

## Guidance Notes

# Neighbourhood Planning Technical Support Neighbourhood Planning Grant

Effective: 26 June 2015

## Welcome

We hope the following guidance will help you make a successful application for either grant or technical support. Please read it carefully before you begin and refer back to it when completing your application form.

In the June update we have:

- Explained that you need to get screening advice from your Local Planning Authority prior to applying for technical support or grant for a strategic environmental assessment (page 7 and pages 21-22)
- Updated the information about when you should expect to hear the outcome of your application (page 13)
- Provided more information about what will happen once you are offered a grant and the due diligence process (page 14)

Before you press submit on your application please read our ‘important points’ section one last time and ensure these have all been covered.

## Who can apply?

Any Town or Parish council, Neighbourhood Forum or prospective neighbourhood who are preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order are eligible to apply to the programme.

Where a Town or Parish council exist, they are the body that must lead the Neighbourhood Plan. They can set up a working group to take forward the plan, but the Town or Parish council remains the responsible body and it must be a representative of the Town or Parish Council that applies for support.

Where there is no Parish or Town council, a prospective Neighbourhood Forum of at least 21 people must be formed to lead and co-ordinate the plan making activity.

If you are a Neighbourhood Forum/prospective Neighbourhood Forum, which has not been incorporated and you are applying for a grant, it is important that you identify an eligible organisation to hold the grant for you.

If you are eligible to apply, then the first stage of the process is to establish what type of support you qualify for. This is done through the Expression of Interest form.

## Expression of Interest

This form is to establish the level of complexity you are facing when writing your Neighbourhood Plan. This will establish what support you are eligible to apply for.

The parameters for complex groups are laid out below - you must meet one or more of these criteria to be classed as a complex group.

- Neighbourhood Forums (where there is no Town or Parish Council)
- All groups writing a Business Development Plan
- All groups writing a Neighbourhood Development Order
- Town or Parish Councils working across 3 or more Parish councils
- Neighbourhood forums working across three or more wards or across Local Authority boundaries
- Have a population of 25,000 or more
- Have a diverse community
- Have a highly transient community
- Situated in high growth areas
- Situated in deprived areas.

As you complete the Expression of Interest form, please provide us with the information required to prove that you meet the above criteria.

### The main contact for the group

This should be someone who is leading the Neighbourhood Planning process. This person may be contacted by telephone as part of the assessment and needs to be available during normal working hours. This contact should be a representative of the qualifying body leading the plan and must not be a consultant or other person who will be paid through the grant.

A number of questions require a simple yes or no answer. Where questions require further investigation the following should help you to complete the Expression of Interest.

### Population of 25,000 or more

This figure should include local residents of all ages, not just those who are of voting age. If you are unsure of this figure, particularly if you are setting up a neighbourhood forum, please either speak to your local planning authority or, if you are still at a very early stage, give us your best guess to the nearest thousand.

### Diverse community

Does your area have a particularly diverse community, how many ethnic groups live in your proposed neighbourhood area?

### Highly transient community

Does your area have a significant percentage of the population who move in and out of the community on an annual basis?

### High growth areas

To find out if your Neighbourhood Plan is looking to allocate high growth you will firstly need to find out if your Local Authority has an up to date Local Plan. A Local Plan is the name for the collection of documents prepared by your Local Planning Authority for the future development of the local area. You can find out if your Local Planning Authority has an up to date adopted local plan by speaking to them directly. You can find out contact details for them on the Planning Portal [here](#).

If the Local Authority **DOES** have an adopted Local Plan it will allocate a certain number of houses for your local area, if you intend to allocate **MORE** than this, then your Neighbourhood Plan is one of high growth.

If the Local Authority **DOESN'T** have an up- to date Local Plan then you will need to speak to the Local Authority and establish if you wish to allocate housing that is in excess of the estimated need for the neighbourhood area. It will help you to ask to see either the emerging local plan or up-to-date housing needs survey.

The Local Authority duty planning officer should be able to answer these questions or direct you to someone in Planning Policy who can help.

### Areas of deprivation

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) shows us levels of deprivation across England. Geographical areas are ranked and scored across a whole range of indicators.

To determine your Neighbourhood Area IMD score please enter your postcode into the search box on the [OpenDataCommunities.org Deprivation Mapper website](https://www.opendatacommunities.org/deprivation-mapper).

On the webpage, scroll down to the map. Hover the cursor over your Neighbourhood Area to reveal a white information box. The decile number in this box is the area's IMD score.

For example, the area indicated in the image below has an IMD score of 4.



*Images:* postcode map and rank decile (via OpenDataCommunities.org Deprivation Mapper)

Areas of high deprivation have an IMD score of 1 or 2. These areas are coloured red.

Areas of low deprivation have an IMD score of 9 or 10. These areas are coloured blue.

Each of these areas are called 'LSOA' 'lower super output area'. This is the way the government assess deprivation and need in a given area. All LSOAs are roughly equal population sizes, although geographical sizes vary. It is likely that your neighbourhood area will be made up of a number of LSOAs and we need you to assess the score for your area.

If 30% or more of your Neighbourhood Area has an IMD score of 1 or 2 the area has a high level of deprivation, regardless of the area's overall score. If less than 30% of your Neighbourhood area has an IMD score of 1 or 2 the area is not classed as having high levels of deprivation, even if there are pockets with higher scores.

