

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING – A FLAGSHIP GOVERNMENT POLICY



Jonathan Green of the Decentralisation and Neighbourhood Planning team at the Department for Communities and Local Government confirms the priority the new Government still places on this pivotal policy for our sector

Since our last article for 'The Clerk' over two years ago, the popularity of neighbourhood planning, one of the Government's flagship policies for devolving decision-making to local communities, has continued to soar. The picture nationwide has progressed so much that we thought it was about time we updated you.

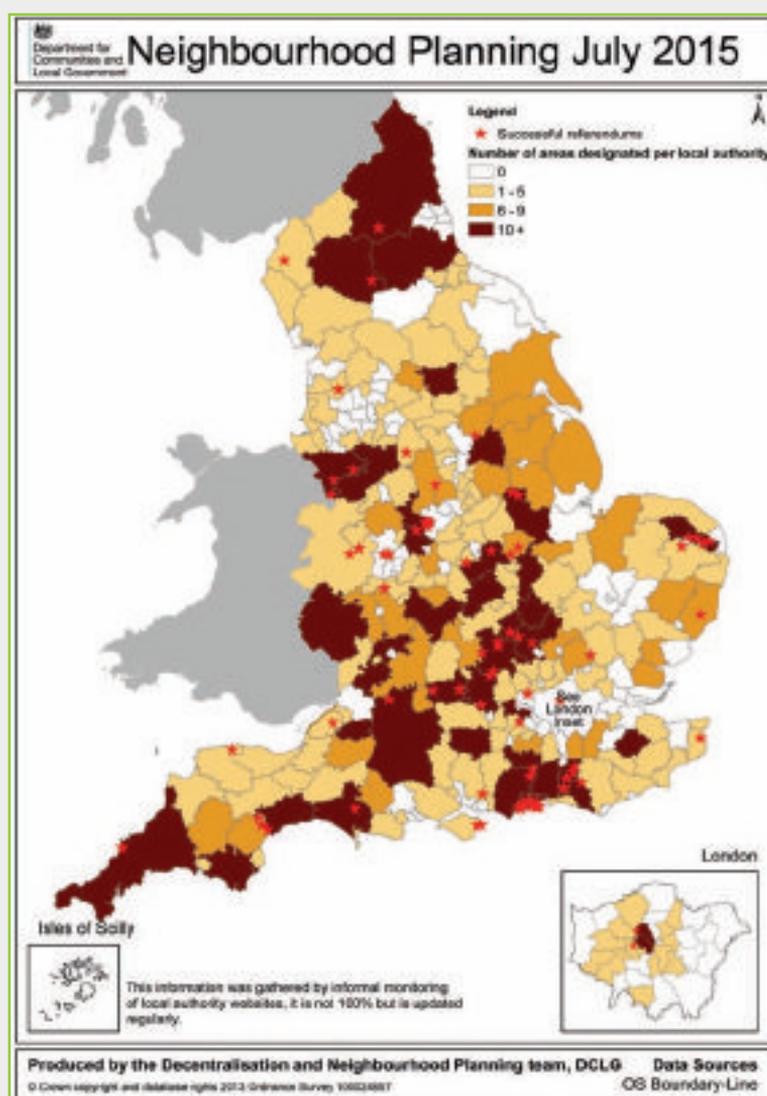
Neighbourhood planning, introduced by 2011's Localism Act, gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. It allows communities to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, what they should look like, what infrastructure should be provided and what should be protected.

More than 1,500 communities across the country have taken the first steps towards producing a neighbourhood plan for their area. This represents over 8 million people, or 15% of the population of England. All 81 of the neighbourhood planning referendums to have been held since the first in Upper Eden, Cumbria in 2013 have resulted in 'Yes' votes; on average by an emphatic 88% on a 34% average turnout. These include the first Neighbourhood Development Orders (in Cockermouth, Allerdale), Community Right to Build Orders (in Ferring, Arun) and business neighbourhood plan (in Central Milton Keynes). With the 100th referendum just around the corner, it will be interesting to see what other innovative ways communities use these powers as we reach a century and beyond.

Here in the Department we have seen the return of Greg Clark, one of the architects of Localism, as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. There is further continuity with Brandon Lewis retaining responsibility for neighbourhood planning as part of his role as Housing and Planning Minister.

Political and practical support remains high for all of the communities across England who have already begun preparing their neighbourhood plan, and every effort will be made to ensure that many more have the opportunity to join them. The Conservative manifesto committed to '[encouraging] ... communities engaged in neighbourhood planning to complete the process and assist others to draw up their own plans.' The new Housing Bill will help to ensure this as it aims to 'simplify and speed up the neighbourhood planning system, to support communities that seek to meet local housing and other development needs through neighbourhood planning.'

The current support contract, worth £22.5 million, came into effect in April 2015 and represents a 50% increase on the value of the previous programme. As a community you can now apply for up to £8,000 to help progress your plan, and those facing more complex issues (such as un-parished areas, deprived areas or those producing a business neighbourhood plan) are eligible for a further £6,000 and technical support from a planning expert.





Everyone can be involved in the Neighbourhood Planning process

Take up of support through the new programme has been high. Over £2.27million of funding and technical support has already been handed out and over 400 neighbourhood planning groups are currently on the programme. For information on how to join them, visit www.mycommunity.org.uk.

We also recently commissioned Planning Aid England to produce a suite of resources to help neighbourhood planning groups through the process. These can now be easily accessed in one place at <https://www.thinglink.com/scene/647426465779941378>.

The Planning Aid website also has a number of further resources, including their latest podcast on how to work with consultants: <http://www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/>

Social media is another great way of keeping up to date with all the latest developments, and sharing knowledge with others who are facing similar challenges, or trying to achieve similar aims. As well as the @communitiesuk twitter account (use and peruse the #neighbourhoodplanning hashtag to stay in the loop), you can also take part in the discussions on LinkedIn – just search for Neighbourhood Planning and join the group! Alternatively you can send your questions to the team at decentralisation@communities.gsi.gov.uk

From the policy's beginnings with 233 'front-runner' areas leading the way, we have now seen more than 1,500 communities take up the challenge of neighbourhood planning, and act upon their visions for amazing things in their areas. They are now starting to reap the benefits. With plenty more in the pipeline it is clear that communities know their area best and, when given a genuine stake in shaping its future, have a real hunger to put this knowledge and enthusiasm into practice.



Emma Critchley

HELP IS ON HAND!

Emma Critchley, Neighbourhood Planning Programme Manager at Locality, explains the support they can provide

Neighbourhood Planning can sometimes seem like a daunting process, but remember that help is at hand to support parishes through the journey. Locality, the national network of ambitious and enterprising community-led organisations, is running the government-funded Neighbourhood Planning and Community Right to Build support programme and is able to offer both grant funding and technical support for the next three years.

All groups writing a neighbourhood plan are eligible to apply for a grant of up to £8,000, and can use this in a variety of ways including developing a website, training, help with project planning, undertaking a household survey, publicity materials and engaging planning experts.

