



Planning Aid England

Engaging Communities in Planning

Embarking on the Neighbourhood Plan Journey

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What Planning Aid England Does

Planning Aid England (PAE) is a small part of the RTPI but with a big responsibility – **to help people understand and engage with the planning process.**

It is built on the principle that everyone should have access to the planning system and have the opportunity to get involved in planning their local area.



We help people take an active role in the planning system by:

1. Providing **free, independent, professional planning advice** to the general public via our planning guidance website www.planningaid.co.uk and email advice service (accessed via the website);
2. Offering further **bespoke support** to individuals and groups who meet our [casework criteria](#);
3. Acting as ‘**neutral facilitator**’ in the planning process – for example by providing independent professional advice as part of a Local Plan consultation. PAE works particularly with local planning authorities that have a high percentage of highly deprived areas (based on IMD data);
4. Commissioning **training and resources** to facilitate community engagement.



Overview

- Initial stages of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan
- Importance of starting the process in the right way
- Avoiding the mistakes that have caused other Groups to falter
- Demanding task that will take several years to complete
- But the reward of having a real say in local planning decisions is worth it



Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the Right Reasons

- NOT about:
 - Stopping all development
 - Taking full control
- IS about:
 - Guiding where development can appropriately be sited
 - Better meeting the needs of the local community
 - Taking greater account of the local character of the area
 - Having more of a say about building design



Choosing the Neighbourhood Area

- **Parish and Town Councils** – should plan for the whole parish area unless the local community extends into other parishes
- **Neighbourhood Forums** (in non-parished urban areas) have to define an area that properly encompasses a local community



Involving the Local Community Every Step of the Way

- Process is designed to be community led
- Ask local people (and businesses) for their views from start
- Ordinary folk need to be recruited to help prepare the Plan
- Content of the Plan to be representative of local opinion
- Written report is required to show the community has been properly involved and produced for when the Plan is examined
- Then the Plan needs to achieve majority support in the referendum



Establishing Relevant Local Issues

- Those preparing the Plan need to carefully evaluate the characteristics and functioning of their local area – eg use the Place Standard
- These initial outcomes need to be presented to local people
- To gauge whether these are right issues and ask if there are other matters to consider
- Many non-relevant issues will be raised by the community – littering, dog mess, speeding/congested traffic, anti-social behaviour...



What Neighbourhood Plans Can and Can't Deal With

- Planning issues are for the Plan; non-Planning issues for side projects
- The Plan deals with 'Development' – the construction of buildings and use of land
- But can't deal with some developments:
 - Minerals and waste operations, strategic sites and projects, major transport schemes and traffic management works
- Can deal with:
 - Local housing and commercial developments, building design, open space and recreation, local transport proposals such as footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes
- Can CHOOSE which to deal with, no obligation to do all



Where Neighbourhood Plans Fit In with Other Plans

The Development Plan Cake



Gathering Evidence

- Readily available facts and figures – Population Census, Index of Deprivation etc
- Previous studies and records including those done/collected for the Local Plan by the local authority
- Local surveys that community volunteers can do
- Specially commissioned technical reports – such as those done as Locality Technical Support



Developing a Vision and Objectives

- Vision -
 - What the locality should be like at the end of the Plan's life
 - The expected outcome of implementing the Plan's policies
- Objectives –
 - the means to achieve the Vision
 - Set the scope of the Plan's policies



Always Keeping an Open Mind

- The scope and remit of the Plan will evolve as it progresses through various drafts
- At consultation stages always ask - ‘is the Plan on the right course?’, ‘do you have anything to add?’
- Be prepared to change direction if good suggestions arise
- Don’t be too precious about the Plan’s content, it needs to be owned by the community at large
- So, compromises along the way will be necessary



Considering Alternatives

- Good practice to present the emerging issues with optional ways of resolving them
- Allow the community to pick their preferences
- Record how the Plan has evolved over time and how it has been shaped by the responses from the public
- Alternatives may need to be formally assessed as a means of demonstrating how the Plan contributes to ‘sustainable development’



Importance of Delivery

- The policies and site proposals in the Plan need to be capable of being implemented, ie effective
- Mainly this will be through development being profitable and landowners willing sellers
- When grant funding or a subsidy is required demonstrate this resource is likely to be available by quoting probable sources



Writing Policies (the hard bit!)

- The Policies are the actions of the Plan
- Need to be well justified, reasonably worded and deliverable
- Understandable by the local authority planners and appeal inspectors, otherwise they will be over-ruled
- Focus for the Examiner, who may recommend wording changes to ensure the Policies can achieve what they are intended to do



Typical Content of a Plan

- Introduction
- Vision and Objectives
- Spatial Portrait
- Local Plan Context
- Policies
- Plan Implementation, Monitoring and Review
- Policies Map
- Appendices - including any non-planning project proposals



Sources of Support

- The local authority – required by Regulations to provide assistance and advice
- Locality (with Groundwork) - administer the Government's Neighbourhood Planning Support Programme
- Planning Aid – volunteers help Groups in more disadvantaged areas
- Planning consultants – can do the whole job of preparing a Plan, but at a price so use only for the harder bits!



Government's Support Programme for 2021/22 (year 4 of 4)

- **Grants** of up to **£28,000** that can (and should) be spread over several years to pay for planning consultants, community engagement costs (eg survey software, room hire, display materials etc) and other incidental expenses
- **Technical Support** free consultancy assistance in specialist areas such as evidence reports and assessment work -
 - Housing Needs Assessment
 - Housing and Open Space Sites Assessment
 - Design Guide
 - Site Viability
 - Etc
- **Grant eligibility can be maximised by the Plan covering housing and design aspects**



Be Prepared for the Long Haul

- First do a residents' (and businesses) survey
- Assemble evidence
- Consult on issues, alternatives for dealing with them, and also evidence
- Prepare and consult on a draft of the Plan
- Consider comments received, revise Plan as necessary
- Submit Plan to the Local Authority with supporting documents
- Local Authority publishes the submitted Plan to allow formal comments to be made
- Local Authority appoints independent examiner in consultation with the Plan Group
- Examination held to consider submitted Plan and the comments made on it
- Examiner makes recommendations for any modifications
- Modified Plan put to referendum
- If majority public support in referendum, the Local Authority formally 'makes' the Plan



Any More Questions?

