



**Local Heritage  
Engagement  
Network**

# **Toolkit**

**No. 10**

**Neighbourhood  
Planning: How  
to get involved  
(advice for the  
historic  
environment)**

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## Contents

### **This document is intended to be used by:**

- Individuals with an interest or expertise in the historic environment who are, or would like to be, involved in a Neighbourhood Planning process in their area,
- Local heritage/archaeology/history groups who would like to support or advise Neighbourhood Planning Forums or Parish Councils in their region,
- Individuals or groups who are commenting on consultations on a draft Neighbourhood Plan.

### **This document will:**

- Describe the basic background to neighbourhood planning and its relevance to the historic environment,
- Describe how neighbourhood plans could be useful for protecting archaeology,
- Give you information about how to get involved with existing neighbourhood forums,
- Provide links and summaries to 'general' advice documents from government,



## Neighbourhood Planning: Introduction and background

**Neighbourhood Plans, in their current form, were brought in in 2011 as a provision of the Localism Act. They are a positive element for community planning and have been widely taken up across the country.**

Neighbourhood Plans are a potentially powerful tool to pass down decision-making to a more local level and exert influence on the development of a neighbourhood area.

They can be creatively used to add protections for the historic environment and help local communities create a local planning system which is specifically built around local values, and reflects the cares and concerns of local people.

However, whilst there is basic guidance from Historic England and many local authorities about how to use the historic environment within a neighbourhood plan, this is often focussed on statutory designations, and there is often a lack of awareness among many archaeological and heritage groups as to the range of potential benefits of engaging with the neighbourhood planning process.

At the CBA, we have little knowledge of local people interested specifically in archaeology being involved in Neighbourhood Planning Forums and would like to increase this. We want to encourage more local historic environment groups and individuals to help advise or engage with neighbourhood planning processes.

### **Three good reasons to get involved in Neighbourhood planning:**

- **Neighbourhood planning is here to stay:** No political party wants to row back from the principles of devolved control which it puts in place.
- **The limits of what is possible are still being explored:** Locally specific policies could help you cover a huge range of things, from preventing encroachment of new development on historic sites, to helping to bringing specific historic buildings back into use.
- **It provides a real opportunity to affect change to your neighbourhood:** Both in terms of the direct way of influencing development proposals and in collecting funding contributions for local projects.

## **The basics of Neighbourhood Planning**

In simple terms, Neighbourhood planning is;

- A means for local communities to influence the planning process, by designing a specific vision, aims, and policies for their neighbourhood area
- A democratic process, with Plans required to be put to a local referendum before coming into force
- A statutory instrument, with greater force than parish plans or village design statements.
- A document that can last for up to 20 years.

Neighbourhood planning is not;

- A way to decrease the amount of development which happens in a region
- A way to give the final say to local communities
- A way to exempt neighbourhoods from any other local, national, or international policies

Neighbourhood plans are commonly used to:

- Allow communities to choose where new homes, shops and offices should be developed
- Develop transport, local amenities, employment, or heritage proposals
- Define what aspects of local character are most valued and influence the design of new development

### **Key information**

This toolkit does not intend to provide a detailed guide to how to engage in a neighbourhood plan. There are several comprehensive guides available for this purpose ([see section on where to find guidance](#)). However, for those new to the process of neighbourhood planning, it may be useful to provide a basic explanation of the process.

#### *1. Is a Neighbourhood Plan the right tool for you?*

It is important to note that producing a neighbourhood plan is not a small task. Unlike many projects it must be taken forward with substantial involvement and agreement of the entire neighbourhood. Thus, unlike many heritage or archaeology projects this is not something that can exist as a niche interest.

Neighbourhood planning is an issue of civic engagement and there is no substitute for the impulse of a community to genuinely grasp opportunities to be part of decision-making in their neighbourhood.

Whilst this process may take on a variety of themes, one of which could be archaeology or the historic environment, this should be considered as part of the broader work of improving the neighbourhood.

There is a wealth of relevant advice on placemaking and heritage which may be useful in culturing an approach to neighbourhood planning in this way and can help you to decide whether neighbourhood planning is right for you or what the best approach to being involved in the process may be.

