

Neighbourhood Plans

A guide to preparing a Neighbourhood Plan

February 2017

1 Neighbourhood Plans

What are Neighbourhood Plans?

The Localism Act has introduced a new type of Community Led Plan. Communities now have the right to produce a Neighbourhood Plan, setting out policies on the development and use of land in a parish or neighbourhood area. They may be very simple or go into considerable detail as to where people want development.

Once the plan is made, it will become part of the local authority development plan, a statutory plan against which planning applications will be judged. A Neighbourhood Plan might also result in a Neighbourhood Development Order which will grant planning permission for specific development proposals.

Would a Neighbourhood Plan be right for your area?

Developing a Neighbourhood Plan can help communities to play a greater role in determining the future of their area. It can bring the community together to share ideas and build consensus about needs and priorities for the area. It can also help to create lasting partnerships to take forward actions that may arise from the process.

Note: A Neighbourhood Plan must conform to national planning policy, the Core Strategy and other legal requirements. Plans can be used to promote more housing and infrastructure than proposed in the Core Strategy but not less. It gives communities the opportunity to shape what that planned growth will look like and where additional growth might go. It cannot be used as a tool to stop development taking place that is acceptable under national and local planning policy.

If the issues in your neighbourhood do not relate to land use and development, or if they relate solely to the provision of affordable housing, there may be other community led solutions that are more appropriate than Neighbourhood Planning.

For example:

- Parish Plans
- Village Design Statements
- Local Housing Needs Studies - to facilitate to provision of Affordable Housing on Exceptions Sites in the Green Belt

You don't have to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. The Development Management policies still apply throughout the District. You need to consider carefully what your community actually wants and is willing to achieve.

	Parish Plans	Neighbourhood Plans
Preparation	There are no statutory rules governing its preparation	Its preparation will be subject to statutory regulations and its content will be constrained by policy guidance
Status	To be adopted as a supplementary planning document (SPD) by the District it must be subject to consultation and be consistent with Council policy	To be adopted as a development plan document (DPD) it must be subject to consultation, consistent with Council policy, submitted for independent examination and approved by referendum

Parish Plan/Neighbourhood Plan Comparison

Who can prepare a Neighbourhood Plan and who needs to be involved?

In parished areas, only the parish council can initiate and lead the process, as the elected local representatives. They will need to involve the wider community in the development of the plan: residents, businesses, local groups, local Councillors (at parish/town, District and County level), landowners and developers. Neighbourhood Plans are usually based on existing parishes or towns.

It is essential that the local planning authority is involved throughout the process; as they have direct responsibility for some of the steps. The local planning authority such as, Sevenoaks District Council, can provide assistance and advice but it is up to the Parish/Town Council to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan.

2 Getting started

The local planning authority is required to approve the 'neighbourhood area' for which the plan is being produced and to approve the local group that wants to prepare the plan as a 'qualifying body'. There are two types of 'qualifying body' – parish/town councils and neighbourhood forums. In areas where a parish or town council exists, these are the only bodies that can prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. The 'neighbourhood area' is expected to follow parish boundaries. However, a neighbourhood area can cover only part of a parish or can be a combination of parishes. If the proposed neighbourhood area covers more than one parish, then consent must be sought from each of the relevant parish councils.

Get the community on board

- Set up a **Steering Group** to coordinate the development of the Plan. The steering group should feature wide representation from the community and the neighbourhood area to be covered. It must not be dominated by any particular group (including the parish council).

The plan depends on local leadership and participation to be successful. Give everyone a chance to get involved from the beginning by:

- Writing to everyone with a local interest inviting them to the event and asking them to state their level of interest in taking part in development of the plan and about any particular skills they have
- Holding an **initial event** to explain the intentions of developing a neighbourhood plan. Through this event encourage the community to explore strengths and weaknesses, identify broad issues and recruit volunteers to a Project Steering Group. The event will also need to establish the boundary of the 'neighbourhood area' for which a plan will be prepared.

