



Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit Guidance Note 3

Neighbourhood Planning: Getting Started

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Adopted December 2017

This document includes hyperlinks to a range of websites, and the hyperlinks can be accessed using the published version of this document, which is available to view via: www.scambs.gov.uk/npgguidance. Every effort has been made to ensure that these hyperlinks are up-to-date, however as websites change these hyperlinks can become invalid.

Herefordshire Council has kindly given permission for us to provide links to their guidance on neighbourhood planning.

Huntingdonshire District Council has kindly allowed us to take inspiration and wording from their Neighbourhood Planning Guidance.

If you have any queries relating to this document, please contact us via neighbourhood.planning@scambs.gov.uk or 01954 713183.

Who gets involved in neighbourhood planning?

Who leads neighbourhood planning in South Cambridgeshire?

Where a community wants to take up the opportunities offered by neighbourhood planning, the legislation enables two types of organisation, known as *qualifying bodies*, to lead it:

- a parish or town council
- a neighbourhood forum

In most cases, it will be *parish councils* that will be considered as the qualifying body in our district but some parishes in South Cambridgeshire do not have a parish council. These local communities can either get involved with neighbourhood planning in an adjoining parish or formally apply to the Council to be designated as a 'Neighbourhood Forum'. To be designated, a neighbourhood forum must have a membership that includes a minimum of 21 individuals who either:

- live in the neighbourhood area
- work there; and/or
- are elected members for a local authority that includes all or part of the neighbourhood area

How can SCDC help?

If you live in an area with a parish meeting please contact SCDC in the first instance: neighbourhood.planning@scams.gov.uk or 01954 713183.

Guidance and Regulations

Neighbourhood Planning Regulations

- Original (April 2012): [Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](#)
- Amended (February 2015): [Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2015](#)
- Amended (October 2016): [Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) and Development Management Procedure \(Amendment\) Regulations 2016](#)

These regulations may occasionally change or new regulations introduced

National Guidance on Neighbourhood Planning

- [National Planning Practice Guidance](#)

Setting up a Steering Group or Working Party

Once a decision has been made to produce a neighbourhood plan it is a very good idea to set up a Steering Group or Working Party to oversee this project.

National guidance highlights that although it is the parish council (PC) that is responsible for neighbourhood planning they should work with other members of the community who are interested in, or affected by, the neighbourhood plan proposals to allow them to play an active role in preparing a neighbourhood plan. The relationship between any group and the formal function of the parish council should be transparent to the wider public. It should be clear whether a steering group/working party or other body is a formal sub-committee of the parish or town council. The terms of reference for a steering group or other body should be published and the minutes of

meetings made available to the public.

You will want to ensure all your decision making during the preparation of the plan is open for scrutiny and that it does not seem as if decisions have been made behind closed doors by your steering group/ working party or parish council. Your local community should be able to understand how the policies in your plan have evolved.

Roles of the Parish Council and steering group

The steering group should take on the day to day running of the neighbourhood plan leaving the Parish Council to concentrate on other parish matters. The steering group should report regularly to the Parish Council on progress of the plan. It could be that the steering group gives a presentation to the Parish Council at key stages of the plan making; however the neighbourhood plan should be a standing item on the Parish Council agenda.

The Steering Group or Working Party

Gather as broad a working party / steering group as possible:

Members of a diverse steering group will provide different perspectives, and their backgrounds will also help the group engage with different sections of the wider community. However, remember the membership should be representative of your neighbourhood area.

How large should the working party / steering group be?

Experience from other groups has found that between 6-9 people is ideal – enough to bring in a variety of opinions and skills; and not so many as to prove unwieldy. Remaining action-focused is key. Sub groups can look at and discuss particular issues or take on specific tasks.

Think about how to recruit and manage volunteers:

Consider targeting people in your community with specific skills to help with particular tasks, and parcel up tasks into manageable chunks that might attract volunteers more than undefined roles which could last for several years.

Keeping the momentum of your group:

You may find that the enthusiasm found at the start of the process can be diminished over time as the task of preparing a neighbourhood plan takes much energy and resources from the group. Membership of your steering group may change as you undertake different tasks. New members may bring in fresh ideas and enthusiasm. Make sure that plan making is widely shared, but also that someone or a small group has editorial control over the plan. This will help to get the structure and content right, ensure that policies are supported by evidence and that the plan meets the basic conditions required by national regulations..

