

Neighbourhood plans – Frequently asked questions

What are neighbourhood plans?

Through the Localism Act, which became an Act of Parliament on 15th November 2011, the government is giving local communities more power to influence the future of the places they live by preparing neighbourhood plans. Neighbourhood plans can establish a vision for an area as well as general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood. They should be about local rather than strategic issues. For example it could cover where new shops, offices or homes should go and what green spaces should be protected or other planning related issues. Neighbourhood plans should be focused on guiding development rather than stopping it. They also have to be in line with national policy and the Council's local planning policies. If adopted it will become a statutory plan and be used in making decisions on planning applications.

Who will prepare them?

Neighbourhood plans should be prepared by the community in the form of a 'Neighbourhood forum.' This should be made up of a minimum of 21 people and be as inclusive as possible. The neighbourhood plan needs to be supported by the whole community before it can be adopted. Neighbourhood plans will also be subject to an independent check as well as a local referendum where the plan will need to get majority support.

What areas can be covered by a neighbourhood plan?

Any area can have a neighbourhood plan. They can cross local authority boundaries although they should not overlap with adjoining neighbourhoods who also wish to prepare a plan for their area. If the area is very small eg one street, the Council may suggest you join with other neighbourhoods to create a larger area.

What weight will be given to neighbourhood plans in planning decisions?

When adopted, neighbourhood plans will be statutory planning documents. They will form part of strategic policies in the Hertsmere Local Plan and Core Strategy and be compatible with EU obligations and human rights requirements, and therefore will have significant weight in planning decisions.

What is the Council's role?

The Council will have a duty to provide technical advice and support to those producing a neighbourhood plan. It also has to:

- agree the boundary of the area to be covered by a neighbourhood plan
- agree the composition of, and formally designate, neighbourhood forums
- organise the check by an independent examiner into a neighbourhood plan and the referendum
- adopt the neighbourhood plan and bring it into force.
- The Council's role should be clarified once the regulations have been adopted.

Things to consider if you're thinking of starting a neighbourhood plan

- What do you want your neighbourhood plan to achieve?
- Is a neighbourhood plan the right tool to achieve what you want?
- What area do you think your plan should cover? What is the boundary?
- Who will be in the neighbourhood forum?
- How can you make the neighbourhood forum representative of the local community?
- How will you engage the wider community while preparing your plan?
- How will you build consensus within the community?
- Are there other groups or areas nearby who have similar objectives? Have you contacted them?
- Will neighbouring areas be affected by the neighbourhood plan? If so, how?
- What sort of skills and support will you need to prepare a neighbourhood plan?

- How long do you think the plan take to prepare? What are your timescales?

Who should I contact if I want to find out more?

Contact the Planning Policy & Transport Team by emailing local.plan@hertsmere.gov.uk or calling 020 8207 2277