

Meeting Synopsis

1. Context and Strategic Position

- The meeting was set against a background of **significant planning uncertainty**, including:
 - Pending vote on the **Pendle Local Plan** (based on the 2023 NPPF).
 - **Local Government Reorganisation**, with Pendle Borough Council to be abolished by 2028 and a new unitary authority expected (likely Blackburn-led).
 - Anticipated further revisions to the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** and the introduction of **National Development Management Policies**, increasing uncertainty for local plan-making.
- The group's shared objective is to **create certainty and strong local designations for Colne** through an updated Neighbourhood Plan, so that future unitary authorities must take these into account.

2. Neighbourhood Plan Review – Scope and Direction

- It was agreed that the **core policies of the existing Neighbourhood Plan remain broadly sound** and will not fundamentally change.
- The review will focus on:
 - **Updating and tightening policies** rather than wholesale replacement.
 - Strengthening the Plan's role in **development management and decision-making**.
- The most significant proposed changes relate to:
 - **Town centre and High Street regeneration**, incorporating outcomes from the recently completed **Masterplan** (including Craddock Road and Newmarket Street).
 - A stronger emphasis on **regeneration-led planning**, particularly in the South Valley.

3. Land and Site Issues

- Pendle Council is in the process of divesting multiple assets ("fire sale"), presenting an opportunity for Colne Town Council to acquire:
 - Former garage sites, allotments, agricultural land, cleared housing sites, and other small parcels.
- Key points agreed:
 - These sites are largely **within the settlement boundary** and many may qualify as **brownfield**, though this will need site-by-site assessment.
 - There is **no requirement to allocate additional housing sites** at present, as Colne has a housing target of zero; any delivery is additional benefit.
 - Caution is required to avoid **conflicts of interest**, particularly where the Town Council may become a landowner.
 - The Neighbourhood Plan must not be perceived as allocating sites simply because they are council-owned.
- A distinction was made between:
 - **Planning policy** (Neighbourhood Plan policies enabling or supporting development), and
 - **Asset-based regeneration and delivery strategies** (to be progressed separately but aligned with the Plan).

4. Regeneration Focus

- Strong consensus emerged that:
 - The South Valley represents a long-term **regeneration opportunity**, despite historic viability challenges.

- A **regeneration area policy** within the Neighbourhood Plan is an appropriate and defensible approach.
- Delivery should not be relied upon to meet housing numbers but should instead be enabled through supportive policy.
- Examples from other areas (e.g. Northlight in Brierfield) were cited to demonstrate how **public intervention can transform low-value areas** over time.
- The group emphasised the importance of **ambition**, positioning Colne as a destination with strong cultural, heritage and environmental assets.

5. New and Updated Policy Areas Identified

The following policy areas were agreed for further development or strengthening:

- **Non-designated heritage assets:** addition of several new candidates, with updated mapping and descriptions.
- **HMOs:** exploration of policy options to manage impacts (e.g. occupancy thresholds), subject to alignment with national and local policy.
- **Nature and environment:** embedding the forthcoming **Lancashire Nature Recovery Strategy** once published.
- **Design policy:**
 - Moving key design principles directly into Neighbourhood Plan policies (rather than relying on external documents).
 - Stronger, checklist-style design criteria to support decision-making and refusals.
 - Improved guidance on parking, dormers, dark skies, and boundary treatments.
- **Conservation areas:**
 - Incorporating concise, locally specific statements of special architectural and historic interest for each conservation area.
 - Aligning with updated character appraisals currently being prepared.

6. Process, Timetable and Next Steps

- A **site visit and policy workshop** was provisionally agreed for **Wednesday 7 January**, subject to confirmation of travel arrangements.
- The visit will:
 - Focus on key issues and opportunity sites rather than covering the entire parish.
 - Be followed by offline policy analysis rather than an immediate in-person group meeting.
- A full **project plan and timetable** will be developed **after:**
 - The site visit, and
 - An initial sift and assessment of potential sites (including SEA implications).
- The target ambition is to **complete the Neighbourhood Plan review during 2026**, ahead of the new unitary authority taking effect.

7. Actions Agreed

- **Gina to:**
 - Prepare and circulate a short written summary of the meeting for the wider group.
 - Coordinate mapping and lists of potential sites following the Town Council decision.
- **Dave / consultants to:**
 - Review policy context once site maps and boundaries are provided.
 - Advise on whether sites require allocation, can be supported through existing settlement/brownfield policy, or should sit within a regeneration framework.
- **Sarah to:**

- Prepare an initial, informal regeneration area sketch/map for discussion.
- All parties to:
 - Share information transparently and maintain clear separation between planning policy and land ownership interests.