

Planning Help

Helping you influence decisions that shape where you live



Step 1: Getting started

Build a team; engage your community; prepare and plan.



Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan might seem daunting. If you follow the steps set out in this guidance, and keep in touch with your local planning authority, then the process should be quite straightforward and you should not go wrong.

Look at relevant local and national planning policy and the regulations

Before doing anything else, have a look at national planning policy. This is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. This sets out the Government's overall approach to planning, which your Neighbourhood Plan must take into account.

Then read the Local Plan prepared, or being prepared, by your local planning authority. This will set out a vision and objectives for the whole of the district or local authority area. It will describe an overall strategy including how much and what sort of development should happen and in broad terms where this should take place. It will also include policies that set down what sort of development it will support, and what sort of development it will not support. It is likely to address a whole range of other relevant issues such as flood risk, nature conservation, and transport and access issues. It may even include policies that are specific to your own community.

You should also read the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations. These set out the steps that you have to take so that your plan can be formally adopted.

Who should be involved?

Your parish or town council, or the neighbourhood forum, should lead the process. But you should seek to involve the wider community, including:

- ▶ residents (including those who you are aware have expressed a wish to live in the area);
- ▶ community organisations;
- ▶ businesses; and
- ▶ landowners.

Nobody should feel excluded. If your wider community is on board from the start, then it will be easier to achieve the support that is needed to adopt a Neighbourhood Plan at the referendum stage.

Top tip

Don't just contact those people who you know or who you think will agree with your views. Make sure that the whole community is aware of the intention to develop a Neighbourhood Plan. This might involve providing information in other languages and formats, to make sure that, for example, ethnic minority groups or those who are blind or partially sighted can be involved.

If you live or work in an area where there is no parish or town council, then a neighbourhood forum will need to be set up. This will require quite a lot of support and people willing to be members of the forum (a minimum of 21 members of the forum will be required). The Neighbourhood Planning Regulations include set procedures that have to be followed for the forum to be formally approved by your local planning authority. Your local planning authority will also need to agree the area that the forum represents (see p.24). If you would like to set up a forum, you should talk to your local planning authority who will be able to advise you on the best course of action. They will also be able to advise about what criteria your forum will need to meet to be eligible.

Involving your wider community

People do not generally like having things imposed on them. So a Neighbourhood Plan must be a genuine community document. If you involve the wider community, including those who work in the area as well as residents, the greater the chances that your Neighbourhood Plan will gain support.

You will need to decide when and how to involve the wider community in your Neighbourhood Plan process. This may include organisations or individuals with a particular interest - businesses, community organisations and landowners. There are many ways of making people aware that you intend to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan, and involving them along the way, such as:

- ▶ meetings and events;
- ▶ leaflets and posters;
- ▶ workshops and questionnaires;
- ▶ website, email groups and social media (e.g. Facebook);
- ▶ notices in parish magazines or local newsletters; and
- ▶ the local press and radio stations.

Top tip

It is essential that the content of your Neighbourhood Plan represents the views of the wider community, not just those of the project group. In developing your plan there should be a two-way flow of information, backwards and forwards between the leading group and the wider community.

Don't forget that other organisations and the wider public are not just there to hear your ideas. There is usually a wealth of information and knowledge bound up in local communities that needs to be tapped into to inform your Neighbourhood Plan. The process for preparing a Neighbourhood Plan needs to be well thought out.

You may find it helpful to set up a Neighbourhood Plan project group. If you decide to do this, try to ensure that the project group includes a wide range of views, skills, knowledge and experience. A good size for a project group would be between five and ten people. Their job will be to oversee the process and preparation of your Neighbourhood Plan. However, it's the parish or town council, or the neighbourhood forum, who is ultimately responsible for the Neighbourhood Plan.

Define your Neighbourhood Plan area

You will need to decide what area the Neighbourhood Plan should cover. If you are considering developing a neighbourhood forum you will need to think about what area you could legitimately represent. You should also note there can only be one Neighbourhood Plan covering any one area, so if your boundaries overlap with another Neighbourhood Plan area, you may need to change the boundaries you have defined.

Although a parish or town council may want to include only the area it covers, the boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan area can be extended or reduced if this is justified and agreed with the adjoining parish or town council.

Once you have decided on your proposed neighbourhood area it will need to be formally approved by your local planning authority. They will undertake a formal consultation on this and consider any representations that might argue for different boundaries from those you have proposed.

In agreeing a Neighbourhood Plan area your local planning authority may also decide to designate it as a 'Business Area'. This will only be the case where the area is wholly or predominantly business in nature. This will make no difference to the process you go through to develop your Neighbourhood Plan but it will have an effect at the referendum. This is explained under Step 8 on p.46.

Prepare a programme for your Neighbourhood Plan

One of the first tasks will be to prepare a programme of work to prepare the Neighbourhood Plan. This is likely to include:

- ▶ The tasks that need to be undertaken at each stage.
- ▶ What resources will be needed to undertake the tasks (people, venues, materials, funding, etc.).
- ▶ How much time each stage will take.

It would be useful to get advice on this from your local planning authority.

Top tip

Do not underestimate how much time it will take to organise public consultation events and material and to analyse the

responses received. In developing your programme of work ensure adequate time is allowed for this.

Sustainability Appraisal

The purpose of *Sustainability Appraisal* is to appraise the social, environmental and economic effects of a plan. In doing so it helps to ensure that decisions are made that contribute to achieving sustainable development.

Neighbourhood Plans will need to conform to EU legislation and so in some circumstances they may require a Sustainability Appraisal to be undertaken. Whether or not your plan requires a Sustainability Appraisal will depend on factors such as how the proposals in it might affect the environment, society or the economy, whether you are proposing a higher level of development than in your Local Plan and whether it will affect nature conservation sites of EU importance.

You should discuss with your local planning authority whether your Neighbourhood Plan needs a Sustainability Appraisal. If it is required it should be developed in parallel with your Neighbourhood Plan, and so you should build it into your work programme. Even if one is not required it can be a useful tool for 'testing' your plan to ensure that it is suitable for your community. We have included further basic information on undertaking a [Sustainability Appraisal and how it relates to the steps set out in this document](#).

More detailed user-friendly guidance can also be found at www.levett-therivel.co.uk/DIYSA.pdf (PDF download, 2Mb).

Top tip

The Local Plan will have been subject to Sustainability Appraisal. If you follow the same approach for your Neighbourhood Plan then this should ensure that you are doing what you need to do.

 [Step 2: Identifying the issues to address in your Neighbourhood Plan](#)

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