



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Neighbourhood planning

Government response to consultation



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Introduction

- 1 The Government recognises the importance of giving communities a stronger voice in planning decisions and a real choice about future development of their area. Our reforms have given significant new power to communities in deciding the scale, location and form of development in their areas.
- 2 Through neighbourhood planning, the Government is supporting people who care about their communities and want to get involved in improving them. For the first time residents and individuals in businesses can produce neighbourhood plans to set planning policies that will be used in determining planning applications, and can grant planning permission for development they want to see through neighbourhood development orders (including community right to build orders).
- 3 It is clear that communities have positively embraced these new powers. Across England more than 1,200 communities have applied for a neighbourhood planning area to be designated; more than 1,100 of these neighbourhood areas have been designated by local planning authorities. We estimate that more than 5 million people in England (9.7%) live in a designated neighbourhood area¹.
- 4 In July 2014, the Government launched a technical consultation on planning which set out a number of proposals for improving the planning system². Section 1 of this document put forward proposals to make it even easier for residents and business to come together to produce a neighbourhood plan or a neighbourhood development order. The proposed reforms are part of a wider set of planned improvements that will help more communities that want to take up the new powers to do so, and ensure individual neighbourhood plans and Orders can complete more quickly.

¹ Based on intelligence from informal monitoring using automatic reporting of updates from local authority websites, media and other sources (data as at November 2014)

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/technical-consultation-on-planning>

About the consultation

- 5 Our technical consultation on planning reforms sought views on proposals to introduce time limits within which local planning authorities must take decisions on certain applications for a neighbourhood area to be designated. We also sought views on changes to the pre-submission consultation and publicity process for neighbourhood plans and neighbourhood development orders, and the documents that must accompany a neighbourhood plan when submitted to a local planning authority.
- 6 Consultation ran from 31 July to 29 September 2014. There were 467 responses to the consultation of which 137 (29%) were from individuals and 330 were from organisations. Of the organisations responding 42 per cent were from the public sector. Just under 10 per cent of responses were made on behalf of parish and town councils and designated neighbourhood forums. 18 per cent of respondents were from the development industry (or had development interests) professional bodies and trade associations. Table 1 below provides details of responses by types of organisation.

Table 1: Responses by type of organisation

Type of organisation responding	Number
Public Sector	200
County Council	10
District/Borough Council	71
London Borough Council	26
National Park Broads Authority	6
Parish/Town Council	42
Unitary Council	30
Other Public Sector	15
Voluntary / Community	43
Community Organisation	11
Designated Neighbourhood Forum	4
Residents' Association	4
Voluntary/Charitable Sector	20
Other Community Sector	4
Retail (A1) or Financial and Professional Services (A2) Business	2
Existing A1 retail / shop	1
Professional Service	1
Other	85
Developer/ House Builder	19
Developer association	3
Local Enterprise Partnership	1
Land Owner	1
Professional institute / professional e.g. planner, consultant	26
Professional Trade Association	18
Other (none of the options in the lists above)	17
Total organisations	330

- 7 It should be noted that in evaluating the responses to this consultation, the government has carefully considered the arguments put forward in support of, or against, any particular proposal, rather than reaching a view based on the absolute number for or against.
- 8 The Government intends to develop regulations and guidance as quickly as possible. Our objective is to lay new regulations in Parliament to come into effect - subject to the Parliamentary process - by the end of January 2015.
- 9 The rest of this report sets out an overview of the responses to individual questions, and provides more detail on the Government's proposals for implementing the package of reforms.

Consultation questions

- 10 This section summarises responses to the individual questions posed in the consultation document under the four broad headings of:
- timely decision taking by local planning authorities
 - pre-submission publicity and consultation
 - strategic environmental assessment
 - further measures

Timely decision taking by local planning authorities

- 11 A local planning authority must take decisions at key stages in the neighbourhood planning process and provide advice or assistance to a parish council, neighbourhood forum, or community organisation that is producing a neighbourhood plan or an Order. Timely and well-considered decisions by local authorities are therefore a key part of delivering effective neighbourhood planning. We are very clear in our planning guidance that local planning authorities should fulfil their duties and take decisions as soon as possible.
- 12 We consulted on specific proposals to introduce a time limit for taking decisions on the designation of a neighbourhood area and sought views on whether there were other stages in the process where similar time limits may be beneficial.

