Acle Neighbourhood Development Plan Review
2025-2040

A report to Broadland District Council and The Broads Authority on the Acle Neighbourhood Development Plan Review

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Executive Summary

1 I was appointed by Broadland District Council and the Broads Authority in July 2026 to carry out the independent examination of the Acle Neighbourhood Plan Review.

2 The examination was undertaken by written representations. I visited the neighbourhood area on 21 August 2026.

3 The Plan includes a variety of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. The Plan has a focus on ensuring high-quality design, the proposed designation of a series of Local Green Spaces, the identification of important local views, and consolidating the role of the village centre. The review process has been undertaken in short order.

4 The Plan has been underpinned by community support and engagement. All sections of the community have been engaged in its preparation.

5 Subject to a series of recommended modifications set out in this report, I have concluded that the Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.

6 I recommend that the referendum area should coincide with the designated neighbourhood area.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
27 October 2026

1 Introduction

1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the review of the Acle Neighbourhood Development Plan 2025-2040 ('the Plan').

1.2 The Plan was submitted to Broadland District Council (BDC) and the Broads Authority (BA) by Acle Parish Council (APC) in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan.

1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2023, 2024 and 2026. The NPPF continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.

1.4 The role of an independent examiner is clearly defined in the legislation. I have been appointed to examine whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions and Convention Rights and other statutory requirements. It is not within my remit to examine or to propose an alternative plan, or a potentially more sustainable plan except where this arises from my recommended modifications to ensure that the plan meets the basic conditions and the other relevant requirements.

1.5 A neighbourhood plan can be narrow or broad in scope and can include whatever range of policies it sees as appropriate to its designated neighbourhood area. The submitted Plan has been designed to be distinctive in general terms, and to be complementary to the existing development plan. It has a focus on ensuring high-quality design, the proposed designation of a series of Local Green Spaces, the identification of important local views, and consolidating the role of the village centre.

1.6 Within the context set out above, this report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the basic conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.

1.7 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case and that referendum results in a positive outcome the Plan would then become part of the wider development plan and be used to determine planning applications in the neighbourhood area.

2 The Role of the Independent Examiner

2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.

2.2 I was appointed by BDC and the BA, with the consent of APC, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of BDC, the BA and APC. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.

2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. In previous roles, I have 43 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level and more recently as an independent examiner. I have significant experience of undertaking other neighbourhood plan examinations and health checks. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral System.

Examination Outcomes

2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan, I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:

(a) that the Plan as submitted should proceed to a referendum; or
(b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
(c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.

2.5 The outcome of the examination is set out in Section 8 of this report.

Other examination matters

2.6 In examining the Plan, I am required to check whether:

- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
- the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and
- the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.

2.7 I have addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.6 of this report and am satisfied that they have been met.

2.8 Section 98 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 was enacted in March 2026. It requires that a neighbourhood plan:

- so far as the qualifying body considers appropriate, and having regard to the subject matter of the plan, must be designed to ensure that the development and use of land in the neighbourhood area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change; and
- so far as the qualifying body considers appropriate and having regard to the subject matter of the plan, must be designed to take account of any local nature recovery strategy under section 104 of the Environment Act 2021 that relates to all or part of the neighbourhood plan area.

2.9 I have addressed these two matters and have taken account of the comprehensive information in the Basic Conditions Statement. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan complies with these two requirements. Section 6 of this report comments more widely on the basic conditions.

3 Procedural Matters

3.1 In undertaking this examination I have considered the following documents:

- the submitted Plan
- the Basic Conditions Statement
- the Consultation Statement
- the SEA screening report
- the HRA screening report
- the Acle Design Codes and Guidance
- the Housing Needs Assessment
- the Data Profile
- the representations made to the Plan
- APC's responses to the clarification note.
- the Greater Norwich Local Plan
- the Broadland Development Management Development Plan Document 2015
- The Broads Local Plan
- the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024 and August 2026)
- Planning Practice Guidance
- relevant Ministerial Statements

3.2 I visited the neighbourhood area on 21 August 2026. I looked at its overall character and appearance and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan.

The examination process for the review of a neighbourhood plan

3.3 The Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 identifies the circumstances that might arise as and when qualifying bodies seek to review 'made' neighbourhood plans and introduces a proportionate process to do so based on the changes proposed.

3.4 There are three types of modification which can be made to a neighbourhood plan or order. The process will depend on the degree of change which the modification involves and as follows:

- minor (non-material) modifications to a neighbourhood plan or order which would not materially affect the policies in the plan or permission granted by the order. These may include correcting errors, such as a reference to a supporting document, and would not require examination or a referendum; or
- material modifications which do not change the nature of the plan or order and which would require examination but not a referendum. This might, for example, entail the addition of a design code that builds on a pre-existing design policy, or the addition of a site or sites which, subject to the decision of the independent examiner, are not so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the plan; or
- material modifications which do change the nature of the plan or order would require examination and a referendum. This might, for example, involve allocating significant new sites for development.

3.5 The statement produced by APC advises that all existing policies have been reviewed, and that not all were considered to be in need of amendment. Furthermore, it comments that where gaps in policy have been identified new policy has been prepared to address these issues and they relate mainly to the natural and historic environment. For these reasons, APC concludes that the modifications to existing policies nor the introduction of new policies are so significant or substantial as to change the nature of the neighbourhood development plan.

3.6 I have considered APC's commentary very carefully. Taking account of all the available information, I have concluded that the significance or substance of the modifications proposed to the Plan is such that both an examination and a referendum are required. In this context, I have concluded that the proposed modifications are so significant as to change the nature of the Plan. I have reached this decision for two reasons. The first is the cumulative effect of the new policies in the Plan (Policies ACLE10-16). The second is the specific effect of the proposed package of Local Green Spaces in Policy ACLE12.

3.7 APC acknowledged this decision and was comfortable for the examination to proceed on this basis.

General Comment

3.8 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations made to the submitted Plan, I was satisfied that the Plan could be examined without the need for a public hearing.

NPPF August 2026

3.9 A revised version of the NPPF was published in August 2026. The implementation arrangements in its Annex A advise that plans submitted before its publication date (17 August 2026) will have been prepared on the basis of the 2024 version of the NPPF. This applies to the submitted Plan. The examination has continued on this basis. Any references to the NPPF in this report are to the December 2024 version of the document.

4 Consultation

Consultation Process

4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such, the regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.

4.2 In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2012, APC prepared a Consultation Statement. It is proportionate to the neighbourhood area and its policies. It is commendably concise and underpinned by more detailed appendices.

4.3 The Statement records the various activities that were held to engage the local community and the specific work undertaken on specialist reports. There is a clear focus on the Household Survey.

