

NOTES ON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Autumn 2020

Edition 25



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NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING MINISTERIAL INTRODUCTION

**Introduction from The Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP,
Minister for Housing**



I would like to start by thanking neighbourhood planning forums, parish councils, and local planning authorities for ensuring neighbourhood planning is able to continue despite the challenges caused by the pandemic. I have heard of groups who engaging innovatively with hard-to-reach audiences, groups who have been using this time to get further into the details of their plans to make their policies stronger, and local planning authority officers who have continued to offer exceptional neighbourhood planning support despite the unique challenges they are facing. The fact that neighbourhood planning has continued despite the limitations of Covid-19 is testament to all your hard work, and for that I say a huge thank you and congratulations.

As you will have seen from the last edition of this newsletter, over 1,000 neighbourhood plans have successfully passed referendum since 2011 when the policy was instigated. It is heartening to see the number of communities highly engaged in planning and passionate about the design of their local area. However, I know that more needs to be done to ensure no community feels left behind. That is why I would like to use this edition to draw further attention to the additional funding now available to urban and deprived communities who wish to develop a neighbourhood plan. These communities (as set out in the relevant criteria on page 4) will be able to benefit from a further £8,000 worth of grant funding and additional technical expertise. This is on top of the £1,000 increase in grant funding announced in May available to all neighbourhood planning groups to assist with the challenges brought about by the pandemic. In relation to this, I would like to reaffirm our commitment to encouraging the increased take up of Neighbourhood Planning in urban and deprived communities, as well as in the North, as we believe that it is important that Neighbourhood Planning spreads further into these areas

Finally, I would like to mention the latest announcements on planning reforms which I am aware will be of considerable interest to many of you. The proposals in the Planning for the Future White Paper are designed to produce a more accessible, democratic, predictable and speedy planning process, in order to deliver high quality, beautifully designed homes in the right places that our country needs. As you may have seen, within the White Paper, there are a number of proposals related to Neighbourhood Planning, including Proposal 9 which states “Neighbourhood Plans should be retained as an important means of community input, and we will support communities to make better use of digital tools.”

Government is committed to retaining neighbourhood planning as an important part of the planning system. Indeed, by placing community engagement at the beginning of the planning process, we want to ensure people across the country are more involved in shaping their local environment than before. As part of this we will want to consider whether the content of neighbourhood plans should become more focused to reflect proposals for Local Plans, as well as the opportunities offered by digital tools and data to support their development and improve accessibility for users. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to our consultations. As individuals with such expertise and experience in neighbourhood planning, my officials and I really value hearing your views.

Recent Planning Consultations

Planning for the Future White Paper

The Planning for the Future White Paper was launched on 6th August 2020.. We would like to thank neighbourhood planning groups and the wider sector for getting involved and having their say in this consultation, as well as the 'Changes to the current planning system' consultation. As part of these consultations, the Government sought views on the future of neighbourhood planning, so we welcomed hearing from communities, and others, with direct experience of the process to inform decisions on whether the proposals are appropriate.

It is important to emphasise, in light of the White Paper in particular, that the Government's commitment to neighbourhood planning remains strong. Since statutory Neighbourhood Plans became part of the planning system in 2011, over 2,600 communities have started the neighbourhood planning process to take advantage of the opportunity to prepare a plan for their own areas – and over 1,000 plans have been successfully passed at referendum. Neighbourhood Plans have thus become an important tool in helping to 'bring the democracy forward' in planning, by allowing communities to think proactively about how they would like their areas to develop.

Within the Planning for the Future White Paper there are a number of proposals which relate to Neighbourhood Planning, including Proposal 9 which states "Neighbourhood Plans should be retained as an important means of community input, and we will support communities to make better use of digital tools. However, we want to consider whether the content of neighbourhood plans should become more focused to reflect our proposals for Local Plans, as well as the opportunities which digital tools and data offer to support their development and improve accessibility for users". As you may have noted, across the White Paper, there is also a renewed focus on design, and there could be a strong role for future neighbourhood plans to include design codes which determine the character and identity of a place.

