

Top tips on Neighbourhood Planning: Managing relationships between Qualifying Bodies and Local Planning Authorities

1. Understand the motivations of the group early on and where the aims of the Group are not best achieved through a Neighbourhood Plan don't be afraid to advise an alternative approach

It is important to understand the issues that are the trigger for interest because it might be that a neighbourhood plan is not the most appropriate planning tool to address those issues. For example, if the lack of affordable housing is a particular problem in the local area, it may be best to start with a housing needs study before working with Housing Associations to deliver affordable housing.

Alternative ways to get involved in the planning of the local area should be explained at the outset, these might include getting involved in other planning documents such as Supplementary Planning Documents or Area Action Plans, preparing a more informal plan such as a community plan or village design statement, seeking to influence the Local Plan, responding to consultation on planning applications, developing a Neighbourhood Development Order or Community Right to Build Order, or an Article 4 Direction.

2. Provide clarity on the advice and assistance Qualifying Bodies can expect

This could take the form of a Service Level Agreement, a model template is available on the PAS website: http://www.pas.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning/-/journal_content/56/332612/4079060/ARTICLE

3. Provide information and links to information

There is considerable existing guidance on neighbourhood planning produced by Locality, Planning Aid and others; and it is therefore not necessary to reproduce this, rather Local Authority websites should act as a signpost.

For other topics, it may be most efficient to produce locally specific guidance. Some good examples of authorities producing a suite of locally specific guidance include:

- Aylesbury Vale: <http://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning-guidance-and-funding>
- Herefordshire Council: <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning>
- Cornwall Council: <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/neighbourhood-planning-toolkit/preparing-a-neighbourhood-plan/neighbourhood-planning-guide-notes/#-tab-359260>

Groups can also find advice on sources of funding helpful, for some authorities this may require working with other Council Departments, for example the community action team or voluntary sector team.

4. Use the right staff and establish a single point of contact

Regular communication with groups is key to success, and the aims should be to establish a transparent and trusting relationship. Officers with good interpersonal

skills and who are able to manage expectations make good Neighbourhood Planning Officers. The choice of language can be key to getting relationships off to a good start, discussions will be technical but should not get bogged down in jargon. The LPA should challenge policies as they emerge but it is not their job to draft the plan. The key advice given to Qualifying Bodies should be recorded. LPAs should encourage Qualifying Bodies to have a single point of contact.

5. Raise awareness of Neighbourhood Planning within the Council

The duty to advise and assist groups applies to the whole Council, not just the planning teams. There are several departments who may need to be involved in Neighbourhood Planning in order for it to be a success, including Development Management, Property Services, Democratic Services and Communications, Electoral Services as well as Members and the County Council where there are highways issues.

6. Use students to help

Some groups have found students can provide valuable additional resources, for example in the Whitchurch Neighbourhood Plan students undertook the landscape assessment.

7. Share evidence

LPAs should be transparent about evidence they are in the process of preparing and where evidence is not yet available consider if the methodology can be shared. Groups often find resources provided by the LPA such as mapped constraints, viability evidence and needs studies particularly helpful. Sharing information which is within the public domain but not yet published can help build trust.

Additionally sharing the production of evidence can empower the community, for example Bath and North East Somerset include sites allocated in Neighbourhood Plans in their Site Allocations DPD. Where the Local Plan is using evidence from a Neighbourhood Plan a clear timetable for delivery should be agreed, for example in Basingstoke groups were given several months to progress site allocations and the Council were prepared to step in if evidence was not provided by the deadline.

See advice on evidence: http://www.pas.gov.uk/web/pas1/neighbourhood-planning/-/journal_content/56/332612/3614484/ARTICLE

8. Help Qualifying Bodies who want to buy in services

Some groups will want to buy in professional services and the effectiveness of this often depends on appointing the right consultant under the right terms. Some groups will find advice and support on this helpful. Cornwall Council have produced a guidance note on this topic:

<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/15229958/buying-in-services-guide-note-final.pdf>

9. Get help from a third party if there is significant tension

An independent broker can help with difficult relationships, this could include Planning Aid or an Officer from a neighbouring authority. NPIERs also offer

health checks: <http://www.rics.org/us/join/member-accreditations-list/dispute-resolution-service/neighbourhood-planning-independent-examiner-referral-service-npiers/>

10. Establish a process for maintaining relationships after the Plan is made

The whole Council should be informed when Neighbourhood Plan is made and processes should be put in place to ensure Plans are used in decision making, for example by adding Neighbourhood Plans to the template for reporting planning application to Planning Committee and adding the boundary of made plans to the Council's GIS system.

The Housing and Planning Bill includes new powers for neighbourhood forums to request notification of planning applications in their neighbourhood area.

Qualifying Bodies should also be encouraged to establish internal processes for regularly using plans, for example Ascot, Sunningdale and Sunninghill parishes in RBWM have a separate joint delivery group which was set up after the plan was made. The groups refer to specific Neighbourhood Plan policies in their representations on applications.

See also Top tips on 'Post Adoption Neighbourhood Planning'.