



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

# Neighbourhood planning

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# What is neighbourhood planning?

Neighbourhood planning is a new way for communities to decide the future of the places where they live and work.

They will be able to:

- choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built
- have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided
- grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead

The government has introduced the community right to do neighbourhood planning through the [Localism Act](#).

[General regulations governing neighbourhood planning](#) came into effect in April 2012.

[Regulations on the referendum stage](#) came into force in August 2012.

## Why does neighbourhood planning 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.

In theory, planning was always supposed to give local communities a say in decisions that affect them. But in practice, communities have often found it hard to have a meaningful say. The government wants to put power back in the hands of local residents, employees and business, councils and civic leaders - those who know best the needs of their local areas.

Neighbourhood planning is optional, not compulsory. No one has to do it, if they don't want to. But we think that lots of people will want to take the opportunity, to influence the future of the place where they live or work.

## How does neighbourhood planning work?

There are 5 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. They have long experience of working with and representing local communities.

**In areas without a parish or town council**, local people will need to decide which organisation should lead on coordinating the local debate. In some places, existing community groups may want to put themselves forward. In other places, local people might want to form a new group. In both cases, the group must meet some basic standards. It must, for example, have at least 21 members, and it must be open to new members.

Town and parish councils and community groups will then need to apply to the local planning authority (usually the borough or district council).

It's the local planning authority's job to keep an overview of all the different requests to do neighbourhood planning in their area.

They will check that the suggested boundaries for different neighbourhoods make sense and fit together. The local planning authority will say no if, for example, 2 proposed neighbourhood areas overlap.

They will also check that community groups who want to take the lead on neighbourhood planning meet the right standards. The planning authority will say no if, for example, the organisation is too small or not representative enough of the local community, including residents, employers and business.

If the local planning authority decides that the community group meets the right standards, the group can call itself a 'neighbourhood forum'. (This is simply the technical term for groups which have been granted the legal power to do neighbourhood planning in a particular area.)

## **Stage 2: preparing the plan**

Local people will need to pull together and prioritise their early ideas, and draw up their plans.

They can choose to draw up either a plan, or a development order, or both. It is entirely up to them. 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
- neighbourhood plans must contribute to achieving sustainable development

With a **neighbourhood plan**, communities are able to establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood. They will be able to say, for example, where new homes and offices should be built, and what they should look like. 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 buildings they want to see go ahead. Neighbourhood development orders allow new homes and offices to be built, without the developers having to apply for separate planning permission.

### **Stage 3: independent check**

Once a neighbourhood plan or order has been prepared, an independent examiner will check that it 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 parish, town council or neighbourhood forum may decide to consult the local community again before proceeding.

### **Stage 4: community referendum**

The local council will organise a referendum on any plan or order that meets the basic standards. This ensures that the community has the final say on whether a neighbourhood plan or order comes into force.

People living in the neighbourhood who are registered to vote in local elections will be entitled to vote in the referendum.

If more than 50% of people voting in the referendum 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 following a successful referendum, it carries real legal weight. Decision makers are obliged to consider proposals for development in the neighbourhood against the neighbourhood plan.

A neighbourhood order grants 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.

## **Funding and support**

There are several sources of advice and support for communities who are interested in doing neighbourhood planning:

The government has awarded a contract to Locality, in partnership with the Royal Town Planning Institute, Planning Aid England and partners, to deliver a £9.5 million, 2-year programme to support communities to progress their Neighbourhood Development Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders. The programme will offer hands-on, practical support and grants of up to £7,000 per neighbourhood area. Communities can submit applications from 1 May 2013. Full programme details will be available from the [My Community Rights website](#) when the programme goes live. For more information, see the [factsheet](#).

The local planning authority is under a duty to support and obliged by law to help people draw up their neighbourhood plans.

Developers, parish and town councils, landowners and local businesses may all be interested in sponsoring and taking a leading role in neighbourhood planning. In fact, in many areas, local businesses are working alongside local residents, local government and others with an interest in the neighbourhood's future development and growth.

## **Further information**

There is more information about neighbourhood planning on the [My Community Rights website](#).

The Department for Communities and Local Government policy team also produces [regular bulletins](#) containing latest news and policy developments.