

## **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS**

**A neighbourhood plan cannot stop development** and government has made it clear that it is not a tool for residents to oppose proposals for new developments close to them. Neighbourhood planning is about shaping the development of a local area in a positive manner.

**A neighbourhood plan should not promote less development than that identified in the local plan for the local area (such as new housing allocations)** It can allow greater growth levels, providing it meets the basic conditions. It can specify policies and guidance on how new development should be designed, orientated and located. Neighbourhood plans can be a powerful tool in shaping the development of a neighbourhood. The timeframe for the neighbourhood plan will be for communities to decide, for example whether it is a 5, 10, 15 or 20-year plan.

### **Relevance**

Whilst the local plan covers the whole district, a neighbourhood plan is focused on the needs of the specific neighbourhood and allows the local community to specify what they expect from development. This could include things like urban design, affordable housing, and allocating sites/locations for commercial, housing and other development. **This is about guiding and shaping development, not undermining the delivery of development in that area.** The plan could also guide the provision of infrastructure, for example, setting out priorities for new development such as improving pedestrian links, upgrading paths and open space. This would inform subsequent negotiations between local authorities and developers

**Once a neighbourhood plan has been completed, it will have to be submitted to the local planning authority and then be subject to an independent examination.** This will make sure that the proper legal process has been followed and that the plan meets the basic conditions described previously

If successful at referendum, a neighbourhood plan comes into force as part of the statutory development plan for the area alongside the local plan. **Local planning authorities and planning inspectors considering planning applications or appeals must make their decisions in accordance with the policies of the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Emerging neighbourhood plans may be a material consideration in planning decisions.**

### **Scope of the plan**

The scope and complexity of the plan will depend on various factors, including what is already covered in the local plan (sometimes called a core strategy), the nature of the neighbourhood area (for example economic condition and expected level of growth) and the community's preferred outcomes. A plan could be wide-ranging, or deal with one or two issues only. It could be detailed, or simply set general principle for development. The choice is down to the neighbourhood planning body producing the plan. This will clearly have significant implications in terms of time and cost.

The need to meet the 'basic conditions' All neighbourhood plans must meet the 'basic conditions' set out in planning law. This will be tested through an independent examination.

The basic conditions for neighbourhood plans are that they must:

- have regard to national policy;
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan for the local area; and
- be compatible with EU obligations.

### **Alternatives to a neighbourhood plan**

There are alternatives to producing a neighbourhood plan. These could include:

- influence an emerging local plan core strategy or supplementary planning documents prepared as part of the local plan, for example by making representations at consultation stages
- influence or help to prepare design and development briefs for key sites (working closely with the local planning authority);
- comment on planning applications and/or get involved in pre-application discussions;
- focus time and money on delivering actions in existing plans (e.g. a parish plan);
- persuade the local authority to produce an area action plan or consider new designations, such as a conservation area or Article 4 Direction (it should be noted that neighbourhood plans cannot make such designations);
- develop a community project and raise funds for its delivery.

### **Financial resources**

There will be costs associated with preparing a neighbourhood plan. Estimates vary widely; from less than ten thousand pounds to several times this amount for larger and more complex plans (such as a town centre and its environs). Some of the costs are the responsibility of the local planning authority, such as the costs of holding the independent examination and the public referendum.

Funding for other costs will need to be found by the parish/town council or neighbourhood forum preparing the plan. It is advisable to prepare an estimated budget for the plan process. This could cover items like the costs of community engagement activities and professional consultancy costs if required (for example, to cover specialist advice, evidence development or policy writing). Of course, there may be unforeseen costs – for example, if the evidence base or outcome of community engagement identifies new issues. Some contingency is therefore necessary.

### **Making a decision**

The production of a neighbourhood plan is undoubtedly a tremendous opportunity, **but to embark on preparing a plan there needs to be a clear idea of the practical and financial implications. The advantages and opportunities previously mentioned should be weighed against the time and cost implications and other considerations to help make an informed decision.**

There is no evidence that Neighbourhood Plans displace development from other parts of the local authority area. Neighbourhood plans have helped improve design policy and refined local priorities e.g. housing for specific societal groups.