

# **Awbridge Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2025-2042\***

## **A report to Test Valley Borough Council**

*\* As submitted, the Plan period is given as 2025-2045, but the Parish Council has agreed that this should be amended to 2025-2042.*

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Independent Examiner**

**July 2026**

## **Executive summary**

I was appointed by Test Valley Borough Council on 7 May 2026 with the agreement of the Awbridge Parish Council, to carry out the independent examination of the Awbridge Parish Neighbourhood Plan.

The examination was completed solely on the basis of the written representations received, no public hearing appearing to me to have been necessary. I made an unaccompanied visit to the area covered by the Plan on 18 June 2026.

Awbridge is a rural parish about four miles north-west of Romsey. Its population is spread around a number of small residential enclaves, all of which sit within a rolling, verdant landscape lying close to the shallow valley of the River Test. There is no commercial centre and few services, and the current strategic planning context envisages very limited future growth.

Subject to a number of recommendations, I have concluded that the Awbridge Parish Neighbourhood Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements at this stage of its preparation, and consequently I am pleased to recommend that it should proceed to referendum.

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## Introduction

1. This report sets out the findings of my examination of the Awbridge Parish Neighbourhood Plan (the ANP), submitted to Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC) by the Awbridge Parish Council (APC) in October 2025. The Neighbourhood Area for these purposes is the same as that of the Parish Council's boundaries.
2. Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to help local communities shape the development and growth of their area, and this intention was given added weight in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), first published in 2012. The current edition of the NPPF was published in December 2024 (with a small correction in February 2025), and it continues to be the principal element of national planning policy. Public consultation on a new version of the NPPF closed on 10 March this year. It includes relatively minor changes to the intended role of neighbourhood plans (NPPF paragraphs 29 and 30), and I am satisfied that it has no implications for the current examination.
3. Detailed advice about the preparation of neighbourhood plans is provided by national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) on neighbourhood planning, first published in March 2014.
4. The main purpose of the independent examination is to assess whether the Plan satisfies certain "basic conditions" which must be met before it can proceed to a local referendum, and whether it is generally legally compliant. In considering the content of the Plan, recommendations may be made concerning changes to both policies and any supporting text.
5. In the present case, my examination concludes with a recommendation that, subject to certain detailed recommendations, the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this results in a positive outcome, the ANP would ultimately become a part of the statutory development plan and thus a key consideration in the determination of planning applications relating to land lying within the ANP area.
6. I am independent of the Parish Council and do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan. I have the necessary qualifications and experience to carry out the examination, having had 30 years' experience as a local authority planner (including as Acting Director of Planning and Environmental Health for the City of Manchester), followed by over 20 years' experience providing training in planning to both elected representatives and officers, for most of that time also working as a Planning Inspector. My appointment has been facilitated by the independent examination service provided by Penny O'Shea Consulting.

## Procedural matters

7. I am required to recommend that the Awbridge Parish Neighbourhood Plan either
  - be submitted to a local referendum; or
  - that it should proceed to referendum, but as modified in the light of my recommendations; or
  - that it not be permitted to proceed to referendum, on the grounds that it does not meet the requirements referred to in paragraph 3 above.
8. In carrying out my assessment, I have had regard to the following principal documents:

- the submitted ANP
  - the Consultation Statement (version 3.0 April 2026)
  - the Basic Conditions Statement (version 2.0 October 2025)
  - the Strategic Environmental Assessment/Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Statement (January 2026)
  - the representations made to the ANP under Regulation 16
  - selected policies of the adopted Test Valley Local Plan (TVLP)
  - relevant paragraphs of the NPPF.
9. I carried out an unaccompanied visit to the Plan area on 18 June 2026, when I looked at the overall character and appearance of the Parish, together with its setting in the wider landscape and (where feasible) at those areas affected by specific policies or references in the Plan. Where necessary, I refer to my visit in more detail elsewhere in this report.
  10. It is expected that the examination of a draft neighbourhood plan will not include a public hearing, and that the examiner should reach a view by considering written representations<sup>1</sup>. In the present case, I considered hearing sessions to be unnecessary. I should add that none of the representations received at the Regulation 16 stage included a request for a hearing.
  11. I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted Plan. My recommendations for changes to the policies and any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are highlighted in ***bold italic print***.

#### **A brief picture of the neighbourhood plan area**

12. The Parish of Awbridge had a population of fewer than 800 at the time of the last Census, living in the small settlements of Awbridge, Kent's Oak and Upper and Lower Ratley, with more isolated dwellings scattered around an attractive, largely wooded landscape and gently rolling hills. Parts of Newtown also fall within the Parish. A separate element is a spaciouly laid-out retirement village at Stanbridge Earls (the Basic Conditions Statement points out its population was not included in the Census data).
13. The roads which connect these various elements are often single-track, and longer views of the surrounding countryside are generally scarce, due to the extent of hedge and tree cover. There is no commercial centre, and few local services. However, there is a small primary school at a focal point in Kent's Oak, and the village hall/playing field/children's playground are clearly an important feature in the life of the village. There are 15 listed buildings in the Parish (including the Church of All Saints).

#### **The basic conditions**

14. I am not required to come to a view about the 'soundness' of the Plan (in the way which applies to the examination of local plans); instead, I must principally address whether or not it is appropriate to make it, having regard to certain "basic conditions", as listed at paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). The

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 9(1) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

requirements are also set out in paragraph 065 of the relevant PPG<sup>2</sup>.