4.4 The Statement also provides specific details on the consultation processes that took place on the pre-submission version of the Plan (November 2025 to January 2026). The comments received on that version of the Plan are listed in Appendix 4e along with commentary about the way in which the Plan was refined because of this process.

4.5 I am satisfied that consultation has been an important element of the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation. From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I can see that the Plan has promoted an inclusive approach to seeking the opinions of all concerned throughout the process. BDC has carried out its own assessment that the consultation process has complied with the requirements of the Regulations.

Consultation Responses

4.6 Consultation on the submitted plan was undertaken by BDC. This exercise generated representations from the following organisations:

- National Highways
- Environment Agency
- Norfolk Wildlife Trust
- The Broads Society
- Norfolk County Council
- Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service
- The Broads Authority
- The Broads Drainage Board
- Repton Property Developments and Lovell Homes (Repton/Lovell)
- Broadland District Council
- Water Management Alliance
- Anglian Water

- Natural England
- NHS Norfolk and Suffolk ICB

4.7 I have taken account of all the representations in preparing this report. Where it is appropriate to do so, I refer to specific representations on a policy-by-policy basis.

5 The Neighbourhood Area and the Development Plan Context

The Neighbourhood Area

5.1 The neighbourhood area is the parish of Acle. Acle is a historic village located between Norwich to the west and Great Yarmouth to the east. The parish is located within Broadland District and the Broads Executive Area. The neighbourhood area is primarily rural and is characterised by arable farmland on higher ground in the west and south, with marshland /pasture on low-lying land in the north and east. The village of Acle is located in the centre of the parish on the edge of the higher ground. It has an attractive and vibrant village centre. It was designated as a neighbourhood area on 20 August 2013. The population in 2021 was 2,824 persons living in approximately 1,300 households.

5.2 The overlap between Acle and the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads results in the neighbourhood area containing a number of important landscapes, wildlife areas and green spaces. Primarily, to the southeast of the village there is a large low-lying area known as Decoy Carr which is designated as a Ramsar site, Special Area of Conservation, Special Protected Area and Site of Special Scientific Interest. In addition, there are a number of important wildlife sites and natural assets such as Roman Wood.

5.3 Acle is well served by community and sports facilities with a large recreation centre and grounds, a library, health centre and various community meeting rooms. The recreation centre provides outdoor sports pitches, children's play areas, lawn bowls and indoor bowls facilities, tennis courts, five-a-side pitches and a social club. There are four other play areas within the village. Acle Academy serves the village and a large rural hinterland. The village also has a primary school and pre-school facilities. In the round it is a very interesting and diverse area in which to prepare a neighbourhood plan.

Development Plan Context

5.4 The Basic Conditions Statement sets out the comprehensive nature of the development plan context for the neighbourhood area.

5.5 BDC and South Norfolk Councils have worked with Norwich City Council and Norfolk County Council to prepare the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP). The GNLP comments about the housing and job needs of the area to 2038 and builds on the long-established joint working arrangement for Greater Norwich. It includes strategic policies to guide future development and plans to protect the environment. It looks to ensure that delivery of development is done in a way which promotes sustainability and the effective functioning of the whole area. The GNLP was adopted by BDC in March 2024.

5.6 Acle is identified as a 'Key Service Centre' in the settlement hierarchy of the GNLP. The approach to such settlements is that they will continue to be developed to enhance their function as places to live, and providers of employment and services to serve the settlement and its hinterland, with significant levels of development expected to take

place in the majority of Key Service Centres. The GNLP makes provision in Acle for both residential and employment development. The provision for residential development is 580 dwellings (between 2018 and 2038). This provision is made up of two main components. The first is a new allocation (B.AC.1) of land west of Acle (north of Norwich Road, south of South Walsham Road, 25.5 hectares) for residential development and will accommodate approximately 340 homes, associated open space and community facilities. The second is a further 240 homes which have either been completed, received planning permission, or are rolled-forward allocations, from the previous Joint Core Strategy.

5.7 The Broads Local Plan was adopted in May 2019. It seeks to ensure that The Broads remains a key national and international asset and a special place to live, work and visit. The Local Plan is currently being reviewed.

5.8 In this broader context, APC has carefully produced a Plan which seeks to complement the existing development plan. In addition, the submitted Plan has relied on up-to-date information and research that has underpinned existing planning policy documents. This is good practice and reflects key elements in Planning Practice Guidance on this matter.

Visit to the neighbourhood area

5.9 I visited the neighbourhood area on 21 August 2026. I approached it from the west along the A47. This helped me to understand its position in general and its accessibility to the strategic road network.

5.10 I looked carefully at the character and vibrancy of the village centre, the proposed Local Green Spaces, and the proposed important views.

5.11 I saw the importance of the railway station to the immediate south of the town.

5.12 I also looked carefully at the area around the Acle Bridge Inn. Thereafter I drove to the north and east into the part of the neighbourhood area within The Broads.

6 The Neighbourhood Plan and the Basic Conditions

6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted neighbourhood plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped in the preparation of this section of the report. It is an informative and well-presented document.

6.2 As part of this process, I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:

- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- ensure that the making of the neighbourhood development plan would not result in the development plan for the area of the authority proposing that less housing is provided by means of development taking place in that area than if the neighbourhood development plan were not to be made;
- not breach, and otherwise be compatible with, the assimilated obligations of EU legislation (as consolidated in the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 (Consequential Amendment) Regulations 2023; and
- not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

I assess the Plan against the basic conditions under the following headings.

National Planning Policies and Guidance

6.3 For the purposes of this examination, the key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework December 2024 (NPPF).

6.4 The NPPF sets out a range of land-use planning principles to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following are particularly relevant to the review of the Acle Neighbourhood Development Plan:

- a plan-led system - in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and the local plan context in Broadland District and The Broads Authority (as described in Section 5 of this report);
- building a strong, competitive economy;
- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving local communities;
- taking account of the different roles and characters of different areas;
- highlighting the importance of high-quality design and good standards of amenity for all future occupants of land and buildings; and
- conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

6.5 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally, and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 13 of the NPPF indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.

6.6 In addition to the NPPF, I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy including Planning Practice Guidance and ministerial statements.

6.7 Having considered all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance subject to the recommended modifications in this report. The Plan has a focus on ensuring high-quality design, the proposed designation of a series of Local Green Spaces, the identification of important local views, and consolidating the role of the village centre.

6.8 At a more practical level, the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraph 16d). This was reinforced with the publication of Planning Practice Guidance. Paragraph ID: 41-041-20140306 indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. Policies should also be concise, precise, and supported by appropriate evidence.

6.9 As submitted, the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. Most of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan fully accords with national policy.

