

**Pilning & Severn Beach Neighbourhood Plan
STATEMENT OF COMMON GROUND**

between

**Pilning & Severn Beach Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
The Environment Agency
South Gloucestershire Council**

6 February 2025

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) covering approaches to mitigation of flood risk has been prepared during the development of the Pilning & Severn Beach Neighbourhood Plan, and has been signed by Pilning & Severn Beach Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (P&SBNPSG), the Environment Agency (EA) and South Gloucestershire Council (SGC), referred to hereafter as ‘the parties’.
- 1.2 The purpose of the SoCG is to set out as at January 2025, areas of agreement between the parties in respect of how flood risk issues have and will be addressed through the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.3 The agreed SoCG will allow P&SBNPSG to progress with further technical work by flood risk specialists, utilising public funded grants, with reasonable confidence that flood risk can be mitigated and therefore that grant money will not be wasted.
- 1.4 P&SBNPSG was established and commenced its work in January 2021.
- 1.5 An independent Housing Needs Assessment was completed by AECOM with their technical support package through Locality in 2021. This identified the need for 246 new dwellings plus 30 to 41 specialist homes for older people in the plan period through to 2035.
- 1.6 This need was supported in surveys of residents and local business undertaken in 2021 and 2022. Additionally, the need for some retail (pub/bar and takeaway) in Severn Beach and parking for railway station and visitors to the coast were identified.
- 1.7 Potential sites were identified in ‘Calls for Sites’ undertaken by both SGC and P&SBNPSG. Other potential sites were put forward by P&SBNPSG. These sites have been subject to on-going evaluation of their availability, suitability and deliverability by both P&SBNPSG and AECOM, resulting in a shorter list of potential sites.
- 1.8 An independent report ‘Design Codes and Guidelines’ by AECOM/Locality was issued on 24th January 2023. The document can be found on the P&SBNPSG website https://www.psbpc.co.uk/_files/ugd/61816a_5bc869d6cc18402d8f315e40ccd41e9e.pdf The report considered water and flood risk and identified design solutions for dwellings in areas susceptible to flooding.
- 1.9 There has been regular communication between P&SBNPSG and SGC, through emails and at meetings, with SGC providing guidance and advice in the development of the Neighbourhood Plan.

- 1.10 Issues of Green Belt and flood risk were identified by SGC as significant policy challenges for the Neighbourhood Plan to overcome in a meeting at their offices with P&SBNPSG on 6th July 2023. SGC outlined that for flood risk, P&SBNPSG must resolve the approach to flood risk following national policy (in the National planning Policy Framework) and demonstrate how the Sequential and Exceptions Tests will be passed on any sites that make it into the Plan for allocation.
- 1.11 To develop its strategy, P&SBNPSG had further discussions with SGC and different flood risk specialists/consultants, including JBA consulting who had completed Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) work for SGC.
- 1.12 In December 2023 P&SBNPSG shared its initial draft Sequential Test with SGC. Both parties recognised the need for access to the modelling showing the design flood scenario in 100 years which has been remodelled as a result of the improved Avonmouth Severnside Enterprise Area (ASEA) sea defences and is needed in order to consider residential development. The new modelling was produced by the ASEA project (by Mott MacDonald on behalf of the EA, SGC and Bristol City Council (client partners) to support the objective to enable new commercial development in the ASEA and the design flood scenario for tidal flooding is 0.5% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP). The ASEA modelling is based on higher central climate change allowance whilst guidance requires that some forms of development are considered against upper end allowance so proxy data or amended Two-dimensional Unsteady FLOW (TUFLOW) modelling will be required.
- 1.13 A formal request for the data was made by P&SBNPSG to the EA, on 18th December 2023. P&SBNPSG had previously on 20th October 2023 made an application to the EA for product 4 information. The EA advised that the P&SBNPSG's work should consider flood risk from all sources, with a requirement to involve the Lower Severn Internal Drainage Board as they hold the local area fluvial model.
- 1.14 A joint meeting was held between P&SBNPSG, SGC and EA on 26th January 2024. The meeting was positive and concluded the following:
- The EA expect to have updated flood modelling data available by the end of February 2024
 - Once the data was available, the draft Sequential Test would be updated by P&SBNPSG
 - Proposed residential allocations would require Exception Tests, which would likely group the three sites in Severn Beach and separately all the Pilning sites
 - The Exception Tests would specify suitable measures appropriate to address identified risk levels, rather than seek to confirm a scheme design
 - Developers will be responsible for selection of measures within designs at application stage via the site-specific flood risk assessment.
- 1.15 On 22nd November 2024 P&SBNPSG received electronic copy of the initial 100-year ASEA re-modelled flood data from the EA. This was used by P&SBNPSG to revise the draft Sequential Test which was sent to both SGC and the EA.
- 1.16 A meeting between P&SBNPSG and SGC on 5th December 2024 discussed the revised draft Sequential Test which, based on the new 100-year data, identifies there are no significant risk of flooding at the potential sites. However, it was recognised the electronic copy of the breach scenario ASEA re-modelled flood data from the EA was needed, to allow P&SBNPSG to complete the Sequential Test and to progress with Exception Tests

