made and published spatial development strategies, together with any regional strategy policies that remain in force. Neighbourhood plans that have been approved at referendum are also part of the development plan, unless the local planning authority decides that the neighbourhood plan should not be made.

G

- **Green Belt** - land kept permanently open, serving five purposes as defined by the NPPF including: checking urban sprawl of large built-up area; preventing neighbouring towns merging; assisting in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; preserving the setting and special character of historic towns; and assisting in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

I

- **Infill Development** - the filling of a small gap in an otherwise continuous built-up frontage, or within settlements where the site is closely surrounded by buildings.
- **Infrastructure** – all the ancillary works and services that are necessary to support human activities, including roads, sewers, schools, hospitals, etc.
- **Isolated Homes in the Countryside** - the NPPF resists isolated dwellings in the countryside unless specific circumstances apply. 'Isolation' should be defined by its ordinary meaning - whether development is physically separate/apart from other built form.

L

- **Large Built-Up Areas** - significant urban areas.

N

- **National Landscapes (formerly Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - AONBs)** – areas legally designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 and Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.
- **Non-Strategic Policies** – policies contained in a neighbourhood plan, or those policies in a local plan that are not strategic policies.

P

- **Physical Features** - permanent features like roads, field boundaries, curtilages of buildings used to define settlement boundaries.
- **Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development** - core NPPF principle that plans and decisions should approve sustainable development unless adverse impacts significantly outweigh benefits.
- **Proposals Map/Policies Map** - map showing land-use designations and allocations identified in the local plan.
- **Proportionate Growth** - development that is appropriate to the size and character of existing settlements, typically through small-scale development.

R

- **Rural Exception Sites** - small sites used for affordable housing in perpetuity where sites would not normally be used for housing. Rural exception sites seek to address the needs of the local community by accommodating households

who are either current residents or have an existing family or employment connection. A proportion of market homes may be allowed on the site at the local planning authority's discretion, for example where essential to enable the delivery of affordable units without grant funding.

S

- **Settlement Boundary** - defined lines drawn on a map to indicate where a town or village's built-up area ends and the countryside begins.
- **Strategic Policies** - policies and site allocations which address strategic priorities in line with the requirements of Section 19 (1B-E) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- **Sustainable Development** - development that meets present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs, comprising economic, social and environmental objectives.
- **Sustainable Transport** - efficient, safe and accessible transport with low impact on the environment, including walking and cycling, ultra low and zero emission vehicles, car sharing and public transport.



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Alternative formats of this publication are available on request. These include large print, Braille, audio, email, easy read and alternative languages.

If you would like to discuss neighbourhood planning with a member of the team, please call us on 01235 422600 or email planning.policy@southandvale.gov.uk