## After you have completed your Expression of Interest

The Expression of interest will determine if your Neighbourhood Plan qualifies as a complex group, or you are facing complex issues.

A relevant application form will be generated and you will receive this overnight as a unique link via email. All groups will be eligible to apply for up to £8,000 in grant, for groups facing more complex issues, as outlined above they will be able to apply for grant and additional technical support. For complex groups, the application form will be a combined grant and technical support form, for all other groups this will be a grant only application form.

Your link to the application form will stay live for 30 days, during which time you can revisit it at any time. It will automatically save the information you have entered provided that you have clicked the 'next' button on the relevant page. Once you have pressed the submit button on the final page you will not be able to make any further change or submit your form again.

The link will be automatically deleted after 30 days. Please ensure you complete it within this time period or any information will be lost.

Please provide as much, and as detailed information possible, those applications that do not provide us with enough information to make a decision on will be rejected.

Please make sure you keep a note of any information you submit to us. You may wish to copy and paste your responses to a word document as a backup.

## Applying for Grants

All groups who are writing a Neighbourhood Plan are eligible to apply for a grant.

Both groups that have applied for support in the past, and groups that are new to the Neighbourhood Planning process are eligible to apply under this programme.

Please make sure that you have submitted your end of grant report for the 2013-15 programme before submitting your application to this new programme.

## How much grant funding can you apply for?

All groups are eligible to apply for £1,000 and £8,000 grant funding. Applications with amounts outside these parameters will be rejected. Please tell us the amount of grant you are applying for rather than the total amount you intend to spend on your plan.

Applications for grant must be between £1,000 and £8,000. If your application is not within this range it will be automatically rejected.

Applications for grant are assessed on how well they meet the fund criteria and it is important that you do not rush your application. Make sure that you focus on the content of what you write. Although each application will be looked at on a first come, first served basis, it is the quality of the application that will determine whether or not it will be recommended for funding.

## How many times can you apply for a grant?

You can apply for a total of £8,000 across the three year period from 2015-18. We would like to encourage you to consider your needs for the next six months, so that you don't need to make multiple applications.

Whilst up to 4 applications may be submitted per group we anticipate an average of 2 applications per group.

Please note you must have spent, or have plans in place to spend your grant before you can apply for the next one. Any unspent grant will be subject to return.

## The timescale of the planned activity

Please note that you can only apply for funds that will be spent within the next 6 months or before the end of the financial year, whichever is earliest.

Any funding applications that come outside of these dates will be automatically rejected.

Under no circumstances can we fund activity that has happened in the past, or prior to the grant being awarded.

## What can I apply for?

You are able to apply for costs associated with developing the Neighbourhood Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order.

These may include, but are not limited to:

- Developing a website
- Training sessions for members of the steering group
- Help with putting together a project plan
- Public indemnity insurance ( if you are a neighbourhood forum and this is not already in place)

- Help with developing the evidence base and analysing it to identify issues and aims for your plan
- Undertaking a housing survey
- Engaging a facilitator to help with capacity building, for community consultation or workshops
- Engaging a planning expert to help you draft policies
- Engaging a planning expert to help you to draft relevant policies
- Support for making site allocations
- Contribution to required specialist studies, such as housing needs assessments
- Contribution to undertaking a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) if your local planning authority has identified that one is needed. Please include details about the date and outcome of the screening advice. We will not pay for the screening itself as this is part of the LPA duty to support neighbourhood planning
- Support with undertaking the six week pre-submission consultation
- Support with collecting and analysing responses from the six week pre-submission (Regulation 14) consultation and deciding how to modify the neighbourhood plan.
- Help with understanding whether your plan is ready for examination (meeting the basic conditions and other legal requirements)
- Provide training in the legal requirements which will be tested at the examination stage
- Venue hire
- Publicity materials
- Printing
- Costs associated with planning and undertaking public engagement and consulting on the plan.

If you are a complex group, please ensure you are not applying for grant for packages of work that can be delivered through technical support. This means you can save your grant to pay for other costs!

## Filling in the grant application form

Some of the questions on the application form are required fields and some are optional. If you leave a required field blank, you will not be able to continue to the next section of the application form until you have completed it. We provide you with text boxes to add any details that you think are relevant.

Some of this information you will have to hand, other items might require you to speak to the Local Planning Authority. You can search for your Local Planning Authority using the Planning Portal [here](#).

### Population of the area

Please provide an estimate of the population in your Neighbourhood Plan area. This figure should include local residents of all ages, not just those who are of voting age. If you are unsure of this figure, particularly if you are setting up a Neighbourhood Forum, please either speak to your local planning authority or, if you are still at a very early stage, give us your best guess to the nearest thousand.

### Level of deprivation

To find the level of deprivation of your area you can search the [OpenDataCommunities.org Deprivation Mapper](https://www.opendatacommunities.org/deprivation-mapper) and search using the postcode of the area. If you are still at a very early stage, give us your best guess of where your area may cover.

### Previous and on-going support

The application also asks for information about any support that you have already received. This might be as part of the preceding programmes funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government, from your local authority or by using other funds including any local precept. Groups which have already received support are encouraged to apply to this programme so that they can continue to progress their plans.

### Project Plan

Effective project planning is very important to neighbourhood planning. A project plan can help you identify when you will reach key stages and help you plan for resources and costs needed. Please fill in the project planner template we have provided for you [here](#) and upload it to your application form (this is also available on the Resources section of the My Community website: <http://mycommunity.org.uk/resources/neighbourhood-plan-project-planner/>). It is broken down into the various stages and is designed to help you focus on the key tasks needed in the production of your neighbourhood plan.