Question 1.1: Do you agree that regulations should require an application for a neighbourhood area designation to be determined by a prescribed date? We are interested in the views of local planning authorities on the impact this proposal may have on them.

- 13 There were 376 responses to this question. There was broad support (more than 70% of respondents) for the principle of introducing a time period within which a decision on whether to designate a neighbourhood area should be made. Support for the changes was high among organisations that are, or are capable of becoming, qualifying bodies e.g. parish and town councils and neighbourhood forums. There was also a high level of support from the development sector (over 80%). The majority (60%) of local authorities responding also supported the principle of setting time limits.
- 14 A number of respondents, particularly from local planning authorities, raised the issue of local authority resourcing, and more specifically the need for local planning authorities to continue to receive funding to manage their responsibilities. Another point frequently raised by local authorities was for any new regulations to clearly set out from when the time period would run, and that this should only be after the local authority has received all the information required in order to publicise an area application.

- 15 Where respondents commented further they generally suggested that the prescribed date should allow for flexibility if objections were received, or if the proposed neighbourhood area proved contentious and therefore required greater consideration.
- 16 A number of local planning authorities also raised concerns about the ability to determine an area application within a time limit when the plan or Order covers two or more local authority areas. Approval would be required by each authority which could cause unavoidable delays in reaching a decision.

Question 1.2: If a prescribed date is supported do you agree that this should apply only where:

- I. **the boundaries of the neighbourhood area applied for coincide with those of an existing parish or electoral ward; and**
- II. **there is no existing designation or outstanding application for designation, for all or part of the area for which a new designation is sought?**

- 17 There were 322 responses received to this question. Over 80 per cent of those responding supported restricting the types of area applications to which a 10 week time limit would apply. Respondents noted that ward boundaries were rarely considered an appropriate basis for neighbourhoods by communities. The view was expressed that as electoral wards cover a wide area and many communities, applications might become contentious, leading to high numbers of responses to analyse. A number of respondents disagreeing with these proposals did not want ward boundaries to become the default option. It was felt that, by seeking to achieve a speedy decision on an area application, there could be the unintended consequence of distorting the process of identifying genuinely appropriate neighbourhood boundaries.
- 18 The point was made that there may be circumstances where there are a number of competing applications for neighbourhood areas to be designated. Setting a time limit in these circumstances could limit the ability of the authority to work with the applicants to reach a consensus on an appropriate neighbourhood area.
- 19 A more specific point was raised in relation to area applications in national parks where both a district or borough council and a national park authority might have planning functions for different parts of the parish. In these instances an application would require the agreement of both authorities. This might not be possible to coordinate within the 10 weeks proposed.
- 20 While not explicitly consulted upon, there is evidence in the responses of support for authorities being required to take a decision within a certain timescale for all types of area application, but with the recognition that more complex cases may require longer than 10 weeks (10% of local authority respondents indicated support for decisions on all area applications being made within a set time period).

Question 1.3: If a date is prescribed, do you agree that this should be 10 weeks (70 days) after a valid application is made? If you do not agree, is there an alternative time period that you would propose?

- 21 There were 341 responses received to question 1.3. Responses were evenly balanced with 49 per cent agreeing with the proposal and seven per cent having a neutral opinion. The majority of local planning authorities thought 10 weeks too short a period in which to reach a decision, particularly for more complex cases. While this view was shared by others, 63 per cent of responses from those other than local authorities supported the proposal. Some respondents suggested that if time periods were introduced there should be a provision for timescales to be extended should the need arise. Respondents made the point that it was important that local authorities had sufficient time to arrange suitable publicity, and for there to be flexibility when setting the period within which representations on area applications needed to be received, particularly during holiday periods.
- 22 Local authorities in particular expressed clear and specific views about the resourcing of local planning authorities. While a number of local planning authorities commented that 10 weeks was too short a period if they were required to analyse representations, prepare reports, and accommodate authority committee cycles, others commented that the time limits could be achieved through the delegation of decisions to council committees or officers.

Question 1.4: Do you support our proposal not to change the period of six weeks in which representations can be made on an application for a neighbourhood area to be designated? If you do not, do you think this period should be shorter? What alternative time period would you propose?