### 1. *Designating a neighbourhood area:*

Any group of more than 21 people can apply to be designated as a Neighbourhood Forum. This is likely to be either;

- A parish or town council
- An existing community group
- A newly formed forum

Note: in this guidance, we refer collectively to these organising forums as 'neighbourhood planning teams'. All forms of team must be open to new members.

Neighbourhood areas have to be defined through an application process to the local council. In a parished area, this will often simply be the parish boundary, but may extend further. Areas will be checked by the local authority to ensure they make sense and do not overlap.

### 2. *Plan-making*

Entering into the neighbourhood planning process requires a lot of work. Policies must be evidenced and compliant with local, national, and international policies. [There is guidance available](#) on how to ensure this conformity and evidence.

Neighbourhood planning teams must undertake a rigorous programme of engagement with the local community and interest groups. The plan will need to demonstrate with evidence that it is based upon a complex understanding of local people's needs and wants and that the plan aims to reflect them.

Neighbourhood planning teams will need to decide what they want their plan to do, and develop a range of policies to satisfy those needs. There is no formal restriction on what can be included in a neighbourhood plan, so long as policies are in conformity with planning policy and do not require the creation of new mechanisms (e.g. the creation of a local list where there is not already one in place).

There may be ongoing roles for neighbourhood planning teams as areas with neighbourhood plans can claim funds from the Community Infrastructure Levy (see below), which is paid by developers who build within the area which can be directed to local project work.

### *3. Checks*

Once completed, neighbourhood plans are subject to a process of checks by the local authority and by an independent planning inspector. There will also be a public consultation.

Local residents and groups can comment on a draft plan at this consultation stage, which can be useful for anyone who has not been part of the production of a plan.

Whilst the majority of the formative work on a plan is done at an earlier stage, there are still opportunities to influence the plan or express concern with any existing policies and propose changes at this stage, particularly if these changes seek to ensure that the plan is in conformity with other local and national policies, or if the change would be likely to substantially increase public support for the plan.

### *4. Referendum*

After the check process is confirmed, the local authority will hold a neighbourhood referendum which must receive a majority in order to pass. It has not been uncommon for neighbourhood plans to pass with in excess of 90% approval showing that it is possible for an engaged democratic process to yield exceptional results at this ultimately devolved level. Many neighbourhood plan referendums have extraordinarily high turnout.

### *5. Additional work*

There is a potential to produce additional work around the creation of a neighbourhood plan. For example, in Wing, Buckinghamshire, following their successful neighbourhood plan referendum, the Parish Council established the Wing heritage group from the volunteers engaged with the Plan, and have undertaken a range of projects to advance knowledge of the area's heritage and archaeology, including successfully bidding for Heritage Lottery Fund money.

## **Other community planning tools**

There are other forms of community-level planning tools which may also be of interest of use to local groups. These include:

- Village design statements
- Parish/community plans
- Assets of community value/Community asset transfer
- Conservation Area designation
- Informal projects/agreements with local councils

Many of these tools are useful, depending upon how they are utilised by local authorities. However, neighbourhood plans are a part of the statutory development plan and therefore carry more weight than village design statements, or parish and community plans.

Neighbourhood plans also have a wider application than many other types of community involvement, like registers of assets of community value.

If you decide that a neighbourhood plan is the not the correct tool for you, you may wish to explore whether these other options may work for you.



## What can a Neighbourhood Plan do for heritage?

Heritage is likely to form a part of all neighbourhood plans, from what information is sought by Neighbourhood planning teams to inform understanding of the area, to what aims it identifies for the future and the ways the plan seeks to influence them.

Broadly speaking, heritage in neighbourhood plans can be used to:

1. Develop an understanding about the development of a place
2. Identify social and economic values which rely on heritage
3. Recognise and protect unique character and quality of place
4. Support regeneration
5. Boost the local economy and tourism
6. Increase community participation

It may be useful for Neighbourhood Planning groups to develop arguments based upon the ability of a heritage-based approach to changing the image and perception of a place, increasing environmental quality (by protecting what is valued, and improving what detracts), improve tourism and the visitor offer or help attract business and investment.

