



a million voices for nature

## Neighbourhood planning

Neighbourhood planning is an optional new way for communities to decide the future of the places where they live and work. Neighbourhood planning is about letting the people who know about and care for an area, plan for it. It is led by the residential and business community, not the council, and is about building neighbourhoods – not stopping growth.

Communities will be able to:

- choose where they want new development, both built and natural. This could include green infrastructure and land for conservation, as well as homes, shops and offices
- create policies on what those new developments should look like, this could include, for example, requirements for wildlife-friendly features in buildings
- grant planning permission for the type of development they want to see in their neighbourhood.

### Why does it matter?

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

### How will it work?

There will be five key stages to neighbourhood planning:

- **Stage 1: Defining the neighbourhood**

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

In areas with a parish or town council, the parish or town council will take the lead on neighbourhood planning.

In areas without a parish or town council, community groups will have to lead on the debate. The group must also meet some basic standards. It must, for example, have at least 21 members and be open to new members.

Town and parish councils and community groups will then need to apply to the local planning authority.

If the local planning authority decides that the community group meets the right standards, the group will be able to call itself a 'neighbourhood forum'. The town or parish council or neighbourhood forum can then start planning for their neighbourhood.

- **Stage 2: Preparing the plan**

Local people can choose to draw up either a plan, or a development order, or both.

With a **neighbourhood plan**, communities will be able to establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood. They will be able to say, for example, that new homes should include solar panels, or wildlife-friendly features such as swift bricks.

The neighbourhood plan will set a vision for the future. It can be detailed, or general, depending on what local people want.

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

It is entirely up to local people which plan they choose, but both must follow some ground rules:

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

- **Stage 3: Independent check**

An independent examiner will need to check that a neighbourhood plan or order meets the right basic standards.

If the plan or order doesn't meet the right standards, the examiner will recommend changes. The planning authority will then need to consider the examiner's views and decide whether to make those changes. If the examiner recommends significant changes, then the local community may need to be consulted again before proceeding.

- **Stage 4: Community referendum**

The local council will organise a referendum on any plan or order that meets the basic standards. People living in the neighbourhood who are registered to vote in local elections will be entitled to vote in the referendum.

In some special cases - people from other neighbourhoods may be allowed to vote too. If more than 50 per cent of voters support the plan or order, then the local planning authority must bring it into force.

- **Stage 5: Legal force**

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

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

### **Stepping up for nature**

Neighbourhood planning offers you and your community the opportunity to plan positively for wildlife in your area.

Through neighbourhood plans and orders, local communities can secure, for example, wildlife-friendly features in new development, on-site renewables, increased green infrastructure, or allocate sites for nature conservation purposes.

You can find ideas and advice on incorporating wildlife-friendly features into new development on our website ([www.rspb.org.uk/conservationadvice](http://www.rspb.org.uk/conservationadvice)).