Contributing to sustainable development

6.10 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the contribution that the submitted Plan makes to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social, and environmental. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. In the economic dimension, the Plan includes policies for new housing (Policy ACLE1), for the village centre (Policy ACLE4) and for mixed uses (Policy ACLE5). In the social role, it includes policies on local green spaces (Policy ACLE12), and on education and health issues (Policy ACLE7). In the environmental dimension, the Plan positively seeks to protect its natural, built, and historic environment. It has policies on design (Policy ACLE1), flood risk (Policy ACLE10), biodiversity (Policy ACLE13) and heritage assets (Policy ACLE16). This assessment overlaps with the details on this matter in the submitted Basic Conditions Statement.

The making of the neighbourhood development plan would not result in the development plan for the area of the authority proposing that less housing is provided by means of development taking place in that area than if the neighbourhood development plan were not to be made

6.11 I have already commented in detail on the development plan context in Section 5 of this report.

6.12 The Basic Conditions Statement advises that there is one specific housing allocation made in the adopted GNLP - B.AC.1: Land west of Acle, north of Norwich Road, south of South Walsham Road (340 dwellings). It also asserts that the policies of the modified Plan do not prevent this allocation from coming forward, nor do they place any undue restrictions on it. It also advises that the policies of the modified Plan seek to facilitate sustainable development through good design, layout and connections to the village centre and other facilities. The modified Acle Neighbourhood Plan also acknowledges in Policy ACLE2 that development will come forward during the plan period through infill and windfall development and on underused or vacant land within the adopted settlement limit.

6.13 In general terms, I agree with APC's conclusions on this matter. However, I have recommended modifications to some of the policies in the Plan to ensure that they do not inadvertently conflict with this basic condition and result in the development of less than 340 homes on the allocated site in the Local Plan.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

6.14 The Neighbourhood Plan (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 require a qualifying body either to submit an environmental report prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 or a statement of reasons why an environmental report is not required.

6.15 In order to comply with this requirement, BDC and the BA undertook a screening exercise in December 2025 on the need or otherwise for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be prepared for the Plan. The report is thorough and well-constructed. It concludes that the Plan is unlikely to have a significant effect on the environment and therefore does not require a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

6.16 BDC/The Broads Authority undertook a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan in October 2025. It assesses the potential impact of the Plan's policies on the Broads/Broadland SPA/Ramsar/SAC.

6.17 The HRA concludes that the neighbourhood plan will not give rise to likely significant effects on these protected sites, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, and that Appropriate Assessment is not required.

6.18 Having reviewed the information provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that a proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various regulations. None of the statutory consultees have raised any concerns about

these matters. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with this aspect of neighbourhood plan regulations.

Human Rights

6.19 In a similar fashion, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. There has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. On this basis, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

Summary

6.20 On the basis of my assessment of the Plan in this section of my report, I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications contained in this report.

7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

7.1 This section of the report comments on the policies in the Plan. It makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that the various policies have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.

7.2 The recommendations focus on the policies in the Plan given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended changes to the associated supporting text.

7.3 I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan are fit for purpose. It is distinctive and proportionate to the neighbourhood area. The wider community and APC have spent time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that they wish to be included in the review of the Plan. This sits at the heart of the localism agenda.

7.4 The Plan has been designed to respond to Planning Practice Guidance (ID:41-004-20190509) which indicates that neighbourhood plans should address the development and use of land.

7.5 I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted Plan.

7.6 For clarity, this section of the report comments on all the Plan's policies.

7.7 Where modifications are recommended to policies, they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

The initial parts of the Plan (Sections 1-5)

7.8 The Plan is well-organised and has been prepared with much attention to detail and local pride. It makes an appropriate distinction between the policies and their supporting text. Its presentation is first-class. The use of colours, excellent maps and figures, and carefully chosen photographs ensures that the Plan is easy to understand and navigate.

7.9 The initial elements of the Plan set the scene for the policies. They are proportionate to the neighbourhood area and the subsequent policies. The Introduction sets the scene for the Plan. Figure 1 sets out the process which the preparation of the Plan has followed. It identifies the Plan period and the neighbourhood area (in Figure 2). It also sets out the reasoning behind the Plan's review.

7.10 Section 2 provides the planning policy context within which the Plan has been prepared. Paragraph 2.8 advises that the GNLP makes provision for 580 dwellings in Acle between 2018 and 2038. This provision is made up of a new allocation (B.AC.1), which will provide 340 new homes, and a further 240 homes which have either been completed, received planning permission, or are rolled-forward allocations from the previous Joint Core Strategy

7.11 Section 3 provides information about the parish. It provides interesting and comprehensive details which help to set the scene for the eventual policies.

7.12 Section 4 comments about the way in which the Plan was prepared. The breakdown of events overlaps with the details in the Consultation Statement. It helpfully identifies the various phases in the evolution of the Plan. In addition, it is presented in an attractive and easily understood format.

7.13 Section 5 sets out the Vision for the parish as follows:

'*As the "Gateway to the Broads", Acle will continue to flourish as a key service centre, whilst maintaining its rural village identity. Development will be sustainable, well designed, create healthy and safe places, environmentally conscious and community focused. Acle will be a prosperous place for all generations to live, work and visit.'*

7.14 Section 5 also sets out a series of Objectives. The Vision and the Objectives collectively provide a framework for the policies. This is shown diagrammatically in Figure 13. Section 5 also comments about the way in which the Review intends to revise the policies in the made Plan.

7.15 The remainder of this section of the report addresses each policy in turn in the context set out in paragraphs 7.5 to 7.7 of this report.

Policy ACLE1: The Design of New Development

7.16 This is a modified policy. The Plan comments that it includes much of former Policy 10 and acts as principal design policy for the Plan. The supporting text advises that the policy seeks to ensure that any new development in or around the village should be mindful of the special physical characteristics of Acle and its sense of community identity. It also advises that it expects that house builders and promoters will take steps to ensure that any new housing developments integrate socially as well as physically into the existing settlement.

7.17 The policy has the following three elements:

- The design of all new development in Acle should reflect the village's local distinctiveness and identity and seek to enhance the quality of the built environment and Acle's overall character.
- Proposals for new development, including residential and non-residential development, should be of a high standard of design and have regard to the guidance set out in the Acle Parish Design Guidance and Codes 2025.
- Development proposals should refer to the relevant Character Area analysis found in Appendix A of the Acle Parish Design Guidance and Codes 2025, to have a better understanding of Acle's context. This applies to larger-scale development and small-scale development such as infill and extension

7.18 In general terms, this is an excellent policy which is underpinned by the Design Guidance and Codes (Appendix B). In the round, it is a first-class response to Section 12 of the NPPF.

7.19 BDC and the BA set out a series of detailed points on the policy.

7.20 I have noted the Integrated Care Board's support for the policy and the changes made in the plan preparation process.

