**Neighbourhood Plans - FAQs**

**What is the difference between neighbourhood plans and community plans or village plans?**

The Council’s Community Plan or Village Plans can cover all things important to a community. Neighbourhood plans are restricted to land use and development matters, which once adopted will become part of the formal local development plan, should relate to the use and development of land within a designated neighbourhood. In addition, the process and regulations set out in the Localism Act 2011 will need to be followed when preparing a neighbourhood plan.

**What areas can be covered by a neighbourhood plan?**

In general terms, any area can have a neighbourhood plan. They can cross local authority boundaries but they cannot overlap with adjoining neighbourhoods, who also wish to prepare a plan for their area. The boundaries of the area will need to be agreed with and approved by the Council.

As part of the All in One consultation process (see question 4), 14 areas have been identified, for which the Council is currently preparing Village Plans. The Council would recommend using these established neighbourhood/village boundaries for any possible future neighbourhood development plans.

**Can there be more than one neighbourhood plan for an area?**

No. There can only be one neighbourhood plan for an area.

**What areas can be covered by a neighbourhood plan?**

Neighbourhood plans can only be prepared where a “Neighbourhood Forum” is formally established. A community group wanting to achieve “Neighbourhood Forum” status can approach the Council and ask for this; formal designation and approval of the Neighbourhood Forum by the Council will be required. A Neighbourhood Forum needs to be made up of a minimum of 21 members, who either live, work or are a Councillor in the area concerned. The Forum will also need to have a written constitution. The neighbourhood plan needs to be supported by the whole community before it can be adopted.

**How long will it take to prepare a neighbourhood plan?**

It will be up to individual areas to decide on the pace at which they wish to progress their plans. However, it is anticipated that on average the process is likely to take around two years.

**What conditions must a neighbourhood plan fulfil?**

Neighbourhood planning does not mean that communities can plan how and what they like. There are still parameters set by national, regional and local planning policies and neighbourhood plans will have to meet a number of conditions:

* They must have regard to national planning policy;
* They must be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained within the local development plan; and
* They must be compatible with EU obligations and human rights requirements.

**How much work will be required to produce a neighbourhood plan?**

This will largely depend on how much detail the plan goes into. Neighbourhood Forums would also need to use appropriate, proportionate and up-to-date evidence to support the policies in a proposed neighbourhood development plan. In addition, there are minimum statutory requirements (e.g. Sustainability Appraisal) that will need to be completed.

**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 the local development plan, which is made up of the London Plan and our local planning policy documents (see question 3). Neighbourhood plans, once adopted, will have significant weight in making decisions on planning applications.

**What is the Council’s role in the neighbourhood planning process?**

The Council has a duty to provide technical advice and practical support to those producing a neighbourhood plan however, in view of current resource constraints any support would of necessity be very limited. It also has to:

* Agree the composition of, and formally designate, neighbourhood forums;
* Agree the boundary of the area to be covered by a neighbourhood plan;
* Organise the check by an independent examiner into a neighbourhood plan before it can be voted on in a local referendum;
* Organise the referendums; the plan will need to get majority support;
* Adopt the neighbourhood plan and bring it into force.

This is a new process that has not been tried before and it will therefore be a learning process for all of those involved, including the Council and its officers.

**Who will pay for the neighbourhood planning process?**

It will be up to the Neighbourhood Forum to pay for the preparation of a neighbourhood plan. The Council will only pay for the independent examination and the referendum, as well as provide technical advice and practical support.

**How long does a neighbourhood plan last?**

A neighbourhood plan will normally last for five years at which point it should be reviewed. It will also be possible to review the plan within the five year period if necessary.