## Budget breakdown section

In this section of the form you will need to provide detailed breakdowns of the estimated costs for the support you require.

This part of the application is broken down into 3 sections. Professional fees, project costs and other.

### Professional fees

If you are using the grant to engage professionals to support you with your neighbourhood plan you are strongly advised to ensure that they are appropriately qualified for the work they are delivering. This would generally mean a qualified planner, preferably a chartered member of the Royal Town Planning Institute (MRTPI), to provide advice on planning legislation, policy and issues. Similarly there are a range of specialists who might need to be involved in other work for your Neighbourhood Plan.

### Type of activity

Please select the type of professional support you are applying for from the drop down menu.

### Type of activity detail

Please provide a summary of the type of support this professional will be delivering.

### Budget breakdown

Please provide the day rate you will be paying. (Please do NOT provide an hourly rate) Please note that the maximum day rate is £500 per day excluding VAT and reasonable expenses. If the quotations you obtain identify that the specialist advice will exceed these rates, please attach the quotation and explain the basis on which you think a higher cost is appropriate.

In some instances, you may be quoted a fixed price for a piece of work such as a technical survey or an assessment, and it will not be appropriate to calculate a day rate. In this circumstance, we expect the group to have checked that this is the market rate for this work, either by getting more than one quote and /or complying with your own financial regulations. Please attach a copy of the quotation to your application.

If there are additional reasonable expenses they can be outlined in the 'other' section below.

Reasonable expenses need to meet the standards are laid out below:

Item		
Travel	Standard class rail fare	
Mileage	45 pence per mile car	
	24 pence per mile motorcycle	

Item		
Overnight accommodation	<i>Within London</i>	<i>Outside London</i>
	£120 per night maximum	£90 per night maximum

## Cost

Please provide a total cost to be delivered by this professional.

Example of completed section:

### Budget Item 1: Professional Fees

1.1 Type of Activity	1.1 Type of Activity Detail	1.1 Budget Breakdown	1.1 Cost (£0.00)
Consultants <input type="checkbox"/>	Consultant to analyse evidence base	3 days at £400 a day	1200
1.2 Type of Activity	1.2 Type of Activity Detail	1.2 Budget Breakdown	1.2 Cost (£0.00)
Consultants <input type="checkbox"/>	Consultant to write planning policy	3 days at £400 a day	1200
1.3 Type of Activity	1.3 Type of Activity Detail	1.3 Budget Breakdown	1.3 Cost (£0.00)
Facilitator costs <input type="checkbox"/>	Facilitator for consultation events	3 days at £350	1050 <input type="text" value="x"/>

You must include all the quotes from all the professionals/consultants you are thinking about using. Please compile these into one document to upload.

We need you to have a reasonably clear idea of the scope of work you are asking a professional to undertake. This will help you to make an accurate grant application. You will be able to confirm which consultant you are using following being awarded a grant. Remember if you are eligible for technical support it makes sense to only apply for grant to pay for items not covered by technical support.

Please note we cannot fund salaried posts or compensate for loss of earnings. This includes paying additional hours for an existing member of staff or employing someone on a casual or freelance basis.

## Project costs

### Type of activity

Please select the type of activity from the drop down menu.

### Type of activity details

Please provide a summary of the type of work that will be carried out.

### Budget breakdown

Please give a breakdown of the costs applied for. For example, how much each item/area of work will cost and how many of each item are to be delivered.

### Costs

Please provide the total cost for this particular activity.

Example of completed section.

#### Budget Item 2: Project Costs

2.1 Type of Activity	2.1 Type of Activity Detail	2.1 Budget Breakdown	2.1 Cost (£0.00)
Room hire	Hire of village hall for 2 consultation events	2 x £100 room hire costs	200.00
2.2 Type of Activity	2.2 Type of Activity Detail	2.2 Budget Breakdown	2.2 Cost (£0.00)
Website development	Setting up of website and hosting	£750 set up costs. £250 hosting costs - see attached quote	1000.00
2.3 Type of Activity	2.3 Type of Activity Detail	2.3 Budget Breakdown	2.3 Cost (£0.00)
Printing costs	Printing of consultation flyers	1000 x flyers at 0.50p each	500.00
2.4 Type of Activity	2.4 Type of Activity Detail	2.4 Budget Breakdown	2.4 Cost (£0.00)
Publicity costs	3 adverts in the local newspaper	3 x £60 for 1/2 page advert	180.00

If you are applying for website costs, please attach a quote from the relevant expert.

### Other

Please use this section to outline any other costs you would like to apply for to help you write your neighbourhood plan that do not fit in to the sections above.

### Applying for a contribution to a larger budget

Groups can apply for a grant of up to £8,000 where it is a contribution to a larger overall budget. However you will need to apply for specific items that you intend to spend the grant on and only include these in your application.

**PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT ITEMS INCLUDED IN THE GRANT APPLICATION DO NOT EXCEED £8,000.**

The items you apply for should ideally be those which will start at least one month after you submit your application (to allow time for the assessment and grants offer and acceptance process to be completed).