15. It is important to note that there have been changes to the statutory basic conditions since the Parish Council began work on the Plan. These arise from the provisions of Sections 98 and 99 of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, and the principal one for my examination is the replacement of a broad requirement under condition (e) for neighbourhood plans to be “in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan for the local area” with a specific one which (in plain language) would ensure plans do not propose less housing than what is provided for in the development plan for the area (effectively, the Local Plan).
16. In summary, all neighbourhood plans must:
  - have regard to national policy and guidance (Condition a);
  - contribute to the achievement of sustainable development (Condition d);
  - not result in the development plan for the area proposing that less housing is provided than if the neighbourhood development plan were not to be made (Condition e);
  - not breach, and otherwise be compatible with, EU obligations, including human rights requirements (Condition f);
  - not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017; and
  - comply with any other prescribed matters<sup>3</sup>.
17. The Basic Conditions Statement (BCS) begins by summarising the formal background to the ANP, including the statutory requirements<sup>4</sup>, before assessing in tabular form how its provisions relate both to national policy and the strategic policies set out in the Test Valley Local Plan. A separate section considers the way the Plan seeks to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development in the Parish. The BCS concludes with a summary of the way the Plan has been designed to be compatible with EU obligations in relation to environmental matters, before briefly considering the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1988 and the Equality Act 2010.
18. Overall, I consider that the BCS amply explains the relationship between the ANP’s policies and its wider context.

### **Other statutory requirements**

19. A number of other statutory requirements apply to the preparation of neighbourhood plans, all of which I consider have been met in this case. These are:
  - that the Parish Council is the appropriate qualifying body (Localism Act 2011) able to lead preparation of a neighbourhood plan;
  - that what has been prepared is a Neighbourhood Development Plan, as formally defined by the Localism Act; that the plan area does not relate to more than one Neighbourhood Area; and that there are no other neighbourhood plans in place within the area covered

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<sup>2</sup> Reference ID: 41-065-20140306

<sup>3</sup> A new basic condition would relate to any requirements imposed in relation to Part 6 of LURA 2023 (environmental outcomes reports). The details of this are yet to be announced.

<sup>4</sup> These reflect the position as it was before the changes referred to above.

by the plan;

- that the plan period must be stated. In the case of the ANP this is given as “to 2040”: this aligns with the end-date of an earlier draft of the new Local Plan, but not with either the adopted LP or the current draft of the updated one. I asked the Parish Council for clarification on its intentions here, and it has said that it would support modifications such that the Plan period is consistently given as 2025-2042. ***I recommend that this be done.*** (The Parish Council also comments that it would support any necessary changes to “supporting documents”: it specifies the Consultation Statement, but the Basic Conditions Statement might also be amended since it refers simply to an end-date of 2040. If this can be done, it would clearly be helpful, but it is something which lies outside my brief as examiner to recommend.)
  - that no “excluded development” is involved (this primarily relates to development involving minerals and waste and nationally significant infrastructure projects).
20. A screening report is required in order to determine whether a neighbourhood plan needs to be accompanied by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), under the terms of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004. It is the qualifying body’s responsibility to undertake any necessary environmental assessments, but it is the local planning authority’s responsibility to engage with the statutory consultees.
21. Part 5 of the Consultation Statement states: “Although the Awbridge Neighbourhood Plan area is situated wholly outside of the New Forest National Park, it was considered prudent to determine whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) were required”. As a result, a Screening Statement was published by TVBC in January 2026 which concluded that, as the ANP does not propose or allocate any housing sites and included policies that support sustainable development, neither an SEA nor an HRA are required. Table 2 of the report sets out an assessment of the Plan’s likely environmental effects in more detail.
22. Full details of the considerations which support the assessment are set out in the statement, and I have been given no reason to question any of the conclusions reached. These are supported by Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency, as statutory consultees in the process.
23. It is a requirement under the Planning Acts that policies in neighbourhood plans must relate to “the development and use of land”, whether within the Plan area as a whole or in some specified part(s) of it. I am satisfied that that requirement is for the most part met.

### **National policy**

24. National policy is set out primarily in the NPPF, a key theme being the need to achieve sustainable development. The NPPF is supported by Planning Practice Guidance on neighbourhood planning, an online resource which is continually updated by Government.
25. I have borne particularly in mind the advice in paragraph 041 of the PPG that a policy in a neighbourhood plan should be clear and unambiguous, concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence. In addition is the requirement set out in the NPPF itself, at paragraph 16f), that “plans should ... serve a clear purpose, avoiding unnecessary duplication of policies that apply to a particular area” [for example, those already in place in the relevant local plan]. I would point out here that the latest draft of the pending NPPF update emphasises this last point.

## **The existing Development Plan for the area**

26. The principal component of the development plan for the area is the Test Valley Borough Revised Local Plan 2011-2029 (which I will usually refer to as the TVLP), adopted in 2016<sup>5</sup>. A review of this Plan was completed in 2021 and concluded that it remained up to date and consistent with national planning policy as it then stood. I have learned from an online search that further review of the Local Plan to 2042 is currently under way, with a public consultation on a full draft having been completed in September 2025.
27. Policy COM2 of the adopted TVLP describes the settlement hierarchy for the borough, which consists of four tiers: the two major centres of Andover and Romsey; six key service centres; a large number of “rural villages”, of which Awbridge is one; and finally all other villages within the wider countryside. Paragraph 5.45 of the Plan explains that the rural villages category relates to settlements with a smaller range and number of facilities, or a lower level of accessibility, than those in the first two tiers, but where “some additional development may be appropriate”. Further detail of what this might mean in practice is given in Table 7, but no figures (for example housing numbers) are provided.
28. The current draft of the 2042 Local Plan would maintain this broad approach. Under Spatial Strategy Policy 1, Awbridge would remain in tier 3: these are villages which may be described as “more sustainable rural settlements”. Neither the adopted nor the emerging local plans allocate any specific sites within Awbridge for development; however, the draft Plan would require the village to make provision for a minimum of 10 dwellings, as the Parish’s contribution to meeting the newly assessed needs of the borough<sup>6</sup>.
29. I will make further references to development plan policies in the body of the report, as necessary.