Range of skills:

Your steering group will need members with a range of skills to produce the plan:

- a project planner to keep the plan on track and to keep a record of those that have offered to get involved in plan making;
- a financial expert to keep a control on the budget plan – however the budget remains the

Parish Council's responsibility;

- a 'people' person to organise the consultation events for the plan and the celebrations for the group as milestones are reached.
- A person who may have some skills in technical report writing and ideally in planning to help oversee the drafting of the plan to ensure it reads well and that policies have evidence to support them and that they meet the basic conditions.

Other Resources

National Planning Practice Guidance – [Who leads on neighbourhood planning in an area?](#)

Herefordshire Council guidance note 28: [Setting Up a Steering Group](#)

Top Tips

Be creative, and have fun: if you're going to put significant time and effort into this process, make it fun for all involved. Celebrate reaching milestones, and if you get bogged down in the process, remember why you are doing this!

Getting Organised

Creating the best neighbourhood plan possible

Before getting started it is worth considering why you want to do a neighbourhood plan, and what you could achieve through the plan itself and through the plan-making process. This will help inform the vision and objectives for your neighbourhood plan.

The best neighbourhood plans are:

- Based upon strong community engagement, and are owned by the wider community;
- Uniquely local;
- Complementary to Local Plan policies, providing additional policy detail;
- Not reworking Local Plan policies but policies specific to the local area that will help shape the future of your parish
- Not just about creating a nice-looking document, but have a focus on the implementation of community projects and ideas.

The Neighbourhood Planning process can:

- **Inform communities:** developing a neighbourhood plan can educate and inform the steering group and wider community about planning and the process of planning for the local community.
- **Tackle non-planning issues:** community consultation often flags up issues of importance to the community that are not related to the planning system, such as speeding or the need for new community groups. These should not be lost, and can be addressed separately to the creation of the planning-focused document. They could be included in a community led plan created alongside the neighbourhood plan or be included in the neighbourhood plan as an appendix.
- **Bring people together:** working with others over a period of time in the steering group can connect people, and if done well, community consultation events can also be enjoyable social occasions.

To create the best neighbourhood plan possible, it is important to get organised.

How can SCDC help?

As part of our 'Support Offer for Parish Councils' SCDC will offer to meet you to help you consider how to get started on your neighbourhood plan.

This meeting might cover matters such as:

- a run through of the process for preparing a neighbourhood plan including highlighting the all-important basic conditions which your plan will have to meet,

- the requirements to fit in with national planning policy,
- what neighbourhood plans can cover, but also what they can't,
- what may be involved in terms of technical work,
- expectations of effective community engagement,
- the requirements to fit in with the strategic policies in the currently adopted Local Development Framework and the emerging Local Plan and how this might shape the content of the neighbourhood plan, and
- possible resource and capacity considerations.

Likely time-scales for neighbourhood planning

Neighbourhood plans do not take a set amount of time. How long it takes to complete your neighbourhood plan is essentially down to you. When considering time-scales, it may be helpful to consider the following issues:

- **A serious time commitment:**
Given the time requirements for getting organised, community engagement and evidence gathering, in addition to the statutory processes, your neighbourhood plan could take perhaps 2-3 years to complete. This is a significant time commitment for any group, so you will need to be committed and persistent to see it through to completion.
- **Quality over speed:**
Your primary goal should be to create the **best** plan possible, based on comprehensive community involvement and solid evidence. This should be the main driver for how long your plan takes, rather than trying to get it done as quickly as possible.
- **Keeping the local community informed:**
Whilst the steering group will be keeping the parish council informed on the progress of the plan you need to remember to also engage with your local community so there are no surprises in the draft plan. Their support or challenges to your ideas for policies/ site allocations may help keep the momentum of the plan making going and offer alternative solutions to solving issues you want to include in your plan. Ultimately it is the local community who will vote in the referendum as to whether the plan will be used for determining planning applications in your local area.

Timescale

SCDC would appreciate you keeping us informed of your progress (by updating the timeline attached to the Memorandum of Understanding) so that we can plan our resources.

Top Tip

Regular updates to your local community: plan making can be a lengthy process for those involved in the 'doing' of the plan making. You will need to remember to keep the local community regularly engaged in the process rather than leave gaps between informing them of progress. Regular newsletters and/or events that tell them what is being looked at will help.

Other Resources

[SCDC Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit:](#)

Community Engagement and Neighbourhood Plans

Likely costs of a neighbourhood plan

Based on experience nationally, the average cost of producing a neighbourhood plan is about £13,000. This average figure masks the great variation between the costs of different neighbourhood plans, with the cost increasing with plan complexity. Case studies are available setting out individual plans' spending.

Funding is available to all groups preparing a neighbourhood plan, and more details are set out in the 'Funding and Support' section that follows.