7.21 Repton/Lovell comment about several elements set out in the policy and the associated Design Code.

7.22 I have considered these comments carefully within the broader context of APC's ambitions for the policy. In this context, I recommend a series of modifications to the policy to bring the clarity required by the NPPF and to allow BDC/the BA to implement the policy through the development management process. In specific terms, they seek to safeguard the integrity of the allocated site on the edge of the village in the adopted Local Plan and to ensure that the details in the policy do not inadvertently prevent the number of homes as anticipated in that policy. In summary, the recommended modifications are as follows:

- a recasting of the fourth part of the policy so that it requires a positive response to, rather than a careful consideration of, the identified Design Guidance and Code themes;
- detailed revisions to the requirements for various Design Guidance and Code themes; and
- the deletion of the biodiversity element from the Design Guidance and Code.

7.23 Otherwise, I am satisfied that the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the fourth part of the policy with:

'As appropriate to their scale nature and location, proposals for new housing development should respond positively to the following design code themes:'

Replace RV.01.2 Settlement Edge with:

'Developments on the edge of Acle should integrate sympathetically into the village and transition into the countryside by using comprehensive landscaped buffering and avoid hard edges to development. The design and layout of larger developments should ensure that they provide access to existing Public Rights of Way connecting the village to the countryside. Residential development proposals should incorporate dedicated green spaces and green verges within their layout that link to create 'green corridors' which link the countryside to the village.'

Replace RV.01.4 Building Form with:

'New dwellings should be either single storey bungalows or 1.5–2.5 storey houses and respond positively to the context provided in the immediate locality.'

Replace RV.01.5 Extensions with:

'Extensions should be appropriate in size and scale to the massing and layout of the existing main building, and be subservient to the main building.

Extensions should be designed so as not to result in a significant impact in terms of loss of privacy and overlooking, overshadowing or an otherwise overbearing impact on neighbouring properties. Extensions should include appropriate car parking provision and not reduce the amount of off-street parking below the required standards.'

Replace RV.02.3 Roofline with:

'Rooflines should respect traditional Broadland roof design and where appropriate include a variety of roof pitches to add visual interest to the rooflines of new development.'

Replace RV.02.4 Boundary Treatments with:

'Wherever practicable, front boundary walls should remain under 1m in height and retain visual connections. Appropriate boundary treatments should be used for plots in sensitive locations such as those which back onto the countryside or open spaces. Hedgerows at the front of properties should be well-defined and not obstruct pedestrian movement. Wherever practicable, the boundary treatments of existing building plots should be retained, including hedgerows.'

Replace CV.01.2 Legibility and Wayfinding with:

'Streets should contribute to the character of the area, taking into consideration features such as active frontages, enclosure and high-quality landscaping. Pedestrian routes should be designed so that they integrate into the existing street network. Wayfinding could be aided by the introduction of appropriate and sensitive signage in the countryside.'

Delete GC.01.03 (Biodiversity) from the Design Code

Policy ACLE2: New Housing

7.24 This is a new policy. It addresses scale, type, tenure and location of new housing. The Plan advises that the policy has been developed to give broad strategic guidance for the location of new 'windfall' development in the village that may come forward in addition to the GNLP allocations. It advises that new 'windfall' housing development should be located inside the adopted settlement limit for the village, close to existing development and within easy reach of the village centre, where good access to local facilities can be achieved.

7.25 The policy advises that the focus for new development in Acle over the plan period will be within the adopted settlement limit (figure 15) or within specific allocations made in the adopted Local Plan. It also advises that new housing development should be located where it can best integrate with existing development and benefit from proximity to the existing community facilities.

7.26 Within the settlement limit, the policy advises that proposals for small windfall and infill sites consisting of individual dwellings or small groups of dwellings will only be supported where they are well related to the existing built-up area, where their development would incorporate good quality design which maintains or enhances the

character and appearance of existing buildings, street scene and surroundings and where safe pedestrian and cycle connections to existing community facilities can be provided.

7.27 The policy also comments about the mix of housing. It does so under a series of headings as follows:

- Size;
- Affordable housing;
- Specialist housing; and
- Annexes and ancillary accommodation.

7.28 In general terms, the policy takes a positive approach and has regard to Section 5 of the NPPF. It is underpinned by the Housing Needs Assessment and the results of the Household Survey.

7.29 I recommend the deletion of the word 'only' in the third part of the policy. In the wider context of the policy (and its criteria) it is unnecessary. In addition, it provides a negative rather than a positive approach and would detract from the national ambition to boost the supply of housing land (NPPF paragraph 61).

7.30 The detailed elements on the mix of housing development are very helpful. In this context, I recommend a series of detailed modifications to their wording to take account of the representations received from BDC, the BA and Repton/Lovell. APC agreed to the revisions in its response to the clarification note.

7.31 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

In the third part of the policy delete 'only'

At the end of the Size section add: 'In this context the provision of smaller market housing to meet the needs of older persons would also be supported.'

Replace the first part of the Affordable Housing section with:

'where affordable housing is to be provided, the affordable units should be fully integrated with the open market housing and 'pepper-potted' in clusters around the site.'

Replace the second part of the Specialist Housing Section with:

'In accordance with the approach in Policy 5 of the Greater Norwich Local Plan, at least 20% of new homes on major developments in the part of the neighbourhood area within Broadland District should meet Building Regulations M4(2) standards of adaptability and accessibility.'

Policy ACLE3: Residential Car Parking.

7.32 This is a modified policy which includes the details of Policy 11 of the made Plan as a wider parking policy.

7.32 The supporting text comments that parking provision for new developments should be made in accordance with the adopted standards of the Highway Authority. Adequate and well-maintained parking provision is an important element of new development, whether it is for a single dwelling or for a major housing scheme or business premises.

7.33 I have carefully considered the representations from the BA and Repton/Lovell. I recommend a modification to the design element of the policy to reflect Design Guidance and Code CV.01.2 (On-Plot Parking) to avoid parking being in front of dwellings. This will facilitate some limited frontage parking, which can be landscaped effectively while allowing the delivery of small terraces of homes, which help ensure the delivery of a sustainable mixed development. I have noted the comment from the BA on the focus of the policy. However, I am satisfied that there is a natural overlap between the design and layout of housing development and their parking arrangement.

7.34 Otherwise, I am satisfied that the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

In the Design section replace the second part with:

'All forms of parking areas should be designed to minimise the visual impact of the car on the street scene and the amenity of residents. Parking associated with new dwellings should be well connected and avoid being in front of dwellings. Furthermore, parking should not be divorced from the dwelling concerned, and should be appropriately lit to allow natural surveillance and safety.'

Policy ACLE4: Village Centre.

7.35 This is a modified policy. It is a merger of Policy 2 and Policy 8 of the made Plan to address both uses and public realm. The wording is also updated. It advises that within the village centre (figures 16 and 17), proposals will be supported in principle which contribute to achieving a vibrant and viable village centre comprising a mix of retail, service sector, business, hospitality, tourist, cultural and residential uses. It also comments that development proposals which would assist with the diversification and retention of existing retail uses within the village centre will be supported. The retention of existing retail uses and 'active frontages' within the centre will be encouraged.