## **The consultation exercise (Regulation 14)**

30. Regulation 14 requires the Parish Council to publicise details of their proposals “in a way that is likely to bring [them] to the attention of people who live, work or carry on business in the area”, and to provide details of how representations about them can be made. Regulation 15 requires the submission to the local planning authority of a statement setting out the details of what was done in this respect, and how the qualifying body responded to any matters which arose as a result of the consultation process.
31. The Consultation Statement is dated April 2026. It begins by explaining the statutory requirements in relation to public consultation and sets out the Parish Council’s aims in that regard. It explains that progress on taking matters forward was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, before work began again in earnest in 2021. A housing needs assessment was carried out on the Council’s behalf at round about the same time. The details of the various consultations are set out, with links to the Council’s website for more information.
32. Pre-submission consultation on the draft Plan was held in the spring of 2024, and the statement explains in detail how this was handled. Table 2 lists all the statutory consultees involved and Table 3 summarises any comments received, together with the Parish Council’s response.

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<sup>5</sup> A copy of the TVLP was not included in the submitted documents, but it is easily accessible online. There are two published versions of the Plan: one is dated December 2015 and the other January 2016. I have used the latter.

<sup>6</sup> Spatial Strategy Policy 5

33. Overall, the Consultation Statement is a thorough and readable account of the earlier stages of the Plan which clearly satisfies the statutory requirements.

#### **General observations about the Plan**

34. The Plan document is attractively produced and laid out and includes generous use of maps and photographs. The maps are generally produced to a high standard, and the policies are clearly differentiated from the supporting text by the use of shaded boxes.
35. The document begins in Parts 1 and 2 by summarising the background to the Plan, including the relevant statutory provisions and the national and local planning context. Part 3 is a description of the NP area, noting the individual small settlements which are contained within it and referencing a history of the Parish set out in Appendix II, and a Parish profile (Appendix III)\*. The population of the Parish is given as 767 in 2021, but this is said to be out of date since it takes no account of a recent expansion to include the retirement village.
36. \*[The Plan's content page shows a total of nine appendices, some of which (such as the Local Green Space Assessment) are key to understanding certain policies. These are not included in the Plan document itself, nor do they appear as direct links from TVBC's ANP webpage. While that page does include a link to the relevant Parish Council website, the further link there to the Plan's appendices is somewhat buried. ***I recommend that the appendices to the Plan are attached to it in a much more straightforward way, and that the contents page be amended to show where they can be found.***
37. Part 4 of the Plan sets out the "issues and opportunities" presented by its preparation and includes a five-element "Vision" which, in summary, emphasises supporting modest, sustainable growth which respects the distinctive structure and character of the village and which meets (in particular) the needs of young families and people wishing to downsize. This overview is then developed into a total of 15 specific objectives, followed by 13 individual policies grouped under the topic areas of the natural environment; housing; heritage and design; and community, services and accessibility.
38. The contents page has different headings for two of these topic areas: "Built Development" and "Infrastructure". ***To avoid confusion, I recommend that this anomaly should be removed.*** In addition, I suggest that the contents page includes the policies themselves and the pages on which they can be found: at present it only references paragraph numbers.

#### **Representations received (Regulation 16)**

39. The statutory consultees who responded were Southern Water, Natural England, Historic England, National Highways, the Environment Agency, The Coal Authority and Hampshire County Council. None had any adverse observations about the Plan, although some had suggestions for changes to the wording of policies (where I make no observations in response to these, I am content for the Parish Council to decide for themselves whether to incorporate them). I will comment on any specific points made by these bodies and by TVBC as necessary, under the relevant policy headings, and will deal with the small number of other representations similarly.

#### **The policies**

40. Unless otherwise stated, I have concluded that (so long as my specific recommendations are accepted) each of the Plan's policies satisfies the basic conditions. I have therefore not made that point under each policy heading.

## Policy A1: Landscape character

41. This policy is preceded by an explanation of the Test Valley Character Assessment carried out by TVBC, which identifies three distinct landscape types within the Parish. The contextual material also includes notes on the issues which currently affect the areas concerned. The policy itself lists four ways in which new development should seek to respect the varied landscapes and rural character of the area: there is some overlap here with TVLP Policy E2, but the NP adds relevant detail, and so I do not consider this to be a major concern.
42. ***I recommend that two changes be made to the policy, the reasons for which I think are self-explanatory. Firstly, the opening sentence should be preceded by the phrase “Where relevant to its character and location, development proposals should have regard...”. Secondly, the following should be added to the first requirement ‘...lose their individual identity, as set out in Policy A6 of this Plan’.***
43. In addition, it is not clear what part iv of the policy means (“addressing the issues and solutions as identified in Appendix IV and as highlighted in the supporting text”). There is no explanation of the purpose of Appendix IV, in particular insofar as its relationship with the Design Code is concerned, and the reference to supporting text is too vague. On the face of it, there is also unnecessary overlap with other policies in both the NP and the LP. ***I recommend that part iv of the policy be deleted.***