## What can't the grant money be spent on?

There are a number of items of expenditure which are not eligible for a grant under this programme. These are listed below:

- Any General administration costs , such as arranging and minuting steering group meetings
- Funding salaried posts or compensating for loss of earnings, this includes paying additional hours for an existing member of staff and / or employing someone on a casual or freelance basis at an agreed hourly rate. The only exception to this is where you are engaging a planning consultant, or someone to deliver specialist, technical support, on an hourly basis, although even in these circumstances you may prefer to get a fixed price quote for the work to be undertaken
- Paying for volunteer time, however reimbursement of reasonable out of pocket expenses is eligible
- Reimbursing expenditure which has already been incurred, we recommend that you only apply for funding for activities that start at least one month after the date of your application
- Capital items - generally this means that a purchase results in owning a lasting asset such as computers, photocopiers or digital projectors
- Any other activity which is not directly associated with developing the Neighbourhood Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order
- In addition, we cannot fund general contingency for unknown costs or cost overruns.

## VAT

Activities which are funded by a grant are outside the scope of VAT and so the VAT cannot be recovered by groups who are not part of the government family, even if they are registered for VAT. Parish and Town Councils should refer to Notice 749 from HMRC which explains the special rules which apply to public bodies and should allow you to reclaim VAT in some circumstances. This may also be the case for a parish or town council which is not registered for VAT.

Please take this into account when costing your grant application and seek specialist VAT advice if needed.

## How are the applications assessed?

### Grant support

Applications for a grant from eligible applicants will be assessed based on the information provided in the application form and against the following criteria:

- Is all the proposed expenditure eligible? (we will reduce the total amount of grant awarded for any items of ineligible expenditure)
- Is there a clear need for the project spend?
- Is there evidence of how the planned activities will help you progress towards a Neighbourhood Plan for your area?
- Is the project realistic and achievable? Can the activities be delivered in the timetable given?
- Can the activities be delivered within 6 months of the application, or within the financial year, whichever is the soonest?
- Are the project costs reasonable and do they add up?
- Does the project demonstrate value for money in terms of the relationship between costs and benefit?

### Who makes the final decision?

Recommendations about who gets the grants are made by Locality's assessors based on how well the application criteria have been met. Each recommendation will be reviewed before approval or rejection for funding.

### Letting you know the outcome of your application

We will inform you by email whether you have been successful or not. We aim to assess applications which are for grant only within 10 working days. Where an application is also for technical support, we will normally make our decision following the outcome for the technical support application. Therefore you should expect it to take approximately 20 working days for a decision to be made about both the grant and the technical support. If the decision is going to take longer than this, we will let you know.

### What happens if you are successful in being offered a grant?

Once your grant application has been approved by Locality, Groundwork UK will become the day to day contact for your grant (expenditure).

They will email you offering you a grant setting out the detailed terms and conditions and requesting copies of any further documentation required in order to pay out your grant. They will do this within 10 working days of the grant being recommended by Locality. They will also send you a separate email from their Programme Management System 'Gifts' to invite you to complete their due diligence process to accept the grant offer.

For the due diligence process, you will be asked to provide bank account details for your group/organisation (or for the Accountable Body who will hold the funds on your behalf), details of all authorised signatories on the account (including names, home addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses) and a recent bank statement for the bank account where you wish the grant to be paid. You will also be asked to confirm that you have appropriate insurance in place for your project.

Once you have submitted all of the information requested through 'Gifts', you will receive your grant payment within 10 working days, or if some information is missing or needs to be queried, you will be contacted by Groundwork UK. When planning the start date for your project, please allow at least 20 working days for Groundwork UK's process.'

Successful applicants will be asked to provide a financial and activity monitoring report on completion of the planned activity. You will need to provide a report about what progress you have made as a result of the funding and submit this along with invoices and receipts for any items of £1,000 or more. Any unspent funds will need to be returned to Groundwork. Full details of reporting requirements and how to pay back any unspent funding will be provided by Groundwork UK with the terms and conditions.

Due to government restrictions on this fund all grants must be spent within the financial year they are awarded. Therefore, for example, if you are applying for a grant in November 2015, you can only apply for funding to take you up to March 2016. If you have not reached the £8,000 ceiling you may reapply for further funding in the next financial year.

## What do you need in order to receive funding?

If you are a Town/Parish council, or an incorporated Neighbourhood Forum with a bank account with two signatories, you can receive the funding directly into your account.

If you are a prospective/unincorporated\* Neighbourhood Forum, you will need to nominate an incorporated organisation/charity to hold the grant on your behalf. You will need to provide details of this organisation and their bank details when you accept the terms of the grant and they will need to agree to hold the grant on your behalf.

If you are an incorporated Neighbourhood Forum, and you do not have a bank account (with two named signatories), you will need to open one in your organisation's name or nominate an incorporated organisation/charity to hold the funds on your behalf. You will need to provide details of this organisation and their bank details when you accept the terms of the grant and they will need to agree to hold the grant on your behalf.

Incorporated organisations have a separate legal status, such as Company Limited by Guarantee, Community Interest Company (CIC), Industrial & Provident Society, Charitably Incorporated Organisation etc. If you are unsure whether your neighbourhood forum or nominated fund holding organisation is incorporated, please check using the [Companies House Web Check Tool](#). If it is incorporated it will be listed on this website. Further information can also be found on the Charity Commission website.

\*a Neighbourhood Forum that does not have a separate legal status.

## Technical Support Guidance

Technical support is available to all groups who are facing more complex issues developing their Neighbourhood Plan.