- 23 There were 350 responses to this proposal. The proposal was well supported across all groups, with 80 per cent in favour. Of the 18 per cent of respondents taking a different view, half suggested that the publicity period should be reduced to four weeks or less, particularly where a neighbourhood area application coincided with an existing parish boundary or if the proposal for a 10 week prescribed time limit were to be introduced. Some respondents expressed the view that reducing the consultation period risked prejudicing community involvement.

Government response

- 24 In March 2012³ the Government signalled its intention to revisit the use of time limits in the neighbourhood planning regulations in light of experience. Anecdotally, slow decision making by local planning authorities, particularly at the start of the

³ Neighbourhood Planning Regulations: Consultation Summary of responses. March 2012

process, is frustrating for communities and can discourage them taking up the new right. Therefore the Government notes and welcomes the broad support for the principle of setting time limits within which decisions on applications for the designation of a neighbourhood area should be taken.

- 25 There were strong arguments set out for and against our more detailed proposals. However we remain of the firm view that timely decision taking, particularly at the start of the process, gives more communities the confidence to consider neighbourhood planning and provides greater certainty for communities that have already taken that decision. After careful consideration we intend to go further than the proposals set out in questions 1.2 and 1.3 of the consultation document and proceed with introducing time limits within which decisions on all applications to designate a neighbourhood area must be made. However, while we are clear that unnecessary delays in making decisions should be avoided, we are equally clear that some area applications may be more complex and therefore require more time within which to reach a decision. Therefore we intend to require local planning authorities to take decisions on applications for the designation of a neighbourhood area within the following time scales:
- where the area applied for follows parish boundaries the period will be eight weeks (we also intend shortening the minimum period that the local planning authority must allow for representations to be made from six to four weeks in these cases)
 - for applications that include any of the areas of more than one local planning authority (even if the area applied for follows parish boundaries) the period will be 20 weeks
 - for all other applications the period will be 13 weeks
- 26 We have carefully considered the views expressed by respondents, particularly local authorities, that sufficient time is needed for effective publicity arrangements to be put in place. To address these concerns we propose that in all cases the time period will run from the date immediately following that on which the application is first publicised.
- 27 We recognise that local planning authorities are required to meet new legislative duties in relation to neighbourhood planning and we are committed to ensuring that, in line with new burdens principles, local planning authorities receive the appropriate funding to do so. The Government does not consider that the proposed reforms will introduce a requirement for additional administration or expenditure by local authorities; indeed we note that a number of authorities stated that timely decision taking can be achieved by effective delegation. Therefore we consider our current arrangements for meeting any new burdens are sufficient. In October we announced that £12 million will be available for 2015/16 to help local authorities meet the cost of their neighbourhood planning responsibilities.

Question 1.5: We are interested in views on whether there are other stages in the neighbourhood planning process where time limits may be beneficial. Where time limits are considered beneficial, we would also welcome views on what might be an appropriate time period for local planning authority decision taking at each stage.

- 28 There were 239 responses to this question. Thirty nine per cent of respondents did not see further time limits as beneficial; 38 per cent did suggest a stage where time limits may be appropriate; the remaining respondents were of a neutral opinion
- 29 Respondents not proposing the introduction of further time limits frequently stated the need to strike a careful balance between ensuring neighbourhood plans and Orders can progress in a timely fashion without reducing the flexibility to respond to local circumstances or placing unnecessary burdens on local planning authorities. This was a view held by 57 per cent of local authorities responding. By contrast, support for further time limits was the majority view (54 per cent) amongst respondents from the development industry (or those with a development interest) or professional bodies. Support for further time limits was more balanced amongst parish and town councils and designated neighbourhood forums (50% in favour).
- 30 Those not proposing other stages in the process where time limits might be beneficial still stated that timely progress and timely decision taking were important. It was suggested that local planning authorities and those preparing neighbourhood plans and Orders should work together to agree their own timetables as an alternative to further regulation.
- 31 Of the 38 per cent of respondents that did wish to see time limits at other stages of the neighbourhood planning process the most common suggestion was a prescribed time limit for a local planning authority to formally make a neighbourhood plan or an Order following a successful referendum. Respondents also suggested that there should be time set within which a neighbourhood plan or an Order should go to referendum following examination, with suggestions for time periods ranging from four weeks to six months. The examination period and decisions on the designation of neighbourhood forums were two other commonly cited stages for the introduction of time limits.