In addition, groups which have particularly

complex issues are able to apply for free technical support. To qualify, groups need to be in high growth or highly deprived areas, have populations over 25,000, or be working on a joint plan with three or more town or parish councils. The technical support is delivered by our partners Aecom, a world-class interdisciplinary consultancy with a strong planning team. Aecom consultants will work alongside you, helping with what you cannot manage, and working against a clearly defined brief, such as producing a design guide, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), evidence review or site assessment. There are 12 technical packages available and groups can apply for several if needed.

Don't forget that there is also up to £50,000 available to groups who want to turn neighbourhood planning policies into action by building new housing or using the Community Right to Build to create new community buildings. Grants

are available now from the Community Buildings Pre-feasibility and Community Buildings Project Support funds.

For more information on all of these support opportunities, go to www.mycommunity.org.uk where you can find lots of resources, technical guidance, tools and templates that will help you understand and tackle the processes involved. You will also be able to download funding guidance and link to application forms. You can also find out how other groups have successfully navigated the process by reading their inspirational stories.

If you would like some one to one advice, or would just like to hear a friendly voice on the end of the phone to talk you through the support available, you can contact us through our advice line on 0300 020 1864 which is open Monday to Friday 9.30- 12.30. Alternatively email us from the website Help Centre.



Caroline Duckworth

CREATING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Caroline Duckworth, Senior Advisor Climate Ready Built Environment with the Environment Agency, explains how neighbourhoods can be made resilient to flooding, droughts and heatwaves

Extrême weather can have serious impacts on local communities. This can range from ill health to damage to homes and businesses to loss of community facilities. Climate Ready and CommunityPlanning.net have produced a guide to help communities make themselves more resilient as part of Neighbourhood Planning and other community projects at www.communityplanning.net/resilientcommunities.



Why is resilience to extreme weather important?

In the 2012 floods 8000 homes were flooded and in the 2007 floods 400,000 school days were lost. Also, 2000 excess deaths were attributed to the 2003 heatwave in England and Wales. Low rainfall over a long period up to the start of 2012 saw many parts of the country under a hosepipe ban. While these impacts can be devastating, communities, being resilient, can also have benefits such as creating a local environment that is healthier, more attractive to live and do business in and help to create opportunities for recreation.

What can communities do and who can help them?

The neighbourhood planning can be a helpful process where communities can identify a range of actions to help an area become more resilient to flooding, heat waves and drought. Some of these actions can be achieved through a neighbourhood plan, but some actions can also be achieved as part of wider community projects.

Flooding

As part of a neighbourhood plan, you can identify which buildings are at risk of flooding, using the flood maps on the Environment Agency website. The neighbourhood plan can be used to promote ways of reducing flood risk, such as by creating green space on streets and around buildings to soak up heavy rainfall.

Once you have identified the parts of the neighbourhood at risk of flooding you can use this information to take future action outside of the neighbourhood plan by encouraging people at risk to:

- Sign up to Floodline to get alerts when a flood is about to happen.
- Use of 'property level flood protection' such as floodgates and airbrick covers when a flood is imminent to stop water getting in your home.
- Develop flood plans - The National Flood Forum can help you prepare individual and community flood plans.

Warm weather and heatwaves

When we have very warm weather it can be difficult for vulnerable people to cope, such as older people, people with illnesses or disabilities. Homes and neighbourhoods can be made more resilient to

very warm weather by increasing the amount of local green space with street trees. Pocket parks will also help keep neighbourhoods and buildings cool. Small changes to buildings, such as solar shades and blinds and by having light coloured building facades can also help. These actions could be encouraged as part of new developments through Neighbourhood plans. They also could be achieved as part of housing improvement programmes by housing associations.

Outside of the neighbourhood plan, communities can help vulnerable people by giving them extra help to do daily tasks and by ensuring they can stay cool by opening windows, moving to a cooler part of the house and have plenty of cool food and drinks.

Water shortages and drought

Prolonged periods of low rainfall can result in water use restrictions such as hosepipe bans. This can mean gardens and other green space can start to suffer. By planting drought resistant plants and trees and installing water butts we can save water in the garden as well as helping keep green areas green during drier periods. We can also save water in the home by installing water efficiency devices in homes such as low flow taps, showers and toilets. As well as saving water, it can also save money by reducing energy use for hot water and water bills, where water is metered.

Many of these actions can be encouraged through neighbourhood plans, but also as part of refurbishments by housing authorities or as part of partnership projects with your local water company. Wider community engagement can encourage water saving behaviours, such as having short showers instead of baths.

Further information

More information with examples from existing communities on how they have made themselves more resilient through neighbourhood plans and other community projects can be found on www.communityplanning.net/resilientcommunities. If you have any examples of how you have made your community resilient to flooding, drought or heatwaves please email them to climatechange@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Steve's VAT Fact



Steve Parkinson

Please note: Individual requests for VAT advice should be directed to the SLCC Advisory Service in the first instance.

VAT CATEGORIES

STEVE PARKINSON, YOUR SOCIETY'S DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, ALSO DELIVERS OUR VAT TRAINING COURSES

Where a parish or town council exists, it is the only body that is entitled to submit a Neighbourhood Plan for its area and it must follow specific regulations to do so. Preparing a plan is therefore a non-business activity and the council will be able to reclaim any VAT that it incurs in preparing the plan.

It is important to note that this only applies to expenditure incurred by the council, where it orders the work, receives the supply of goods or services and pays from its own funds (including grants awarded to it).

Where a separate community group is set up to prepare the plan, the council won't be able to reclaim VAT if it simply hands over funds to the group. Where significant expenditure is to be incurred on consultants or design work, councils should consider ordering and paying for this work directly so that they can reclaim the VAT. The council will own the plan that it is submitting and will be the ultimate recipient of any advice or design used in its creation.

 Email advice@slcc.co.uk or call 0845 450 6156



THE ALTON EXPERIENCE

Meanwhile Steve offers some practical advice based upon his experience as the long serving Town Clerk to Alton TC in Hampshire

When Alton Town Council resolved to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan in 2013, there were already substantial pressures on planning. Applications for housing were anticipated on six sizeable sites around the town and these were submitted during the early stages of plan preparation.



The steering group of councillors and volunteers set an ambitious timescale of achieving a draft plan within a year of the launch event. The council recognised that the work could not be done with existing resources and budgeted for use of consultants. The group was also well supported by district council officers. Amazingly, despite a delay to await the results of a transport study, a draft was ready for consideration after a year.

The biggest issue was the location of new housing, which in turn impacted on transport, sewage and other infrastructure. The surrounding hills caused concern over rainwater run-off, coupled with a strong local desire to avoid building up to the skyline. The group managed to allocate sites for the required 700+ dwellings on greenfield sites and achieved wide consultation, with over 1,000 people attending one of the exhibitions.

Even as the pre-submission public consultation began, the owners of the last working brewery in the town advised that they intended

selling the site and asked if it could be considered for housing. An additional policy was added, recommending a development brief for the site for mixed residential and employment use.

