

## **Notes on Neighbourhood Planning**

**Edition 17, December 2015**

### **Housing and Planning Bill**

The Government wants to **simplify and speed up** the neighbourhood planning system so that communities who wish to meet their local housing and other development needs through a neighbourhood development plan or order are not unnecessarily delayed.

The **Housing and Planning Bill** introduces powers to modify the neighbourhood planning process so that in certain cases a local planning authority must designate the whole of a neighbourhood area applied for, and to introduce **time periods for key local authority decisions** once a plan has been independently examined.

The Bill also includes measures to help resolve disagreements between neighbourhood planning bodies and local authorities, by providing the Secretary of State with powers, in limited circumstances and at the request of the neighbourhood planning body, to intervene and decide whether an order or plan proposal should proceed to referendum. Finally, the Bill will provide designated Neighbourhood Forums with the **right to be notified of planning applications** in their area, in line with the existing right enjoyed by parish councils. Planning Aid England have summarised the Bill [here](#).

The detail of many of these changes will be included in [secondary legislation](#) and subject to further public consultation. We will publish our consultation document in due course.

Separately, consultation is already underway on proposed changes to National Planning Policy, which include aspects related to neighbourhood planning and the green belt. You can submit your views on the consultation document [here](#).

### **Raising awareness and building capability**

Reaching the 100<sup>th</sup> referendum in October, and the 126<sup>th</sup> two months later shows just how much momentum has built up behind neighbourhood planning. To capitalise on this enthusiasm and appetite within communities to plan for their future, we are taking actions to ensure that even more people are able to benefit from the policy:

- We have increased the number of **Neighbourhood Planning Champions**, and are working with [Locality](#) and [Community Development Foundation](#) to support and train them, helping them act as advocates, run local networks and support peer-to-peer learning.
- A joint Cabinet Office and DCLG fund for **Community Organisers** to support groups to take up neighbourhood planning and other community rights in deprived areas has launched, and a project piloting capacity building for **community organisations in deprived neighbourhoods**, via a consortium led by [Renaissi](#), is due to begin soon.
- We are working with [CPRE](#) and [ACRE](#) on a project to reach Parish Councils and Rural Community Councils to bust myths, raise awareness and encourage groups who have stalled, through **regional workshops** and training materials.

### **Planning Guidance**

The **Planning Practice Guidance** should already be your first stop for any neighbourhood planning policy queries. We often receive questions about the weight of emerging neighbourhood plans, and on the relationship between a Local Plan and a neighbourhood plan. Read the guidance on these issues [here](#).

### **Could your community benefit from a parish council?**

Town and parish councils can directly run local facilities such as leisure centres and theatres, manage parks, establish bylaws, fund community groups and use the community rights in the Localism Act.

They are funded by a precept – a sum that the parish council charges that is added to the council tax in the local area. They also receive a proportion of any Community Infrastructure Levy charged by the local authority when development happens within the parish.

Although only around a third of the population is covered by a parish council, any community in England could have one. For example in May 2014, voters in Queen's Park within the City of Westminster in London elected a new Community Council (another name for a parish council). That was the first new parish council in London for decades.

DCLG, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs) are working together to encourage the creation of more parish councils in England.

Now a Neighbourhood Forum whose neighbourhood plan has passed referendum will not need a petition to get the local authority to start a governance review to decide whether to create a new parish council.

Neighbourhood Forum campaign groups will need to work with their local CALC or NALC in London (see <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/about-county-associations> for a list of contact details) for information and advice about next steps.

Further information and resources can be found at <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/create-a-council>.

### Neighbourhood Planning Support

Over £3million of grants, and £1million in technical support has now been awarded to groups under the neighbourhood planning support programme, which launched in April 2015. Applications for the current financial year close on 29 January 2016. **Grant for this period must be spent by 31 March 2016.** Applications for next financial year open on 1 February 2016. For more information and to apply go to [www.mycommunity.org.uk](http://www.mycommunity.org.uk)

### Housing in Neighbourhood Plans

Earlier this year we worked with local planning authorities and neighbourhood planning groups to collect data on Local Plan and neighbourhood plan housing allocations and planning permissions. The sample was small (the first 16 plans to allocate sites for housing) and the findings are heavily caveated. Nevertheless they suggest that in areas with a neighbourhood plan in place, there is a 10% increase in housing allocations, and that

local planning applications and permissions are advancing rapidly. You can read the full report [here](#).

We hope to update the report in April 2016 – if you would like to contribute data for your neighbourhood area, please email: [decentralisation@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:decentralisation@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

In the recent Autumn Statement, the Government reiterated that local communities can allocate land for housing through neighbourhood plans, even if that land is not allocated in the Local Plan. Strumpshaw (Broadland), where the neighbourhood plan allocated a site for a new community centre and allotments, with an enabling housing development for 10 new homes, is one such example. We'll be looking to ensure planning guidance is clearer on this.

### Local Authority Best Practice

Local planning authorities have a duty to support neighbourhood planning groups in their area. They must take decisions at key stages, organise the examination and referendum, and provide advice and assistance. The way in which local authorities carry out this duty varies, but we have seen a range of excellent examples.

A number have held events and workshops for groups in their own and neighbouring areas, with officers, experts and examiners providing training, and crucially giving local groups the opportunity to meet each other and share experiences. Some have helped to organise 'twinning visits' with neighbourhood planning groups in other authorities, for example in Wolverhampton and Preston.

South Downs National Park Authority has developed a toolkit and practical resources to support neighbourhood planning groups. Cornwall, Leeds and Wiltshire are among others who have followed this approach.

Many local authorities employ dedicated Neighbourhood Planning Officers, some of whom also belong to our [Neighbourhood Planning Champions network](#). Finally authorities such as Broadland have been 'topping up' grants awarded to groups from the DCLG support programme to help them advance their plans.

[This](#) useful guide from the Planning Advisory Service looks in further detail at how local authorities are reacting to the increase in neighbourhood planning activity in their area.

### **Referendum Round-up**

All 126 of the neighbourhood planning referendums to have been held so far have been successful. The most recent took place in Linton (Leeds) on 17 December and saw 96% of voters say Yes to the neighbourhood plan, on a turnout of 48%. Over 250,000 people have now voted in neighbourhood planning referendums. Average Yes vote is 89% and average turnout is 33%.