

Neighbourhood Planning – Rising to the Challenge

Changes to the planning system set out in the Localism Bill will give people new rights to shape the future of their local areas. Neighbourhood planning will allow people to come together to say where they think new houses, businesses and shops should go, what they should look like, and in some cases grant planning consent for these developments.

Parish Councils and neighbourhood forums will have the right to prepare neighbourhood plans and neighbourhood development orders for their local areas. These can be as simple or as detailed as people want and provided that they are in line with national planning policy, the local plan and other legal requirements, and local people vote to approve them, they will form a new local level of the planning system.

How do I get involved in planning the future of my area?

- If you have a Parish Council, they will lead neighbourhood planning in your area.
- Elsewhere community groups can apply to be designated as a neighbourhood forum*. They will define the area they would like to 'plan' and ask the local council to agree this. The council will have the final say on the area to be planned and on whether a group will be recognised as a neighbourhood forum.

What happens next?

- Local councils will be required to provide technical advice and support to help neighbourhoods draw up their plans.
- The draft plan / order will be considered by an independent assessor who will prepare a report for the Parish Council / neighbourhood forum and local council to consider.
- Provided the plan / order is in line with national planning policy, the local plan and other legal requirements, a referendum will be held.
- If over 50% of those voting do so in favour, the plan / order will be brought into effect and will form a new local level of the planning system.

How will parish councils and Neighbourhood Forums involve everybody?

Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Forums will organise and facilitate the process of plan preparation and help develop a local approach to shaping the future of their area.

Successful neighbourhood planning will be built from balanced, inclusive and widespread involvement of local people in the process.

Whilst no 'perfect recipe' exists, there are some key ingredients which will help:

- Start with questions, not answers.
- Focus on what people care about – this will help motivate and engage them.
- Recognise and respect that people have different views, but each is equally important.
- Seek out and involve people and groups who you would not normally work or interact with – not just those that you know.
- Monitor who gets involved and who does not – then try to find a way to include them.
- Use different approaches for different people and different ways to catch attention.
- Good engagement inspires and motivates, it generates enthusiasm and commitment and importantly, should be enjoyable and rewarding for all those involved.

* To be a Neighbourhood Forum a group must be open to anyone in the area to join; it must have more than three residents from the area; a written constitution and the objectives of furthering social, economic and environmental well-being. The council can reject an application to be a neighbourhood forum on the basis, amongst other things, that the group is not representative.

The role of the Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum is to facilitate and organise the process, and to help people develop local solutions which will shape the future of their local areas.

Principles of Involvement



Learn from the process – identify what people thought was good and what could have been done better. Share experiences with others who are going through this process and learn from their successes.



Research – explore the neighbourhood, local history, different communities and groups, facilities and other community assets. What do people value and what would they like to see changed? What will motivate people to get involved, what else is happening in the area? Ask the local council about the local plan and other planning policy documents.



Relationship building, – develop links with community groups who can assist. How typical are they of the area – what barriers might exist to wider engagement and what help might be needed to build the ability of under-represented groups to engage?



Communications – use existing networks to communicate, place posters in places where local people visit. Start the process with questions, not answers. Use different approaches to communicate with different groups. Ensure that information can flow in all directions and response dates are clear. Hold events and meetings at times to suit different groups. Ensure openness, clarity and transparency at all times.

Principles of Engagement



Continuing to engage – value the effort people have put into the process by continuing the ‘conversation’. Share with everyone the range of views and ideas put forward – it will help with understanding and building agreement. How will any differences be resolved? This is not a ‘one stop’ journey, but a continual process of engagement.



Monitor and evaluate – monitor who is involved, does it reflect all parts of the community in the area or are there gaps? Have local businesses and land owners been involved? How can these gaps be filled to ensure balanced and inclusive views are captured.



Inclusive – ensure that it is not just a few who get involved. Everyone has an equal right to have their views heard and respected. Those who shout loudest are not always representative of the wider community – balanced inclusive engagement helps to decide how representative different views are.



Timing – be realistic. Identify opportunities to connect with other events in the locality. Inclusive and balanced engagement may appear to be time consuming, but in the long run will save time and resources and bring a wide range of other benefits.