7.36 I saw the economic and social importance of the village centre during the visit. In general terms the policy takes a positive approach and recognises the importance of a mix of retail, service sector, business, hospitality, tourist, cultural and residential uses to the vitality of a village centre.

7.37 In general terms, the policy has a positive approach which has regard to Sections 6 and 8 of the NPPF. Within this context, I recommend the following modifications to bring the clarity required by the NPPF:

- recognising that planning permission may not always be needed for the use of upper floors for residential use;

- shifting the emphasis to one based on access and amenity rather than the relationship between the upper floor residential use and the associated retail use (which may alter without the need for planning permission); and
- revising the wording used in the final part of the policy.

7.38 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the third part of the policy with:

'Insofar as planning permission is required, proposals for residential development at first floor level above existing retail or commercial uses will be supported where appropriate access is provided, and the residential accommodation provides appropriate standards of amenity'

In the final part of the policy, replace 'will be expected to' with 'should'

Policy ACLE5: Mixed uses, Underused and Vacant Land.

7.39 This is a new policy. It addresses potential redevelopment sites within the built-up area and incorporates elements of Policy 9 of the made Plan.

7.40 The supporting text advises that it is the intention of the modified Plan to create a thriving village centre by encouraging the sensitive development of underused brownfield sites for small-scale mixed-use activities such as retail, office and residential.

7.41 The policy comments that proposals for the mixed use or redevelopment or re-use of underused or vacant land will be supported where a series of criteria are met. It also comments that where the proposed development site is located within or immediately adjacent to the village centre and has a site frontage to either Norwich Road, The Street, New Road, Old Road and Reedham Road, retail uses, including food retail, will be encouraged on the site frontage.

7.42 In general terms, the policy takes a positive approach which has regard to Sections 5 and 11 of the NPPF. It also complements the contents of Policy ACLE4.

7.43 Within this wider context I recommend a series of detailed modifications to reflect the comments in the representations from BDC and the BA. They will bring the clarity required by the NPPF. In particular they clarify that the policy relates to sites within or adjacent to the village centre. In the second part of the policy, I recommend a modification to the wording used so that the policy can be applied through the development management process. This acknowledges that 'encouraged' has limited weight in a planning policy context. I also recommend the removal of its opening element given the recommended modifications to the first part of the policy.

7.44 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the opening element of the policy with:

'Proposals for the mixed use or redevelopment or re-use of underused or vacant land within or adjacent to the village centre will be supported where the following criteria are met:'

Delete a)

Replace e) with: 'the proposed development provides car parking that meets the requirements of other policies in this Plan.'

Replace the second part of the policy with:

'Where the proposed development site has a site frontage to either Norwich Road, The Street, New Road, Old Road and Reedham Road, retail uses, including food retail, will be supported on the site frontage. Other uses such as parking, employment and housing, either behind or above, will be supported where they would maintain or improve the vitality and viability of the village centre.'

Policy ACLE6: Acle Bridge Improvements

7.45 This is a modified policy. It was formerly Policy 1 of the made Plan.

7.46 It advises that the area at Acle Bridge (figure 18) shall be safeguarded for high-quality leisure and tourism uses, including food and drink premises, marinas and moorings which are consistent with its location in the Broads. It also comments that proposals for improvements to the facilities in the area should seek to create a high-quality visual gateway to the village. This would include improvements to the environment, access road, public realm, interpretation and signage promoting footpath and cycle links to Acle village which support well-being and tourism.

7.47 I looked carefully at the site during the visit. I saw its location to the north east of the town and adjacent to the Acle Bridge Inn.

7.48 I note that this policy continues the approach taken in the made Plan. I sought APC's comments on the extent to which there are any emerging proposals for the area affected by the policy. In its response to the clarification note, it advised that:

'There are no current applications or formal proposals within the area affected by the policy. There have been historic applications connected with Acle Bridge Inn such as play equipment, campsite, lighting etc and also flood defence works as part of a Broad wide scheme. There have been informal aspirations for some time locally for an improved leisure and boating offer in the area.'

7.49 On the balance of the evidence I am satisfied that it is appropriate to retain the policy in the Plan. It will set a robust context for any proposals to come forward. In this context, I recommend that two of the five parts of the policy are repositioned into the supporting text. This will acknowledge that they are process issues rather than land use policies. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of each of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the policy with:

'The area at Acle Bridge (figure 18) shall be safeguarded for high-quality leisure and tourism uses, including food and drink premises, marinas and moorings which are consistent with its location in the Broads.

Proposals for improvements to the facilities in the area should seek to create a high-quality visual gateway to the village. This would include improvements to the environment, access road, public realm, interpretation and signage promoting footpath and cycle links to Acle village which support well-being and tourism.

Any new development should respect the setting of the St Mary's Priory scheduled monument which is located on adjacent land.'

At the end of paragraph 8.4 add:

'Policy ACLE 6 sets out a framework for the development of the site. Any development proposals should refer to the relevant policies in the Adopted Broads Local Plan and to appropriate national and local technical guidance regarding flood risk which will be used to assess the suitability of proposals in this area. Where appropriate, archaeological investigations may be required as part of any work in this area.'

Policy ACLE7: Education and Health Provision.

7.50 This is a modified policy. It is a merger of Policy 3 and Policy 4 of the made Plan to create a single education-based policy with updated wording. It results in a wide-ranging policy on education and health care provision.

7.51 In general terms, the policy takes a positive approach to these matters and has regard to Section 8 of the NPPF.

7.52 I have carefully considered the Plan's approach to the relationship between the Acle Academy and the development of the housing site as allocated in the GNLP. In this context, I sought APC's comments on the extent to which the second paragraph has any bearing on the way in which the housing site was allocated in the Local Plan. It responded that:

'The paragraph is entirely consistent with the Local Plan policy (B.AC.1) which recognises that this site is the only site which would enable any future expansion of the Academy and therefore this opportunity should not be lost through an inappropriately designed development which would prevent further expansion from happening.'

7.53 On the balance of the evidence I am satisfied that this is an appropriate issue for the Plan to address. I have also taken account of the Repton/Lovell representation. Taking account of all the relevant information, I recommend that this element of the policy is modified so that it focuses on land use matters. In this context, I recommend that the process matters are repositioned into the supporting text.

7.54 I also recommend modifications to other elements of the policy to address matters raised by BDC. They will ensure that the policy has the clarity required by the NPPF.

7.55 Otherwise, I am satisfied that the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the second and third paragraph of the Acle Academy section with:

'The design and layout of proposals for new housing adjacent to the Acle Academy on land west of Acle, north of Norwich Road, and south of South Walsham Road should not prejudice the future expansion of the Academy.