Government response

- 32 The Government has carefully considered the responses calling for other parts of the neighbourhood planning process to be subject to time limits within which decisions must be taken and will consult on further proposals. The Government will use planning guidance to reinforce its position that local planning authorities should make every effort to conclude each stage of the neighbourhood process promptly, particularly once they have satisfied themselves that a neighbourhood plan or an Order proposal has met the relevant legal tests and should proceed to referendum.
- 33 In the consultation document we also referred to the Government's longer term ambition to introduce measures whereby neighbourhood areas are automatically

designated if a local authority does not take a decision within a specific time. There were too few comments in the responses to consultation to gain a clear picture of the range of opinion on this proposal. The government considers that the measure represents an effective and proportionate response to the issue of delays in the designation of neighbourhood areas and that it will make a significant contribution to encouraging more communities to start neighbourhood planning. We intend to consult on more detailed proposals.

Pre-submission publicity and consultation

- 34 We consulted on removing the current requirement for a minimum of six weeks of pre-submission publicity and consultation by those preparing a neighbourhood plan or an Order. To ensure that there remained confidence in the robustness of the consultation process underpinning proposals for neighbourhood plans and Orders we also consulted on introducing a new basic condition that neighbourhood plan and Order proposals would be tested against. Our intention was to ensure that the scope and nature of the consultation had been adequate and that the results of the consultation had been considered in developing neighbourhood plan or Order proposals. We also proposed requiring consultation with certain landowners where neighbourhood plans are intended to be used to allocate specific sites for development.

Question 1.6: Do you support the removal of the requirement in regulations for a minimum of six weeks consultation and publicity before a neighbourhood plan or Order is submitted to a local planning authority?

Question 1.7: Do you agree that responsibility for publicising a proposed neighbourhood plan or Order, inviting representations and notifying consultation bodies ahead of independent examination should remain with a local planning authority? If you do not agree, what alternative proposals do you suggest, recognising the need to ensure that the process is open, transparent and robust?

- 35 Question 1.6 received 397 responses. There was strong support (73%) from all respondent groups for the current publicity and consultation requirements. Where respondents commented further, many thought the current requirements set a clear benchmark in terms of what was expected of consultation and ensured all those living in the local area were made aware of their opportunity to comment on a plan or an Order proposal. A number of respondents argued that that the current requirements give an opportunity to consider a near-final document and to understand how policies in a plan or proposals in an Order work in combination.
- 36 A number of respondents pointed out that the pre-submission consultation phase was the last opportunity that the community had to suggest changes to a neighbourhood plan or Order proposal. There was a suggestion from a few respondents that an unintended consequence of the change could be to increase the number of post-submission representations seeking changes to a neighbourhood plan or Order at too late a stage in the process. This could add to the length and complexity of the examination process and also raise expectations that an independent examiner would resolve any disputes between parties.
- 37 Certain groups of respondents did raise specific issues. Higher tier authorities and other public bodies wished to ensure that they continued to be involved in development proposals in which they might have an interest. A number of

respondents from business, the development industry and utility companies with interests in a number of neighbourhood areas across England, were concerned that the proposal would make it more difficult to track progress of neighbourhood plans or Orders and therefore to participate (84% of these respondent groups wished to see the current pre-submission publicity and consultation arrangement retained). This stage was regarded as necessary to give the time needed to formulate a response to a neighbourhood plan proposal, and for any concerns to be resolved in partnership with the community.

- 38 There were 381 responses to question 1.7, with over 90 per cent of respondents in agreement that responsibility for the publicity ahead of an independent examination, should remain with local planning authorities.
- 39 A frequent reason given for maintaining the current responsibilities was the potential costs for qualifying bodies to manage this stage. As there were no overriding benefits to the change it would add to rather than reduce the burden on qualifying bodies. Many of those that supported the proposal referred to local planning authorities having the systems in place to ensure that the process was transparent and robust, particularly when recording representations. The point was made that authorities would also have the mechanism (such as consultation websites) and contact information needed to reach a wide audience, including other public bodies and those with a development interest, which they may not be able to share.