Groups with complex issues include:

- Neighbourhood Forums (where there is no Parish or Town Council)
- Clusters of parishes
- High growth areas
- Deprived areas
- Business led Neighbourhood Plans
- Populations of over 25,000
- Groups preparing a Neighbourhood Development Order

It will be established at the expression of interest stage if you are a 'complex' group and, if eligible, you will receive the relevant application form.

### What is Technical Support?

Technical Support is available to groups facing more complex issues developing their Neighbourhood Plan.

Technical support is a range of support packages which are delivered by one of our expert consultants offering face to face support. You will be allocated a lead supporter who will work directly with the group to deliver the package of technical support through to completion. We are working with AECOM and the NPIERS service who will provide the packages of support which are awarded.

Technical Support cannot be used to fund your chosen consultant to deliver support packages. If you are eligible for technical support, but wish to continue working with your known consultant we recommend you review the packages of support available and talk to your

consultant about how best they can support you, funded through grant, in areas not covered by the Technical Support packages. This way you may be able to receive the widest ranging support from the programme.

Technical support is designed to provide you with information (evidence) and advice (professional judgement) which will help you to decide your priorities & direction, to draft policy, avoid legal challenges and to engage confidently with stakeholders such as developers, councils, local businesses and of course residents who will have a vote at the end of it all.

Our consultants are all highly skilled and have wide experience in delivering Neighbourhood Plan. They will work alongside you, doing only what you cannot manage and with a clearly defined brief, such as producing a design guide, a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Evidence review or Site assessment. The more substantial pieces of work will last between a few weeks to several months depending on the complexity of your situation.

We are particularly keen to help ambitious groups, from all types of neighbourhood, who want to really influence how their place grows and changes going into the future.

Please see below for a description of each support package:

- Establishing a Neighbourhood Forum
- Housing Advice and Assessment
- Heritage and Character Assessment
- Site Options and Assessment
- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Habitats Regulations Assessment
- Urban Design and Masterplanning
- Viability of Proposals
- Evidence base and policy review
- Facilitation support
- Plan health check prior to examination.

## Establishing a Neighbourhood Forum

### What is it?

This service helps a Neighbourhood Forum through its early development to the point where it has a defined and well-argued physical boundary for the neighbourhood area and is able to demonstrate to a local planning authority that it is capable of leading the Neighbourhood

Planning process & has local support to do this. We can steer you through the legal requirements, developing a constitution, costs, project planning and publicity. We will also share best practice.

### How will it help?

Setting up a new body or adapting an existing organisation can be both exciting and challenging, particularly as Neighbourhood Planning brings together lots of different interests from one area and ideally these would be represented on your forum. Agreeing a Neighbourhood area boundary in a built up area where one neighbourhood may merge into another can also be challenging. Having an independent view on the Neighbourhood area boundary or critical friend support with regards to the inevitable 'forming, storming, norming and performing stages', you'll probably move through when working with a new group of people can also be helpful getting everyone pulling in the same direction.

### Prerequisites?

Enthusiasm and commitment from volunteers for community led planning. You will have a core group who have already understood the benefits of a Neighbourhood Plan or be a group of residents or businesses who want to have more control of future development and how local spaces develops. You will be able to demonstrate the group are committed to undertaking Neighbourhood Planning for example in the minutes of your meetings, and have a good idea of the key roles that individual volunteers will play -e.g. chair person, communications, technical tasks.

## Housing Advice and Assessment

### What is it?

Where Neighbourhood Planners choose to provide for the housing needs of their area, for example through decisions on where housing should go and the type and the tenure of new housing, plan policies need to be underpinned by evidence to support the choices made and the approach taken. Establishing future need for housing is not an exact science, and no single approach will provide a definitive answer. The housing need assessment process therefore involves making balanced judgements, as well as gathering numbers and locally relevant data. The process can sometimes be complex, as a single Neighbourhood Area almost never constitutes a housing market operating in isolation from other areas, and must therefore be assessed in its wider context.

### How will it help?

Not all those preparing a Neighbourhood Plan will have a clear housing allocation for their area set out in the Local Plan. Equally, some may want to take a fresh look at the types of housing needed locally. Our assessment, based on proven best practice helps Neighbourhood Planners understand what their contribution to the local authority-wide housing requirement might be,

which in turn can help build an understanding of how many houses to plan for over your plan period. Our housing needs advice forms part of the evidence base (rather than being a policy document) and provides a firm foundation for you to develop informed neighbourhood housing policies, including policies allocating specific sites for new housing.

### Prerequisites

Needless to say, you must be able to demonstrate that you are seeking to address housing growth in the Neighbourhood Plan in the absence of a clear housing allocation for your area, and with ambitions that may exceed local plan/emerging local plan targets. The more local information available, the better, for example you may have carried out a local household survey into housing need and people's experiences of housing, spoken to co-operative estate agents or had an initial steer from your local council.

## Heritage and Character Assessment

### What is it?

A heritage and character assessment is a tailored study that brings alive the history and development of a neighbourhood or wider area in planning terms. It identifies a comprehensive range of physical features to help define your area, particularly those features that contribute to its special character and sense of place. This can be anything from views, to materials; or past events that have shaped how your area has grown and changed over time. The assessment commonly identifies sub-neighbourhoods, which will inform policies and guide new development.

### How will it help?

If an important reason for producing a Neighbourhood Plan is to ensure that new development respects the character of your Neighbourhood Area then a heritage and character assessment can help you to understand and evaluate an area's defining characteristics. The historic buildings, pattern of streets and open spaces and the interaction between these are just some of the things that make your neighbourhood distinctive from the next.