Lessons

- Resources will be limited so use staff, volunteer and consultants' time wisely.
- Focus on critical issues that matter and don't try to do everything.
- Communicate widely, keep the planning authority involved.
- Engage with landowners as well as the public.
- Ensure your site selection is robust – it will be challenged.
- Take the opportunity to designate local green space.
- Be willing to adapt your plan as situations change.



through the neighbourhood planning process

by Nicola Hodgson, Case officer with the Open Spaces Society

The National Planning Framework's opportunity to designate land in England as a Local Green Space (LGS) has existed for three years, yet it is little use with no nationally-prescribed guidance. The Open Spaces Society helps councils and local communities protect their open spaces and has published a tool-kit consisting of three handbooks: How to win local space through neighbourhood plans; Community assets and protecting open space and Local green space designation. We have called on all English local planning authorities to be proactive in designating land as a local green space (LGS) through neighbourhood plans.

Local Green Space

The government claims that the LGS designation will mitigate the impact of the Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 which prohibits an application for registration as a village green on any land that has entered the planning system, or even been shown on a draft development plan.

However, it is a poor exchange. Many valid village green applications have been stopped but little new land has been made LGS. Moreover, the designation can only be considered when a local plan is reviewed, or during the neighbourhood plan process.

The National Planning Policy Guidance gives inadequate advice on the designation of LGS and its definition is vague. For instance the land must be 'in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves', 'local in character' and 'not an extensive tract of land' but with no explanation as to what these phrases mean. The Wing neighbourhood plan LGS report (Aylesbury Vale District, Buckinghamshire) has highlighted the problem caused by unclear definitions of 'close proximity' and 'extensive tract of land'.



Identify and designate your local green space through local and neighbourhood plans



There is no nationally-prescribed process and so it is left to the local planning authority to decide how to determine any submissions for LGS.

We urge local councils to help their communities identify and designate LGS through the local and neighbourhood plans. The flagship Thame neighbourhood plan (South Oxfordshire District, Oxfordshire) won government funding, yet the community was not made aware of the opportunity to designate LGS. Precious green space valued by local people is now vulnerable to development.

In the North Dorset neighbourhood plan the LGS designation is merely applied to land already designated as open space, rather than to saving threatened open spaces. Similarly in South Cambridgeshire protected village amenity areas are being considered for LGS designation.

Developers are pursuing challenges to proposed LGS. Because the Backwell neighbourhood plan (North Somerset) was challenged by a developer's barrister at the examination hearing, the examiner recommended deletion of the proposed LGS and the land will not now be protected.

The Fortune Green and West Hampstead neighbourhood plan (London Borough of Camden) includes 15 areas of LGS. However the majority are existing parks, nature reserves and playgrounds, with only a few new areas such as an orchard and railway embankments.

Listing as a Community Asset

For four years, under the Localism Act 2011, it has been possible to list open space as a community asset. This is an alternative protection because 'listing' may be regarded as a 'material consideration' for planning where a change of use is proposed. However it is for the local planning authority to decide whether such a listing will be considered material. It appears to be more difficult to list open space than buildings. Data collected by Development Control Services in 2014 from 134 local planning authorities shows that only half the nominated open space succeeded. This is a worrying trend which must be addressed.

We urge local councils and communities to use our tool-kit to protect open space and provide health and well-being benefits for the public.



NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS AND HERITAGE

Shane Gould, Local Government and National Infrastructure Advisor at Historic England explains how to prepare a heritage-aware neighbourhood plan

The historic environment is the legacy of thousands of years of human activity in the form of buildings, monuments, settlements and landscapes. People value their local heritage, and neighbourhood plans can help in its conservation, using local character to guide future development.

What information is needed, and where can it be found?

A sound evidence base is essential, including information on how a place has developed, how its heritage can contribute in future, and what needs to be done to conserve or enhance it. Local authority Historic Environment Records are important resources for identifying what there is and why it is important, and many can be accessed online (www.heritagegateway.org.uk). Information on nationally-important listed buildings, scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, and registered battlefields can be found on the National Heritage List for England www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/.

It is advisable to speak to the local authority conservation officer and the local authority archaeological advisory service (often provided by the County Council), who manage the Historic Environment Record and provide advice on archaeological matters, on how to incorporate heritage in neighbourhood plans.

How can you properly capture heritage in your plan?

- An analysis of the historic character and its contribution to the appearance of the place
- The identification of any nationally and locally designated heritage assets, and sites of local importance
- Environmental issues the plan seeks to address
- Policies to protect heritage assets, their settings and views, and historic environment considerations to be taken into account when developing sites
- Guidance to encourage locally distinctive development
- Opportunities to conserve, repair and bring heritage assets back into use, especially those that are at risk
- Opportunities for use of heritage assets to generate social, economic or environmental benefits
- The possibility of new or revised conservation areas together with conservation area appraisals, the need for a local heritage list or local buildings at risk survey

How can Historic England help?

Historic England has a statutory role in the neighbourhood planning process and is likely to get involved in those plans which affect heritage sites and areas of the greatest importance, that are sensitive to change or at risk, and where our limited resources can have the greatest impact. We also have to be consulted on all neighbourhood development orders and community right to build orders.

If you are not sure whether Historic England needs to be involved, we advise you to contact our relevant office as early in the process as possible (www.historicengland.org.uk/about/contact-us/local-offices/).

We have also prepared further guidance on neighbourhood planning and the historic environment: www.historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/plan-making/improve-your-neighbourhood/.

Alvechurch Neighbourhood Plan Committee Workshop



✓ Heritage Checklist

1. Does the plan have a clear vision and strategy for the historic environment, and are the key conservation issues identified?
2. Does the plan record all heritage assets?
3. As part of the evidence gathering have you consulted your local Historic Environment Record?
4. Has consideration been given to Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk Register', local authority buildings at risk registers and whether proposals in the plan can use these assets?
5. What are the opportunities to protect, enhance, and improve the understanding and appreciation of the historic environment?
6. How can the historic environment be used to help shape and inform future development in the area?
7. How can the contribution of the area's heritage to its economy, social cohesion and environmental quality be sustained and enhanced?
8. What impact will the proposals have on heritage assets, their settings and local character?
9. Does the plan include specific historic environment policies to address locally specific matters?
10. Do the design policies consider historic or locally distinctive aspects of character?
11. Have proposed site allocations taken proper account of heritage assets (including setting) in both selecting these and through accompanying policies which set out development parameters?
12. Have you discussed your plan proposals with the local authority heritage specialists and, if appropriate and necessary, Historic England as early in the process as possible?

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING CHAMPION

by Matthew Bills, Neighbourhood and Green Spaces Officer for Harborough District Council.

My duties include being a Neighbourhood Planning Champion, but, although not a Planner, I support 18 communities in Neighbourhood Planning. Not being a Planner has helped me in my Neighbourhood Planning role, I think, as I tend to see things from the communities perspective.