Town or Parish Council activities

Getting started

- Get the community on board
- Establish a steering group
- Define the 'neighbourhood area' and seek approval from **Sevenoaks District Council**

Getting organised

- Develop a communication strategy
- Create a time plan for the process
- Determine local skills, expertise and training needs
- Prepare a budget/ secure funding
- Keep a record of community involvement and consultation

Preparing the information base

- Consider the requirement for Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)
- Create a profile of your community
- Review existing plans and strategies for the area
- Audit existing infrastructure and designations
- Carry out surveys and needs assessments
- Summarise findings and identify issues

Drafting the Neighbourhood Plan

- Draft a vision and objectives for the area
- Feedback and further community involvement
- Prepare an SA Scoping Report
- Explore and consult on options
- Choose preferred options and draw up proposals
- Check for conformity with planning policies
- **Consult community on proposals**

Finalising the Neighbourhood Plan

- Prepare final plan document
- Agree monitoring, evaluation and review
- Prepare final SA Report
- Prepare EIA Report
- Consult community on proposals
- Submit proposals to Sevenoaks District Council
- Independent examination
- Referendum

The Plan is made

Local Authority role
(Sevenoaks District Council)

To publicise proposed area and designate Neighbourhood Plan

Duty to support
To give advice on:

- Information and potential sources
- The Consultation Strategy; who to consult / questionnaires
- SA/EIA Assessment

To check for conformity with planning policy

To publicise the Plan for six weeks. Appoint examiner to consider the Plan, send submission
Arrange for referendum to be held. Publicise and notify the community of the decision. Adopt Plan

3 Getting organised

Before starting to develop the actual Neighbourhood Plan, the steering/project group should...

- Prepare a programme for progressing the Plan. This should define a list of tasks, consider resources (both in terms of time and finance), and when and from where advice will be sought
- Develop a communications strategy. This should look at the best way to communicate with the wider community and ensure continued involvement throughout the process. People are more likely to participate if they are kept informed. This strategy could include using:
 - Web and social network sites
 - Flyers and posters
 - Notices in Parish magazines
 - The local media
- Establish contacts with the local community, businesses landowners/representatives, the District Council, local councillors and public agencies such as Natural England, Environment Agency and English Heritage
- Define and agree the boundaries of the Neighbourhood Plan area with the Local Planning Authority
- Investigate the potential costs of preparing the plan and identify possible sources of funding. The Government has provided some costings for the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans

Activity	Range of costs
Community consultation	£5,000 £10,000
Publicity and production of plans	£1,500 £7,000
Independent examination	£5,000 £8,000
Referendum	£1.80 / head (£8,300 / ward)

The examination and referendum will be funded by the Local Authority. More details can be found at

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/neighbourhoodplansimpact

Potential sources of funding or support in kind:

- Fundraising
- The private sector
- Planning related organisation such as CABE, PAS or RTPi

Note:

- Try to draw on those in the community who have relevant skills, knowledge and experience
- It could be a long process (up to two years) it is vital that the commitment and momentum of the local community is maintained
- The more representative the Steering Group/Forum the greater the success of the Plan

- Maintaining communications with the community is vital; the community should be made aware at an early stage of what is happening and remain informed throughout the Plan process
- Keep a record of community involvement and consultation
- Involve the local ward members. “Frontrunners” in Neighbourhood Planning have shown this is key.

4 Preparing an information base

This should be aimed at creating a profile of your community and its characteristics. In order to create this profile you may need to:

- Carry out an audit existing infrastructure and designations
- Undertake community-wide surveys/questionnaires and needs assessments.
Summarise the main issues
- If you have prepared one of the following, consider whether information can be used to inform the Neighbourhood Plan:
 - Parish Plans
 - Village Design Statement/Village Appraisal
 - Community Action Plan/Community led planning
 - Conservation Area Appraisals
- Consider the need for other work to comply with legislation (for instance Sustainability Appraisals, Appropriate Assessments and EIAs) and how this will feed into the work programme
- Review national and Local Plan policies (outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework, the District’s Core Strategy, the Allocation and Development Management Plan and the emerging Local Plan 2015-2035)
- Contact the Sevenoaks District Council for evidence based information/other contacts for sources of information. This may include:
 - Strategic Housing Market Assessment
 - Strategic Housing & Employment Land Availability Assessment
 - Other Local Plan documents
- Identify issues
 - Identify the issues which you would like to address considering the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to your neighbourhood that were highlighted through your consultation. This is important as it will help in deciding upon a “Vision” for the future and on what objectives should be achieved
 - Review issues previously identified through a sustainable community strategy and consultations exercises in the development of the Local Plan, as well as other documents produced for or by the Parish/Town Council.