There is, however, a distinct difference between neighbourhood plans which are informed by heritage in a very basic way, and those which seek active policies to shape it, or even take it as a central guiding principle. It is helpful to break this down by what **must** be included, what arguably **should** be included, and what optimistically **could** be included in a plan.

### **What must be included?**

In order to pass examination by the Planning Inspector Neighbourhood Plans will need to demonstrate that;



- a) Sufficient regard is paid to statutory protections and local policies in respect of the historic environment.*

This means that neighbourhood policies should not conflict with the local plan, which may contain strategies or policies relating to site allocations, regeneration, town centre development, local heritage lists, or the (re)development of identified sites. Understanding this landscape of compliance may also require dialogue with local authorities to ensure compliance with emerging local plans.

- b) Understandings of statutory duty to protect and enhance heritage assets and national planning tests for sustainability*

Neighbourhood Plan policies must be in conformity with both the statutory regime for protection of listed buildings and scheduled monuments, as well as other designations (e.g. Registered Parks and Gardens, World Heritage Sites). This will mean ensuring that policies included within the neighbourhood plan do not conflict with [national statutory obligations](#) (which, among other things, affect what can be done to listed buildings with and without permissions) as well as national policy, most prominently the [stated aims of the National Planning Policy Framework](#) to ensure sustainable development in respect of the historic environment.

- c) Online Historic Environment Records have been consulted and that plans are aware of designated heritage assets.*

Most Plan groups will be expected to have consulted Historic Environment Records (HER – the local database of information held on the historic environment. See [here](#) for more information) to gather evidence necessary to have a suitable understanding of the neighbourhood and that the historic significance of these assets is known. (Note: This is the *minimum* that a group will need to do with HER data. See below for more details.)

### **What *should* be included?**

As part of a positive approach to utilising the historic environment as an element to influence the shape and direction of a neighbourhood plan, neighbourhood plan groups 'should';

- a) Consult Historic Environment Records, archives, and museums, both online and in person to develop strong understanding of historical development and significance of the local area.*

This point is a direct expansion of the point above, but rather than the absolute minimum necessary for compliance, neighbourhood planning teams would, in almost all cases, benefit from seeking to develop an understanding of their area from the HER data.

Data has shown that advice from local history societies has been extremely useful to groups in becoming aware of and usefully interpreting data on the historic environment.

- b) Setting out a historic character statement to inform the community vision and guide new development.*

An informal statement of how the historic environment is important to the neighbourhood, and how that influences the community's views on managing change to that landscape, *should* be part of any plan. Even ostensibly modern areas lacking in traditional historic buildings or listed assets will benefit from a character-based approach to understanding place. A good statement of character can be a way to effectively evidence a plan's approach to deciding where development should be sited or why certain infrastructure should or should not be built.

- c) Draw on local and national policies to inform and enhance delivery on policy goals at a neighbourhood level.*

Neighbourhood plans can encourage greater use of the HER resource, and promote access to and understanding of heritage information. They can, for instance, emphasise that the local community places a high importance on its heritage and thereby give material weight to proposals which reflect heritage values. This can be equally (or even especially) applicable in areas of more modern heritage, including post-industrial character areas, where heritage is not already as clearly protected through the planning system as it may be in typical 'chocolate box' type villages.

### **What *could* be included?**

Neighbourhood plans have enormous scope for putting in place innovative local solutions to planning issues. Some neighbourhoods may make heritage the centre of these solutions, others may have heritage as one supporting strand of a wider vision. However, there are few areas where there are no opportunities for heritage related impacts. Of course, it is up to each individual neighbourhood plan team to decide, based upon consultation, whether heritage protection or enhancement is what they want to use their plan for, but there are numerous opportunities for those who do wish to seek innovative heritage policies as part of their plan. A neighbourhood planning group may therefore consider;

- a) Setting out an in-depth report/statement on historical development and character, including design characteristics, and therefore construct development guidelines which reflect the most valued elements of the historic environment.*

By developing a strong heritage understanding of a local area, a neighbourhood plan can influence future change by setting criteria which respect community values and historic significance and contribute to creating and maintaining distinctive and sustainable neighbourhoods.