Development in this location should be aided by a strategic masterplan, produced through community collaboration, which guides the development of the sites in a comprehensive manner to ensure that it does not compromise any future expansion of the Academy.'

Replace the Primary and Pre-School Provision section with:

'Proposals for the provision of new, enhanced and multi-purpose buildings/spaces will be supported. Wherever practicable, they should be designed to allow for the physical and social integration with the existing primary school.'

Replace the Health Care Provision section with:

'Proposals for future enhancements to medical and dental services either through the provision of new buildings, the expansion or extension of existing facilities or through the use of shared community spaces will be supported. Any such services should be easily accessible by pedestrians and cyclists whilst providing appropriate provision for car parking which reflects patient needs.'

At the end of 8.5 add: 'The consolidation of Acle Academy may be required to accommodate the planned levels of new growth. This is addressed in the first part of Policy ACLE7.'

Policy ACLE8: New Cemetery Provision

7.56 This is a new policy. It comments that where a need for new cemetery provision is established for Acle, proposals for a new cemetery will be supported subject to a series of criteria.

7.57 I recommend that the policy is recast to remove the issue of need. There is no need to frame the policy in this way, and the supporting text sets out the scene and the policy approach is not challenged. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the opening element of the policy with:

'Development proposals for a new cemetery in Acle which meet all of the following criteria will be supported:'

Policy ACLE9: Improving Health, Accessibility and Connectivity

7.58 This is a modified policy. It incorporates Policy 5 of the made Plan into a policy which addresses wider connections and accessibility. It results in a comprehensive policy.

7.59 Its focus is that proposals which would contribute to making the parish safer and more accessible for residents, including pedestrians and cyclists, and would contribute to the health and well-being of residents, through the provision of a network of green walking/cycling routes will be supported. It also provides commentary on the requirements for major development proposals.

7.60 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach which has regard to Sections 8 and 9 of the NPPF. In this context, I recommend modifications to elements of the policy based on the representations from Repton/Lovell and BDC. In turn they will bring the clarity required by the NPPF.

7.61 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

In the second part of the policy, replace 'must' with 'should'

Replace the first sentence of the third part of the policy with:

'Wherever practicable, major new development should take opportunities to encourage the use of sustainable transport through the provision of public transport infrastructure such as bus stops and shelters.'

In the New Routes and Connections section, replace the opening element with:

'Development proposals which seek to deliver any of the new routes listed below (and as shown on Figure [insert number]) will be supported:'

Include a new map to show the location of the eight potential new routes

Policy ACLE10: Flood risk

7.62 This is a new policy. It promotes urban drainage systems and seeks to direct development away from areas at risk of flooding from all sources.

7.63 In general terms, the policy takes an appropriate approach to flood risk and has regard to Section 14 of the NPPF. However, it takes a broadbrush approach which could have a significant impact on minor and domestic proposals which will continue to be the principal type of planning applications in the Plan period. As such, I recommend modifications to ensure that the policy takes a proportionate approach to flood risk. APC agreed to this approach in its response to the clarification note.

7.64 I recommend modifications to the third part of the policy on this basis. In doing so, I recommend that other elements of that part of the policy are deleted as they address process matters (already included in the supporting text). In other cases, I recommend that the existing supporting text is consolidated by the repositioning of the relevant element of the deleted policy.

7.65 I also recommend other modifications to the SUDS section to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the third part of the policy with:

'As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should demonstrate how they mitigate their own flooding and drainage impacts, avoid the increase of flooding elsewhere and seek to achieve lower than greenfield runoff rates.'

In the Sustainable Drainage Systems section, replace 'All new development is required to' with 'Development proposals should'

At the end of 10.6 add: 'The third part of the policy comments about the need for development proposals to demonstrate how they mitigate their own flooding and drainage impacts, avoid the increase of flooding elsewhere and seek to achieve lower than greenfield runoff rates. This would include assessing the cumulative impacts of developments rather than the individual proposed site. Developers should consider the potential for flooding from all sources, including surface water and groundwater sources.'

Policy ACLE11: Light Pollution and Dark Skies

7.66 This is a new policy on light pollution. The supporting text provides a useful local context to the policy. In addition, it comments about the relevant policy in the adopted Broads Local Plan.

7.67 In general terms, the policy takes a positive approach to this matter. In this context I recommend a series of modifications to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. They include replacing the various uses of 'must' with 'should' to acknowledge the role of a neighbourhood plan within the wider development plan. I also recommend that an element of practicability is introduced into the part of the policy which advises that new street-lighting should not be located at the edge of the settlement.

7.68 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Throughout the policy, replace the uses of 'must' with 'should'

Replace the first sentence of the second part of the policy with: 'Wherever practicable, new street-lighting should not be located at the edge of the settlement.'

Replace the third part of the policy with: 'Development proposals should reduce and mitigate the potential disturbance or risk of their external lighting schemes on nocturnal wildlife.'

Policy ACLE12: New and Existing Green Spaces.

7.69 This is a new policy. It identifies a number of Local Green Spaces and sets out the priorities for new green spaces. The policy proposes 23 Local Green Spaces (LGSs). Detailed design of new green spaces is set out in the Acle Parish Design Guidance and Codes (GV01.1 – Open Spaces).

7.70 The policy includes a separate element on new green spaces.

7.71 I looked carefully at the proposed LGSs during the visit.

7.72 The approach is underpinned by details in Appendix C. Based on all the information, I am satisfied that LGS 1-20 meet the criteria in paragraphs 106 and 107 of the NPPF.

7.73 I sought APC's comments on LGS21 and 22. In its response, it advised that:

'LGS21 – Damgate Wood – Northern section is approximately 5.6 hectares in size and southern section is approximately 6.1 hectares.

LGS22 – It is accepted that this currently lies some distance from the main built-up area of the village, however there are cottages within 150m. The development of allocated sites in the GNLP: for example B.AC.1 west of Acle and north of Norwich Road and B.AC.2 Land north of Norwich Road will both bring built development closer to proposed LGS22. Intervening land is also put forward through the most recent Call for Sites and therefore there is the potential for even more development in close proximity to LGS22. The site is a popular walk for residents, and it is also part of a Norfolk Trail, Burlingham Woodland Walks, and part of the GNLP planned green corridor to Norwich.'

7.74 On the balance of the evidence, I am also satisfied that LGS 21 and 22 meet the criteria for LGS designation in paragraphs 106 and 107 of the NPPF.

7.75 The general element of the New Green Spaces section of the policy takes a positive approach. Nevertheless, I recommend modifications so that the policy has the clarity required by the NPPF, is simplified, and excludes some of the elements that focus on outcomes rather than land use policies.