Question 1.8: Do you agree that regulations should require those preparing a neighbourhood plan proposal to consult the owners of sites they consider may be affected by the neighbourhood plan as part of the site assessment process? If you do not agree, is there an alternative approach that you would suggest than can achieve our objective?

Question 1.9: If regulations required those preparing a neighbourhood plan proposal to consult the owners of sites they consider may be affected by the neighbourhood plan as part of the site assessment process, what would be the estimated cost of that requirement to you or your organisation? Are there other material impacts that the requirement might have on you or your organisation? We are also interested in your views on how such consultation could be undertaken and for examples of successful approaches that may have been taken.

- 40 A clear majority (85%) of the 383 respondents to question 1.8 supported a requirement to consult owners of sites that might be affected by a neighbourhood plan, with support even across different response groups. While some respondents supported the idea of regulating such consultation, others suggested non-regulatory alternatives. Many respondents drew attention to the fact that if the minimum six week pre-submission consultation period is well organised and publicised, this provides landowners the opportunity to make comments on a neighbourhood plan if they have not been consulted before.

- 41 Within the context of overall support for consulting landowners a frequent response, especially from parish and town councils and neighbourhood forums, was that it may be onerous to write to all land owners and tenants within a neighbourhood area. Many commented that it could be very difficult to identify and contact every landowner and that there was not often easy access to such information. The point was made that any regulation would need to be clear on the scope of plan proposals covered by any requirement, and the need to notify individuals should be kept to a minimum.
- 42 Respondents were concerned about the implications for a neighbourhood plan if, despite best efforts, a landowner could not be contacted and consulted. Respondents therefore wished for clarification of what a minimum requirement would be.
- 43 There were 268 responses to question 1.9, many of which stated that the respondents were unable to calculate the costs but that they would vary depending on the neighbourhood area. Fourteen per cent of those who answered the question believed that any additional costs would be minimal, these responses predominantly suggested that there would be 'little or no cost' or that the cost would be of only a small amount of volunteer time. A number of respondents commented that additional costs were unlikely as it is activity that is already carried out. Where respondents provided some calculation of costs these ranged from a few hundred pounds to several thousand pounds. Land Registry searches and holding consultation events or meetings were examples given of potential costs.

Question 1.10: Do you agree with the introduction of a new statutory requirement (basic condition) to test the nature and adequacy of the consultation undertaken during the preparation of a neighbourhood plan or Order? If you do not agree, is there an alternative approach that you would suggest that can achieve our objective?

- 44 There were 374 responses to this question. The majority who responded (76%) supported the proposal although for many respondents this support was contingent on the proposed reforms to the pre-submission publicity and consultation requirements (as set out in question 1.6) being taken forward. Commenters expressed the view that if this reform was not taken forward, then a new basic condition would be unnecessary.
- 45 Support was high across the different groups responding but more finely balanced amongst those organisations that are, or are capable of being, qualifying bodies (52% supporting the proposals).
- 46 A number of those supporting the proposal raised the issue of how the adequacy of a consultation might be determined. Without clear guidance respondents felt this could lead to extra time, and therefore costs, being spent on unnecessary activity by some communities as they seek to fulfil the requirement. Some were also concerned that there is scope for wide interpretation of what could be considered

adequate and this might open up the possibility of legal challenges from any organisation that felt they had not been adequately consulted.

Government response

- 47 The Government welcomes the overwhelming support for the current level of consultation required under the regulations. It is clear that those responding placed a high degree of importance on consultation and wish to see the requirements to demonstrate effective consultation enhanced rather than reduced. However, the Government's intention is to simplify and streamline rather than add to the requirements on qualifying bodies. Having considered the responses to the consultation we do not intend to take forward the proposed reforms to the pre-submission consultation and publicity process. The current arrangements are workable and proportionate while providing for local flexibility. In line with our conclusions on the appropriate way forward on question 1.6, to bring forward the additional requirements set out in questions 1.7 and 1.8 would be adding to, rather than reducing, the burden on those preparing a neighbourhood plan or an Order. Therefore we do not intend to take forward the proposals to introduce a new basic condition or require certain land owners to be consulted on neighbourhood plan proposals.