I am the first port of call at Harborough District Council for any of our communities wishing to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan. Having a dedicated resource, albeit only part of my role, helps the Authority to respond quickly to enquiries, but also helps build a good working relationship between the Council and the community. I once described the Neighbourhood Planning process as being longer than some marriages, and like a marriage you need to build a relationship of trust and openness. Without the consistency of communities being able to email, call or ask someone they know to a meeting this would be more difficult.

This close working relationship was demonstrated in a recent Ministerial visit to the District of Harborough by Brandon Lewis. One of our community groups

reassembled a quite complex public exhibition with only 3 days notice. The Minister was most impressed by the amount of work that communities were inputting into their community engagement, and I was most grateful to the community group and pleased we had such a good working relationship built up over many months.

My aim with all the Neighbourhood Plan groups we support is to give them the tools to do the job. It is not the role of Local Authorities to write Neighbourhood Plans, but it is most certainly their role to provide information, advice, knowledge and sometimes a shoulder to cry on. We have provided a toolkit that guides communities through the Neighbourhood Plan process, but one of the most useful documents we have produced is one that directs communities to website pages that will help them find information about topics that Neighbourhood Plans may include. By providing this we are allowing communities to self help.

Being a dedicated officer for Neighbourhood Planning we are able to support the Neighbourhood Planning Forum that is



managed by the County Council, and other seminars such as PAS and CPRE events. We see many of our Neighbourhood Plan groups attending these. We also facilitate District Council workshops for our Neighbourhood Plan Groups, and I work closely with our Parish Liaison Officer to get the Neighbourhood Planning message out to communities that have not yet 'taken the plunge'. In addition we provide two newsletters each year from the Planning Policy section to inform communities about progress on Neighbourhood Planning and the Council's new Local Plan.

Because I am working with communities on a day to day basis I can make it my role to be the communities 'voice on the inside'. The District Council is currently working towards its new Local Plan, and I am able to ask difficult (and sometimes daft) questions, challenge the thought processes of officers and keep

Neighbourhood Planning and community aspirations at the forefront of the District Council Planning process.

If I had to sum up why I think my Neighbourhood Planning Champion role has been a success it would probably be because I have been able to build bridges between communities and the Planning Authority. I am not just the officer that drops in to deliver bad news, but can share the communities successes at consultation events, hear the views and concerns of residents and take it all back the my colleagues to help Neighbourhood Planning influence how the Council thinks and operates.

Because I am working with communities on a day to day basis I can make it my role to be the communities 'voice on the inside'



Minister of State, Brandon Lewis MP, visits a NP consultation in Foxton in Leics

'NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING: CATALYST AND CONTAINER FOR COMMUNITY ACTION'



Prof. Gavin Parker

By Prof. Gavin Parker, Chair of Planning Studies, University of Reading. Lead author of 'User Experience of Neighbourhood Planning' (October, 2014)

If any of you thought that Neighbourhood Planning (NP), as introduced under the 2011 Localism Act, could be ignored; that it would perhaps just fade away along with the Big Society (remember that?), then the election result of May 8th 2015 and the momentum thus far created for Neighbourhood Planning should cause you to think again. Many of you reading this will already be engaged with Neighbourhood Planning of course, others of you may have been involved with non-statutory Community-Led Planning (CLP) / Parish Planning currently or in the past. Clearly many people do want to be involved in shaping the future of their own area and well-conceived planning and engagement tools can help with that.

Participating neighbourhoods have made good progress in developing Neighbourhood Plans and most have been overcoming any difficulties encountered, often with the aid of consultant support, their local planning authority, or both. It was seen by many participants in our recent research study 'User Experience of Neighbourhood Planning in England', that undertaking to produce a Plan was burdensome and for some that could prove a disincentive. The research we undertook detailed a wide range of proposed areas for improvement across the stages of NP and in terms of different aspects, such as task related or themed templates, project planning advice and other guidance. There was and remains a gap in terms of understanding all actor behaviours and motivations in NP and this requires further research activity (for example; non-participating areas, Local Authorities).

Government, along with partners, have been looking at the findings during the past few months and some accessible tools and templates have been recently produced to assist groups as a result, see: <http://www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/resources/documents>

Further direct advice for town and parish councils is included in the research report itself (see links below). It is clear the NDPs are necessarily co-produced - they require partnership and neighbourhoods need their local planning authority to play their part. For some tasks or in some neighbourhoods, professional help may also be required and up to 70% of all groups so far have involved consultants in some way. Looking back over the past four years, we can now say that enough experience has been developed such that the main actors involved should be more adept at navigating the system and if not, then learning is being shared more effectively.

Given that a Plan has to gain popular support to pass the neighbourhood referendum, many communities have appreciated that the project cannot be rushed if a high quality and politically acceptable Neighbourhood Plan is to be produced. Two years is a feasible target time frame to get to the examination stage. The importance of building relationships and momentum within a community was recognised in the research too. More generally previous work looking at community planning has also underscored how community planning and engagement activity or a community building exercise is important and useful

of itself, as well as potentially delivering tangible goods in the form of socio-economically valuable development or CIL money to assist with community facilities.

As such the final point relates to the title coined here – Neighbourhood Planning as a catalyst for other community planning and action, as well as a *container* for some of that wider activity. NP can be used as a driver for other useful engagement and evidence gathering at parish level. CLP / Parish Planning principles can and should where possible be applied in the early stages of NP engagement. This can be very useful and can be used in many ways – and not only to produce an NDP document (in fact many elements probably won't make the cut...). As such I would urge parish and town councils to conceive of NP not only as an end of itself but also as an instrument either to provoke and encourage wider engagement and capacity building, or as a means to channel some locally derived aspirations into a formal statutory document. In short to try and maintain the lessons and tools developed over the past twenty years or so and combine them with the new(ish) NP tools. The outcome should be a better informed, networked and possibly better served neighbourhood - armed with evidence to support bidding for funding or to negotiate with local service providers - as well as a Neighbourhood Plan with statutory weight.

The full report of the research mentioned above may be found here:
<http://mycommunity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/User-experience.pdf>

And the Executive Summary: <http://mycommunity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/User-experience-executive-study.pdf>

BILLEDON NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN

SPECIAL FEATURE

Billesdon is a small village situated between Leicester and Market Harborough. The Billesdon Neighbourhood Development Plan (BNDP) was approved by referendum in October 2014, with a 'Yes' vote of 85% on a 55% turnout of eligible residents.

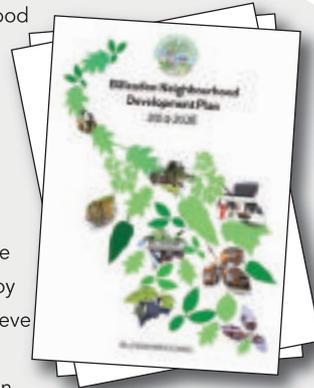
The Plan took three years to complete. Many difficulties, foreseen or otherwise, were encountered throughout the process, and these were resolved only through the tireless work and tenacity of our Council Chair and a dedicated team of local residents, reinforced by expertise provided by a contracted professional planning consultant.