## Policy A2: Important views and vistas

44. Policy A2, together with figure 13 and a series of photographs, identifies 14 locations within the Plan area which permit valuable views across the landscape, and development proposals would be required to demonstrate that the integrity of these views would not be harmed. Paragraph 6.2.3 explains that they have been selected either because (a) they contribute to the unique character of individual settlements; (b) help to maintain the strong connection between settlements and the surrounding landscape (including the New Forest National Park, which lies outside the NP area); (c) they are close to designated heritage assets; or (d) they have a role in protecting the aesthetic value of the landscape setting and views.
45. It was not practicable for me to visit each of these viewpoints, partly because of the number of them but also because figure 13 identifies them on a topographical base, rather than on a general one which shows roads and public rights of way. It would be a normal expectation that viewpoints suggested in neighbourhood plans for some kind of protection should be located in the public realm (although this is not a statutory requirement). ***In order for Policy A2 to have more clarity, I recommend that figure 13 be replaced with a simpler map which shows more clearly the precise location of the viewpoints.***
46. There was one objection to this policy. Mr C Petrie is the owner of Daneswood, a large house set well back from Danes Road, close to the western edge of the NP area. He and Ms C. Merrit object to the inclusion of views 2 and 3 within the scope of Policy A2. They have a related objection to the implications of Policy A6, which I will come to in due course. (I note here that the objections have been set out in two separate documents: one dated 25 May 2026, which is the formal representation under Regulation 16; the other being included within the Parish Council’s response, dated June 2026. While some of the details between the two vary a little, the grounds for the objections are the same).

47. Mr Petrie does not challenge the brief descriptions of the views obtainable from the public footpath in question<sup>7</sup>, nor does he provide his own assessment of their visual value. Instead, he asks for the wording of the policy to be amended to reflect his opinion that: (i) the views are “transient”; (ii) that they are across private land; (iii) there is no “clear methodology” for justifying the designation; and (iv) the policy “may unnecessarily constrain the future assessment of proposals relating to established residential land” by “imposing an unnecessary degree of planning restraint without sufficiently clear justification”.
48. It is not clear to me how, in practical terms, the policy could be re-worded to meets these considerations: effectively, Mr Petrie wants views 2 and 3 to be excluded from its scope. He adds that, when taken together with the impact of five other policies, the ANP “may unnecessarily prejudice the balanced consideration of future development proposals on their individual planning merits”.
49. In my opinion, these arguments are without merit. Firstly, the fact that the views (transient or not) are of private land, or land with an established residential use, is irrelevant: but even if this were not the case, it is not the land itself which is the subject of the policy, but the places from which it can be seen – in this case from a statutory public footpath. I would add that Daneswood itself is completely hidden from public view.
50. Secondly, while it is clearly helpful to be able to identify the individual components of a “view”, I am not aware of any methodology for assessing visual value, still less for “determining what degree of change may be acceptable” (to quote Mr Petrie) in planning terms: by its very nature, these judgements are bound to be subjective.
51. Finally, I disagree that the policy’s impact would be unreasonable for the reasons Mr Petrie gives. It does not (and could not) of itself prevent future development on the land, should other policies permit this in principle. Moreover, while the land would, as he says, also be affected by other policies designed to protect the visual quality of the area, this clearly applies everywhere within the Parish (and the wider Test Valley), and does not support the claim that “collectively, these policies risk introducing a disproportionately restrictive framework”. Putting it bluntly, there is nothing special about Daneswood, and there is no requirement for development plans to avoid conflict with the aspirations of individual landowners.
52. In summary, I have been given no reason to believe that the local planning authority, should they be asked to consider future planning applications affecting Daneswood, might give more weight to Policy A2 than to any other elements of the development plan. For these reasons, I see no case for recommending the removal of viewpoints 2 and 3 from the scope of Policy A2, nor for changing the way the policy is worded.

### **Policy A3: Local Green Spaces**

53. NPPF paragraphs 106-108 deal with the designation of land as Local Green Space (LGS) through local and neighbourhood plans, allowing communities “to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them”. To summarise, the LGS designation should only be used where the green space is (a) in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves; (b) demonstrably special to a local community; and (c) local in character and not an extensive tract of land (NPPF para. 107). Policy A3 identifies ten parcels of land to be protected as LGS, explaining that national policy requires managing development within them to be consistent with the policy for Green Belts.

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<sup>7</sup> No. 010/701/1 (source: online search)

54. Map 14 shows the location of the parcels of land to be protected. However, parts of it are difficult to read because of the positioning of the captions. ***I recommend that each site be given its own, clearer map.***
55. A number of the sites are, or appear as, substantial roadside verges, and Hampshire County Council, in its capacity as local highway authority, has concerns about their designation as LGS in case this would restrict their ability to promote necessary highway improvements in Awbridge in the future. HCC asks for the removal of sites LGS4, 6, 7.1 and 7.2 and a reduction in the scope of LGS2. One representation also questions whether a verge is “demonstrably special”. Alfred Homes (see under Policy A7) has a specific objection to the inclusion of LGS6, which they consider does not meet the NPPF tests.
56. There is no national guidance about whether or not roadside verges might be suitable or unsuitable as LGS in planning terms. My experience suggests that some local planning authorities have advised against including them, whereas others have looked at the matter on a case-by-case basis. My own view about HCC’s concerns is that as the local highway authority they would always be in a position to make a case for any necessary improvements (and would be likely to have the necessary powers to carry them out), so LGS designation ought not to be a significant barrier. In this case, the County Council seems to view the issue as a matter of principle, as it has not suggested that there is anything unusual or pressing about the situation in Awbridge which would require a more precautionary approach.
57. The ANP’s assessments carried out for compliance with the NPPF criteria are necessarily subjective in nature; and while one might question the strength of the arguments for including highway verges, even when well landscaped, the exercise appears to have followed the guidelines consistently, and I therefore make no recommendations for any changes to the list.

