

REPORT PC26.040 Review of Neighbourhood Plan

Author: Jon Sloan, Clerk

Date: 23rd March 2026

1. Purpose of this Report

This report provides Council with a clear assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of undertaking a review of the Laverstock & Ford Communities Neighbourhood Plan (made October 2022). It incorporates:

- A summary of the actions taken between 2024-2025, including consultancy engagement.
- The impact of the decision (May / June 2025) by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to stop funding for the neighbourhood planning support programme.
- The implications of the January 2026 rejection of Wiltshire Council's draft Local Plan by the Planning Inspectors, drawing on Wiltshire Council's [correspondence](#) of 12th March 2026.
- A reasoned recommendation for Council consideration.

2. Background and Timeline

2.1 Neighbourhood Plan status

The Laverstock & Ford Neighbourhood Plan (NP) was made in October 2022 and forms part of the statutory development plan for Wiltshire. It includes policies on settlement separation, green buffers, landscape sensitivity, design, biodiversity, and local green spaces.

The NP (pg.28) itself anticipated a review in 2026, or earlier if required by changes in the Wiltshire Local Plan.

2.2 Parish actions during 2024–2025

- Late 2024: Initial discussions began regarding whether the NP should be reviewed. The Deputy Clerk obtained consultancy quotations.
- Early 2025: Master Land & Planning (MasterLP) were appointed.
- March 2025 (PC25.043): MasterLP's initial report was submitted to Council; a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group was formed.

2.3 Withdrawal of national Neighbourhood Planning grant funding (May–June 2025)

- In May–June 2025, central government withdrew all national grant funding for Neighbourhood Planning.
- This resulted in the Parish Council pausing the project.
- At the June 2025 Council meeting, the Deputy (Interim) Clerk confirmed that MasterLP's work had been placed on hold due to the grant withdrawal.
- At the September 2025 F&GP Committee, councillors agreed to terminate further NP review work in light of the funding loss and the likely high-cost burden falling to the parish.

- This should potentially have been taken to Full Council to resolve. Apologies that it wasn't.

2.4 Wiltshire Local Plan Examination – January to March 2026 developments

Wiltshire Council's emerging Local Plan was rejected by the Planning Inspectors in January 2026. This decision likely increases exposure to speculative development across the county due to the absence of an up-to-date Local Plan. Wiltshire Council's letter of 12th March 2026 (linked in section 1) further confirms the significant difficulties ahead:

- The Inspectors consider that substantial further evidence, engagement, and consultation are required before the Plan could be found sound.
- Wiltshire Council acknowledges that it may now need to begin work on a new Local Plan, with reports scheduled for Cabinet and Council in May 2026.
- The situation creates an extended period where Wiltshire will not have an up-to-date Local Plan, weakening the strategic framework upon which Neighbourhood Plans normally rely.

3. Implications for Laverstock & Ford Parish

3.1 Weight of the existing Neighbourhood Plan

The NP (2022) is recent, robust and comprehensive, containing:

- Detailed green buffers and settlement separation policies (Policy 1).
- Landscape sensitivity analysis (Appendix 1).
- Local Green Space designations (Policy 3).
- Strong biodiversity, heritage, and River Bourne corridor protections (Policy 2).
- Detailed design and infrastructure policies (Policies 4 & 5).

These remain material considerations whether or not the plan is formally reviewed.

3.2 Reduced effectiveness of a refreshed NP in the current policy vacuum

Under national planning rules, Neighbourhood Plans hold full weight when:

- There is an up-to-date Local Plan, and
- The Local Planning Authority has a deliverable 5-year housing land supply.

Wiltshire currently has neither. Because the Inspectors have determined that the Local Plan cannot proceed without substantial further work and Wiltshire may need to begin a new Local Plan process this means an NP review completed in 2026-27 would be operating for several years without a stable strategic policy framework.

