

PLANNING THE FUTURE OF YOUR PARISH



Stephen Butt, Local Council Consultancy Associate, describes the complexities, challenges and benefits of neighbourhood planning.

Neighbourhood planning was introduced in the Localism Act, 2011. More than 3,000 plans have since been made or are underway. However, University of Reading research has shown a significant number of parish and town councils have hesitated to start work on neighbourhood plans because they see them as burdensome and time-consuming.

We don't have the time...

Creating a plan can be time-consuming, especially for a small parish with few staff, because it must stand up to scrutiny. It needs to be authoritative and comprehensive because it will be consulted when every future planning application in your parish is considered.

After all the hard work in creating it, your parishioners will be asked to support it, or otherwise, at a referendum. So it really is important to involve the community right from the start. Your council will find everyone in your community has something valuable to contribute, including landowners, developers, farmers, businesspeople, shopkeepers, pub landlords, early morning dog-walkers, and parents taking their children to school.

Everyone with a knowledge and an understanding of where they live can help.

We already have a parish plan...

Having a plan – any plan – is good. It gives a council a strong sense of direction, but neighbourhood plans are different. They are not 'wish lists' or simply aspirational. They are carefully structured documents that consider future development in the context of the local economy, heritage, social and business elements of the community.

Stay connected

Neighbourhood plans are made by communities, not councils. In fact, it is preferable for the parish or town clerk not to have an administrative role in a neighbourhood planning steering group.



However, it is just as important for the steering group and the council to work together. Delegating one or two councillors to sit on the group and including a report as a regular agenda item, will ensure the council has regular progress reports and can ratify any expenditure.

Will a neighbourhood plan stop unwelcome development?

Your planning authority must test all planning applications in your area against the policies in your plan – as well as the district local plan. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, and amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework, are intended to strengthen the authority of local and neighbourhood plans, but they must not conflict.

In effect, a local plan decides the broader picture, and a neighbourhood plan complements it with detail. A neighbourhood plan is not a 'No Entry' sign for developers, but rather a signpost indicating potential sites for development.

For the future

Neighbourhood plans need to stay up to date, so it is wise to stay connected with those who were most actively involved in creating your original plan. Their experience and expertise can continue to serve the community. They can also form an extremely useful advisory group to consider future planning applications.

Local Council Consultancy (LCC) can help

We can be your guide through the often complex procedures until your plan is presented to the community at a referendum. We can provide a structure for your work, help you to liaise with relevant authorities and draw together your research into a cohesive plan.

LCC can also advise on innovative ways to involve your community and ensure you secure grants to cover the cost of creating your plan.

Visit www.localcouncilconsultancy.co.uk to find out more