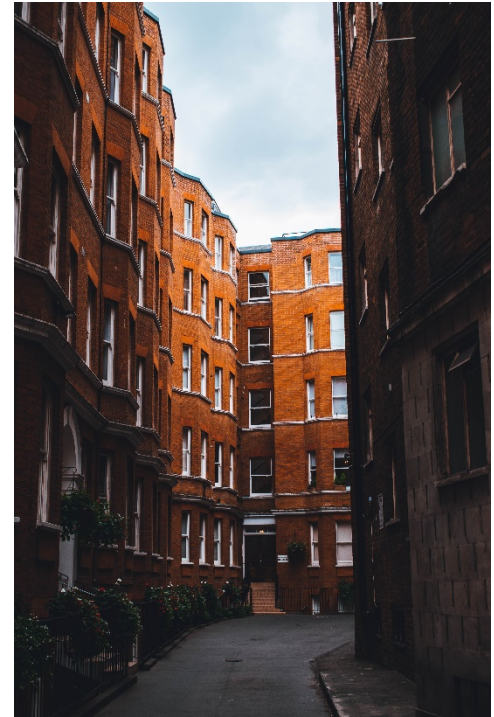
The 'Planning for the Future' White Paper sets the direction of travel for planning reform over the coming years, but your responses will be considered as it is refined. We would like to thank everyone once again for their contributions and will provide updates on the reforms in future newsletters.



Additional Support For Urban and Deprived Areas

As you may already be aware, the Government is now providing communities in urban areas and deprived areas (places that are amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England, in accordance with the Index of Multiple Deprivation) with direct additional support for neighbourhood planning. The additional support, which was launched on Monday 10th August 2020, increases the grant available to neighbourhood planning groups in urban and deprived areas from £10,000 to £18,000 and gives them access to a range of technical planning support packages, which only a limited range of groups currently qualify for.

The aim of this offer is to increase the take up of neighbourhood planning in urban and deprived areas, which is low and has decreased in recent years. The Government is interested in promoting opportunities for all groups, including those in disadvantaged areas, to have a say in shaping their communities. We therefore encourage communities to take up this offer of enhanced support, where eligible. An increase in take up of neighbourhood planning in urban and deprived areas could have genuinely positive effects on these communities.



Additional Support Increased Basic Grant

As mentioned in our previous newsletter, the maximum value of Basic Grant available to groups has now increased by £1000, from £9000 to £10,000. This is in recognition of the additional challenges neighbourhood planning groups are facing during the Covid-19 crisis. The increased Basic Grant allowance is available to all groups, including those who may already have received some Basic Grant funding previously. To apply please go to: <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/about/>.



INTERVIEW WITH A LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY

SARAH FURLEY CORNWALL

Sarah Furley is the Neighbourhood Planning Group Leader in the Planning and Sustainable Development Team at Cornwall Council. She discusses neighbourhood planning in her local area with us, and how it has been affected by Covid-19 over the past few months.

Can you tell us a little about the local area you work in, and the neighbourhood planning activity in your area?

Cornwall Council is a unitary authority, so our neighbourhood planning team supports all active neighbourhood planning groups across the whole of Cornwall. We have a great variety of groups, ranging from small coastal or rural communities to larger villages and market towns; it's a large area to cover. We have 213 parishes and 125 designated NDP areas, which represent 137 parishes, because some are clustering together to create joint plans. This means that about two thirds of Cornwall is covered by NDP areas! Of those active plans, well over a third of them are either adopted or progressing through the final statutory stages: we've got 38 made plans, and a further 11 either at Regulation 16 consultation, examination, or awaiting referendum when those restrictions are lifted.



Newquay, Cornwall

We support these groups with a dedicated NDP team and liaise closely with the Area Development Management teams to make sure those plans are implemented. We also have good support from specialist officers across Cornwall Council who comment and give advice on early draft plans on topics such as flood risk, coastal change management, landscape, heritage assets and transport, and there is widespread member support for neighbourhood planning.

What impact has the Covid-19 pandemic had on neighbourhood planning activity in your area?

Initially groups were concerned about whether they should or could continue and how they could adapt to overcome the restrictions, but in fact we haven't seen much reduction in activity or demand for our support. This hasn't been easy, because apart from me, the whole NDP team has been redeployed during the pandemic to cover other essential duties, but we've managed to keep going to provide ongoing support and at least keep groups moving through the statutory processes. We've been able to rely on the good work that we did in the early days, setting up an online [Toolkit](#), with guide notes, templates and step by step processes, so that groups can still access this support although we can't meet face to face. We also circulate a monthly e bulletin so we can share tips and information, and some groups have met up with us on video calls – as well as the usual email and phone contact.