A neighbourhood plan could highlight local historic vernacular architecture and set a design policy which seeks to enhance character (e.g. by requiring new developments to mirror features like railings to complement existing materials and styles) or protect particularly dominant elements of the historic character, like particular street patterns, or important industrial buildings (see Wolverton neighbourhood plan, [below](#)).

A plan might also explore specific policies, for example, to set rules for heritage appropriate signage on shop frontages, set limits on the height of buildings, protect particularly significant views (e.g. of a church spire or a river), or protect undesignated assets with local significance and amenity, including green space (e.g. protecting green space around an ancient trackway).

In short, any policy which enhances the area's distinctive aspects, would contribute to a positive development strategy for sustainable development or the local economy, or which helps to deliver community ambitions for the improvement of the area could be considered.

*b) Identify specifically how heritage is important to the neighbourhood area, including contribution to economic and social benefits for the community.*

Does the town benefit from tourism, or is it an objective of the Plan to influence it? Is the neighbourhood's retail offer related to the character of the area's buildings and streets? Is there a local museum? The neighbourhood plan should seek to identify and influence the development of these benefits.

*c) Develop policies which utilise heritage as a way to create tangible benefits for communities or use heritage as a driver of economic development.*

Neighbourhood plan groups can devise policies which are designed to realise the potential of a neighbourhood to deliver social and economic benefits. This could, for example, be by encouraging retail developments on particular streets, potentially as a way to secure optimum re-use of historic buildings.

*d) By dictating appropriate use or regeneration criteria for particular sites or areas.*

Neighbourhood plans can set goals for conservation, put in place restrictions on use for assets, provide an encouragement for assets to retain existing uses, or

encourage the re-use of particular assets – particularly those which are ‘at risk’ to encourage bringing forward development plans.

These policies can be particularly useful in ‘transitional areas’, such as former industrial areas where traditional industries are being replaced by new uses.

*e) Other potential uses.*

There are many innovative ways to potentially use neighbourhood plans which have not yet been tested in practice. For example, [in one recent case, St Ives neighbourhood plan](#) put in place restrictions on the sale of second homes – causing a major shake up to the local planning orthodoxy!

It is important to note that an innovative group of local residents will be best placed to assess exactly what exciting opportunities may exist, based on local wishes. In theory, there are ways to promote community involvement in archaeological mitigation, or enhance local services and infrastructure. Think creatively and pursue your ideas with your local council. You never know what you may be able to make work!



## What can *I* do for my Neighbourhood Plan?

### **For groups:**

#### ***Offer to be an advisor***

Neighbourhood Planning Forums should approach key local stakeholders in preparing their plans. This could very well include local heritage and archaeology groups. However, we are not aware that many groups get involved extensively in this way.

A [2014 report](#) funded by English Heritage (now Historic England) concluded that “Neighbourhood Plan teams will rarely unlock the full potential of heritage information without further assistance and guidance from external organisations. Assistance from local societies, local planning authority staff and third sector and private organisations is commonly used and is a highly valued component of the plan-making process.”

A local archaeology group could assist a Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum by:

- Making the initial contact by writing to them to highlight the potential value of including historic environment policies in Neighbourhood Plans
- Offering to meet and discuss the local heritage/archaeology
- Providing a guided tour of the area to group members highlighting archaeology and heritage
- Helping teams to navigate and understand data on the historic environment, e.g. how to use online HERs, archives and museum collections, and how to interpret information.
- Assisting with exploring potential heritage projects for Community Infrastructure Levy funding, or link up networks to provide access to volunteers or community archaeology experience, etc.
- Promoting resources and advice from heritage bodies.
- Offer to send representatives to attend meetings as a liaison/advisor.

If you do not feel your group has the expertise to help with some aspects of this list, you can still get involved with engaging with the Neighbourhood Plan group

and liaise with the CBA to be put in touch with people who could help, or receive training from us.