The Parish of Billesdon has some 420 households with a population approaching 900. The Plan provides for the building of around 45 new houses and a small employment area, as stipulated by Harborough DC under its local plan for the next fifteen or so years. The village is very

popular and about a dozen housing sites, all backed by a developer, were competing to secure adoption for building consent. Some local residents were equally keen to make sure that certain sites were not developed.

As one of the first Neighbourhood Plans to proceed, finding our way through the legal process with limited guidance and support was extremely difficult. Developers made the process even more so by submitting applications in the middle of the plan preparation process, and by lobbying the electorate on the eve of the poll to vote 'No' simply because their sites had not been selected.

One of the more important objectives of our plan was to protect the character of the village and this we have sought to achieve by the inclusion of our Village Design Statement



within the Plan. This puts design guidance on a more robust, statutory footing and is designed to impose appropriate standards of building in the village for the future.

Plan preparation took longer and was more complicated than anticipated and only time will tell whether the effort has

been worthwhile. Perhaps our greatest legacy has been our contribution, as pioneers, to a wider understanding of the neighbourhood planning process.

Philip Camm, Clerk to Billesdon Parish Council

Planit-X provides high-quality town and country planning services and we have advised many town and parish councils on the preparation of neighbourhood plans. We work with local people to provide the homes and jobs the community need while protecting important open spaces and landscapes.

Planit-X Town & Country Planning Services
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LET'S HEAR IT FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING!

Your National Planning Advisor, Andrew Towler, celebrates its success but says that neighbourhood planning can improve

It is now nearly four years since the Government set out its reforms in the 2011 Localism Act to encourage greater local involvement in the planning system.

Neighbourhood Plans were a central plank of these reforms. This introduced a new tier into the planning system, Neighbourhood Plans; for the first time parish councils and in unparished areas unelected groups of people, called neighbourhood forums, were enabled to develop policies, including allocating land, to guide and shape development in their particular area.

At the time there was much written, especially in the planning press, about neighbourhood planning – much of it sceptical. Communities would not be interested, or they lacked the skills to do it; and perhaps most of all it would be a 'Nimby's Charter'.

Despite what was said at the time the experience is very different.

To date, over 1,500 neighbourhood plans are being prepared across England with close to one in ten of the population living in an area where a Plan is being prepared.

Indeed, there is little signs that the pace in their development is slackening and if present trends continue (and there is little to suggest that it will not) could easily see in a few years a third or even a half of the Country covered by Neighbourhood Plans.

To date, over 1,500 neighbourhood plans are being prepared across England

These figures, however, it could be argued, hide the true impact of Neighbourhood Plans. There has been a shift in the balance of power in planning away from planning and other professionals to communities.

In areas without a Neighbourhood Plan, or those who have not had been involved in their development, it is sometimes hard to understand their impact.

Indeed, there are some in the planning profession that argue too much weight is now being given to them in the planning system.

Parish Councils have been at the forefront of their development. Reliable evidence is not available, but what there is suggests that the vast majority of neighbourhood plans are being prepared by parish councils.

This reflects not only the foresight and ability of parish councils to mobilise support and resources to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan but their long held desire to become more involved in the planning system. Rather than being a consultee in the planning system, they have become shaper and drivers of it.

The Neighbourhood Plan genie is well and truly out of the bottle!

Yet despite this tremendous start tension remains and which, if not ironed out may stifle the extent to which Neighbourhood Plans can make play their full and proper role.

Our experience is that the attitude of district/borough to help communities preparing Neighbourhood Plans is a key ingredient to their success. There are examples of district/borough councils that are actively supporting neighbourhood planning, some of which are highlighted in this edition of The Clerk. We welcome these examples, however the overall picture is patchy. Too many districts/boroughs state that they lack the resources to help, despite in most cases receiving Government financial support and under a legal requirement to do so. Indeed, some still appear to be openly hostile to the development of neighbourhood plans in their area, and actively go out of their way to frustrate and stifle their development.

The process is still too bureaucratic and technical. It requires a technical knowledge and skills that many communities lack, and find off putting. It also requires resources, which for many parish councils are in short supply both within the Council and the wider community.

Neighbourhood planning also has the potential to play a much bigger role in delivering real benefits at the local level. They could provide a vehicle for the delivery of community led projects in support of the key policy and objectives of that Plan – the provision of affordable and self-build housing, the transfer of community assets and local transport schemes are just a few good examples.





THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS

Debbie Wildridge, Community Land Trust Manager for Eastern England, explains how CLT's can help deliver neighbourhood plan ambitions

Two things may have prompted your community to get active and to work on a Neighbourhood Plan (NP). The new government has renewed its policy to encourage the work on NPs, providing funding for support agencies and individuals to assist communities in delivering one. At the same time it has pledged to build 200,000 'starter' homes and 270,000 affordable houses by 2020.

Thereby comes an opportunity for communities to determine their planning locally and a threat of potentially inappropriate development in terms of size of site and density of building from 'greedy' commercial developers in your city/town/parish.

So, your Neighbourhood Plan is carefully, deliberately and painstakingly drawn up. The benefits include a clearer idea of what the community does want, local people are now interested and supportive and have voted in a positive referendum for their NP and the local council has acquiesced.

But, what then? Delivering against that local plan is the next and crucial stage before the goodwill and enthusiasm dies down and the NP collects dust in a bottom drawer together with accusations of 'another tick box exercise'.

It is likely that there will be community ambitions – affordable homes for local people, built to a scale and design in keeping with the neighbourhood; local employment opportunities; conversion of buildings or land to other uses; acquisition of land for recreational purposes; facilities to ensure services remain or become local – a long list of particular requirements identified through the consultation process.

Community Land Trusts (CLT) are an effective way of ensuring that these ambitions also truly serve the long term interests of the community, in fact, in perpetuity.

CLTs do exactly what the name suggests. The community take ownership of the land or building assets they acquire and as a registered legal entity (with charitable objectives) they will 'lock-in' the asset value for the benefit of that community.

What does that mean in practice? A recent example I have been involved in includes setting up a CLT and negotiating with the local County Council for some redundant land, well situated on the edge of a village, and its acquisition for a nominal sum, to build 18 affordable homes for local people. A big issue arising in this parish's NP was the need for local housing for local people. Modest expansion of the village was seen by the majority as acceptable.

By setting up a CLT to channel the development, the land owner was satisfied that a well governed, legal, representative and non-profit making organisation was the beneficiary of the disposal of redundant assets which otherwise would have remained ugly wasteland.

This ability of CLTs to encourage local landowners to be generous and in some cases philanthropic is a feature of community-led development – they regard themselves as custodians and are willing to share that task providing it is for the common good, is well regulated and serves the community.

Local people feel truly involved, consulted at each stage on the plan, the design, in the allocation of the homes and the long term management of the asset. It belongs to them. A steering group, formed to drive the



Community engagement is an important factor as demonstrated here at various CLT's in the Eastern Region

project, will eventually include the tenants of the homes.

Another recent development in the East of England involves a much more ambitious scheme which will result in a new doctor's surgery, employment units, a new village green, footpaths, an extension to the cemetery, and a mixture of 23 affordable homes together with 53 market houses in a village tired of having inappropriate development thrust upon them.