Strategic Environment Assessment

- 47 The current regulations prescribe the documents that must be submitted to the local planning authority with a neighbourhood plan proposal. We consulted on adding to this requirement the documents that regulations currently require to be produced in order to demonstrate that a land use plan or programme is compatible with environmental assessment obligations. Our objective in proposing the reform was to ensure that sufficient information was submitted with a plan proposal to enable the public to make informed representations and for an independent examiner (and subsequently a local planning authority) to assess the neighbourhood plan's proposals against the basic conditions.

Question 1.11: Do you agree that it should be a statutory requirement that either: a statement of reasons; environmental report; or an explanation of why the plan is not subject to the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive must accompany a neighbourhood plan proposal when it is submitted to a local planning authority?

Question 1.12: Aside from the proposals put forward in this consultation document are there alternative or further measures that would improve the understanding of how the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 apply to neighbourhood plans? If there are such measures should they be introduced through changes to existing guidance, policy or new legislation?

- 48 There were 362 responses to question 1.11. The proposal was well supported by respondents (81%) and many said that the requirement to submit one of the documents listed in the question would provide much-needed clarity to the process. A further 10 per cent of respondents either had a neutral opinion or wanted further information on the proposed requirement
- 49 Of the small number who disagreed the majority represented parish or town councils, and neighbourhood forums. Some of these respondents raised the issue of the additional burden that the new requirements could place on a qualifying body, and that this would increase the time and money spent on a neighbourhood plan. This could form a barrier to entry for some groups. Many commenters also noted that although the new requirement would provide clarity, more guidance would be needed to ensure that groups could meet the new expectations.
- 50 There were 197 comments received in response to question 1.12. The overwhelming majority of these focussed on the need for further guidance on the processes and requirements around the environmental assessment of neighbourhood plans, for both local planning authorities and for those preparing neighbourhood plans. Commenters made specific suggestion as to what this guidance might contain. Many called for templates for screening reports to ensure consistency. Others requested flow charts that could help lead those producing a

neighbourhood plan through the process and allow them to assess at each point what they needed to be doing in order to comply with the regulations. It was suggested that information was also needed on which organisations to engage with and at what stage.

- 51 The observation was made that it was difficult to know under what circumstance the Strategic Environment Assessment Directive and Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 applied, and that guidance from local planning authorities did not always clarify this. Some respondents felt this led to more work than necessary being undertaken by those preparing a neighbourhood plan. This in turn has added unnecessary time and costs into the neighbourhood planning process.

Government response

- 52 The Government welcomes the strong support for the proposal. We intend to proceed with the reforms and add these documents to the current list of prescribed documents that must be submitted to the local planning authority with a neighbourhood plan proposal.
- 53 We have used planning guidance to address directly the relationship between neighbourhood plans and the requirements under the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. We will consider whether further clarification in guidance is necessary.
- 54 We have considered carefully the points raised regarding the resource implications of our proposal for those preparing neighbourhood plans. However, we do not consider that this proposal represents a new burden. This is because regulations already require that, where it is determined that land use plan proposals are unlikely to have significant environmental effects (and, accordingly, do not require an environmental assessment), a statement of reasons for this determination must be prepared. Where a proposed land use plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, an environmental assessment must be carried out and an environmental report prepared. However, we do recognise that communities may need access to specific advice on how to undertake this aspect of neighbourhood planning, particularly where an environmental assessment is required. Therefore this October we announced that we are making available £22.5 million from 2015 to 2018 to provide community groups with expert advice, grant funding and technical assistance towards the production of neighbourhood plans and Orders.

Further measures

- 55 We sought views on what further steps can be taken, by the Government and others, to encourage more communities to take up their right to produce a neighbourhood plan or neighbourhood development order.

Question 1.13: We would like your views on what further steps we and others could take to meet the Government's objective to see more communities taking up their right to produce a neighbourhood plan or neighbourhood development order. We are particularly interested in hearing views on:

- **stages in the process that are considered disproportionate to the purpose, or any unnecessary requirements that could be removed**
- **how the shared insights from early adopters could support and speed up the progress of others**
- **whether communities need to be supported differently**
- **innovative ways in which communities are funding, or could fund, their neighbourhood planning activities.**

Question 1.14: Are there any further comments that you wish to make in response to this section?