#### **Policy A4.1: Biodiversity and habitats**

58. Awbridge enjoys a rich and varied natural landscape both within the Parish and in the surrounding countryside. Notable features are the largely deciduous woodlands, and the River Test and its floodplain, which forms the eastern edge of the Parish; and these and other features support a range of important habitats, including both statutory and non-statutory designated sites. Policy A4.1 would require development proposals to demonstrate that, where appropriate, they have taken into account their impact on a range of assets, including Ancient Woodlands, sites of biodiversity value, internationally and nationally designated sites and local priority habitats (the locations of which are shown in figure 17). In addition, reference is made to the importance of trees and the provision of bat boxes, hedgehog houses and the like.
59. These requirements largely duplicate the provisions of Local Plan Policy E5 and, to a lesser extent, E2. However, since reference is made to specific locations of particular importance to the ANP area, the policy adds value to the Local Plan, and so I do not recommend that it be deleted.
60. The Basic Conditions Statement says that Policy A4.1 “requires.... development proposals to deliver a net gain of at least 10%....”, when in fact it does not do so. This should be rectified. In addition, I consider some elements of the policy as drafted to be somewhat over-prescriptive.

61. *I recommend that the Policy be replaced by the following:*

***“In line with statutory requirements, new development will be required where appropriate to provide a biodiversity net gain of at least 10%. Development proposals will be required to have regard to TVLP Policies E2 and E5. Where relevant, proposals must:***

- i. protect, or mitigate any impact on, the Ancient Woodlands shown on figure 17;***
- ii. protect the international and national designations (including Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest etc.) as shown in Figures 16 and 18; and***
- iii. avoid the loss of significant trees and hedges and, where possible, improve the linkage between existing wildlife corridors, as shown on figure 19. Where the loss of a mature tree or hedgerow is unavoidable, the proposals must make provision on site for replacements that are of a similar type to those lost and be native species, in accordance with those listed in the Design Code.***

***In addition, proposals must protect and, if appropriate to their scale and nature, enhance biodiversity sites of local value to the Plan area (e.g. Awbridge Hill Nature Sanctuary), as well as the non-statutory sites and the biodiversity opportunity areas shown on figure 18 and the individual types of local priority habitats shown on figure 17. Where appropriate and feasible, new development must also take the opportunity to provide bat boxes, bird boxes (including swift boxes), hedgehog houses and highways through fences”.***

62. By way of explanation for the reader, *I further recommend that the following be added to the introductory text to the policy after paragraph 6.4.5: “The Environment Act 2021 requires certain planning permissions to be subject to a condition requiring details of how a net gain of 10% in biodiversity can be achieved (on the site or elsewhere). More generally, when assessing planning applications which might impact on biodiversity and other natural assets, the local planning authority will have regard in particular to TVLP Policy E5, which seeks to conserve, and where possible restore and/or enhance these features, while setting out the circumstances where loss or harm to them would not be permitted.”*

63. Hampshire County Council draws attention to the desirability of the policy including reference to the Local Nature Recovery for the County. This would seem to be a sensible suggestion for the Parish Council to consider, but not one which would warrant a specific recommendation from me.

#### **Policy A4.2: The Solent Region International Sites**

64. This policy seeks to reinforce guidance from Natural England about the importance of avoiding any net increase in nitrogen reaching the Solent Region International Sites. While clearly a strategic policy, this matter is not covered by the existing Local Plan: Policy A4.2 is therefore designed to make a local contribution to this important objective by setting out appropriate development management measures where they are needed.

#### **Policy A4.3: Mottisfont bats**

65. The Mottisfont Bats Special Area of Conservation is one of only six known “maternity sites” (where female bats gather to give birth and raise their young) in the UK. The supporting material to this policy says that the rare Barbastelle bat makes use of a much wider area around the SAC “and could potentially be foraging and breeding at satellite sites in the Plan

area". Neither the policy nor the introduction to it points out that the SAC itself lies outside the Plan area, and therefore its provisions cannot apply directly to it. ***I recommend that this is made clear in paragraph 6.4.12.*** This does not, of course, prevent policies being put in place relating to Awbridge.

66. While the broad approach to biodiversity is covered by TVLP Policy E5, it is clearly appropriate that the NP makes specific reference to the Mottisfont designation, and I consider that Policy A4.3 contains the necessary level of guidance for applicants for planning permission.

#### **Policy A4.4: New Forest Special Protection Area**

67. This policy is designed to protect certain bird species from the impact of tourism, including development proposed within the 13.8 km "Zone of Influence" of the New Forest Special Area of Conservation. This requirement (which would cover the whole of the NP area) is a result of cooperation between neighbouring authorities and statutory bodies. The policy itself sets out in very general terms what steps would need to be taken to achieve the conservation objective, but these would be sufficient to alert applicants for planning permission to the need to consult with the appropriate authorities on the detailed requirements. There is no equivalent policy in the TVLP.
68. TVBC asks for an addition to the second paragraph of the policy, so that it reads: "This could be in the form of a financial contribution towards an agreed package of mitigation measures within and outside the designated sites, including the provision of alternative natural green space for recreational use *to the standard in force at the time of the application. Such mitigation measures must be secured for the duration of the development's effects and must fully adhere to any updates to the guidance issued following the approval of this Plan*". ***I recommend that this be done.***
69. Note: The Basic Conditions Statement omits reference to Policy A4.4: there is no obvious reason for this, but since it is outside my remit as examiner to make a specific recommendation on the point, I simply suggest it would be helpful for that omission to be rectified.