How have the neighbourhood planning groups in the local area addressed the challenges in preparing a plan during the Covid-19 pandemic? Have you seen any innovative approaches e.g. around engagement?

Groups have been very good at using their local knowledge and connections to adapt their consultation processes to overcome the challenges posed by the necessary Public Health restrictions on meeting up. We've shared some best practice examples through our e-bulletin, so that groups can learn from each other. Some examples include:

- Sending out a postcard or summary leaflet to all residents to alert them to the consultation and give information on viewing the NDP online or requesting a hard copy if people can't access the document digitally.
- Putting up posters in key locations, rather than hard copies of the NDP, so that if people are out and about taking exercise or doing essential shopping, they will see the publicity.
- Offering an email or telephone enquiry service, to replace the lack of informal discussions that would normally take place at exhibitions and events.

- Using the local support networks that were set up during the strict lockdown - e.g. delivering prescriptions and food to those who were shielding - to ensure that these people were informed of the consultation
 - Making extra sure that businesses were contacted and asking them to share the information with their staff to cover the requirement to inform those who 'live, work or have an interest' in the area.
 - Using local radio and local press where appropriate and putting articles in any leaflets or parish magazines.
- Many groups were of course already using social media and online consultation methods - and these continue - but the main issue was to ensure awareness for the whole community, particularly those who were isolated and without access to digital technology. I know that local groups have accessed the extra funding through Locality, for the increased printing costs.

How have you been supporting your neighbourhood planning groups during Covid-19?

We keep the neighbourhood planning pages on our website up to date so that groups know that, even if there is reduced team capacity, they can contact us and access help. We have a dedicated neighbourhood planning email address so we can continue to respond to emails, even though team members are redeployed.

We encouraged groups to keep going if they could and publicised good practice, suggested tasks they could get on with, and linked to the updated National Guidance and Locality advice, and extra funding offer in our e-bulletin.

We made sure that we could continue with the regulatory processes at Legal Compliance, Regulation 16 consultation and Examination

stages, even though our team capacity was reduced. We've met with some groups on video calls to continue our support surgeries and we can still supply maps, carry out screening and review draft policies and submission documents as usual. We also have an interactive mapping service which is provided free of charge to all parishes and NDP groups: groups can use this to access data, create their own maps and carry out research into the constraints and designations in their area. They can click through from the map to any background evidence, such as Conservation Area Appraisals, AONB Management Plans, SHLAA and Brownfield registers, current planning consents and housing completions year by year, so between this and the toolkit there is a lot of information that they can access independently.

Do you have any tips on how local planning authorities can build a good relationship with neighbourhood planning groups?

Good communication is key. This does take time of course, but if you have a range of standard information and guidance that groups can access, then at least you can focus your time on informed discussion of particular points with each group, rather than standard procedures.

Having a dedicated NDP team and being clear that there is widespread support for neighbourhood planning in Cornwall helps to set a positive context for discussion. I think I spend most time explaining the scope (and limitation) of planning powers and helping communities to understand where they can focus their efforts to add most value. If groups understand that we are here to help them achieve their ambitions, as far as planning powers

allow, then this helps them to see that if we advise against a particular policy it's because it doesn't work – not because we wish to frustrate them.

In the last round of Local Councils' planning training events, I ran a 'Neighbourhood Planning – Lessons Learned' session collaboratively with volunteers from active groups. They shared tips from their perspective, and we looked at some case studies to illustrate policies which worked well – and some which had not held up at examination or at appeal. This was a positive way to share good practice and learn from each other. I liked the 'Top Tips' that Locality produced – especially as it started with 'the Local Planning Authority is your friend!'

Is there anything else you would like to share about your authority's approach to neighbourhood planning?

We are fortunate that, as a large unitary authority, it's worthwhile and possible to make the investment in the toolkit and neighbourhood planning team, to provide the foundation of our support offer. The general support for neighbourhood plans across the Council, from officers and members, helps enormously to ensure that NDPs are resourced and implemented. We liaise closely with Cornwall Council's Localism Team and community link officers, to refer queries and assist communities with issues that can't be addressed with planning policy.

The value of neighbourhood planning is embedded within the Council's approach and the benefits it can bring, to community engagement and involvement, feeding into other strategic policy, strong relationships between Cornwall Council and local councils and more effective engagement by the community in planning generally, is recognised and supported.