Some weary NP veterans may feel at this stage that the number of years (?) it has taken to get to adoption of the Plan is enough community participation for anyone!

However, the involvement of a wider group of people who are networked, better informed and engaged is an opportunity to harness their enthusiasm and build real community spirit. By now there should be a strong feeling that you are not alone but catch the mood before it evaporates.

Forming a CLT is not a difficult process built on the back of a successful NP, and the opportunity to make a difference, take up the challenge of local power to determine local priorities and to deliver real tangible benefits for your community is a prize worth seeking.

For more examples and contact details please see www.clteast.org and the national organisation for CLTs www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk

PLANNING AID ENGLAND PUBLISHES NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING RESOURCES FOR PARISH COUNCILS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

SPECIAL FEATURE



Planning Aid England has produced a suite of resources to assist those parish councils and community groups developing a Neighbourhood Plan.

These resources have been created using Planning Aid England's wealth of experience and knowledge from assisting parish councils and community groups through the neighbourhood planning process.

The resources provide practical tips and advice on various stages of the Neighbourhood Plan process from designating the neighbourhood area to submitting the plan for examination. They are designed for parish councils and community groups to use.

They include a series of how to guides, templates and videos. Topics include:

- Project planning
- Resourcing your neighbourhood plan
- Engaging with landowners and developers
- Developing a vision and objectives
- Writing planning policies

Speaking about the new resources John Romanski, Senior Planning Aid England Advisor said:



"We are incredibly proud of these resources not least of all as their preparation has been a collaborative process. We have drawn on not only our experience of helping groups deliver a plan but also the experiences of neighbourhood planning groups, local planning authorities and other key players in the neighbourhood plan process. We hope these will give groups the knowledge, skills and confidence to realise their vision for their own communities."

It is hoped that the resources will encourage more communities and parish councils to prepare neighbourhood plans

More information can be found at

http://www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/news/2015/07/22/Resources_for_neighbourhood_planning_putting_the_pieces_together

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rCOH

Pursuing neighbourhood plans and other community rights of the Localism Act can enliven, transform but also frustrate and worry town and parish councils in equal measure. Often the council's clerk will be at the sharp end of these projects as they become both technically challenging and highly charged. rCOH's project experience – acquired by supporting more than 60 local councils across rural and urban England since the new rights were established – allows us to offer clerks and their projects teams some valuable insights to help them achieve success and to retain their sanity!

The clerk's role is pivotal in managing the administration of the project, from applying for the area designation through to securing the budget and overseeing the formal consultations and document submissions. More than that, the clerk is usually crucial in managing the relationship between the project steering group, the local council and the planning authority, with which there is often some 'baggage' on planning matters. The clerk will also be expected to address conflicts of interest of council and steering group members and ensure that the proper procedures are followed. Steering groups can get ahead of themselves and it's usually the clerk that steps in to keep everything in check.

Our top three tips for clerk surviving these projects are:

- administer the project just like any other council business
- help the project team to build a positive working relationship with the planning authority from the outset but don't be afraid to challenge them
- expect to receive objections to your handling of the process when consulting on documents

rCOH has seen enough over the last three years to be sure that using external professional planning support helps build the confidence of clerks and their project teams to stay ahead of such developments and not to buckle under the weight of local community expectations.

*Neil Homer MBA MRTPI
Planning Director, rCOH Ltd*

make localism work for your community

If your community wishes to plan its own future, and then design and deliver it, we can help. We'll give your team the confidence and drive to produce successful Neighbourhood Plans and Community Right to Build Orders, and can implement your proposals as a trusted development partner.

We've supported over 40 local councils so give us a call if you'd like our help.



CASE STUDY: BINFIELD



Amanda Scully, clerk to Binfield PC in Berks, considers the challenges neighbourhood planning place upon a clerk



Amanda Scully



A visioning exercise in Binfield

Teamwork is the order of the day in Neighbourhood Planning. To produce a plan, there needs to be a motivated group of people who are gathered and determined to take up the challenge.

Neighbourhood planning can be costly in both money and man hours. Community volunteers will be needed to share the work. Essentially you need a leader (a councillor or member of the public) to drive the process and keep focus on the job in hand. Including someone from the planning department with knowledge of and access to the relevant maps and associated documents and offer advice is also important.

The Clerk's role is probably as co-ordinator, or at least a conduit for information. A website, which could be separate from the parish council's, will need updating and the council website will still require information and links to the right documents. The Clerk is also likely to have information about community groups and have contacts both to canvas for volunteers for the steering group and for the consultation phases.

And there will be documents! Plenty to read. Lots to learn from what other groups have done. Masses of strategic documents pertinent to a neighbourhood plan held by the planning authority and others to understand what can and can't be included in the final document.

So if you are going ahead, be prepared for the long haul and keep those lines of communication open.

Fact File:

-  Binfield, Berks

-  Population: approx. 7,800

-  No. of councillors: 11

-  Annual budget: £153,457.70

-  Parish council Band D £39.79

-  No. of employees (FTE) 2

-  NP expenditure over 3 years to date £6,014.99

-  NP grants received £30,000 via 3 Borough Councillors' ward funds

 0845 568 5555  enquiries@crp.uk.com



Community Resource Planning

Your one-stop-shop for assistance and advice in town planning matters affecting you and your community.

Neighbourhood Plans

We can guide you through the process of progressing your Neighbourhood Plan, from initial evidence-gathering through to preparing for the Plan's examination.

Local Planning Authorities

Several of our planning consultants have previously worked at a Local Planning Authority. We have extensive experience of acting for Local Planning Authorities at appeal.

Objecting to proposed development

Sometimes unwelcome development proposals can appear from out of the blue. We have extensive experience of advising how communities and individuals can most effectively see-off unwelcome development.

CASE STUDY: ST ANNE'S ON THE SEA



Sally Taylor



Town Clerk, Sally Taylor looks at how you begin a Neighbourhood Development Plan for a seaside town with over 27,000 residents, an international airport and a population that had never heard of the term Neighbourhood Planning.

It was quite a challenge when I began to consider how St. Anne's Town Council was going to deliver a Neighbourhood Plan for our town.

June 2013

At the Town Council there was much enthusiasm and ambition for the Plan, but none of us knew how to go about writing one. So we began by designating an area, this was the whole Parish, including the airport (annoyingly called Blackpool International Airport but actually located in St. Anne's). This bit's easy, you draw a red line on a plan and your principal authority undertakes the official process on your behalf.

We set up a steering group and project manager, comprising of three Councillors and myself. I was also nominated to be the project manager, not the easiest job but someone has to do it. The Council agreed funding and I successfully applied for the grant funding from Locality. So did we go off and write the Plan? Well no, we quickly realised we needed some independent expertise and discovered Envision Consultants. The Council also very quickly realised that the Plan would cost more than the initial grant received, so additional funding was agreed and allocated and our consultants (Keith and Kieran) appointed.