7.76 I sought APC's advice on whether there is any direct evidence to support the final element of the New Green Spaces part of the policy and whether there any relationship between this part of the policy and the content of paragraph 10.21 of the Plan. In its response to the clarification note it advised that:

'The figure of 25 mentioned in the last part of the policy is taken from the definition of 'major development'. It is considered that at this point (the construction of 25 dwellings) that the need arises for amenity/play needs for residents, and it would also enhance the visual design of the development. There is no specific relationship between paragraph 10.21 and this part of the policy.'

7.77 I have considered this matter carefully alongside the representations. In principle I am satisfied that it will be appropriate for the delivery of open space to be phased throughout the development of a site. Nevertheless, in the absence of any evidence to support the 25 houses as a key stage, I recommend that the issue is addressed in a more general way which would give BDC/the BA the opportunity to address the phasing in planning conditions or a legal agreement associated with the determination of planning applications.

7.78 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the New Green Spaces section with

'Proposals for new housing development should include quality outdoor green amenity space. Green infrastructure (such as open space, natural green space, recreational areas, allotments, community woodland and orchards) should be designed with child-friendly interventions (such as play spaces) or should be aligned with key routes that connect schools and residential estates. Wherever practicable, development proposals should enhance access to green spaces and trackways, incorporating seating and signage.

Surrounding buildings should overlook public spaces to provide natural surveillance. Landscaping should be designed to ensure that it does not obstruct views of these spaces. Layouts should include a mix of green verges and green grassed areas, to create a visually pleasant entrance to new developments and to reinforce the existing character of Acle

Appropriately sized informal amenity areas, play areas and natural features should be provided for major developments, and their delivery should be phased in line with the development of the site concerned.'

In 10.22 before the final sentence add: 'These matters are addressed in the New Green Spaces section of Policy ACLE12. Where necessary, the phasing of the delivery of amenity spaces and play areas could be addressed in planning conditions or a legal agreement associated with the determination of planning applications.'

Policy ACLE13: Biodiversity and Ecological Corridors

7.79 This is a new policy. It identifies the important ecological corridors in the parish which are to be protected and enhanced. It results in a wide-ranging policy on biodiversity, biodiversity net gain (BNG), and ecological corridors. The policy is underpinned by equally comprehensive supporting text and associated maps.

7.80 The policy takes a positive approach to biodiversity and has regard to Section 16 of the NPPF. However, the broadbrush approach taken in its first part could have a significant impact on minor and domestic proposals which will continue to be the principal type of planning applications in the Plan period. In this context, I recommend modifications to ensure that this part of the policy takes a proportionate approach to biodiversity and the ecological network. APC agreed to this approach in its response to the clarification note.

7.81 BDC, the BA and Repton/Lovell make a series of overlapping comments on the policy.

7.82 This is a very comprehensive policy. On the one hand, this is very positive and reflects the sensitive nature of the neighbourhood area and its biodiversity. However, on the other hand, it overlaps with national policy on this matter and, in certain places, takes a very prescriptive approach which cuts across other guidance and legislation. In other places, the policy incorporates elements of supporting text.

7.83 In this context I recommend a package of modifications to the policy and the supporting text to address these matters, and to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. The recommended modifications will also allow BDC and the BA to apply the policy in a practical way through the development management process. I have considered the comment from BDC and Repton/Lovells about the added value of the BNG elements of the policy beyond that contained in national policy. On the balance of the evidence, I am satisfied that their inclusion in the policy (with the recommended modifications) is appropriate given that they provide a broader context for the contents of the policy.

7.84 In summary, the recommended modifications include:

- ensuring that the policy takes a proportionate approach;
- ensuring that the BNG elements of the policy are consistent with the national approach towards BNG;
- the deletion of the fourth part of the policy and its relocation to the supporting text;
- the removal of the unnecessary prescriptive elements of the policy; and
- a recasting of paragraph 10.29 to reflect the national position on BNG.

7.85 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

In the first part of the policy, replace 'All development proposals' with 'As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals'

Replace the second part of the policy with: 'Using national policy guidance and DEFRA metrics, relevant development proposals should provide a minimum of 10% net gain in biodiversity.'

At the beginning of the third part of the policy, add 'Where appropriate'

Delete the fourth paragraph.

Replace the fifth part of the policy with:

'Wherever practicable, biodiversity net gain should be achieved on site. Where off-site net gain can be justified in line with national policy, it should be located elsewhere in the parish, and be consistent with the relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy.'

Replace the sixth part of the policy with:

'Priorities for Biodiversity Net Gain and enhancement within the parish are the existing strategic tree belts and green corridors (as shown in Figures 29, 30, 31and 32) which will be protected, extended and linked to other existing tree belts, creating circular routes and ecological routes for wildlife within the parish.'

In the Trees and Hedges section, replace the first part with:

'Development proposals should respond positively to ancient trees or hedges, and to trees with a veteran feature.'

In the Wildlife Measures section, add 'Wherever practicable' at the beginning.

Replace paragraph 10.29 with:

'A minimum of 10% net gain in biodiversity will be required either on-site or via enhancement elsewhere. It is important that this Plan considers the issue and identifies ways in which this might be achieved. Policy ACLE13 has been developed to provide guidance on this issue.'

At the end of paragraph 10.30 add the deleted fourth part of the policy.

Policy ACLE14: Landscape and Important Public Views

7.86 This is a new policy. It identifies a number of important public views in the parish of which new development must take account. The supporting text describes the identified views to good effect. I looked at the views carefully during the visit. I saw that they highlighted the close relationship between the village and the countryside.

7.87 The second part of the policy comments that where new edges to the settlement of Acle are to be created by new development, these should reflect the characteristics of the specific landscape character type in which they are located and maintain and enable a rural feel, whilst providing for views and vistas over the surrounding countryside and The Broads. I am satisfied that this part of the policy meets the basic conditions.

7.88 There is a degree of tension between the first two parts of the policy. I recommend that the policy is recast so that this matter is addressed, and that the policy has the clarity required by the NPPF.

7.89 In addition, there is a potential tension between the identification of proposed views A-C and the allocation of land in this part of the neighbourhood area for housing purposes in the GNLP. I note the commentary in paragraph 7.3 of the Basic Conditions Statement and in the details about the three views in the Plan. Furthermore, BDC comments that:

'Whilst we appreciate that views A, B and C are deemed to be important, there is a tension in that the field being overlooked by these views (between Norwich Rd and Mill Lane) forms part of the GNLP allocation, B.AC.1, which allocates this land and land

north of Mill Lane for a total of 340 dwellings. The response from the Qualifying Body to our Regulation 14 representation on this matter is that it is possible for the developer to retain a small arc of the views. However, our concern is whether the wording of the first paragraph of the policy is too stringent to allow a scheme to come forward which respects ACLE 14 but is also policy-compliant with the GNLP. The wording, '...to the detriment of the view as a whole...' is very subjective and, if taken literally, could be regarded as meaning any development visible within an identified view, even where the effect is minor.'