A heritage and character assessment can help you ask the questions that enable you to consider how different features of the landscape/townscape contribute to its character. Before drafting your policies or planning specific developments it can be useful to understand and reflect on the historic and built environment to determine whether and how development might either damage or degrade your neighbourhood, or create opportunities for improvement and strengthening character. Carrying out a Heritage and Character Assessment supports your evidence gathering stage, is highly collaborative and will give you tangible information to act on in terms of the character and history of the place in which you live.

## Prerequisites

A heritage and character assessment is best used at an early stage in the plan-making process or when evaluating the impact of specific proposals as part of a Neighbourhood Development Order.

For example:

*When developing policies that impact the built environment, such as those concerning the use of materials or the night time economy?*

- To improve proposals through better understanding of a place and enhanced protection of historic areas.
- When evaluating the implications of a specific scheme such as a housing or commercial development.
- Identify existing positive townscape characteristics around a development site and help to identify the existing features and materials, or particularly attractive views that can be integrated into development proposals.

## Site options and assessment

### What is it?

If you are using your Neighbourhood Plan to allocate sites for development then you should carry out an appraisal of options and an assessment of individual sites against clearly identified criteria. These sites could be:

- Vacant
- Disused
- Underused
- Currently in another use that is inappropriate
- Undeveloped.

The process usually starts with a desk based review of known and any potential sites suggested by the group that may be suitable sites for housing, employment or other uses such as open space, retail or community facilities. The process includes a review of all work carried out previously by the Local Authority and advises on consultation with local landowners, developers and agents.

### How will it help?

Allocating sites for development can be one of the most contentious but powerful aspects of Neighbourhood Planning. We can help you bring together all existing evidence relating to potential development sites, identifying any new potential sites, and eliminating unsuitable sites. We can do this in a transparent, methodical and informed way which will stand up to later scrutiny. Each site is assessed against national planning policy and guidance; any local guidance you feel important; environmental or physical limitations such as: flood risk; steep slopes or natural features; site availability; and other factors, such as whether the site is

financially viable to develop. The output is a useful shortlist of suitable sites. You can then get feedback on these as part of your consultation on the plan. The final site or sites can then be allocated in the Neighbourhood Plan.

### Prerequisites

For this process, the group would need to share any knowledge relating to potential development sites and landowners and any work on site assessment carried out by the group to date. Groups will need to be committed to achieving sustainable growth, and understand and be prepared to see a site allocations process through to a reasoned conclusion.

## Urban Design & Masterplanning

### What is it?

Urban design can be defined as 'the art of making and shaping successful places'. It deals with the overall plan of a place, including for example, routes, spaces, blocks, the scale, height, width and shape of buildings in relation their surroundings. It is as much about the spaces between buildings as it is about individual buildings. Often the layout of public spaces, parks and streets gives a place its identity. Professional urban designers can work with your group and the community to produce bespoke design guides, masterplans (documents which set out how the site will be developed or improved) for small areas , development briefs or 'design codes' (a set of design rules that developers will need to adhere to). These can ensure that new development responds to the qualities and features that make your neighbourhood special (give it its character) and makes the neighbourhood a better place to live, work or spend time in.

### How will it help?

You will find this useful if you would like to make sure that any new development stands the test of time and complements what makes your neighbourhood distinctive and special. It will also be very useful if there are parts of your area (such as a town centre, local parade or housing estate) needing revitalising, or if a large amount of growth is anticipated. Design sketches or masterplans can also help to bring your plan alive visually and to show you have listened to neighbours and businesses in terms of practical changes they wanted to see over years to come.

### Prerequisites

Enthusiasm to improve or maintain the quality of buildings and spaces in your area, and a willingness see particular sites or areas or policies developed with a design-led approach. It will be important to have considered how aims for a site or area can be achieved through planning, rather than non-planning matters (e.g. through the layout or buildings, spaces and linkages, rather than matters which do not require planning permission, such as signage or highways issues).

# Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

## What is it?

The [Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\) Directive](#) is a European Union requirement that seeks to provide a high level of protection of the environment by integrating environmental considerations into the process of preparing certain plans with a view to promoting sustainable development.

Your Local Planning Authority has a responsibility to support you to screen your emerging plan to identify whether an SEA will be necessary. Please include details about the date and outcome of the screening advice. We will not provide the screening itself as this is part of the LPA duty to support neighbourhood planning.

## How will it help?

In some limited circumstances, where a Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, it may require an SEA. To decide whether a draft Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have significant environmental effects, it must be assessed (screened) at an early stage of the plan's preparation. Screening for SEA is the responsibility of your Local Authority.

Where a Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment (that is, it has been 'screened-in') a Strategic Environmental Assessment must be carried out and an environmental report prepared for publication alongside the draft plan.

One of the following documents must be included with a Neighbourhood Plan proposal when it is submitted to the Local Planning Authority:

- A statement explaining that the plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects (the screening opinion should do this) or
- An environmental report, following public consultation

Where a Neighbourhood Plan is required to undertake an SEA we are able to assist with:

- Scoping out what the SEA needs to focus on and advising on consultation strategy
- Undertaking all or part of the SEA process and providing advice
- Assessing reasonable alternatives for your Neighbourhood Plan
- Providing you with an Environmental Report
- Reviewing the SEA process undertaken alongside your Neighbourhood Plan.