### **For individuals:**

#### ***Join a Forum or Parish Council steering group!***

Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Planning Forums need skilled individuals to join their committees in order for a plan to be successful. If you have experience with archaeology or heritage – whether as a paid professional or amateur – you would be a valuable member of the group. If your experience is less, then you can still be a positive voice for including reflection on heritage in the application.

#### ***Attend community engagement events or workshops***

If you do not wish to be a full member of the plan group, you may still wish to be involved through the engagement processes that the group undertakes. These may take the form of events, focus groups, walks, or discussions. These formative events are a useful way to provide opinions about what matters to you and to share experience of the importance of archaeology and heritage.

#### ***Pursue a plan for your area***

To start from scratch, you will need to canvass opinion, or simply promote the option to your parish council (if you live in a 'parished' area – i.e. an area where there is a parish council). There is existing guidance on how to do this, for example, [here](#).

### **For all:**

#### ***Comment on consultations***

Commenting on the draft document during consultation is not an ideal way to influence content, as much of the work will have already been done, and there may only be appetite to consider minor changes, or changes where it is necessary for the plan to pass. Nonetheless, if you have not had any prior contact there is still a positive potential to engage at this stage.

You may wish to consider:

- Does the plan take proper account of the importance of heritage to the town's current state and future vision?
- Does the plan reflect advice given?
- Is the plan likely to lead to improvements in the historic environment?
- Does the plan reflect local attitudes and has it listened to advice?



## Advice for Neighbourhood Planning Groups

### **Establishing an evidence base**

Almost all neighbourhood plans will take an evidence base which will map designated assets such as listed buildings, scheduled monuments, and conservation areas. In some cases, where heritage is not one of the identified themes of a Plan, it may be judged that these sites already have sufficient protection and may only be directly referenced where necessary in order to ensure compliance with national policy, for instance, to ensure that a site allocated for development gives proper consideration to the impact of the proposed development on heritage assets.

However, by establishing a deeper evidence base, a far greater range of possibilities can be unlocked for a neighbourhood plan. For example, a group which undertakes a characterisation approach to understanding the historic environment, or which utilises historic maps to develop an understanding about an area's history and growth, may be given new insights on the current state of development.

The neighbourhood plan could assess evidence such as use trends in historic buildings, levels of vacancy, or desirability of historic properties in order to inform policies on re-use of buildings or regeneration.

### **Deciding what heritage means to local people**

One of the great advantages over other types of planning that neighbourhood planning has is that it is up to local residents what to include. For heritage, this allows communities to think beyond national designation criteria and other types of top-down heritage value.

For example, if your village has an identified 'character' which residents value, neighbourhood plans can identify the important components of this character and seek to have them preserved and enhanced by future development. This can mean, for instance, highlighting the continuity of industrial character across a defined area which may mean that policies to encourage the retention of unlisted buildings of character could be promoted, where without such a policy it may be that developers would seek to demolish all but the listed buildings on a site.

## **Community participation**

There are a huge number of potential ways to get community participation in heritage management through a neighbourhood planning process. You can undertake;

- Volunteer-led buildings surveys
- Place surveys
- Engage with owners and occupiers
- Assess use and viability of heritage assets
- Discuss community value of sites and places

## **Sustainability & 'mainstreaming' heritage**

It is extremely useful if heritage in neighbourhood plans is addressed as an integral part of wider planning and place-making. Heritage works best when it is considered to be part of what defines an area in the present, including how it is used for viable contemporary purposes (as shops, homes, or visitor attractions) and how it helps to shape modern character, works in relation to modern buildings, traffic, etc. and how influences the way that contemporary decisions about development and expansion are taken.

## **Using Community Infrastructure Levy to fund heritage projects**

Perhaps even more important that the potential to use neighbourhood planning to direct developments in a locally appropriate way, is the potential for communities to earn a share of the developer paid Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Where there is a Neighbourhood Development Plan in place this can be 25% of CIL money, which may amount to many thousands of pounds. Without a Development Plan, this money may be capped. In un-parished areas, you may need to check with your local authority about how to access the CIL funds.

