

How to engage and work constructively with your local planning authority

Putting the pieces together



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1 Introduction

This resource will explain:

- the role of the local planning authority in neighbourhood planning
- how to work constructively with your local planning authority

If you are new to neighbourhood planning you are encouraged to read the [Locality Roadmap](#) which explains the process of preparing a neighbourhood plan. It will provide useful context to this resource which focuses on the 'how.'

If you are unsure who your local planning authority is you can find out [here](#).

2 The role of the local planning authority in neighbourhood planning

Local planning authorities are required to support groups engaged with neighbourhood planning. This '[duty to support](#)' is not quantified. It is for the local planning authority to determine the [appropriate level](#) of support and you need to agree this with it.

The different types of assistance groups have received from local planning authorities include:

- sharing relevant evidence (facts and figures) including information gathered as part of the [Local Plan](#) process
- providing Ordnance Survey (OS) maps
- advising on the status of the Local Plan and how this may influence and affect the neighbourhood plan
- providing advice on the [Strategic Environmental Assessment](#) of plans (SEA) and assisting with the [screening opinion](#) as to whether or not the plan is likely to have significant environmental effects
- identifying the [strategic policies](#) in the adopted Local Plan
- [reviewing](#) draft policies, providing comments on whether they consider they meet the '[basic conditions](#)' and offering alternative wording to make the policy stronger
- helping groups identify who to engage with and how to consult on the neighbourhood plan
- helping groups identify and contact the relevant [consultation bodies](#)

Your local planning authority can be an excellent resource to tap into and it is also a partner in the process. Essentially you are both working towards the same goal, to produce a neighbourhood plan that will meet the basic conditions and other legal tests so that it can proceed to referendum.

Further information on the duty to support is provided within the [Roadmap Guide](#). This [case study](#) discusses Leeds City Council's role in neighbourhood planning.



A number of local planning authorities have developed their own Neighbourhood Planning Toolkits. Often these outline the support they can provide to neighbourhood planning groups. Examples include [Leeds City Council](#), [Herefordshire Council](#) and the [London Borough of Camden](#).

3 How to work constructively with your local planning authority

Your local planning authority has an important role in neighbourhood planning. Here is some advice on how best to work with it:

- **Make contact at an early stage** and arrange a meeting with your local planning authority as soon as you decide you might like to produce a neighbourhood plan. At this early stage it may be able to offer advice on whether neighbourhood planning is the right tool to meet your requirements or whether other [options](#) might be more appropriate. Officers in the planning policy team are generally responsible for working with neighbourhood plan groups and meeting early will help to foster a good working relationship.
- **Meet face to face** if possible, at least initially, as this will help to build a rapport and hopefully a strong working relationship.
- **Discuss and seek to agree the support** the local planning authority is able to provide to you as early as possible to keep expectations realistic. Making assumptions about the support your local planning authority can provide could lead to conflict and a breakdown in working relationships later on. Also be mindful of the other work pressures your local planning authority may be under.
- **Give your local planning authority advance notice** of your intentions, such as: when you intend to submit an application for you neighbourhood area to be designated; or requesting comments on your draft documents. This will assist your local planning authority to allocate appropriate resources to handle your request.
- **Discuss your authority's time-scales and deadlines** especially how they make [decisions](#) (for example, through a cabinet member or a committee or by an officer) and respond to requests for comments. This will ensure that expectations on both sides are realistic, will reduce any potential for misunderstanding and better inform your project plan (see [How to project plan](#)).
- **Decide on a key point of contact** within your group and ask your local planning authority to do the same. This can make it easier to manage the process and share information.
- **Consider formalising methods of working** with your local planning authority. You may wish to formalise your agreed working relationship into a [service level agreement](#) or memorandum of understanding. This will outline the level of support your local planning authority can provide and also detail what they expect from you and your group.
- **Be mindful of relevant local authority departments other than planning.** Your local planning department is part of a wider organisation that has different roles and responsibilities you may need to be aware of. These other departments may provide



further support and information relevant to your neighbourhood plan. They may also have differing views on your emerging policies. For example, the local authority may also be a landowner and the view of the estates department may be very different from the planning department's. We have produced a [template](#) which identifies some of the departments you may wish to talk to and discuss with your key point of contact at the local planning authority.

- **Be courteous** and deal with any misunderstandings or disagreements in a constructive manner. The production of a neighbourhood plan is a collaborative process. There may be times when you disagree but you will still need to work together in an open and professional manner.
- **Put aside any past misunderstandings or difficulties in the relationship.** You need to work together and letting past disagreements affect your working relationship is unlikely to be constructive.
- **Keep the local planning authority informed of progress,** however slight. This will also help you to maintain momentum, keep to time-scales and to discuss any emerging issues that may have an impact on your neighbourhood plan.
- **Ask for feedback, listen to it and use it.** You should discuss emerging ideas, issues and policies with your local planning authority as you develop your plan. It is recommended that you provide the authority with draft material to review and comment on, before presenting them with the final version of documents. This will enable you to take their comments on board and respond in good time to any issues or concerns they identify. You may not always agree with the advice you are being given, but always remember you are both trying to ensure the plan will meet the basic conditions and other legal tests and proceed to referendum.
- **Maximise the value you get out of your local planning authority's time** by ensuring that documents are sent to them in a legible and timely manner. Be clear about what you are asking from your local planning authority and make sure their input has been agreed in advance.

Neighbourhood planning is a collaborative process and is easier and more enjoyable if you are working in partnership with your local planning authority to deliver your plan. A constructive working relationship is the key to this happening.

Agreeing how you will work together in advance, with clear expectations from both sides, will go a long way to achieving a productive relationship. There are examples of this happening all over the country such as [East Coker Parish Council](#), so ensure you make time to learn from the experiences of other groups.



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