7.90 In this context I sought APC's comments about how it has addressed this matter and the potential impact of the identification of the views on the number of homes that would be delivered on the allocated site. In its response to the clarification note, it advised that:

'It is accepted that the ambition of the second part of paragraph 1 is covered by paragraph 2 and therefore there is duplication.

The proposed policy wording recognises that development will take place. It does allow for development within a view but requires that development to take account of the overall view and the policy aim is to challenge the scheme designers to produce a layout that will retain part of or give hints at the views through careful consideration of where green space is located, how buildings are orientated and road layouts. The policy is clear that the onus is on the developer to demonstrate how they have sought to accommodate the view within the development layout.'

7.91 I have considered this matter very carefully. On the one hand, Views A-C are clear and obvious. However, on the other hand, they will be materially affected by the development of the allocated housing site in the GNLP. Whilst I note APC's comments in its response to the clarification note, I am not satisfied that the approach taken meets the basic conditions. In this context there is a real potential for the implementation of the policy to restrict or limit the number of homes to be developed on the site. In these circumstances I recommend the deletion of Views A, B and C. I also recommend consequential modifications to Figure 48 and to the supporting text

7.92 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the first three parts of the policy with:

'The following views and vistas (as shown on Figure 48) are identified as important public views:

List views D-I (and re-letter as appropriate)

As appropriate to their scale, nature, and location, development proposals should respond positively to the identified views and vistas. Where appropriate, proposals should be accompanied by a statement to demonstrate how the view has been taken into consideration.

Proposals that would have a significant adverse impact on the landscape or character of the view concerned will not be supported.'

In Figure 48, delete Views A, B and C

In paragraph 10.42, delete the information relating to Views A-C

Policy ACLE15: Responding to Climate Change

7.93 This is a new policy. It seeks to promote climate change adaptation and mitigation. It has a wide-ranging effect. It advises that proposals for new developments in Acle should (in proportion to their scale and nature) seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from all development types, promote renewable and low-carbon energy infrastructure and enhance climate resilience through sustainable design and nature-based solutions.

7.94 In general terms, this is a good policy which responds positively to Section 14 of the NPPF. It addresses non-domestic scale energy developments and fire breaks

7.95 I have considered the various representations to the policy, including those from BDC and Repton. I have also assessed the extent to which some of the more aspirational elements of the policy would be capable of being implemented through the development management process. In this context, I recommend the following package of modifications to bring the clarity required by the NPPF and to allow BDC/the BA to be able to apply the policy through the development management process:

- recast the second and third parts of the policy so that they can be applied through the development management process and to acknowledge that the ambitions of the second part of the policy may not always be practicable;
- the recasting of the first sentence of the Non-Domestic Scale Energy Developments section to remove the unnecessary use of 'only' given the six criteria in this part of the policy; and
- a series of detailed and technical modifications in the Fire Breaks section.

7.96 Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Replace the second and third parts of the policy with:

'Wherever practicable, residential, agricultural and commercial development proposals should incorporate low-carbon sustainability measures such as ground/air source heat pumps, roof-mounted solar panels and water management measures.

Insofar as planning permission is required, the retrofitting of energy-efficiency and low-carbon measures to existing buildings will be supported where they respond positively to their character and appearance.'

In the Non-Domestic Scale Energy Developments section, replace the first sentence with:

‘Renewable or other energy developments (including associated development such as cables, fencing, overhead wires, ancillary buildings etc), will be supported where the proposal:’

In the Fire Breaks Section, replace the various uses of ‘must’ with ‘should’

Replace the final part of the policy with:

‘Properties that front or back onto the countryside should have a garden adjacent to the landscape to provide additional opportunities to reduce the risk of wild-fires reaching the properties. In this context development proposals should incorporate sensitive planting between the settlement edge and the countryside which responds positively to the site concerned and the vegetation in the surrounding countryside.’

Policy ACLE16: Heritage

7.97 This is a new policy. It has a wide-ranging approach which addresses non-designated heritage assets, buried archaeology and the Halvergate Marshes Conservation Area. Paragraphs 10.60 to 10.65 provide a very interesting commentary about the Halvergate Marshes Conservation Area.

7.98 This is a very positive policy which has regard to Section 16 of the NPPF. I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the local delivery of the social and the environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Monitoring and Review

7.99 Section 11 of the Plan addresses the monitoring and review process for the Plan in a positive way. This is best practice. It acknowledges that circumstances will change in the Plan period and that national and local planning policies will continue to evolve. It also identifies how the Plan will be monitored, and how any updates would be secured.

Other Matters – General

7.100 This report has recommended a series of modifications both to the policies and to the supporting text in the submitted Plan. Where consequential changes to the text are required directly because of my recommended modification to the policy concerned, I have highlighted them in this report. However, other changes to the general text may be required elsewhere in the Plan because of the recommended modifications to the policies. Similarly, changes may be necessary to paragraph numbers in the Plan or to accommodate other administrative matters. It will be appropriate for BDC, the BA and APC to have the flexibility to make any necessary consequential changes to the general text. I recommend accordingly.

Modification of general text (where necessary) to achieve consistency with the modified policies and to accommodate any administrative and technical changes.

Other Matters – Specific

7.101 In addition to the representations which have addressed the policies, BDC has also made comments about the general elements of the Plan and the supporting text. APC has helpfully commented on the various representations. In this broader context (and using BDC's referencing system), I recommend that the following comments are incorporated into the Plan as modifications:

- ANP36
- ANP37
- ANP43
- ANP44

7.102 The BA has also made a series of detailed comments on the Plan and its supporting text. I have considered its comments and the responses from APC. In this broader context, I recommend the following modifications to the Plan (and using BDC's referencing system) insofar as they are necessary to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions:

- ANP46
- ANP52
- ANP53
- ANP57
- ANP58
- ANP59

8 Summary and Conclusions

Summary

8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2040. The Plan has a focus on ensuring high-quality design, the proposed designation of a series of Local Green Spaces, the identification of important local views, and consolidating the role of the village centre. The Plan has been prepared in commendably short order.

8.2 Following the independent examination of the Plan, I have concluded that the review of the Acle Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood development plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.

Conclusion

8.3 On the basis of the findings in this report, I recommend to Broadland District Council and The Broads Authority that, subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report, the review of the Acle Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed to referendum.

Other Matters

8.4 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood area. In my view, the neighbourhood area is entirely appropriate for this purpose, and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved on 20 August 2013.

8.5 I am grateful to everyone who has helped in any way to ensure that this examination has run in a smooth manner. The responses to the clarification note were detailed, informative, and delivered in a very timely fashion.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
27 October 2026