

NOTES ON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Additional Support Available For Local Planning Authorities

For the 2021-2022 financial year, we have launched a range of additional measures to support neighbourhood planning. These include two new funding streams currently open to applications from Local Planning Authorities, which have received significant positive feedback from the sector. The aim of this funding is to support greater uptake of neighbourhood planning, particularly in places where there are currently low levels of take up, such as urban and deprived areas of England. Further details on the two new funding streams available to Local Planning Authorities can be found below:

£2.1m Bidding Fund for Local Planning Authorities in Underrepresented Areas

We have launched a bidding fund worth £2.1m to support the uptake of neighbourhood planning in underrepresented areas. Local Planning Authorities with currently low levels of neighbourhood planning, but where there is an ambition for neighbourhood planning to play a more significant role in coming years, will be eligible to apply. This funding can be used by successful authorities to better resource neighbourhood planning support within the authority – for example through the hiring of:

- engagement officers to promote neighbourhood planning activity across the community
- neighbourhood planning officers to provide within the LPA
- or independent project managers to provide support directly to neighbourhood planning groups.

Simpler Approach to Neighbourhood Planning Pilot

We have also launched a pilot to test whether a simpler form of neighbourhood planning could empower more communities to play a direct role in shaping their neighbourhoods, particularly those in urban and deprived areas. This would be an additional tool for communities who wish to participate in neighbourhood planning activity and influence the future of their area but may not have the capacity to undertake a full Neighbourhood Plan. With this simpler neighbourhood planning tool, communities could set their priorities – and explore if they might also wish to produce a full neighbourhood plan. There will be a total of £330k of grant available to support around 10 authorities taking part in the pilot, who would work closely in partnership with their communities and MHCLG throughout.

The prospectus for the above two funds can be found [here](#).

John Howell MP Government Champion for Neighbourhood Planning, said, "Neighbourhood Planning is an important measure which empowers and gives a stronger voice to communities across England in shaping their local areas. I welcome the Government's commitment to further strengthen Neighbourhood Planning through these two new funds, particularly as they aim to make Neighbourhood Planning more accessible to a wider range of groups across the country. I look forward to continuing to support Neighbourhood Planning in my role as its Government Champion."

Cllr Sue Baxter, NALC chair, said, "NALC strongly welcomes these two excellent and targeted funds being launched by the government. They will help to strengthen the neighbourhood planning system by simplifying it over the medium term. And they will ensure that urban and deprived areas currently without neighbourhood plans have a much better chance of creating them. NALC strongly encourages local (parish and town) councils covering urban and / or deprived areas without neighbourhood plans to engage with their local planning authorities during the bid process."

Tony Armstrong, chief executive of Locality, said, "We welcome the government's announcement of new neighbourhood planning funds for underrepresented communities. This new funding has the potential to empower more people in deprived and urban areas to shape the future of their neighbourhoods."

Additional Support Available For Neighbourhood Planning Groups

As well as the new funding detailed above, we have also launched two further sources of support for groups:

Technical Support Package and Grant for High Street Regeneration or Social Infrastructure

We will be offering a new dedicated technical support package and grant to neighbourhood planning groups seeking to realise ambitious high street regeneration or social/community infrastructure proposals. This offer will provide support to communities who want to redevelop buildings or sites for social or economic uses in town and village centres. The aim is to foster tangible high street regeneration or provide useful social infrastructure that offers demonstrable benefit to the community – in recognition particularly of the impact that Covid-19 and wider recent economic trends have had on the vitality of high streets and town/village centres. Supported schemes will be those that can be delivered in the short to medium term, with or without the need for planning permission.

Site Viability Support

We will also be launching site viability support, which will provide a new technical support package to neighbourhood planning groups who wish to bring forward tricky development, particularly on less viable sites. The support will help groups understand what policy choices and investment requirements would be necessary to bring such sites into a viable use.