#### **Policy A5: Dark night skies**

70. The introduction to this policy explains that there is local support for care to be taken about the levels and type of lighting in the Parish, including concerns about the effect on wildlife, especially bats. The policy itself summarises the safeguards that new development proposals should include to ensure that Awbridge retains its tranquil character. It also says that new street lighting will not be supported – this is perhaps a little blunt: there may be circumstances where improved lighting is needed on safety grounds. ***I recommend that the last paragraph of the policy be replaced with: "Proposals for new street lighting will only be supported in principle where there is a strong case for it on highway and pedestrian safety grounds".***

#### **Policy A6: Setting of the dispersed settlements.**

71. Policy A6 seeks to ensure that any development which might otherwise be acceptable in principle maintains "the open rural spaces between dispersed settlements", in particular those separating Kent's Oak from Newtown, Upper Ratley and Awbridge, and that between Awbridge Hill and Standbridge Earls. These areas are shown on figure 22, and the policy says that development within them "that would be intrusive, or cumulatively result in the merging of settlements, will not be supported".

72. The Basic Conditions Statement says that the policy designates the areas concerned as open gaps, referencing (in part) Local Plan Policy E3 to suggest conformity of Policy A6 with the strategic context. However, LP E3 only relates to 10 specific “higher order” gaps, not to gaps between settlements in general, and clearly was not intended to apply to the spaces between small entities within rural parishes such as Awbridge.
73. I recognise the importance of ensuring that the various built elements of the Parish retain a sense of distinctiveness. However, as TVBC points out in its response to Policy A6, the established settlement hierarchy is clear that the areas of land concerned are defined as “open countryside” for planning purposes, where development is to be strictly controlled.
74. In my view, Local Plan Policies COM2, COM8, COM11 and COM12, together with policies both in the LP and the NP governing design and related issues, provide sufficient safeguards for dealing with the issue, subject to some minor additions to make them specific to Awbridge. Some new housing will need to be accommodated within the NP area over the Plan period; where this might go has yet to be decided, but Policy A7 properly requires schemes to take into account the existing pattern of development, the relationship with open countryside and the need to avoid coalescence.
75. The principal problem with Policy A6 is the fact that the areas of land concerned are precisely defined by figure 22. I consider that the Plan’s objectives can be achieved equally by adopting a more descriptive approach. ***I therefore recommend that figure 22 be amended by the removal of the references to areas 1, 2 and 3, and that Policy A6 be replaced with the following: “Development proposals will be required to safeguard the separateness and distinctive character of the different settlements within the Parish, principally Awbridge, Kent’s Oak, Upper Ratley, Awbridge Hill and Stanbridge Earls. Proposals which individually or cumulatively might result in the merging of these settlements will not be supported.”***
76. For completeness, I have previously noted that Mr Petrie objects to this policy as it stands, making points which are similar in principle to those he raised in relation to Policy A2; my response to those is therefore also the same. Since I am recommending a significant amendment to Policy A6, I can deal briefly with the other matters he raises (in any event, from my examination of the submitted documents it seems that Daneswood is not actually included within Area 1 of Policy A6 as shown in figure 22).
77. Mr Petrie’s suggestion that Daneswood “forms part of the existing developed pattern along Danes Road” is not supported by the facts. Over the roughly 1500m from the southern edge of Kent’s Oak to the junction with the A27, while there is some evidence of residential curtilages (principally occasional access driveways), hardly any buildings are visible due to the presence of extensive belts of trees and shrubs. Online maps confirm that there is little more than a scattering of properties set well back from the road along this length.
78. I am not able to comment on the relevance of the planning permission recently granted for five dwellings on the eastern side of Danes Road to which Mr Petrie refers, beyond noting that for the first 600m or so south of the centre of Kent’s Oak the frontage on that side is already considerably more built up than that opposite.

### **Policy A7: Housing**

79. The ANP does not include any housing allocations. The current categorization of Awbridge as a “tier 3” village clearly means that it is not considered suitable for any large-scale development, due to its lack of facilities and poor public transport. The Plan concludes that no further guidelines are needed in relation to the scale of housing provision, and the level of

“organic growth” envisaged is such that there is not seen to be any need to identify a specific site for new housing.

80. TVBC considers that this conclusion misses an opportunity, a position amplified in the representations by Alfred Homes, who have an interest in land north of Romsey Road. The company points to the increase in the rural housing requirement proposed in the new draft Local Plan, and the fact that some other tier 3 villages have allocated land to reflect the new position. They see an inconsistency between the decision not to do the same in Awbridge and the Parish Council’s acknowledgement of the local housing problem. They also point out that they are in a position to assist with the community’s wish for a new pre-school (and have submitted an application<sup>8</sup> for 38 dwellings, including a school, which is undecided at the time of writing).
81. While neighbourhood plans are of course free to propose housing sites, they are not obliged to do so; and given the fact that the new Local Plan has not reached examination stage it would not be appropriate for me to attach significant weight to its provisions.
82. With the above in mind, I have concluded that there is no reason to recommend any changes to the present stance of the Plan so far as housing numbers or land allocations are concerned. This would not, of course, prevent the Parish Council from considering the matter again in due course if they so wished. It would also have no implications for the Romsey Road application to be determined on its merits.
83. Paragraph 7.1.3 points out that the adopted Local Plan would permit housing which involves replacement dwellings, community-led developments, rural affordable housing or the re-use of existing buildings. This is in addition to “infill” development, which would be permitted within the settlement boundary of Kent’s Oak (proposed to be retained in the updated Local Plan). The new Local Plan would also add windfalls to the list of acceptable developments within the Parish. It seeks to provide a minimum of 10 new homes in Awbridge, the details to be addressed in the Neighbourhood Plan.<sup>9</sup>
84. Part 1 of Policy A7 supports an affordable housing site or community-led site (with an element of affordable housing to meet local needs) “provided that [it] makes provision for wider community benefits”. This requirement is too vague to be of practical value in development management terms. The physical criteria to be met (referred to in my consideration of Policy A6) are appropriate in their own terms but are mostly covered already in the Local Plan and the Parish-wide Design Code. There is also some duplication with other NP policies. Given the fact that there will be only limited development pressure in the Parish if the existing strategic context is maintained, there is a need to simplify the requirements here.
85. The Policy also seeks to provide guidance for “a larger community-led scheme ...” something which is not defined. Such a scheme must be accompanied by evidence of community support – a requirement amply covered by Local Plan Policy COM9. In addition, regard must be had to six very specific requirements, not all of which are likely to be relevant (or feasible) in relation to every proposal that might emerge. This makes for an awkward policy which it would be difficult to interpret and implement.

