

Notes On Neighbourhood Planning Edition 16 – 100 Referendums

This special publication from the Dept. for Communities and Local Government celebrates the milestone of 100 successful neighbourhood planning referendums in England. We asked the latest areas past the post to sum up their neighbourhood planning journeys.

On 8 October 2015, Balsall Heath, Hook Heath and Coton Park, three un-parished areas led by neighbourhood forums, made it 100 successful neighbourhood planning referendums. Eight more areas have passed referendum since. Meanwhile Buckingham in Aylesbury Vale was the 75th plan to be made.

Balsall Heath (Birmingham) 8 October 2015

90% YES 22% Turnout

Balsall Heath is an inner-city district of Birmingham with a multi-ethnic population of about 15,000. Within the area are primary schools, parks, shopping centres (including the famous Balti restaurant quarter), an area of industry, the river Rea and a railway line where the neighbourhood plan proposes a new Balsall Heath station. On Moseley Road, where Balsall Heath began to grow in the 19th century, are several neglected listed historic buildings. The area scores highly on all the standard indices of social and economic deprivation.

However although disadvantaged, we are a confident community which has established a reputation as a place which can organise itself to solve its problems with its own resources. It's clear that people want to contribute when they are included and treated as part of the solution not the problem, and the neighbourhood plan is based upon extensive public consultation. It proposes a programme of growth and regeneration, aimed at restoring prosperity to the area. 30 years ago, Balsall Heath was a place that people wished to leave. The 300 new homes, which the neighbourhood plan proposes building, show that it is now a place where people want to come and live.

Joe Holyoak, Balsall Heath neighbourhood forum

Hook Heath (Woking) 8 October 2015

94% YES 39% Turnout

Hook Heath is a leafy, residential area in the borough of Woking, with about 700 homes. Our Plan has been prepared by a Neighbourhood Forum, created at the initiative of a long-established Residents' Association.

Our vision is to maintain and enhance the area's distinctive and special residential character. The Plan, which seeks to provide a safe, pleasant and sustainable environment for the community, focuses on three policy areas: built environment, open spaces and local infrastructure.

From start to referendum, our simple Plan, with its six policies, has taken three years. The crucial elements of the plan process have been teamwork, consultation, advice and evidence – and yet more advice and consultation. We believe we have captured the wishes of the residents while remaining within the legal framework created by the NPPF and Woking Borough Council's Core Strategy, and are confident that the Plan has strong local support.

Peter Spreckley, Hook Heath neighbourhood forum

Coton Park (Rugby) 8 October 2015

93% YES 25% Turnout

Although our area is a lovely place to live, development has been a bit piecemeal and some of it just doesn't work. Our plan focusses on transport infrastructure, community facilities and open spaces. Further projects include re-working roundabouts, increasing on-street parking, community space and signage. The Forum has already had two notable successes; a new play area for children and a new primary school. Both of these were huge for our development.

It is great to walk around Coton Park and get asked by people when our plan will be accepted and when the changes will happen. Our traffic audit had a nearly 60% response rate, which did take us by surprise. The Forum grew in numbers, people who had never been involved in voluntary work came forward. Our name – Coton Forward – now seems more prophetic than ever, as so many people want this to succeed and move forward.

As Chair of the Forum, I have had an interesting journey. Since we were designated I have become a Borough Councillor and Vice Chair of the Planning Committee in Rugby; neither of which I envisaged when this started. The Forum team have been incredible staying the course during the neighbourhood planning journey and believing in what we were doing. We have all made new friends doing this. We had a strong community spirit already in Coton Park but this has really enhanced it.

Jill Simpson-Vince, Coton Forward neighbourhood forum

Buckingham (Aylesbury Vale)

Referendum 17 September 2015

91% YES 22% Turnout

Buckingham's Neighbourhood Plan covers all of Buckingham town council and part of Gawcott-with-Lenborough parish in Aylesbury Vale. The Plan passed referendum on 17 September 2015 and was made by the local authority within two weeks.

The Plan's vision is to "make Buckingham a better place to live, work, study and play". It allocates land for 617 houses and 400 additional rooms to accommodate the expansion of Buckingham University. It has a strong focus on community, infrastructure and the environment, including a policy to protect movement corridors of Bats and other wildlife.

Support and Resources

Since the support programme launched in April, over 400 grants (worth over £2.5million) have been approved. Around half of the 800 groups who have expressed an interest in support are from 'priority' areas facing more complex issues, such as urban, high growth, business and deprived areas. These are eligible for additional funding and support.

Toolkits

This Autumn we will be launching a number of new 'toolkits' for neighbourhood planners. Topics covered will include: Commissioning consultants; general conformity; housing needs; site assessment and community engagement.

Further toolkits planned for 2016 include design, neighbourhood development orders, viability and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Podcasts

Through the support programme, we are funding Planning Aid England to produce a series of helpful neighbourhood planning podcasts. October's episode focusses on the examination process, including advice on the hearing process and post-examination modifications to the plan. You can find this, and previous podcasts [here](#). A related article from Planning Aid England can be found [here](#).

Champions

Our Neighbourhood Planning Champions have done some great work in offering their expertise and experience to local groups. We will soon be expanding and

revitalising the network, but in the meantime you can find details of the current Champions on [this](#) map.

Coming up next

There are neighbourhood planning referendums in...Duston, Southbourne, Ringmer, Elkesley, Petersfield, Welbourne, East Leake, Whitnash, Climping, Walton, Harworth & Bircotes, Norley, Burgess Hill, Mulbarton...