

# Neighbourhood development plans

## Frequently asked questions



# April 2012

**This document is based on some questions that have been raised with the Council to date. It will be updated as and when further information becomes available.**

## **What is a 'neighbourhood area'?**

Local communities will be able to propose the boundaries of their neighbourhood area. A parish/town council or community group can apply to the Borough Council for an area to become a 'neighbourhood area' for neighbourhood planning purposes. The Council is obliged to publicise the application and invite representations, and will then make a decision on whether to accept the proposal.

## **Who can prepare a neighbourhood development plan?**

Neighbourhood development plans can be prepared by parish and town councils. In areas where there is no parish/town council, they can be prepared by local people working together through a Neighbourhood Forum. A neighbourhood forum must:

- have at least 21 members and be comprised of people who are elected members or who live and/or work in the neighbourhood area. There should preferably be at least one of each of these
- be inclusive and representative of the community in the neighbourhood area
- have a written constitution and be established for the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area.

A proposed neighbourhood forum must apply to the Council for formal recognition. Once a neighbourhood forum has been established, it will exist for five years, and within that period, another neighbourhood forum cannot be designated for the same area.

## **What will a neighbourhood development plan look like?**

Whilst the content of a neighbourhood development plan will be for the neighbourhood forum to decide, there are certain requirements that must be met. Neighbourhood development plans must:

- be based on evidence and consultation with the local community
- be in line with national planning policy and guidance
- be in general conformity with local (borough-level) planning policies and only include proposals for an equal or greater amount of growth than is set out in local planning policies
- be subject to a sustainability appraisal, including a strategic environmental assessment (and where necessary a habitats regulations assessment).

Once prepared, the neighbourhood development plan and supporting information must be submitted to the Council for a 'validation check', before going through an independent examination.

If the examiner is satisfied with the proposed neighbourhood development plan, the Council must arrange for a referendum on the plan to be held. If the majority vote is in favour of the neighbourhood development plan, the Council must adopt the plan and it will become part of the development plan.

## **How will neighbourhood planning be resourced?**

The Government has already provided funding of £20,000 each to assist over 200 'front-runner' neighbourhoods. The Government has additional funds available to support local councils in helping

communities to undertake neighbourhood planning, but the future bidding process for these funds is not currently clear.

The Government has also provided funding for a number of community support organisations to help assist neighbourhoods. Contact details for these organisations are available on the Council's 'Neighbourhood Planning' webpage'.

The Council will be able to help assist in the preparation of neighbourhood development plans, however we have limited resources. Our focus will therefore be on those neighbourhood areas that are willing to embrace change and plan proactively for growth.

## **Do neighbourhood development plans have to be about growth? What about the quality of development and protecting the local character?**

The Localism Act includes a 'basic condition' that neighbourhood development plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Development Framework. This includes planning for at least the level of growth identified by the Council. A neighbourhood development plan could identify the particular locations where this development should go, or include policies to guide what that development looks like. It could not, however, impose such onerous requirements on developers that development would become economically unviable.

The Government has introduced a number of measures to incentivise local communities to embrace development. There are also other mechanisms by which local communities can ensure that the quality of development is appropriate to the local area (for example, that it reflects local character). An important mechanism will be the Council's own development management policies and supplementary planning guidance.

The Council is starting to think about what updated detailed development management policies for assessing development proposals across the borough should look like. We will be engaging with local councillors and local groups to ensure that these policies are appropriate and reflect local priorities across the borough.

## **What will the timeframe of a neighbourhood development plan be?**

It is likely that, in order to be most effective, neighbourhood development plans should set out a long term vision for the neighbourhood area. Timeframes are therefore likely to be at least five to ten years.

However, in areas where a neighbourhood forum prepares the neighbourhood development plan, it is not currently clear what mechanism there would be for reviewing the neighbourhood plan once the designation of the forum expires (after five years).

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

Preparing a neighbourhood plan will take a lot of commitment from the local community.

In areas where there is no town or parish council, the first step will be to agree with the Council a neighbourhood area and for a neighbourhood forum to be formally designated.

The time taken to prepare a neighbourhood development plan will also depend on how detailed the community want the plan to be. However it will take some time to collect local evidence, draft and consult on the proposed neighbourhood development plan and progress through the formal examination stage. For example, the Bookham Start Up Group estimates that it may take up to a year and a half from the neighbourhood forum being set up (May 2012) to the referendum on the neighbourhood development plan being held (end 2014).

## What weight will be given to emerging neighbourhood development plans?

As with local authority planning documents, the weight given to emerging neighbourhood development plans will depend on how far advanced their preparation is. In the very early stages of preparation, the plan may only be given limited weight when considering development proposals in the neighbourhood area. By the time the plan is going through the formal examination stages, it is likely that it could be given greater consideration.

## How will development proposals be assessed when there is no neighbourhood development plan in place?

Where there is no neighbourhood development plan in place, development proposals will continue to be assessed against local (borough) planning policies, as is the case at the moment.

The Council is starting to think about what updated detailed development management policies for assessing development proposals across the borough should look like. We will be engaging with local councillors and local groups to ensure that these policies are appropriate and reflect local priorities across the borough.

## Can a Residents' Association become a neighbourhood forum?

Certain conditions must be met in order for a local group to become a neighbourhood forum. These are outlined above (see 'Who can prepare a neighbourhood development plan'), but include having a written constitution, being representative of the local community, and being formally agreed by the local authority. A Residents' Association will not, therefore, automatically, be able to become a neighbourhood forum, but could be the starting point for discussions about neighbourhood planning in the area.

## What happens if the borough planning policies do not provide specific growth levels for a neighbourhood to plan for?

This may well be the case initially. The Core Strategy focuses on a number of priority areas for regeneration and growth (Redhill Town Centre, Horley Town Centre, Preston, Merstham and the two new neighbourhoods in Horley), and does not allocate specific levels of growth to other communities across the borough. Open lines of communication between local communities and the Council will help ensure that proposals for local neighbourhoods deliver the borough's strategic aspirations and are realistic and deliverable.

If you are thinking about preparing a neighbourhood development plan, or have any questions that are not answered in this document, please contact the Policy Team:

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01737 276000

A list of further neighbourhood planning resources is available at:

[http://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/planning/planning\\_policies/neighbourhoodplanning/index.asp](http://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/planning/planning_policies/neighbourhoodplanning/index.asp)