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<sup>8</sup> A online search shows that this was made on 31 October last year, reference 25/01053/FULLS

<sup>9</sup>NP paragraph 7.1.8 says that these policies “do not carry any weight” because they have not been subject to examination. It would be more accurate to say that they have *limited* weight, which would depend to a large extent on the stage the new Local Plan has reached.

86. Part 2 of Policy A7 relates to the need for affordable homes and seems to add nothing to LP Policy COM8. Part 3 points to the need for schemes to have regard to the Design Code and would be covered by my recommended re-wording of the policy, which follows.
87. In the light of the above, ***I recommend that Policy A7 be replaced with the following: “Proposals for an affordable housing site or community led site (with an element of affordable housing to meet local need) would be supported in principle. Schemes will be expected to have regard to the requirements of Local Plan Policy E1, which seeks high quality design in the Borough; Local Plan Policy E2, which aims to protect, conserve and enhance the landscape character of the Borough; Local Plan Policies COM 8 and COM9, which govern rural exception affordable housing and community-led schemes respectively); other relevant policies in this Neighbourhood Plan (in particular policies A2, A3, A4.1 and A9); and the detailed considerations set out in the Parish-wide Design Code”.***

#### **Policy A8: Non-designated heritage assets**

88. The Parish has 15 listed buildings and one registered park/garden, but there are other heritage assets which are considered worthy of protection due to their age, visual quality and/or historic connections. Policy A8 and figure 29 identify 14 buildings which are particularly valued in these terms, and development proposals will be required to demonstrate how they will preserve and enhance their setting and historical value. It may, however, not always be necessary or feasible to require an enhancement in these terms: ***I therefore recommend a minor addition to the Policy such that it read: “Development proposals should demonstrate how they will preserve and, where appropriate and practicable, enhance non-designated heritage assets...”.***

#### **Policy A9: Design**

89. This policy is designed to give practical effect to part 12 of the NPPF, which sets out the Government’s policies in relation to achieving well-designed places. It also adds necessary detail to Local Plan Policy E1, especially by requiring development to take into account the character appraisal of the Parish (which identifies five distinct types, as located in figure 30 and illustrated by informative photographs). The policy lists nine factors which would be relevant in such an exercise: many (if not all) of these are also discussed in the Design Code, but I consider it necessary for them to be set out in the development plan itself, in order for proper weight to be given to them.
90. As it stands, the opening paragraph of the policy is unclear in its wording. ***I recommend that it be replaced with the following: “New development will be expected to demonstrate how consideration has been given both to the Character Appraisal of the Plan area (as highlighted in figure 30) and relevant parts of the Parish-wide Design Code. Elements which are likely to be of particular importance include:...”.***
91. Hampshire County Council suggests the addition of a requirement to prioritise the sustainable reuse of recycled materials to minimise waste disposal. This would result in a similar (though not identical) wording to existing guidance in the Design Code.

#### **Policy A10: Flooding and drainage**

92. Paragraph 9.1.1 explains that this policy is designed to add to references in the NPPF and Local Plan by identifying particular areas within the Parish that are prone to flooding, both from rivers and as a result of surface water run-off. The policy lists eight factors which new development needs to take into account, including (where appropriate) the adoption of

sustainable drainage systems. These considerations are all relevant in terms of the development management process.

93. Southern Water supports the policy's encouragement for development to incorporate water efficiency measures, but asks that it be strengthened by adding a requirement for new homes to meet either a water efficiency standard of 100 litres maximum daily allowable usage per person, or any future national standards, whichever is lower. It provides examples of where this has been done by other councils, but in each case these are in the context of local plans – which is a more appropriate policy level than a neighbourhood plan to address this issue. I therefore do not recommend that Policy A10 be modified in the way Southern Water suggests.

#### **Policy A11: Accessibility, public rights of way and highway safety**

94. This policy seeks to reflect the consultation responses which highlighted in particular pedestrian safety and access to services and facilities. The suggestion of a new footpath (figure 35) has clear land-use planning implications and it is therefore an appropriate policy for inclusion in the Plan. Other measures being advocated are more related to traffic management considerations, and some of them are too vague to be of any real value. In addition, many of the issues are already covered by Local Plan policies T1 and T2, Design Codes 21-25 and part 9 of the NPPF; and some of the provisions are unrealistic, given the small-scale nature of the schemes which are likely to come forward.
95. To avoid duplication and over-complexity, and to improve clarity for applicants for planning permission, ***I recommend that Policy A11 be replaced with the following: "Support in principle will be given to development proposals which include measures for improving the safety and convenience of local walking and cycling routes between the settlements and to community facilities and the wider area, a priority being the potential route shown on figure 35. All proposals should have regard to Local Plan Policies T1 (managing development) and T2 (parking standards). Particular attention will be given to addressing parking problems in the vicinity of the primary school."***
96. I have noted Hampshire County Council's suggested rewording of parts of the policy. While these are in principle relevant, it seems to me that the very limited scale of future development in Awbridge is such that they are not necessary, and that the general policy requirements set out above will suffice.

