

An introduction to neighbourhood planning

What is it?

Neighbourhood planning is a new way for communities to decide the future of the places where they live and work.

They will be able to:

- choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built
- have their say on what those new buildings should look like
- grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead.

The Government wants to introduce the right to do neighbourhood planning through the Localism Bill. The Localism Bill is being debated by Parliament at the moment.

Why does it matter?

The planning system helps decide what gets built, where and when. It is essential for supporting economic growth, improving people's quality of life, and protecting the natural environment.

In theory, planning has always supposed to give local communities a say in decisions that affect them. But in practice, communities have often found it hard to have a meaningful say. The Government wants to put power back in the hands of local residents, business, councils and civic leaders.

Neighbourhood planning is optional, not compulsory. No-one has to do it if they don't want to. But we think that lots of people will want to take the opportunity to influence the future of the place where they live or work.

How will it work?

There will be five key stages to neighbourhood planning.

Stage 1: Defining the neighbourhood

First, local people will need to decide how they want to work together.

In areas with a parish or town council, the parish or town council will take the lead on neighbourhood planning. They have long experience of working with and representing local communities.

In areas without a parish or town council, local people will need to decide which organisation should lead on coordinating the local debate. In some places, existing community groups may want to put themselves forward. In other places, local people might want to form a new group. In both cases, the group must meet some basic standards. It must, for example, have at least 21 members, and it must be open to new members.

Town and parish councils and community groups will then need to apply to the local planning authority (usually the borough or district council).

It's the local planning authority's job to keep an overview of all the different requests to do neighbourhood planning in their area.

They will check that the suggested boundaries for different neighbourhoods make sense and fit together. The local planning authority will say "no" if, for example, two proposed neighbourhood areas overlap.

They will also check that community groups who want to take the lead on neighbourhood planning meet the right standards. The planning authority will say "no" if, for example, the organisation is too small or not representative enough of the local community.

If the local planning authority decides that the community group meets the right standards, the group will be able to call itself a 'neighbourhood forum'. (This is simply the technical term for groups which have been granted the legal power to do neighbourhood planning.)

The town or parish council or neighbourhood forum can then get going and start planning for their neighbourhood.

Stage 2: Preparing the plan

Next, local people will begin collecting their ideas together and drawing up their plans.

- With **a neighbourhood plan**, communities will be able to establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood. They will be able to say, for example, where new homes and offices should be built, and what they should look like. The neighbourhood plan will set a vision for the future. It can be detailed, or general, depending on what local people want

- With a **neighbourhood development order**, the community can grant planning permission for new buildings they want to see go ahead. Neighbourhood development orders will allow new homes and offices to be built without the developers having to apply for separate planning permission.

Local people can choose to draw up **either** a plan, **or** a development order, or **both**. It is entirely up to them. Both must follow some ground rules:

- They must generally be in line with local and national planning policies
- They must be in line with other laws
- If the local planning authority says that an area needs to grow, then communities cannot use neighbourhood planning to block the building of new homes and businesses. They can, however, use neighbourhood planning to influence the type, design, location and mix of new development.

Stage 3: Independent check

Once a neighbourhood plan or order has been prepared, an independent examiner will check that it meets the right basic standards.

If the plan or order doesn't meet the right standards, the examiner will recommend changes. The planning authority will then need to consider the examiner's views and decide whether to make those changes.

If the examiner recommends significant changes, then the parish, town council or neighbourhood forum may decide to consult the local community again before proceeding.

Stage 4: Community referendum

The local council will organise a referendum on any plan or order that meets the basic standards. This ensures that the community has the final say on whether a neighbourhood plan or order comes into force.

People living in the neighbourhood who are registered to vote in local elections will be entitled to vote in the referendum.

In some special cases - where, for example, the proposals put forward in a plan for one neighbourhood have significant implications for other people nearby - people from other neighbourhoods may be allowed to vote too.

If more than 50 per cent of people voting in the referendum support the plan or order, then the local planning authority must bring it into force.

Stage 5: Legal force

Once a neighbourhood plan is in force, it carries real legal weight. Decision-makers will be obliged, by law, to take what it says into account when they consider proposals for development in the neighbourhood.

A neighbourhood order will grant planning permission for development that complies with the order. Where people have made clear that they want development of a particular type, it will be easier for that development to go ahead.

What happens next?

The formal legal right to do neighbourhood planning will only be available after the Localism Bill is approved by Parliament. We hope that the Bill will be approved later in 2011, and the formal right to do neighbourhood planning will follow later in 2012.

In some places, though, community groups, developers and councils are already thinking about how neighbourhood planning might work in their area. Check your council's website, read your local newspaper, or talk to a local community group to find out what's happening in your area.

Funding and support

There will be several sources of advice and support for communities who are interested in doing neighbourhood planning:

- The **local planning authority** will be obliged by law to help people draw up their neighbourhood plans
- **Developers, parish and town councils, landowners and local businesses** may all be interested in sponsoring and taking a leading role in neighbourhood planning. In fact, in some places, local businesses are already starting a debate with local residents and councils
- **The Government** has committed to providing £50m until March 2015 to support local councils in making neighbourhood planning a success
- **The Government** have already provided £3m to four community support organisations, who already support communities in planning for their neighbourhood. Their details are below:

The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment

Contact name: Sebastian Knox

Tel: 020 7613 8587

Email: sebastian.knox@princes-foundation.org

Website: <http://www.princes-foundation.org/our-work/supporting-communities-and-neighbourhoods-planning>

CPRE in partnership with NALC

Contact name: Nigel Pedlingham

Tel: 020 7981 2832

Email: Nigelp@cpre.org.uk

Website: <http://www.planninghelp.org.uk/>;
www.cpre.org.uk; www.nalc.gov.uk

Locality

The Building Community Consortium

Contact name: David Chapman

Tel: 0845 458 8336

Email: neighbourhoodplanning@locality.org.uk

Website: www.buildingcommunity.org.uk

RTPI

Planning Aid

Contact name: John Rider-Dobson

Tel: 0203 206 1880

Email: info@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Website: <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planningaid/>