On this new funding, Joanna Averley, Chief Planner at MHCLG, said, “We at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government are delighted have launched two new programmes to support neighbourhood planning groups. They aim to help groups bring forward ambitious and complex proposals. This will bring real benefit to a range of communities across England. If the last 12 months have taught us anything, it is that what are neighbourhoods provide us as individuals, families and communities is vital to our own wellbeing and quality of life. These programmes aim to help many more communities shape the future for places where they live and work.”

Details on applying for this additional support available here: <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/apply/>.



Wider Support Programme

Reopening for 2021-22

Further to the additional support which we will be launching under the 2021-2022 Neighbourhood Planning Programme, we are delighted to announce the re-opening of the remainder of the programme and confirm that support available in previous years will continue to be available to neighbourhood planning groups. This includes both the grant and technical support available under the main programme, and grant and technical support available for those interested in bringing forward discounted market homes, with some updates to eligibility.

The 3-year, £8.5m Neighbourhood Planning Discounted Market Homes pilot was announced in 2018, to support neighbourhood planning groups to deliver affordable housing for sale, and is going into its third year. This pilot seeks to test whether additional support will help neighbourhood planning groups to bring forward affordable homes for sale through allocating land in neighbourhood plans and/or granting planning permissions through a neighbourhood development order. This year, we are updating the eligibility criteria. In line with the launch of First Homes (see page 4 for more details), neighbourhood planning groups that are seeking to implement the flexibility afforded to them under First Homes policy will be eligible to apply for the additional grant available under this stream (worth up to £28,000), as well as the full range of technical support. The pilot will also continue to help communities to bring forward other forms of affordable housing for sale, and the eligibility criteria for this is unchanged from previous years of the pilot.

For further information on what different support is available to neighbourhood planning groups, please visit <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/>.



FIRST HOMES UPDATE



Government's response to the consultation on First Homes has now been published [here](#), and a Written Ministerial Statement is expected to follow duly.

First Homes is a new affordable home ownership programme which will offer first time home buyers at least a 30% discount on a new-build home. The discount will be funded by developers as part of their contributions through planning obligations. Crucially, the discount will be passed on to all future purchasers in perpetuity, so these homes will keep helping first-time buyers onto the property ladder for generations to come. In future, 25% of all affordable homes delivered by developers as part of their obligatory contributions will be First Homes.

Neighbourhood planning groups will be able to contribute to the delivery of First Homes by identifying suitable sites within neighbourhood plans for these homes, for which planning permission can then be secured. In addition, neighbourhood planning groups can also put in place neighbourhood development orders, able to grant planning permission directly for schemes that can include First Homes. Furthermore, in the same way as Local Authorities, neighbourhood planning groups will be able to apply a higher minimum discount of either 40% or 50% to First Homes, where the evidence justifies this. Neighbourhood planning groups will also be able to apply additional criteria to set a lower income cap, prioritise key workers, or specify a local connection requirement based on current work or residency. Any eligibility restrictions imposed by neighbourhood planning groups will be time limited to the first three months that properties are marketed for – after this any unsold homes will revert to the national standard criteria.

We recognise that there will be a number of neighbourhood plans that have been prepared based on the existing National Planning Policy Framework and have reached an advanced stage of the plan-making process. For these plans arrangements will be put in place to support a smooth transition to the new system. Under these arrangements neighbourhood plans will not be required to reflect First Homes requirements if:

- they have been submitted for Examination (under Regulation 15 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012) before First Homes policy comes in to force
- they have reached publication stage (under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012) before First Homes policy comes into force and are subsequently submitted for Examination within 6 months of this time

New planning guidance on how this will affect development plans will be published duly. In the meantime, we would encourage groups to begin to consider how they might wish to incorporate this affordable housing policy in their plans. As noted above on page 3, we will be supporting groups who are seeking to implement flexibilities around First Homes, through the Discounted Market Homes pilot.