#### **Policy A12: Community facilities**

97. This policy lists five features of the Parish which are particularly valued by the community, and paragraph 9.3.1 says it sets out to "prevent the unnecessary loss" of these assets. It does not in fact do this, since it is limited to offering support for the enhancement of community facilities in general. Even if this were not the case, however, it seems highly unlikely that any proposals will emerge which would threaten the continued presence of the primary school, the village hall or All Saints Church. The playground and playing fields are already protected under Policy A3<sup>10</sup>.
98. This only leaves Hansard's Farm Shop, an individual business which it would not be appropriate for a planning policy to seek to protect so explicitly. That said, if there were evidence that the named business served a clear social need, an appropriately worded policy could be justified – but no evidence has been provided to suggest that that is the case. In any

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<sup>10</sup> although this is not entirely clear, since the A3 entry does not mention a playground

event, the premises could change to a wide range of other uses under Class E of the Use Classes Order without a planning application being required.

99. A further problem is that the policy as it stands says that enhancement proposals “must demonstrate how they will meet a community need” – a requirement which lacks both clarity and reasoned justification – and they are expected to pass four further tests which either go beyond land-use considerations or are covered by other development plan policies.
100. I fully understand the desire to protect local services and amenities, but policies must be necessary, clear and realistic. Much of the ground covered by Policy A12 is dealt with under Local Plan Policy COM14. ***I recommend that Policy A12 be replaced with the following: “Development that would enhance the range of local retail services, recreation and other social amenities will be supported in principle, subject to compliance with other relevant development plan policies”.***

#### **Policy A13: Small-scale employment uses**

101. This policy has two distinct elements. The first encourages new or expanded small-scale business, subject to the usual impact considerations. While there is some duplication with Local Plan Policy LE17, the latter refers only to existing employment sites, and Policy A13 therefore adds a local dimension.
102. The second part of the policy encourages “new and improved utility infrastructure ... to meet the identified needs of the community...”. It is not clear what this refers to, and because it is too vague a statement to be of practical value, ***I recommend that it be deleted.***
103. [I would point out that the BCS does not include reference to Policy A13 – this seems to be because the employment issue was included within the comments on Policy A12. The Parish Council may wish to amend this slight anomaly].

#### **Implementation and monitoring**

104. It is the practice in many neighbourhood plans for clear guidance to be given on the circumstances where (or when) a review might be undertaken. However, this is not a statutory requirement, nor is it the subject of Government policy beyond guidance that communities are encouraged to keep plans up to date. In this case, the Plan states (at paragraph 1.5.2) that the Parish Council, in collaboration with the community, “will review the Plan every year at the Parish AGM”.

#### **Conclusions on the basic conditions**

105. There is nothing in the Plan that gives rise to any significant concerns in relation to the basic conditions, and my recommendations are principally aimed at reducing duplication with other policies and adding clarity where I think it is needed.
106. I am therefore satisfied that the Awbridge Neighbourhood Plan makes appropriate provision for sustainable development. I conclude that in this and in all other material respects, subject to my recommended modifications, it has appropriate regard to national policy. Similarly, and again subject to my recommended modifications, I conclude that the Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan for the local area. There is no evidence before me to suggest that the Plan is not compatible with EU obligations, including human rights requirements.

### **Formal recommendation**

107. I have concluded that, provided that the recommendations set out above are followed, the Awbridge Neighbourhood Plan would meet the basic conditions, and therefore recommend that, as modified, it should proceed to a referendum. Finally, I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the neighbourhood plan area, but I have been given no reason to think this is necessary.

*David Kaiserman*

David Kaiserman BA  
DipTP MRTPI  
Independent Examiner

29 July 2026

## APPENDIX 1 – SUMMARY TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

| Examiner's report paragraph | NP reference                 | Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 19                          | The Plan period              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amend the Plan period to “2025-2042”.</li> </ul>                                                                                        |
| 36                          | Appendices/<br>Contents page | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attach the appendices to the plan in a more straightforward way and update the contents page to show where they can be found</li> </ul> |
| 38                          | Contents page                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove the anomaly regarding topic areas headings</li> </ul>                                                                            |
| 42 & 43                     | Policy A1                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amend the wording of the policy as suggested</li> <li>Delete part iv of the policy</li> </ul>                                           |
| 45                          | Policy A2                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace figure 2 with a simpler map showing the precise location of the viewpoints</li> </ul>                                           |
| 54                          | Policy A3                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a clear map for each site</li> </ul>                                                                                            |
| 61 & 62                     | Policy A4.1                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace the policy with the suggested wording</li> <li>Add the suggested wording to the policy's introductory text</li> </ul>           |
| 65                          | Policy A4.3                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make clear in para 6.4.12 that the SAC lies outside the Plan area</li> </ul>                                                            |
| 68                          | Policy A4.4                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add the wording suggested by TVBC to the second paragraph of the policy</li> </ul>                                                      |
| 70                          | Policy A5                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace the last paragraph of the policy as suggested</li> </ul>                                                                        |
| 75                          | Policy A6                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amend figure 22 as suggested</li> <li>Replace the policy with the suggested wording</li> </ul>                                          |
| 87                          | Policy A7                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace the policy with the suggested wording</li> </ul>                                                                                |
| 88                          | Policy A8                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add suggested wording to the policy</li> </ul>                                                                                          |
| 90                          | Policy A9                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace the first paragraph of the policy with the suggested wording</li> </ul>                                                         |
| 95                          | Policy A11                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace the policy with the suggested wording</li> </ul>                                                                                |
| 100                         | Policy A12                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replace the policy with the suggested wording</li> </ul>                                                                                |
| 102                         | Policy A13                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delete the second part of the policy.</li> </ul>                                                                                        |