January 2014

So can we now write our Plan? Well no, due to the size of the town, it's best to go out to first stage consultation to obtain people's views. This gives you a basis for a draft Neighbourhood Plan.

April – May 2014

Our first stage consultation. We learnt many lessons from this process; theme groups are useful, consultation at supermarkets is good, and freebies are

welcome. Not so good were long questionnaires, draughty consultation venues and the general public's apathy.

Resulting from the process were numerous reports and documents that gave us the basis for the Plan.

September 2014

We held policy workshops, then it was onto writing these and Plan production. Lots of meetings and discussion followed, our energy levels were waning but we kept moving on.

October 2014

Then Blackpool Airport closed, cue even more frantic discussion and meetings, resulting in (finally) everyone speaking the same language and the consensus being 'We want the airport to remain an airport'. An Enterprise Zone was designated in the Spring Chancellor's budget (including part of the airport) in March 2015.

March 2015

We had produced our draft Neighbourhood Plan, but were thwarted by the May General Election so delayed our consultation until June 2015.

June 2015

More consultation events, newsletters distributed, questionnaires produced, press releases written and many types of community engagement.

We decided to do something totally different during the annual Carnival - with thousands of people attending and therefore a prime opportunity to talk to people. We set up an art stall in the park and invited passing families to "Draw something you love about St. Anne's". Whilst the children got busy with crayons and pens, we talked to parents about the



Sally helps local children prepare Neighbourhood Plan bunting



The finished product

Neighbourhood Plan. The pictures were made into bunting and were hung up around our stall, then displayed at our offices.

There were also many meetings with Fylde Council, along with our unitary authority, Lancashire County Council. We have now produced over 20 Plan associated documents.

July 2015

So where are we now? The consultation closed on 31st July 2015, more work on the policy wording is required, with the aim that the Plan is 'made' early in 2016. Yes we are all a little weary, but more determined than ever.

Advice that I can give you: it will be lots of hard work, the importance of record-keeping (Councils are good at this), keep your principal authority in the loop, take as many photographs as possible and never ever give up.

Oh yes, giving away chocolates, pens and "Neighbourhood Plan" promotional bugs is a must, people love them!

CASE STUDY: HYKEHAM A LESSON IN COMMUNITY COHESION

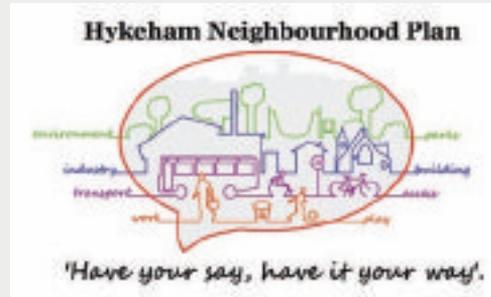


Tracy Broughton, Town Clerk to North Hykeham TC in Lincs, explains a joint approach to neighbourhood planning

North and South Hykeham are two neighbouring parishes. One a medium urban town and the other a very small village. They are unique in that North Hykeham actually borders the City of Lincoln, with some streets located half in the City of Lincoln and half in North Hykeham, similarly the same can be said of North and South Hykeham.

In 2013 North and South Hykeham members got together and agreed to work towards the completion of a Neighbourhood Development Plan. Their first hurdle was the fact that the District Council in partnership with the City Council had already started the ball rolling to develop a Business Led Development Plan spanning the location of the postcode area of LN6 which covered all of North and South Hykeham and some of the City of Lincoln. However they were only concentrating on the business areas. An analysis of business needs in the area had been carried out in 2011 and highlighted the need to further develop some large underdeveloped areas within North and South Hykeham for businesses as the access to this part of Lincolnshire had now greatly improved due to the duelling of the A46 all the way to the A1 and further to Leicester in more recent years.

North & South Hykeham entered into discussions with the district council to look at the way forward to apply for the authority to designate the boundary for the Neighbourhood Plan. At this time the District Council were reluctant to give authority and delayed the decision. North Hykeham took the decision to submit a legal challenge and won. Shortly after the District Council decided to change the way it would approach their development and support to the business areas of the town and village and gave authority for the designated boundary.



The winner of a 2014 poster competition by Anna Rontree then aged 10

This meant that the steering group could now move forward. Invitations were sent out to the community to join the group and it was formed with a school head teacher, residents of both communities and councillors. Professional consultants were engaged and the District Council pledged support from officers. Monthly meetings took place and many activities were borne out of these first meetings. Members engaged with all four primary schools, the two secondary schools, care homes, businesses, customers of the large and small supermarkets and shops. Stickyworld, an online social media mapping platform was developed and use was encouraged with loads of comments being made from all over

Fact File:

	North and South Hykeham
	Population: approx. 16,000
	No. of councillors: NHTC – 18 & SHPC 7
	Annual budget: NHTC £414,000 & SHPC £10,110.65
	Parish council Band D NHTC £86 & SHPC £28
	No. of employees 3 PTE & 8 FTE

the area. Pop up events occurred at all the organised events, these being manned by members of the steering group. To finish a questionnaire was posted to all residents and businesses in the area with a freepost address to post back.

As a result of the consultation an Issues and Actions paper has been compiled using all the results from the consultations above and workshops were created to deal with 4 areas that were identified as the priorities. Traffic and Infrastructure, Housing and Growth, Local Character and Local Services. The committee are now meeting up to feed all their work into the Issues and Actions document.

A Grant from Locality Community Development was awarded of £6500 which helped greatly as the plan is being self-funded by both councils. So far the journey has been one that has created a great community cohesive feel to both areas and the work that has been carried out has been inclusive in all areas of the community. Lessons have been learnt along the way and it is hoped that the final document in whatever form it takes will serve the community for many years to come.

CASE STUDY: WALTON

SPECIAL FEATURE

Helen Massey, chairman of Walton PC's neighbourhood plan steering group explains her community's approach to preparing their plan



Fact File:

	Walton, West Yorkshire
	Population: approx. 3,100
	No. of councillors: 11
	Annual budget: £50,000
	Parish council Band D £30.41
	No. of employees 2 PTE = 1 FTE
	NP expenditure £12,000
	NP grants received £9,900

When the rural village of Walton near Wakefield, West Yorkshire, found it was facing a number of inappropriate developments in the small village, the Parish Council set about forming a Steering Group to tackle the issues.

With new laws introduced by the Localism Act in November 2011, communities across the UK were handed the power to decide what happens on their doorstep, rather than having to rely on the usual centralised response. Walton Parish Council embraced this and, jointly with Wakefield Council, it started to create Wakefield's first Neighbourhood Plan, one of the first in Yorkshire.

A volunteer group of dedicated residents, local parish councillors and businesses met every month, canvassing the local community about the development issues most important to them. Running themes of traffic and highways concerns; over-development; preservation of the heritage of the area; and protection of habitats and green spaces were at the forefront of the concerns. The expertise of the group, and time given freely by those involved, proved invaluable in formulating the Walton Neighbourhood Plan along with a small amount of grant funding and expert advice from Locality.