- 1.17 It was agreed to proceed to a joint meeting between P&SBNPSG, SGC and the EA held on 17th December 2024. The background and draft Sequential Test were discussed. It was agreed that a parish-based Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) would need to be produced by a qualified flood risk specialist, which would include required Exception Tests, grouping the sites in Severn Beach and separately all the sites in Pilning. Once the breach scenario ASEA re-modelled flood data becomes available, the P&SBNPSG would prepare a draft specification for an enquiry to qualified flood risk specialists for the preparation of the SFRA. The draft specification would be sent to the EA and SGC for any comments prior to going out to consultants. SGC proposed that a SoCG should be prepared by P&SBNPSG for the parties to sign, which would be distributed with the draft specification.

2. Governance arrangements

- 2.1 P&SBNPSG is responsible for preparing the Neighbourhood Plan on behalf of the Pilning & Severn Beach Parish Council who will ultimately submit the Neighbourhood Development Plan to SGC for its Regulation 16 examination and public referendum. P&SBNPSG shall ensure that the Neighbourhood Plan represents the views of the Parish, is evidence based, has alignment with the Local Plan and undergoes the appropriate stages of consultation and review.
- 2.2 The EA has operated in an advisory capacity on flood risk to P&SBNPSG at relevant meetings during the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. The EA is a statutory consultee and will formally review the Neighbourhood Plan at Regulation 14 Consultation, anticipated during the second quarter of 2025.
- 2.3 SGC is responsible for its existing Core Strategy and Policies, Site and Places Plan and preparation of the new Local Plan. SGC has operated in an advisory capacity to P&SBNPSG throughout the development of the Neighbourhood Plan. SGC is a statutory consultee and will formally review the Neighbourhood Plan at Regulation 14 Consultation. SGC will put the Neighbourhood Plan through its Regulation 16 examination and when finalised, through public referendum.

3. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally prepared plans can provide for housing and other development in a sustainable manner. It was last amended and re-issued in December 2024. The current content relating to flooding is as follows:

Planning and flood risk

170. *Inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding should be avoided by directing development away from areas at highest risk (whether existing or future). Where development is necessary in such areas, the development should be made safe for its lifetime without increasing flood risk elsewhere.*
171. *Strategic policies should be informed by a strategic flood risk assessment, and should manage flood risk from all sources. They should consider cumulative impacts in, or affecting, local areas susceptible to flooding, and take account of advice from the Environment Agency and other relevant flood risk management authorities, such as lead local flood authorities and internal drainage boards.*

