

Neighbourhood Planning

An introduction to Community Led Planning and Options

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Waveney District Council
Serving the Community

in partnership

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Overview

Waveney District Council and Suffolk Coastal District Council have been working with Suffolk ACRE (now Community Action Suffolk) and Suffolk County Council to support a number of towns and parishes in the districts to develop and deliver their community led plans. A range of different approaches have been used including parish plans, town plans and village reviews. These approaches all aim to identify a community's ambitions for their local area and an action plan to achieve them. Although these types of community led plans don't carry statutory weight, they have helped communities deliver local projects such as the provision of new community facilities.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced new rights for communities including tools that can be used to influence how their local area develops. These new tools are Neighbourhood Development Plans, Neighbourhood Development Orders and the community right to build. These are similar to parish and town plans in that they are not compulsory and they must be community led. However, the key difference is that they carry statutory weight and once the necessary processes have been successfully completed and the plan or order is adopted by the Council, they become part of the Local Plan and will be used to make decisions on planning applications. An important thing to keep in mind is that none of these plans can be used to stop development.

Part 1 is a guide to help communities understand the options available to them by explaining the different types of community plan, the benefits and/or limitations of each type of plan to be able to make an informed decision about which approach is appropriate for them.

Part 2 explains how to get started, practical advice on how to get the community involved in the process to come up with issues and options and how these can be turned into a vision and objectives.

Part 3 provides practical advice on developing a plan and describes what needs to be done and when. It includes details of the early formal stages such as designating a Neighbourhood Area and Neighbourhood Forum and how the Council will support the process.

Part 4 explains the formal processes from submission of the plan to the Council, through the examination process and formal adoption.

Part 5 provides further detail on where to find other help and advice and current sources of funding.



Planning for your Neighbourhood: The Options

Thinking about what you want to achieve and understanding the pros and cons of different community led planning approaches will help you decide which approach is best for you and your local circumstances. Your decision will depend on factors such as:

- Whether there is an adopted town or parish plan in place (or one in progress);
- What development requirements have been highlighted as a result of your engagement with the local community;
- Whether the Council's existing policies are sufficient to deal with the planning issues in your local area.

The information that follows gives some further detail on the different types of community led plan, including Neighbourhood Development Plans and how they can be used.

Non-Statutory Community-Led Plans

Non-statutory plans are produced by communities to create a vision for their area but are not governed by planning law.

Although they do not carry the same weight as statutory documents in determining planning applications, significant weight is given to those that have undergone considerable consultation and are founded on a sound evidence base. They can also be a strong material consideration in determining planning applications where there is an absence of any adopted planning policies, or where the policy is inconclusive.

Types of Non-Statutory plans include: -

- Village Reviews
- Village Design Statements
- Parish Plans/Town Plans
- Community Action Plans
- Town Action Plans/Market Town Health Check

Non-statutory plans do not have to follow any statutory procedures and so can be much simpler for communities to produce. Additionally they do not have to be restricted to issues governed by planning law (e.g. setting criteria for planning applications and designating land). Because they can cover broader issues they can be seen as a more complete vision for the local area.

If any of these plans contain planning issues all or part of the documents can be converted to a statutory document by the local planning authority. When planning matters are included as part of such a document these plans can also be used as evidence to inform the production of a statutory planning document.

More detail is included below: -

Village Reviews

A number of smaller villages have tested this approach. It involves a one-off community meeting where people are invited to come together to identify current local issues and concerns, prioritise those they want to address and agree a plan of action to take things forward, including identifying who needs to be involved. This is a quick and low cost approach and its success relies on the number of people who attend and the cross-section of the community involved.

Alternatively, an exercise using the village review format could be the starting point for identifying whether the key local issues are the type of thing that would be best addressed via a Neighbourhood Development Plan, a Parish Plan, a targeted piece of work such as a housing needs survey or another method.

A Village Review contains a description and analysis of the distinctive aspects of a village and outlines design guidance for further development. These can form part of both a Parish Plan and a Neighbourhood Development Plan but can also be a stand alone document.

Parish and Town Plans

Parish and Town Plans are comprehensive in scope. They set out a vision for how a community wants to develop over the next 5 years and identify the actions needed to achieve it. They can include everything that is relevant to the people who live and work in the community, from employment and playgrounds to the design of new buildings and protection of hedges and ponds. They can include any social, environmental or economic issues, based on what a community decides is important to them and are broader than just focussing on those matters covered by planning law. Town Plans also tend to look beyond their own boundaries in order to take account of the views of those living in the surrounding area that may use the services and facilities within the town.

A robust and inclusive Parish or Town Plan can also help with planning and funding decisions; for example they can help prioritise money secured from development to mitigate impacts on the local area and can also be used to prioritise the County Councillor's locality budgets and any parish money raised from Council Tax.



A Parish or Town Plan cannot determine the allocation of housing or employment land nor determine the outcome of a planning application. However, a Parish Plan can be used to set out the Parish's considerations in securing affordable housing and as evidence when submitting views to the Local Planning Authority on planning applications. Parish and Town Plans can be used as a basis for taking forward planning related and land-use elements into a Neighbourhood Development Plan and can be used as evidence to inform the production of the Council's own site allocation documents or planning policies where these are in the process of being produced.

Examples of Parish Plans can be found on Waveney District Council's website www.waveney.gov.uk/communityledplanning and include the Parish Plans of Kessingland, Blundeston and Flixton, Corton, Halesworth and Worlingham.