FIRST HOMES CONSULTATION UPDATE



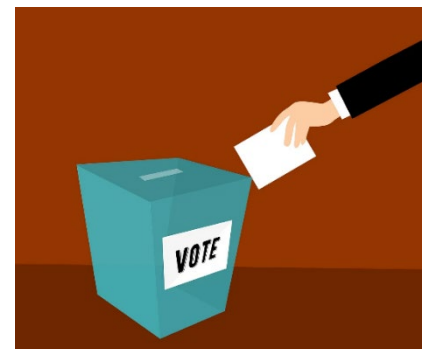
The recent consultation on First Homes has now concluded. This consultation discussed proposals for a scheme to provide homes for first-time buyers with a 30% discount against market value. The consultation covered both the design of the scheme and proposed planning changes to ensure they are delivered. On 6 August 2020 a summary of the consultation responses and the government's view on the way forward was published [here](#). 797 responses were received in total to this consultation from Local Authorities, developers, housing associations, other organisations, and individuals. These provided a clear message that there is considerable support for the First Homes scheme. The conversation on First Homes continues as part of the 'Changes to the current planning system' consultation.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY UPDATE

The postponement of neighbourhood plan referendums due to COVID-19, may have an impact on the level of neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) that some communities would have expected had referendums been allowed to go ahead. We have recently published temporary neighbourhood planning guidance to encourage CIL charging authorities to work with the parish council or neighbourhood forum wherever possible, to consider whether an additional sum, equal to the shortfall in expected CIL receipts can be agreed. If your community is affected, you may wish to bring this new guidance to the attention of the local authority. The guidance is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#covid-19>

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING REFEREDUMS AND LOCAL ELECTIONS UPDATE

As you will be aware, earlier this year Neighbourhood Plan Referendums (along with Local Elections due to take place in May 2020) were postponed due to the ongoing pandemic, and this delay has been kept under review. Cabinet Office has now been confirmed that elections and referendums will not be brought forward until May 2021. This decision was taken in order to provide certainty to Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers.



NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING RESEARCH UPDATE



Research Report on Impact of Neighbourhood Planning Published

We commissioned the University of Reading in September 2019 to undertake an independent piece of research to examine the impact of neighbourhood planning on development outcomes, decision-making and investment, community attitudes and engagement, the influence of geography as well as success factors and common barriers. The research team gathered evidence from an analysis of a large sample of neighbourhood plans and by surveying and interviewing

neighbourhood planning groups, local authorities and other participants in the process, such as developers. The research has now been completed and we have received the final report from the University of Reading, which sets out the main findings and proposed areas for further work.

Drawing on the evidence, the research team found that neighbourhood planning's contribution to housing supply can be significant. The study looked at the 141 plans that had passed referendum and allocated sites for housing between mid-2015 and 2017. These neighbourhood plans allocated a net number of over 18,000 additional dwellings above those that were already allocated in emerging or adopted Local Plans and sites with planning permission, with an average site size of 39 dwellings. Neighbourhood plans have helped improve design policy and refined local priorities e.g. housing for specific societal groups. Neighbourhood plans have also improved local engagement with local planning authorities and are important vehicles for place-making beyond land use planning. In terms of how the plans are used in practice, the evidence from local planning authorities and appeals indicates neighbourhood plans do have an influential role in decisions, reflecting their legal status, and as a minimum they provide nuance to decisions.

The research found that community attitudes to development may become more positive as a result of the neighbourhood planning experience. Some neighbourhoods reported better relations with local planning authorities and a more positive attitude to development, but in other cases poor relations with some local authorities and lack of an up-to-date local plan also presented a barrier. While there has been strong take-up of neighbourhood planning since 2011, take-up rates have slowed considerably. The main reasons for this are associated to known time, processual and technical burdens, relationship with local plan progress, and levels of enthusiasm in some local planning authorities. There is a noticeably low take-up in urban areas, and in northern regions.

While neighbourhood planning is a manageable process for most parished communities and a neighbourhood plan is an achievable goal, support from consultants and positive relationships with the local authority are important to helping with progress. The research process remains burdensome for community volunteers with the time taken to reach completion around three years (and for many it can take longer). Neighbourhood plans take longer when local plans are in progress, particularly where a new local plan is initiated after neighbourhood plan work has started. This can add a further 6-10 months to plan production on average. Local planning authority support overall is varied, with examples of strong support but also ambivalence in other areas.