## Prerequisites

You must have been advised by the Local Planning Authority that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required for your neighbourhood plan.

# Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

## What is it?

An Environmental Impact assessment is a procedure to be followed for certain types of development which are likely to have a significant effect on the environment. This is to ensure that decisions are made in full knowledge of any likely significant effects on the environment and that the public are given early and effective opportunities to participate in the decision making procedures. It may be of relevance to Neighbourhood Development Orders. Development of a type which is listed in Schedule 2 of the EIA Regulations and exceeds the relevant threshold set out in the Schedule or in a 'sensitive area' must be screened by the local planning authority to determine whether it is likely to have significant effects on the environment. Screening should normally take place at an early stage in the design of the project.

Where it is decided that an assessment is required, those preparing a neighbourhood development order must compile the information reasonably required to assess the likely significant environmental effects of the development. This Environmental Statement will accompany the neighbourhood development order proposal. You can find the full EIA regulations [here](#).

## How will it help?

In most cases, it is unlikely that an EIA will be required unless your group is promoting a very large scheme or is located in a 'sensitive area' such as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. This is a decision for the Local Planning Authority. If EIA is required, we will be able to advise on the scope of work required, including the range of topics to be assessed and the method of assessment. Even if EIA is not required, depending on the scale and location of the development, it may still be necessary to prepare certain environmental information (for example, noise studies, air quality assessments or ecological survey) to accompany the Neighbourhood Development Order and we can advise on the scope, cost and timing of this work.

## Prerequisites

You need to be intending to produce a neighbourhood development order and have had a positive screening opinion from the Local Planning Authority. In order for us to be able to advise on the scope of an EIA, and the scope of environmental studies that might be required, we would need to have an understanding of the type and composition of the development i.e. what is the area of the development and the proportion of residential/commercial/retail space to be provided as well details of the proposed development location. We would then work with you to establish a clear approach to preparing the necessary environmental information to accompany the planning application.

## Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA)

### What is it?

A Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) identifies whether a plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. European sites include Special Protection Areas (designated for birds), Special Areas of Conservation (designated for habitats and animals) and Ramsar sites (wetlands of international importance). Initially, you will need to screen the plan to determine whether significant effects on a European site can be ruled out on the basis of objective information - for example how close the Neighbourhood Area is to any European sites. If the conclusion is that the plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European site then an appropriate assessment of the implications of the plan for the site, in view of the site's conservation objectives, must be undertaken. While appropriate assessment is the responsibility of the Local Planning Authority they will need relevant information to be provided by the Qualifying Body.

### How will it help?

The HRA process helps you ensure your plan is compliant with EU obligations. The screening process will alert you to any significant effects of your draft plan on a European Site. Where required, a full appropriate assessment provides you with a vital document for your formal consultation and examination stage that will have been agreed with Natural England.

### Prerequisites

Until a plan has been screened, it is difficult to determine if a plan is likely to have a significant effect on a European Site. However, where the plan covers an area close to a European Site, significant effects are more likely. This service will be provided to areas where the plan is close to a European site and initial screening indicates an appropriate assessment could be required.

## Viability of proposals

### What is it?

An individual development can be said to be viable if, after taking account of all costs, including central and local government policy, regulatory costs and the cost and availability of development finance, the scheme provides a competitive return to the developer to ensure that development takes place and generates a land value sufficient to persuade the land owner to sell the land for the development proposed. If these conditions are not met, a scheme will not be delivered (Local Housing Delivery Group, 'Viability testing local plans', 2012).

The requirement to assess viability forms part of national planning policy and becomes a consideration for any group thinking about allocating sites, producing a Neighbourhood Development Order or introducing a Neighbourhood Plan policy that may impact on the viability of development.

The output of this service would be a report summarising the findings from our residual valuation appraisal(s). The detailed appraisals will be included as an appendix, with the main body of the report putting forward recommendations based on the cumulative impact of policies and/or site-specific issues in respect of site allocations. If the results indicate the plan and/or sites are viable it would provide a basis for groups to push forward with the existing suite of policies/sites, perhaps with tips on how to improve deliverability if there is a limited viability 'cushion'. If the results indicate the plan or site an allocation in a plan, or an Order proposal is unviable, the report will state the main influencing factors. It will suggest the means by which deliverability could be improved or whether a particular policy or allocation should be abandoned.

### How will it help?

The appraisal calculates a range of scenarios (such as costs associated with planning policies and obligations, construction costs and local market values) to determine if a site is viable (i.e. capable of providing a landowner and developer a 'competitive return' whilst still capable of delivering the proposed policies or obligations). For more complex mixed-use schemes additional evidence gathering for costs related to external works, infrastructure and site abnormalities may be required, possibly including, analysis of items identified in an Infrastructure Delivery Plan, CIL 123 list or County planning obligations document. Large site allocations or strategic developments (usually 150+ units and mixed use) for the most complex schemes will involve input from external property specialists.

It should be pointed out however that our viability testing does not attempt to assess the specific price that could or should be paid to the landowner or the profit level that a developer should expect to receive.

### Prerequisites

The viability support can be provided at various stages in the development of a Neighbourhood Plan, Neighbourhood Development Order however, proposals will need to be fairly mature in order that the viability testing outputs are useful and remain robust. Therefore, we would require an indication of the likely uses, quantum of development and any other information that may be necessary e.g. known infrastructure costs or abnormal site conditions. It will also be important to first engage with the Local Planning Authority, landowners and other stakeholders (e.g. agents/developers) should viability evidence be required for a particular site. For whole plan testing we would recommend that draft policies have been subject to some form of consultation and checking from the Local Planning Authority.