Other Resources

Locality

[Support and Grants](#) and [Case Studies](#)

Planning Aid

[Resourcing your neighbourhood plan](#)

Project planning

Given the length of time the neighbourhood plan will take to produce, good project management is essential. This will enable you to manage the workload, and the wider community's expectations if things get delayed. It may therefore be useful to draw up a simple project plan to help you get organised. The project plan could set out:

- When you think you will be able to complete the different steps in the process
- Who will work on different parts of the plan
- Who will be the main point of contact with SCDC
- Who will be responsible for taking actions at specific points
- Who you could get to help you draw up the plan
- 'Community engagement' in the plan-making process

The project plan doesn't have to be particularly detailed and you can fill in parts as you decide on things later. The project plan can, and probably will, change as you go through the process.

You should also remember that you will mostly be relying on the time of volunteers so you will have to work within the limited time that they have. This means it may not be possible to make progress as quickly as you might like.

There are formal stages in the neighbourhood plan process where the national regulations set out the timescale for different projects. These are outlined in the 'Support Offer to Parish Councils'. In addition, for some of the steps where SCDC has to take a decision we have set out how long we will take to do this.

Other Resources

Planning Advisory Service

[PAS Neighbourhood Plan Project Management Tool](#)

Locality

[Project Planner](#)

Planning Aid

[Project planning](#)

Herefordshire Council guidance note 3: [Getting started](#)

Further tips for getting organised

Get help: Use available online resources referenced in this document, and take advantage of the support on offer.

Learn from the best: Read other made neighbourhood plans to work out what you think works and what doesn't.

Learn from others: You can ask us for contacts from other neighbourhood planning groups within the district that are further ahead in the process to learn from their experience or you can join the SCDC Neighbourhood Planning facebook page.

How can SCDC help?

As part of the 'Support Offer for Parish Councils' SCDC will:

- Provide a suite of guidance on neighbourhood planning published on our website.
- Provide links on the [neighbourhood planning](#) pages of the website with links to on-line advice.
- Keep a library of made neighbourhood plans from around England. These can be borrowed by parish councils.
- Hold technical workshops for those preparing plans in the district and provide an opportunity at these for sharing of ideas.

Funding and Support

Funding and support

The average neighbourhood plan will cost around £13,000 to prepare. There is funding and technical support available to help neighbourhood planning which can be applied for from Locality – they have the contract from central government for neighbourhood planning up until 2018:

- All groups writing a neighbourhood plan will be eligible to apply for up to £9,000 in a neighbourhood planning grant.
- Groups proposing to allocate sites for development can also apply for specific packages of technical support such as site viability assessments or urban design guidance where needed and may also be eligible for a further £6,000 in grant. The technical support is supplied by AECOM who offers independent advice via Locality.

The criteria for eligibility for this technical help and extra grant have recently changed. Groups undertaking site assessments and housing site allocations are now eligible to apply for both technical support and extra grant. If you are considering undertaking a site assessment for a site allocation or allocating sites for housing or mixed development, we suggest that you consider applying for the additional grant or technical support provided by AECOM.

You may feel that you would value more intensive planning support for specific parts of the process. Locality identifies some of the things that the grant funding available could be used for. This includes:

- Engaging a planning expert.
- Help with putting together a project plan
- Venue hire, publicity materials, printing and other costs associated with consultation.

Before you apply for this grant you will need to have an idea of the cost of the different tasks you wish the grant funding to cover. You will have to submit this information on how you intend to use your grant in the application form.

Key information about neighbourhood planning grant:

- You can only apply for funds that you can spend within six months or before the end of the current financial year, whichever is the earliest.
- You can only apply for between £1000 and £9000 – if your application is not within this range it will automatically be rejected.
- You cannot apply retrospectively for work that has already taken place.
- You cannot apply for the cost of staff or volunteer's time, except for specialist consultants.

Central Government funding to Local Planning Authorities

In addition, SCDC also receives funding from government for each neighbourhood plan produced. The funding pays for the examiner and referendum, as well as for some of the support we provide. This means that these formal stages of the neighbourhood planning process are free to groups preparing their plans.

How can SCDC help?

Producing a successful neighbourhood plan requires some planning expertise. SCDC can provide a range of support as set out in our 'Support Offer 'for Parish Councils'.

Other Resources

Locality

[Support and Grants](#) - Locality recommend that you read the guidance notes before completing the on-line application for the grants and support.

Top Tip

Speak or meet with South Cambridgeshire Parishes who have already applied for grant funding to find out how to do it and when to do it.