We are reflecting on these findings and intend to set out next steps in due course. The full report can be found [here](#). Thank you to everyone who participated in this research.

Recent Planning Reform

Business and Planning Act 2020

The Business and Planning Bill received Royal Assent on 22 July 2020. It introduces a series of urgent, mostly temporary measures intended to help businesses, particularly in the hard-hit hospitality and construction sectors, to get back to work safely and quickly. These include measures on outdoor seating, extending planning permissions, construction site hours, hybrid appeals, and the electronic inspection of the London Plan Spatial Development Strategy. Further guidance on the changes can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/draft-planning-guidance-to-support-the-business-and-planning-bill>.

Recent Planning Reform

Preventing loss of cultural venues and planning conditions for holiday parks

On 14 July 2020, the government published a [written ministerial statement](#) to support the culture and tourism sectors by both preventing the loss of theatres, concert halls and live music performance venues, and encouraging local planning authorities to exercise their discretion in relation to planning conditions for caravan, campsites and holiday parks. This statement sets out the approach local planning authorities should take to decision making for these venues that have been made temporarily vacant by Covid-19 business disruption. The statement also encourages local planning authorities not to undertake enforcement action which would unnecessarily restrict the ability of caravan, campsites and holiday parks to extend their open season.

The statement comes into effect on 14 July 2020 and will remain in place until 31 December 2022 unless superseded by a further statement.

Recent Planning Reform

Changes to Use Classes

We have introduced regulations to reform and simplify the Use Classes Order to make it easier for high street uses to change use without the need for a planning application. This will create a new broad category of 'commercial, business and service' uses which will allow commercial, retail and leisure uses greater freedom to adapt to changing circumstances and respond to the needs of their local communities. A new community and learning class will allow for the protection of community facilities and infrastructure. Certain uses such as pubs and theatres will remain protected, while others such as hot food takeaways or betting shops will require full planning consent. A number of organisations have created their own visual representations of the new Use Class Orders which are available online.

Meet the Champion

We are pleased to introduce **Mark Pepper** Neighbourhood Planning (NP) Champion, who is based just outside Bristol, to share his experiences and insights as a champion.



Can you tell us a little about yourself and your neighbourhood planning group/area?

My name is Mark Pepper and I am a 53-year-old father of four and grandfather of five. I am a **lifelong resident of Lawrence Weston**, a deprived council housing estate on the outskirts of North Bristol. I'm also employed as the area's **development manager for the resident led and delivered Development Trust, Ambition Lawrence Weston**, charged by the residents to oversee its regeneration. Part of this role sees me as the **Chair of the Lawrence Weston Planning Forum**. The area had suffered from a feeling of isolation from the rest of Bristol for many years, as a result of its location on the outskirts of Bristol, poor public transport, and very strong feelings amongst the residents of being a forgotten neighbourhood.

Lawrence Weston was built as a council housing estate in the 1950's, with about 3600 units of accommodation, and about 7200 residents. The area now has about 52% of social and/or affordable homes with 48% now in private ownership. The area is surrounded by other very affluent neighbourhoods, but Lawrence Weston has long been seen as an undesirable place to live, with past high levels of crime, low educational attainment, high levels of worklessness and unemployment. The area also suffered from poor housing, including cold, harsh, walk up flats and sub-standard pre-cast concrete flat

roofed semidetached 3-bed homes. A lot of these sub-standard homes have now been demolished. With many streets being demolished and sitting idle for many years has more recently further impacted the areas reputation and residents negative reported scores on Quality of Life surveys.

On the up side, Lawrence Weston is very lucky to have large green open spaces, with open country side on its doorstep, low density housing and being close to the rail network, motorways, the coast and vast areas of employment sites for warehouse and distribution jobs, along with two major ports nearby. Traditionally being white British working-class area, we have recently seen an increase in its diversity, mainly being eastern European new arrivals.

How did you become interested in neighbourhood planning?

Back in 2012, the area was suffering, with services and assets being cut. Youth centres, advice services, leisure facilities, and community buildings were closed, bus services were being reduced and becoming even more unreliable and expensive, shops and pubs were closing, and other social meeting places lost - the situation was very bleak.