# Evidence Base and Policy Reviews

## What is it?

Evidence base is the term given to all the documents and information used to underpin the development of a Neighbourhood Plan and its policies or the proposals in a Neighbourhood Development Order. Neighbourhood Planners need to ensure that proportionate, robust evidence supports the choices made and the approach taken. The evidence is drawn upon to explain the intention and rationale of the policies in a Neighbourhood Plan or the proposals in a Neighbourhood Development Order.

We provide a systematic analysis of draft policies or order proposals and the evidence base behind them at an early stage. This is to ensure they are proportional, adequate and properly draw upon any relevant evidence base that has been used to prepare a Local Plan. We don't analyse all the evidence referred to or potentially available, but we do track a wide range of potential evidence to include existing data and maps for the Neighbourhood Area, local household surveys, an area profile, census data, identification of key local strategic policies from the Local Plan, advice on relevant national policies/guidance and existing Local Planning Authority technical studies such as housing needs assessment, an employment land review, an open space study and a characterisation study. We also check whether the evidence being used for a Neighbourhood Plan or a Neighbourhood Development Order is up-to-date and relevant to your Neighbourhood Area. As part of this advice we also check whether draft policies add to and fit in with Local Plan policies (where current) or merely repeat them. This can help you save time by enabling you to focus on policies about the specific characteristics of your area and what is important to local people.

## How will it help?

Because Neighbourhood Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders must meet a number of legal tests, getting your evidence base in shape is very important. The evidence required will depend on the content and nature of the Neighbourhood Plan or the Neighbourhood Development Order. The more ambitious you are, the more evidence is usually required. Having up-to-date evidence in place feeds into succinct, robust policies and really helps you pull out those key issues relevant to your area. It gives you confidence also when undertaking your public engagement and formal consultation.

## Prerequisites

In order to carry out a meaningful evidence base review, you should have a clear vision and a set of objectives for your plan, together with draft policies and evidence considered to date. In the case of a Neighbourhood Development Order you should have a draft proposal prepared, Groups will need to: demonstrate that they understand the importance of using objective data and information to develop their proposals; and gathered and documented the material used so

far to prepare their plan or order. If the forum/parish has a recent community survey/questionnaire that would also be very helpful in terms of evidence.

## Facilitation Support

### What is it?

Skilled facilitators, also expert in neighbourhood planning, are available for short periods to parachute in wherever independent, critical friend or mediation input is required. Our facilitation service covers mediation help between competing interests, advice on communications and process issues.

### How will it help?

Planning can give rise to strong views and Neighbourhood Planning is no different. Relations may become strained and strong positions may become entrenched on key policy issues or choices that have to be made, e.g. between sites. Local councillors can help with this, but if this isn't appropriate, outside facilitation by someone whose is completely independent can help you to look at things differently, find common ground, improve your decision making or kick start a process that is faltering.

### Prerequisites

That you are clearly at an impasse and that you have tried to resolve issues internally before asking for this form of help.

## Healthcheck prior to examination

### What is it?

A Healthcheck will look at whether the draft Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions and advise any potential amendments to ensure the plan meets the basic conditions. This will not involve the re-writing of the policies but general advice on what changes need to be made.

### How will it help?

A Healthcheck is particularly useful for groups to help them understand in more depth how the independent examiner will approach the examination and help them to identify areas which may raise concerns. This will help you to identify areas where you may need to modify you plan, if need be, prior to submission to the Local Planning Authority. This process has been developed to help Neighbourhood Planning bodies approach the independent examination with greater confidence. All the examiners used are members of the of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors NPIERS panel (Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiners Referral Service).

## Prerequisites

A Healthcheck is for those groups who are near the end of the Neighbourhood Planning process. You will need to have a completed draft plan.

## Important notes

### Data Protection Act

By submitting information via the application form you agree that Locality and our partners may use the data you have provided. Wherever your personal information may be held by us, we will take reasonable and appropriate steps to ensure the information you share with us is protected from unauthorised access or disclosure.

If you would like to discuss how your information is stored and used by Locality and our partners in the Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning and Community Buildings Programme please contact [communications@locality.org.uk](mailto:communications@locality.org.uk).

### Public Liability

Please consider carefully the activities you will be undertaking throughout your grant funded project, and whether any of the activities pose a risk to members of your organisation or the public. Remember risk can take many forms - injury, financial loss, reputational damage, etc. If you feel there is risk in any activities you will undertake, you will need to consider whether insurance is required, an insurance broker or financial adviser will be able to give guidance on this. You may wish to include the cost of this as part of your application.

### Equalities duties

Qualifying groups should seek to involve people from all sections of the community in developing the Community Buildings project, and should periodically check that the profile of people who are responding to the consultation are representative of the profile of your local community. Advice on good practice for involving harder to reach groups is available from a range of sources including the [Neighbourhood Planning Roadmap Guide](#)

### Contacting Locality

If you have any questions about how to complete your application, please visit the My Community Help Centre at [mycommunity.org.uk](http://mycommunity.org.uk).

Alternatively, please call our Advice Line on 0300 020 1864 which is open from 9.30-12.30 from Monday to Friday.