The group found that working closely with the Local Authority was one of the key factors to facilitate the success of the plan. With a clear timeline of what it wanted to achieve, Walton Parish Council was able to convince Wakefield Council that it had the breadth of knowledge among the Steering Group members to bring a robust plan forward and enough enthusiasm from residents to create a shared vision for the village.

Walton Parish Council is currently awaiting the report from the Independent Examiner and you can see their progress and more details at www.waltonplan.co.uk.



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With your Neighbourhood Plan you can:

- Choose where new development goes
- Identify and protect green spaces
- Develop a shared vision for your neighbourhood

Whether you have never heard of a Neighbourhood Plan, just don't know where to start, or need advice on a particular aspect of the Neighbourhood Planning process, straightforward help is at hand.

KVA Planning Consultancy provides assistance with all aspects of the Neighbourhood Planning process, including support with policy writing, community consultations and delivering presentations to your Parish/Town Council.



For more information visit www.kvaplaning.co.uk

Or contact enquiries@kvaplaning.co.uk and quote Clerk Magazine





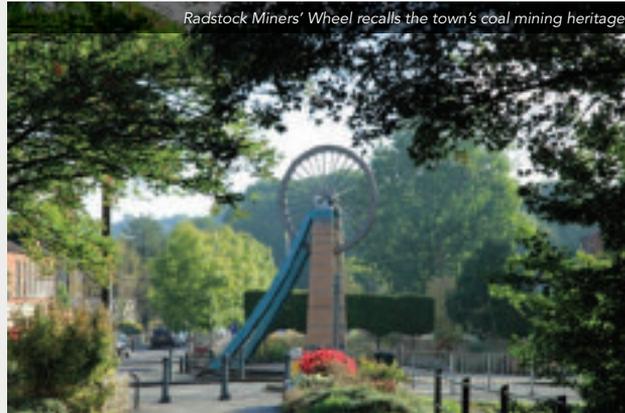
Nicola Duke

Nicola Duke, Town Clerk to Radstock TC in Somerset, offers some advice on the role of the clerk in NP

So, your parish or town council is considering throwing its hat into the ring of neighbourhood planning. Does this fill you with dread, scepticism or a mixture of both? If so, it is worth considering the clerk's role in the neighbourhood planning process. The content and detail of neighbourhood plans will differ vastly from parish to parish and town to town but the clerk will likely play a similar role in the process and that role will primarily be one of facilitation. After all, once the process is underway it is the Clerk who will likely be the first point of contact!

In the first instance, it is vital that councillors have a good understanding of neighbourhood planning, its function and process. Your first step should be to make sure that the Council has a sound understanding of neighbourhood planning and there are many useful places you can go to gather the information. Guidance notes are available from the Planning Portal, the CPRE, mycommunity and your local planning authority. A flowchart is extremely useful in understanding what is involved and the likely timescales. Put together a neighbourhood planning toolkit at the start to guide councillors through the process and give early consideration to obtaining funding for your plan.

Once neighbourhood planning is underway the clerk is invaluable in facilitating the process. The parish or town council as the 'qualifying body' is the lead but it is vital that the plan is not prepared in isolation in the Council Chamber but through wide community engagement. As ever, ensuring community engagement is a challenging



process and the clerk can play an important role in this. The clerk is often best placed to provide information on the wider community and groups that are often hard to reach and which might have specific social needs. Advise your council on local stakeholders and community members who should be approached and prepare information to send them. Consider arranging a town or parish meeting to engage the community; tell them about neighbourhood planning and ask for volunteers for a steering group, ensuring as wide and balanced a representation as possible. Once you have established your group keep up the momentum – run public exhibitions, meet with community groups, undertake consultations, use social media, use established networks and newsletters to publicise activities. This will provide the best opportunity for creating a draft neighbourhood plan which gains community support. Liaise early with your planning authority – a good working relationship will be of great assistance in the process and planning authorities will provide a 'link officer' to meet the duty to provide support and advice to councils. You can also facilitate links with other neighbourhood planning groups in your area – they can often be a great source of information and advice, especially if they are further forward in the process!

But wide engagement also brings its own challenge – how best to integrate the views of councillors and the community? Firstly, consider creating smaller groups and breaking the plan down – identify key areas such as transport, environment, economy, housing – and delegate to smaller groups with

experience and interest. Overall, ensure the group gives due regard to the national planning policy framework, stays topic specific rather than site specific and writes clear and easy to understand policies. Above all, ensure the plan is appropriate to your community – for example, in West Ashton councillors are considering drafting just a few key policies. Don't overcomplicate!

There is no doubt that neighbourhood planning involves much hard work but through effective facilitation of the process clerks can ensure that opportunities are maximised and challenges managed.

Fact File:



Radstock, Somerset



Population: approx.
5,620



No. of councillors:
11



Annual budget:
£243,638



Parish council Band D
£133.85



No. of employees (FTE)
2



James Derounian

CASE STUDY: WINCHCOMBE

Trained Neighbourhood Plan Examiner, activist and academic, James Derounian, reflects on the realities of undertaking a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) from the experience of his home town of Winchcombe, Gloucs

Undertaking' is an appropriate word when it comes to community-based neighbourhood planning... Because sometimes you may wonder if the plan has a pulse, and if it has 'done' for its volunteer carers!

In this article I want to draw out some of the realities of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan (NP). The high policy is one thing, but when it gets down to face-to-face interaction and – let's be frank – sometimes confrontation, it loses conceptual clarity and enters the murky world of human relations, personalities, priorities, 'politics' and pragmatism. Let me illustrate.

Everything takes longer! I have spent the last four years and counting alongside local councillors and community representatives, nurturing and progressing a NP for my hometown of Winchcombe (a small market town, population 5,000, in Gloucestershire). Four years! This is because NPs are built

on the backs of free labour, with the likes of me working it around family and work responsibilities.

Community engagement is problematic!

If you look at the blurb on this it all sounds terribly straightforward. So the national support-agency, Locality, in its online 'Neighbourhood Planning Roadmap' quite correctly "emphasises the need for effective community engagement as an essential part of producing a realistic plan". Trouble is that – although I was prepared for trouble – I didn't foresee when and where that trouble would find me: In the pub having a quiet drink, and being accused of selling a community hall from under residents' feet (untrue); or in front of about 100 baying antis, being slandered when a member of the audience asserted that the NP group were taking backhanders from developers (also not true).....To see through a NP you need individual and group resilience, commitment, a strong sense of humour,

and determination to see through what a majority of residents aspire to.

Finally, I would offer three overall bits of advice: **First**, ensure that as a community and local council, you have the appetite to do a NP; if you are half-hearted – forget it. **Second**, use the skills, knowledge (social capital) within your community to spread the load and widen 'ownership'. And be prepared to precept to buy in technical help. In spite of all I've said I do believe that NPs offer the only shield against inappropriate development. Change happens, but a Neighbourhood Plan enables communities to influence the scale, siting and phasing of development.

Oh, and remember President Lincoln's truism: *"You can please some of the people some of the time, all of the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time but you can never please all of the people all of the time"*.

Cotswold Street, Winchcombe