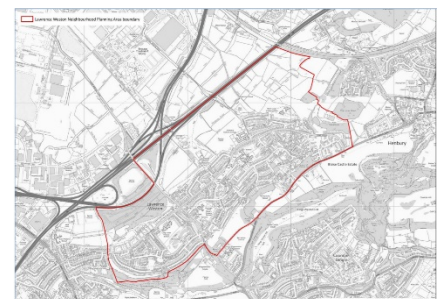
Residents decided to take action, and as a result Ambition Lawrence Weston Development trust was born. We went on to survey our fellow residents to find out what they felt about living in Lawrence Weston and what changes they would like to see. **We formed this information into an easy to read [Community plan](#)** in 2013 and refreshed in 2018.

Although this was, and is, a very useful and aspirational plan, it was still only a community wish list with no real power attached. The

findings of the plan were heavily concerning the built environment, like housing, employment, retail offer, meeting spaces and other land use issues, that alone could not perhaps make the needed changes.

Then along came our knowledge of the Locality Act and Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) opportunity. **We felt that a NDP could facilitate and help deliver our community plan, as well as bring other benefits like empowerment, self-belief, self-esteem, community confidence, pride, and most of all, at last a real voice.** What also interested us to get involved was the benefit that we could shape what and how things get built benefits local residents by meeting their needs and not just big developers. We are very **pro-development** as long as that development benefits local people and the area.

We have had major success in various ways, including a **local lettings policy**, that ensures at least 50% of all social and affordable homes are allocated to people already living in the area, and we have **brought a major supermarket to the area**, that was long called for. From the enhanced Community Infrastructure Levy, afforded to NDP areas, we have **improved leisure facilities, cycle networks, social meeting spaces, and local highways.**



We have **influenced the design and energy efficiency of many developments**, including ensuring fully accredited affordable housing was built by the Local Authority. We are now also **developing our own community led energy efficient affordable 38-unit housing scheme, a new £1.7m Community building, and a £5.2m community owned wind turbine.**

Why did you volunteer to become a neighbourhood planning champion?

As a result of becoming involved in Neighbourhood Planning, and the results it has helped to deliver, along with the above-mentioned increase in community belief, empowerment, and voice, **we felt that other “left behind” communities could benefit the same as we have.** Our Community Plan and our NDP have given other stakeholders the confidence that we know what we want and need and know how to get there. This then has attracted more funding to the area, including being a benefactor of the Local trusts, lottery funded Big Local funding scheme, and other grant funders, like Power to Change, CSE, along with successful applications to other Government funds.

Since you became a neighbourhood planning champion, how have you helped other communities in their neighbourhood planning journey?

Since I've become a neighbourhood planning champion (NPC), my efforts have mainly been focused on local areas to Bristol. The types of help I have given have mainly focused on **sharing our own experience**, giving a better understanding of NDPs and its policies, the effort needed, along with interpreting what is quite complex language and policy for communities like ours.

I do this partly by **sharing and showing an animated film we commissioned** and made for our own communities understanding and interpretation. I also help by

encouraging communities to consider what they are trying to achieve and if NDPs are their best option, so sometimes it is a case of giving them an understanding of what NDP's can and can't do.

How do you think being based in an urban or deprived area affects the neighbourhood planning process?

Being based in an urban and deprived area has its additional challenges when considering the Neighbourhood Planning process. The lack of time available to residents to get involved along with the lack of needed skills and knowledge and spaces to meet makes what is already a complex and time-consuming activity even harder to achieve. This meant that we needed to rely on outside help to understand and engage with the process, **but with the right commitment and support it is doable**, as we have shown.

Do you have any advice and tips for how aspiring groups should approach neighbourhood planning in an urban or deprived area?

For areas like ours, **it was imperative to be as accessible to fellow residents as possible to ensure we took the community with us**, along with their view's aspirations, needs and thoughts. This takes a lot of work and resilience. You should approach Neighbourhood Planning in your own area with an open mind. Your thoughts, needs and ideas may not be the same as other residents. We needed to ensure residents understood what a NDP was, what it can do, and what was needed to make it happen – that is no small task. We tried to be as accessible as possible in our information, from the written word to the meeting places and times. We also made how residents could give their views very accessible, from Internet and social media based to written forms with comment boxes situated at various community venues and spaces. **Seek out the abundance of support that is out**

there, like we did, from your own Local Authority to pro-bono support from planning agents' legal firms, architects, NPCs, and the like.

Recently we have increased the support available to neighbourhood planning groups in urban and deprived areas, what impact do you think this could have?