172. All plans should apply a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development – taking into account all sources of flood risk and the current and future impacts of climate change – so as to avoid, where possible, flood risk to people and property. They should do this, and manage any residual risk, by:
- a) applying the sequential test and then, if necessary, the exception test as set out below;
 - b) safeguarding land from development that is required, or likely to be required, for current or future flood management;
 - c) using opportunities provided by new development and improvements in green and other infrastructure to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding, (making as much use as possible of natural flood management techniques as part of an integrated approach to flood risk management); and
 - d) where climate change is expected to increase flood risk so that some existing development may not be sustainable in the long-term, seeking opportunities to relocate development, including housing, to more sustainable locations.
173. A sequential risk-based approach should also be taken to individual applications in areas known to be at risk now or in future from any form of flooding, by following the steps set out below.
174. Within this context the aim of the sequential test is to steer new development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding from any source. Development should not be allocated or permitted if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower risk of flooding. The strategic flood risk assessment will provide the basis for applying this test.
175. The sequential test should be used in areas known to be at risk now or in the future from any form of flooding, except in situations where a site-specific flood risk assessment demonstrates that no built development within the site boundary, including access or escape routes, land raising or other potentially vulnerable elements, would be located on an area that would be at risk of flooding from any source, now and in the future (having regard to potential changes in flood risk).
176. Applications for some minor development and changes of use⁶² should also not be subject to the sequential test, nor the exception test set out below, but should still meet the requirements for site-specific flood risk assessments set out in footnote⁶³.
177. Having applied the sequential test, if it is not possible for development to be located in areas with a lower risk of flooding (taking into account wider sustainable development objectives), the exception test may have to be applied. The need for the exception test will depend on the potential vulnerability of the site and of the development proposed, in line with the Flood Risk Vulnerability Classification set out in Annex 3.
178. The application of the exception test should be informed by a strategic or site specific flood risk assessment, depending on whether it is being applied during plan production or at the application stage. To pass the exception test it should be demonstrated that: a) the development would provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk; and b) the development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall.
179. Both elements of the exception test should be satisfied for development to be allocated or permitted.
180. Where planning applications come forward on sites allocated in the development plan through the sequential test, applicants need not apply the sequential test again. However, the exception test may need to be reapplied if relevant aspects of the proposal had not been considered when the test was applied at the plan-making stage, or if more recent information about existing or potential flood risk should be taken into account.

181. *When determining any planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere. Where appropriate, applications should be supported by a site-specific flood-risk assessment⁶³. Development should only be allowed in areas at risk of flooding where, in the light of this assessment (and the sequential and exception tests, as applicable) it can be demonstrated that:*
- a) within the site, the most vulnerable development is located in areas of lowest flood risk, unless there are overriding reasons to prefer a different location;*
 - b) the development is appropriately flood resistant and resilient such that, in the event of a flood, it could be quickly brought back into use without significant refurbishment;*
 - c) it incorporates sustainable drainage systems, unless there is clear evidence that this would be inappropriate;*
 - d) any residual risk can be safely managed; and*
 - e) safe access and escape routes are included where appropriate, as part of an agreed emergency plan.*
182. *Applications which could affect drainage on or around the site should incorporate sustainable drainage systems to control flow rates and reduce volumes of runoff, and which are proportionate to the nature and scale of the proposal. These should provide multifunctional benefits wherever possible, through facilitating improvements in water quality and biodiversity, as well as benefits for amenity. Sustainable drainage systems provided as part of proposals for major development should:*
- a) take account of advice from the Lead Local Flood Authority;*
 - b) have appropriate proposed minimum operational standards; and*
 - c) have maintenance arrangements in place to ensure an acceptable standard of operation for the lifetime of the development.*

Footnotes

- 62 *This includes householder development, small non-residential extensions (with a footprint of less than 250m²) and changes of use; except for changes of use to a caravan, camping or chalet site, or to a mobile home or park home site, where the sequential and exception tests should be applied as appropriate.*
- 63 *A site-specific flood risk assessment should be provided for all development in Flood Zones 2 and 3. In Flood Zone 1, an assessment should accompany all proposals involving: sites of 1 hectare or more; land which has been identified by the Environment Agency as having critical drainage problems; land identified in a strategic flood risk assessment as being at increased flood risk in future; or land that may be subject to other sources of flooding, where its development would introduce a more vulnerable use.*