5 Drafting the Neighbourhood Plan

The draft the Plan should be based on broad consensus amongst the community. Wide community involvement is very important at this stage. The steering/project group should:

- Draft The vision and objectives for the area
 - The vision should describe the community’s aspirations for their area; it may look forward across a 15 to 20 year time horizon or the Local Plan

- period and consider what land use and development challenges need to be addressed
 - The objectives should be focused and aim to set out what the Plan seeks to achieve
 - Consultation should take place to ensure that the community agrees with the draft vision and objectives.
- Draft a set of policy/proposal options
 - These should meet the vision and objectives. The options may be general or specific and will vary depending on what you are seeking to achieve. It is useful to consider a “do nothing” option which is essentially what would happen to the area and sites if the Neighbourhood Plan was not implemented
 - The community needs to be consulted to ensure that they agree on the options identified.
- Prepare a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report- this should be carried out alongside the development of the options. Further advice on how to carry out a Sustainability Appraisal can be found. TCPA (2011), Your Place, Your Plan - Levitt Thrivel, URS Scott Wilson (2011), “DIY SA”: Sustainability Appraisal of Neighbourhood Plans
- Choose preferred options and draw up policies/proposals. The plan can include policies, a proposals map and an action or implementation plan. For each objective you should consider what policies could be put in place to try to achieve them.

Policies/proposals may:

- Allocate specific sites for a particular use
- Specify particular requirements relation to each allocation(eg access,landscaping)
- Specify areas to be protected or enhanced as environmental areas or areas of landscape character
- Be more generic and apply to all future development e.g. local design policies and access.

The policies/proposals need to be achievable particularly when they relate to the future use of a site. Stakeholder/landowners should have been approached and involved early in the discussions.

- Check with Sevenoaks District Council for conformity with strategic policies in the development plan.
- **Consult on proposals.**

6 Finalising the Neighbourhood Plan

The final stages of preparation require the following...

The final Plan document, this should be written in plain English and should include:

- A summary of the issues/challenges facing the area
- The vision and objectives
- A description of the proposals/policies preferred explaining what they are seeking to achieve for the use and development of land

- An explanation of how the wider community has been involved and what methods were used to engage them and their responses
- The proposals/policies in relation to a specific site or location which requires protection
- A proposals/policy map showing areas where development should take place or where protection is needed to protect a site from development (e.g. open space or allotments)
- A strategy for the monitoring, evaluation and review of the Plan
- An implementation plan which outlines actions, identifies who will be responsible for undertaking the actions, the level of priority, timetable and source of funding. It could also set targets and indicators as to when a proposal/policy will be achieved once the Plan is made
- The final Sustainability Appraisal Report
- The EIA Report.

Submission of the Plan to Sevenoaks District Council

- Once the Plan is complete there has to be more public consultation. This will include consultations with statutory consultees (such as Sevenoaks District Council, the Environment Agency, English Heritage and Natural England). This consultation should also include
 - An explanation and the results of the consultations and any changes to the draft Neighbourhood Plan
 - A plan/statement showing the neighbourhood area
 - A written statement about how the Neighbourhood Plan meets relevant legislation
 - A statement about who was consulted.
- Once submitted Sevenoaks District will publicise the proposals for six weeks. Representations will be forwarded to the Examiner.

An independent examination

An examiner appointed by Sevenoaks District Council will review the Plan to ensure that it meets:

- European obligations
- National planning policies
- It is in general conformity with strategic policies of the Local Plan
- Compatible with adjoining Neighbourhood Plans
- Contributes towards sustainable development.

Once the examination is over the examiner will prepare a report. This may recommend one of three options: that the Plan proceeds to a referendum, proceeds to referendum with amendments or that it should not proceed.

The Referendum

- Once the examiner recommends that the draft Neighbourhood Plan can proceed then Sevenoaks District Council will organise and pay for a referendum
- All those registered to vote in elections in the Parishes/areas covered should be included in this referendum
- To agree the plan a majority of over 50% is required

- **Making the Plan**

When a majority is achieved, Sevenoaks District Council will adopt the Neighbourhood Plan. Once adopted, the Plan will be a material consideration in the determination of applications for planning permission.

In addition, development granted permission by an adopted Neighbourhood Development Order or Community Right to Build Order may be implemented.