For areas like mine it is so **important to have the technical, legal and planning knowledge support**, that may not be available in areas like ours as opposed to other more affluent areas where these types of professional people live and are more likely to volunteer to help deliver a NDP.

Without this type of help knowledge, support and financial help from the likes of MCHLG, we would of never been able to engage, understand and deliver a NDP, and as a result we would still be in the position as we were instead of now being a well empowered aspirational and a community more in charge of our own destiny and wellbeing.



If you want to get in touch with a Champion, or even find out how to become one, please visit: <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/network/champions-map/>

Meet the Neighbourhood



This article was written by **Janine Griffis and Stephen Taylor** from the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum. Janine was chair between 2014 and 2020, while Stephen became the new chair this year.

We count ourselves fortunate to live in Hampstead, one of London's loveliest areas and one of its most neighbourly. Despite the staggering value of some of its properties and the wealth of some, Hampstead still comprises a wide mix of residents and homes, creating a lively local culture.

Back in 2013, when neighbourhood planning was still new, our local conservation group, the Heath & Hampstead Society, held a public meeting to discuss whether a neighbourhood plan would make sense for Hampstead. We had both been involved in local neighbourhood organisations and volunteered to examine the pros and cons. Our small working group decided that, given all the development pressures, a bespoke plan could go a long way to shape the future of development and protect the "liveability" of Hampstead and its green and leafy character. Had we known that the process would take five years, we might have sat on our hands.

For Janine, chairing the Forum became nearly a full-time job, drafting, setting deadlines, and chairing over 100 meetings. But fortunately, the amiable and capable team comprised a wide range of talents, including experts in architecture, community engagement, sustainability, and web and graphic design. Despite this wealth of know-how, none of us had written planning policy before and we relied heavily on guidance from Camden Council officers and consultants paid for with government grants such as Deborah McGann, who completed our health check.

The highlight for both of us was the first year, which we spent

refining our aims and objections through numerous community engagement events. These not only were fun but gave us a real sense of purpose and helped articulate what we were hoping to achieve. Following this first year were three years of drafting and re-drafting our neighbourhood plan, dozens of times, followed by a year of consultation and examination, leading to our successful referendum with 92% support.

The challenge for all of us during this long slog was keeping up the momentum, setting ourselves deadlines and staying enthused. Had Council officers or our ward councillors not been supportive or had committee members not been of like mind, it would have been easy for the whole process to have stalled. Certain areas of the plan, such as a section on basements and another on traffic and transport, required creative approaches to find planning solutions to issues of great local concern. In one of our traffic policies, for example, we linked development to local PTAL scores, which requires large developments in areas of poor public transport to mitigate potential harm from congestion and air pollution.

Our elation following the Plan's adoption in 2018 was followed by a keen desire to make sure that Camden planners considered in their decision-making the policies we had struggled to draft. We decided not to disband our forum, but to seek re-designation to review planning proposals. We set up a 'planning watch' page on our website and monitored every planning decision on whether it took our policies into account. Very rarely did Camden disagree with our interpretation of the Plan's policies. Camden's

planning team, including the director of Regeneration and Planning, toured the Plan area with us on several occasions to better inform themselves of the area's character and the implications of our policies.

We found that the Forum over the years had developed a certain expertise at community engagement and that this could be tapped to consult on issues not related to the plan itself, issues such as traffic, sustainability, and air quality. In our mission statement adopted at our last AGM, we set out three areas in which to direct our activities: ensuring the performance of the Plan, keeping the Plan under review for future updates and being a forum on issues important to residents, in keeping with the Plan's vision, aims and policies.

Stephen became chair last spring and is looking at what will be needed from the Forum over the coming years. The pandemic has shown the crucial importance of community resilience and engagement. The consequences of the pandemic, and the climate and ecological emergency herald greater challenges to come, as well as opportunities to realise the more liveable environment envisaged in the Neighbourhood Plan. The Forum will continue to work with councillors, traders, and residents to navigate an increasingly uncertain future.

Our advice to anyone interested in developing a neighbourhood plan is to reach a consensus through public consultation on what you hope to achieve. If you start with solid evidence of what local people want, then everything else will follow this clear direction.

The Neighbourhood Planning team at MHCLG

Helen Keen leads the team. Stephen Wright, Darlene Dike, Sujata Talukdar, and Charlotte Stockton lead on support programmes and finance; Robert Griffith, Jen Beresford and Ella Bryant 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/>.