Tools for smaller parishes

A full Parish Plan can take up to 18 months to complete and can involve a significant amount of work. Smaller parishes may feel that this is not suitable for them or that they do not have the capacity to undertake this kind of project. Some alternatives to consider may be: -

- Working with neighbouring parishes on a joint plan
- Linking in to the development of a bordering town plan
- Undertaking a village review (see previous page)

Village/Market Town Design Statement

A Village/Market Town Design Statement (Design Statement) describes the qualities and distinctive characteristics that people value in their locality. It sets out clear and simple guidance for the design of all development in the village or town, based on character criteria. It will not stop development and change from happening but it will help to influence how new development fits into the existing setting of the village/town. They can be an important tool for setting out criteria for small changes, such as the replacement of windows or changes to fences, where planning permission is not always required. A Design Statement can be incorporated into a Parish Plan or Neighbourhood Development Plan or can be a document in its own right.

Statutory Plans

Statutory plans are governed by planning law and there is a regulatory process that must be followed in their production. The following is a list of some of the statutory plans that the Local Planning Authority produce: -

- Development Plan Documents which include:
 1. Area Action Plans
 2. Site Specific Allocations
 3. Planning Policies
- Supplementary Planning Documents
- Local Development Orders
- Article 4 Directions

When the Localism Act came into force in April 2012 it devolved power to local communities to produce their own statutory plans, which are: -

- Neighbourhood Development Plans
- Neighbourhood Development Orders
- Community Right to Build Orders

These plans and orders must be produced in accordance with The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.

Neighbourhood Development Plans must be in conformity with the Council's strategic policies (set out in the Core Strategy/Local Plan). Policies in the Neighbourhood Development Plan cannot block development already part of the adopted Local Plan but they can shape and influence where that development will go and what it will look like.

Undertaking any of these options will require time and resources from the town or parish and its community. The more people who are involved and who feel involved in the decision made about which approach to take, the more successful the engagement will be and the eventual outcome.

Involving the community in the decision is especially important when producing a Neighbourhood Development Plan as there will be a community referendum at the end of the process, which will determine whether the plan will be adopted or not. The whole community should be aware and involved in the decision to develop a Neighbourhood Development Plan and will continue to be involved throughout the process. A broad agreement on the objective of the plan and key issues and policy outcomes that the plan will cover should be outlined at the start of the process.



Neighbourhood Development Plans

Neighbourhood Development Plans will give your community an increased ability to influence planning decisions within your area. They can be used to set out the vision for an area including the allocation of land for development and policies for the use and development of land. This could include the location of new shops, offices or homes and the protection of green spaces. Neighbourhood Development Plans are intended to be flexible so that communities themselves can decide what issues or areas are covered and in how much detail. In parished areas, a Neighbourhood Development Plan will be produced by parish or town councils. In unparished areas (i.e. Lowestoft), a Neighbourhood Forum would be the lead body.

The policies within the local Neighbourhood Development Plan will support the Council's strategic policies. The plan will be subject to independent examination followed by a community referendum, and once adopted your Neighbourhood Development Plan will become a statutory plan and will be used alongside other Local Plan documents to help make decisions on planning applications in your area.

It is important to remember that a Neighbourhood Development Plan is not a tool to avoid or stop development and needs to accord with the strategic policies and parameters set out in the Local Plan.

Neighbourhood Development Orders

A Neighbourhood Development Order can directly grant planning permission for certain specified kinds of developments within the Neighbourhood Area. Permission could be 'full' or 'outline', and could have conditions attached. It could be site specific, or it could grant more generalised development rights across the Neighbourhood Area. Where a Neighbourhood Development Order is in place there would be no need to apply to the Council for planning permission for the type of development covered by the Order.

Community Right to Build Orders

Community Right to Build Orders are a type of Neighbourhood Development Order that give local communities the power to take forward small scale development in specified areas within their town or village without the need to apply for planning permission. They are particularly aimed at helping rural communities plan small-scale development, such as affordable housing, shops or community facilities. They can be instigated by any community organisation not just a Neighbourhood Forum, town or parish council.

The process for preparing and adopting a Neighbourhood Development Order or a Community Right to Build Order is broadly the same as that for a Neighbourhood Development Plan. Development of these plans will require community consultation and agreement and proposals

will be subject to an independent examination and a referendum. Both would also become part of the Council's Local Plan.

Do Nothing?

The Council has criteria based policies to shape the form and location of new development and to help to determine planning applications. These policies cover all types of development from large scale housing and industrial development to small scale proposals such as house extensions and alterations. You may consider that the Council's existing Local Plan policies, either emerging or adopted (i.e. Core Strategy, Site Allocations, Development Management Policies), provide sufficient guidance for your area and it is unnecessary to produce any type of community led plan to further address planning issues. This will be up to you and your community to decide.



Further Information

If you would like to discuss any of these community led planning approaches in more detail, please contact: -

Neighbourhood Planning

Planning Policy & Delivery Team (Suffolk Coastal)

✉ suffolkcoastallocalplan@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

🖱 www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk/neighbourhoodplanning

Planning Policy & Delivery Team (Waveney)

✉ waveneylocalplan@eastsuffolk.gov.uk

🖱 www.waveney.gov.uk/communityledplanning

Parish and other community led plans

Community Action Suffolk

✉ info@@communityactionsuffolk.org.uk

🖱 www.communityactionssuffolk.org.uk

Suffolk County Council

✉ alison.wheatland@suffolk.gov.uk

Active Communities Team (Suffolk Coastal)

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