This creates significant risks:

- Developers can argue the 'tilted balance'¹ applies.
- Strategic allocations in the *future* Local Plan may override the NP.

¹ The 'tilted balance' is a [NPPF](#) planning policy in England that creates a presumption in favour of sustainable development. It is triggered when local authority housing plans are out of date or there is no five-year housing land supply, shifting the balance to favour granting planning permission unless adverse impacts significantly outweigh the benefits.

- The NP could become partly outdated again once Wiltshire publishes the next Local Plan draft.

3.3 Speculative development risk

Thus, the absence of a Local Plan and the Inspectors' January 2026 decision increase the risk of speculative development across Wiltshire.

While a reviewed NP may offer *some* defensive value, this benefit is limited until Wiltshire re-establishes a sound Local Plan and a proven housing supply position.

4. Reasons *against* undertaking an NP review now

A. Withdrawal of funding - full cost now falls to the Parish Council

Since May-June 2025, the national Neighbourhood Planning grant programme has ceased.

A NP review would therefore require Parish-funded:

- Consultant fees needed – £5,000 to £10,000+VAT based on previous quotes.
- Technical assessments (landscape, heritage, ecology, transport) may be needed
- Community consultation may be required

This would be a significant unbudgeted expenditure.

B. Heavy administrative and volunteer burden

A full review requires substantial officer commitment and the re-formation of a volunteer steering group. This would divert resources from existing parish priorities and is difficult to sustain in current staffing conditions.

C. Limited planning benefit at this stage

A revised NP may carry minimal additional planning weight for at least 2-3 years, until:

- Wiltshire has a new Local Plan; and
- A 5-year land supply is demonstrably re-established.

D. The existing 2022 NP already provides some protections

The current NP includes extensive policy coverage on:

- Landscape sensitivity
- Settlement separation
- Biodiversity
- Local Green Spaces
- Design principles

These protections carry weight and must be considered as part of the planning process.

E. High risk of duplication or wasted cost

If the Parish reviews the NP now, it is highly likely that the emerging Wiltshire Local Plan (post-May 2026) would require additional revisions in 2-3 years,

meaning at least: two rounds of costs and two rounds of public consultations.

F. Inefficient to restart work already halted

Work was already paused and formally discontinued in 2025. Recommencing prematurely risks inefficient use of officer time and volunteer goodwill.

5. Reasons for a review

- Updating the NP could eventually restore maximum weight in planning decisions.
- The community may welcome updated evidence, particularly on climate, infrastructure, and green space management.
- Beginning preliminary scoping work might reduce lead-in time when a more favourable opportunity arises.

However, these benefits are contingent on Wiltshire Council having a stable Local Plan trajectory - which is not currently the case.

6. Conclusion

Given the withdrawal of national funding in May-June 2025, the unresolved and now prolonged delays to the Wiltshire Local Plan, and the existing protections within the current 2022 Neighbourhood Plan, there is no compelling strategic, financial, or operational justification for undertaking a review at this time.

A more appropriate decision point will arise once Wiltshire Council has:

- Determined its Local Plan direction (likely later in 2026), and
- Provided clarity on future housing and settlement policy affecting Salisbury and the parish.

7. Recommendation

That Laverstock & Ford Parish Council resolves NOT to undertake any further work on reviewing the Neighbourhood Plan at this time, due to:

- a) The withdrawal of national NP funding.
- b) The absence of site allocations in our current NP coupled with an absence of likely candidates to add. This negates the protections provided in NPPF para.14.
- c) The significant administrative demands that a review would place on officers, councillors, and volunteers.
- d) The limited additional planning weight a revised NP would carry until Wiltshire has a new Local Plan in place.
- e) The risk of wasted investment due to impending major changes to the Wiltshire planning framework.
- f) The continued strength and relevance of the existing 2022 Neighbourhood Plan.

Council officers should instead maintain a watching brief, revisiting the matter once Wiltshire Council's Local Plan timetable and strategic planning direction have been clarified.