RIGHT TO REGENERATE DETAILS

A recent announcement by the Secretary of State for Housing, Robert Jenrick MP, unveiled plans to strengthen powers for the public to be able to convert vacant plots of land and derelict buildings into new homes or community spaces. The 'Right to Regenerate' proposals would help communities to make better use of public land and give a new lease of life to buildings – by enabling underused public land to be sold to individuals or communities.

Under the proposals, public bodies would need to have clear plans for land in the near future, even if only a temporary use before later development. If the land is kept for too long without being used, these bodies would be required to sell it. These measures provide an opportunity for the public and local communities to redevelop and transform eyesores, taking control of unused local land or buildings and transforming them into something they want in their area. This builds on the government's drive to encourage development on brownfield land and to bring forward more beautiful buildings in line with local preferences. The strengthened rights would also apply to unused publicly owned social housing and garages, providing opportunities to transform the local housing stock.

A recent consultation included a question on whether the Right should be extended to include unused or underused land owned by parish councils. Further details can be found [here](#).

Neighbourhood planning gives communities the ability to influence the design of development within their areas including setting a clear vision for the design of new homes and public spaces. There are a number of tools available to support this, including a technical support design package and a masterplanning package available through the Government's Neighbourhood Planning Support Programme. These are aimed at groups who are allocating housing sites or where significant growth is coming forward through the local plan.

Case Study: How the Masterplanning Support Package Aided High Quality Design in Puriton

Puriton received a technical support package for masterplanning, which included work on a design code for a site the group wished to allocate in their plan. We spoke to *Tim Burton*, a member of Puriton's Neighbourhood Planning Committee, to discuss their experiences of using the package and the benefits it has brought.

Tim explained that Puriton was an area identified for growth by their Local Planning Authority, but no sites were allocated in the Local Plan. The group therefore decided to allocate sites in order to shape the future of their area, which qualified them to receive support on masterplanning and design codes. Ahead of this work, the group completed an initial consultation and a call for sites. They also completed their own site selection process which led them to identify a preferred site for approximately 100 dwellings in 2 fields to the east of the village. This was above the 60 homes noted in the neighbourhood area's housing requirement figure.

Once this site had been identified, work began on design codes. As the work progressed, the group established that there was a planning application to build 120 homes on the site. The group decided to plan for this slightly higher number and use the masterplanning and design codes work to help guide this development to suit the village. The parish council has since asked for any development on this site to conform with the design work completed by the group through their draft plan. The group see this as a very positive outcome, as it will help to ensure that development on this site is high quality, and address issues such as parking standards, which are important to the community. The group also used the masterplanning package to improve the quality of the village more generally.

Tim praised the work on design that was offered through this package, saying that a really useful document was produced. He also noted that, even though most of the work was carried out during the first lockdown and the consultants were never able to visit Puriton in person, it was felt they really understood the village's issues. While the Neighbourhood Plan is not yet made, you can review Puriton's design code and masterplanning document on their website, under the Neighbourhood Planning tab <https://puritonparishcouncil.org/documents/#>



High design quality across a cluster of buildings in Puriton

Julie Coleman, a member of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group for Puriton, said "I have sometimes felt out of my depth trying to understand the complexities around planning regulations, and how the Neighbourhood Plan can support local aspirations. Requesting the support package was one of the best decisions we made! The 'Masterplanning and Design' report was particularly helpful; well thought out, containing pertinent local information and providing context to all the elements it covered. I feel that it makes a significant and positive contribution to the completion of a robust Neighbourhood Plan."

For more information about how you can help improve design quality through your plan, please refer to [this toolkit](#).

A further example of best practice use of the design technical support package can be found [here](#).

The Neighbourhood Planning team at MHCLG

John Romanski and Arthur Young are currently leading the team. Stephen Wright, Darlene Dike, Sujata Talukdar and Charlotte Stockton lead on support programmes and finance; Robert Griffith, Ella Bryant and Mark Taylor lead on plan making policy.

If you wish to get in contact regarding Departmental issues, please send MHCLG a message via <http://forms.communities.gov.uk/>.

Localities continue to provide advice directly to groups on neighbourhood planning through their website at <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/>.