- 56 There were 290 responses to question 1.13. A few respondents used this opportunity to repeat points made elsewhere, but, it was a recurring theme for many respondents that their concern was that neighbourhood planning remained a robust and thorough process, and that streamlining it by reducing requirements was not always desirable. A few respondents, particularly developers or those with a development interest, sought clarification on the weight that can be attached to an emerging neighbourhood plan by decision-makers.
- 57 Respondents highlighted the importance of support to those communities going through the process. The principal requirement was considered to be financial support, for both communities and local planning authorities, to make sure that they could fulfil the requirements on them. A number of respondents wished to see more information on the nature and scale of costs involved in producing a neighbourhood plan. Others raised the importance of ensuring continuity of funding beyond the 2014/15 financial year and made the point that delays in funding could deter groups from pursuing a neighbourhood plan.
- 58 A number of suggestions for improvement were made, the most common being clear guidance on the process and access to examples of emerging practice. There were a number of topics or specific aspects of neighbourhood planning suggested for guides. Commenters also felt that more could be done to educate and inspire areas of the country that had not yet seen much if any take up of neighbourhood planning. They believed this could be achieved with outreach programmes. Many respondents wished that it were possible to hear from those who had completed

neighbourhood plans, and to receive more context-specific guidance. There was a call for more workshops, lectures and case studies to disseminate this information. The point was made that with multiple organisations producing support materials the volume of available information can lead to confusion. A consolidated authoritative source of information was suggested.

- 59 The level and nature of support from local planning authorities was also identified as being of importance. Examples at each end of the spectrum were given of authorities being of great assistance and encouraging the uptake and progress of neighbourhood planning, but also occasions where authorities have had a negative attitude that has been a hurdle to successful neighbourhood planning.
- 60 Question 1.14 received 67 responses. Many used the space provided to comment favourably on neighbourhood planning in general, while some others were critical. The majority of the comments repeated points made in answering question 1.13

Government response

- 61 We have used planning guidance to address some of the common questions that communities and others raise about neighbourhood planning; this includes guidance on the weight that may be attached to an emerging neighbourhood plan. The Government's clear policy intention when introducing neighbourhood planning, was to provide a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure they get the right types of development for their community, while also planning positively to support strategic development needs. We have amended the published appeal recovery criteria as the Secretary of State is keen to give particular scrutiny to planning appeals in, or close to, neighbourhood plan areas to enable him to consider the extent to which the government's intentions are being achieved on the ground⁴.
- 62 The Government recognises that communities may need support in order to plan for the future of their areas. Local planning authorities have a legal duty to advise or assist parish and town councils and neighbourhood forums who want to do neighbourhood planning. Since 2013 over 750 communities have been supported through the Government's £10 million support programme. In October the Government announced further funding to help more communities become neighbourhood planning areas by:
- providing community groups a further £1 million for grants during this financial year, in addition to the £4.25 million already awarded since 2013
 - making available £22.5 million from 2015 to 2018 to provide community groups with expert advice, grant funding and technical assistance to get neighbourhood plans and orders from their inception to their coming into force following a local referendum - this is a 50 per cent increase in the value of the existing support.
- 63 We recognise the value of communities sharing their experiences of neighbourhood planning, including the successes, challenges and how these were overcome. We

⁴ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm140710/wmstext/140710m0001.htm>

have a network of volunteer neighbourhood planning champions. These are enthusiasts who understand (and in many cases have been through) the process and give up their time freely to encourage and support other areas to take-up or complete the process. This year we are also providing £100,000 to enable groups to organise workshops on neighbourhood planning in their local area, run by knowledgeable advocates of neighbourhood planning and aiming to give communities the information and encouragement needed to start on a neighbourhood plan or an Order.

- 64 We also recognise that local planning authorities have had to familiarise themselves with the neighbourhood planning system and their specific duties. That is why the Government has supported councils to understand and implement the changes brought about by neighbourhood planning through the Local Government Group's Planning Advisory Service. As noted above the Government has also announced that £12 million will be available for 2015/16 to help local authorities meet the cost of their responsibilities.