4. Key strategic matters that are agreed

- 4.1 P&SBNPSG has evidenced a need for a number of new dwellings in the Parish of Pilning & Severn Beach through Housing Needs Assessment and its surveys of residents and businesses. Agreement was also reached regarding SGC's approach to housing within the Neighbourhood Plan Area in the Local Plan which does not seek to allocate housing due to being able to demonstrate lower flood risk areas across the district. SGC does however support the approach taken by the NPG to apply the Sequential Test to the Neighbourhood Plan Area (NPA). The argument for this presented by the group is that the Housing Needs Assessment outlines a need arising within the NPA and therefore the Sequential Test should be applied to the same area.
- 4.2 In general, in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan, the P&SBNPSG will apply the policies of the NPPF relating to flooding (170 to 182 above), to provide for housing and other development in a sustainable manner.
- 4.3 The P&SBNPSG Sequential Test identifies that in the villages of Pilning and Severn Beach, where residential development is needed, the available and suitable sites are all of very similar flood risk and in Flood Zone 3. There are no other suitable and available sites within the villages of lower Flood Zones or lower flood risk. The Neighbourhood

Plan makes the case, on grounds of sustainability, for developments to be close to the village centres and adjacent to existing settlement boundaries.

- 4.4 The published 100-year flood data remodelled as a result of the improved ASEA sea defences and draft breach scenario data, shows that risk from tidal flooding to Pilning & Severn Beach has been reduced. Opportunities to bring forward new development should be within the scope of appropriately made local Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and Exception Tests, based on that data.
- 4.5 A Level 2 SFRA for the potential sites in Pilning and Severn Beach is to be produced for P&SBNPSG by an appropriate flood risk consultant. The Level 2 SFRA shall inform and include Exception Test(s) applied to the two separate areas of potential sites grouped in Pilning and Severn Beach.

To pass the exception test it should be demonstrated that:

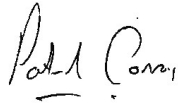
- the developments would provide wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh the flood risk.
 - the developments will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall.
 - safe access and egress can be achieved with a potential need for SGC's Emergency Planners and services to be consulted.
- 4.6 The Exception Tests and as appropriate Site Flood Risk Assessments shall:
- safeguard land from development that is required, or likely to be required, for current or future flood management.
 - use opportunities provided by new development and improvements in green and other infrastructure to reduce the causes and impacts of flooding.
- 4.7 The draft specification for the production of the Level 2 SFRA shall be distributed and agreed between the parties prior to its issue for tendering.
- 4.8 The P&SBNPSG SFRA and Exception Tests, shall ensure strategic policies in the Neighbourhood Plan manage flood risk from all sources and consider current and future impacts of climate change so as to avoid, where possible, flood risk to people and property. They will consider cumulative impacts in, or affecting, any local areas susceptible to flooding, and take account of advice from the Environment Agency and other relevant flood risk management authorities, such as lead local flood authorities and internal drainage boards arising through the Regulation 14 consultation.
- 4.9 Developers of sites included in the made Neighbourhood Plan, will at planning application stage prepare Site Flood Risk Assessments which will appropriately reference and adhere to the P&SBNPSG Level 2 SFRA and Exception Tests.

5. Matters that are not agreed

- 5.1 Although the parties agree to the above approach, its success in terms of allowing any new development to be included in the Neighbourhood Plan cannot be agreed until completed Sequential Test and Level 2 SFRA/Exception Tests are presented by P&SBNPSG for review.

6. Signatories

Signed on behalf of South Gloucestershire Council



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Signed on behalf of the Environment Agency

Briony Waterman

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Signed on behalf of Pilning & Severn Beach Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group



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Dated

6th February 2025