There are many things that a neighbourhood CIL share could be spent on (including handing the money back to be spent on infrastructure which is the purview of local councils, such as schools or roads), but it may be very appropriate to spend some of the money on local heritage improvements or engagement opportunities, for example, funding a community archaeology project, providing money to help community management of a heritage asset (e.g. a graveyard or war memorial), fund the production of a visitor leaflet or heritage trail, or pay for tourist signage. These types of projects yield high value for money in terms of impacts on local engagement, sense of place, and sense of ownership, and can impact a local economy.



For a more detailed explanation neighbourhood planning CIL can be spent on by other groups there is the [advice on CIL levy](#). Heritage examples include funding a community hub and museum space, the installation of public art celebrating local heritage, and seeking environmental improvements in local historic character areas.



## Where to find guidance

**There is a huge amount of information and guidance available to those wanted to get involved with neighbourhood planning. Most of the guidance below is general advice, rather than specific advice about heritage and archaeology.**

There are a number of useful organisations and websites to be aware of:

- **Locality**
  - Neighbourhood planning pages:  
<http://locality.org.uk/projects/building-community/>
  - My community: <http://mycommunity.org.uk/take-action/neighbourhood-planning/>
  - Neighbourhood Planning Roadmap:  
<https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/create-neighbourhood-plan-step-by-step-roadmap-guide/>
- **National Planning Practice Guidance**
  - This is the National Planning Guidance produced by DCMS. It is therefore useful source material, although is not as use friendly as an entry level guide as the Locality Roadmap, referenced above.
  - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>
- **Planning Aid England**
  - <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid/neighbourhood-planning/>
- **Forum for Neighbourhood Planning**  
(<http://www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/>)
  - This site contains news on Neighbourhood Planning around the country, including a map of areas which are currently in the process of drawing up neighbourhood plans.
  - The site allows you to register for a bi-monthly email e-bulletin with the latest news on Neighbourhood Planning
  - It is an excellent place to get general advice and case studies on neighbourhood planning activity.
  - There is a forum, although activity levels on it are quite low.
  -

- **Local Authorities**
  - Many local authorities have their own guidance on neighbourhood planning. It is vital to consult this as it will stipulate any relevant local policies including where to apply and who to contact, including how to access resources.

### **Heritage specific guidance:**

- **Historic England:**
  - <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/planning/plan-making/improve-your-neighbourhood/>
- **Place-check:**
  - This tool is not strictly speaking about only heritage, but it a tool developed by Historic England which can be used to conduct a quick and simple assessment of the historic environment in your neighbourhood.
- **Historic Towns Forum:**
  - [This useful presentation by Dave Chetwyn](#), planning consultant and former Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation Chair provides useful advice on things to consider when thinking about heritage and neighbourhood plans

### **What is going on near me?**

To find out whether there are any plans in your local area you should get in touch with your local Council.

If you are a group which covers a wider area you should be able to ask for a list of areas which are preparing plans from each relevant authority.

### **Example plans**

A few examples of neighbourhood plans with good heritage policies include:

- [Wing, Buckinghamshire](#):
  - This group undertook an in depth assessment of local heritage, and
  - The plan also spawned the 'Wing Heritage Project' which has undertaken a range of local heritage and archaeology projects, aimed at uncovering more information about the village's past and setting goals of improving the village's heritage tourism offer.
  - The Wing Heritage Group website can be accessed [here](#).

- [Morpeth, Northumberland](#):
  - Morpeth took an approach to understanding place which recognised conservation needs and which emphasised the duty of care implied in protecting heritage assets in the process of enhancing local character.
  - The plan contained policies for heritage at risk
  - The plan contained recognition of local historic character and set out criteria for what would constitute over development
  - A useful heritage topic paper, which shows the process of consideration can be accessed [here](#).
- [Wolverton, Milton Keynes](#):
  - This plan shows how a neighbourhood plan group deals with a large and complex development site (in this case a dis-used railway works), setting principles for the redevelopment of the site in the context of the needs of the neighbourhood and the heritage significance of the site locally.
- [Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire](#):
  - A case study which shows the process of utilising historic data to underpin a neighbourhood character assessment. This was a useful tool to enable the group to evidence design policies which seek to protect and enhance historic character.
  - Information on the plan process can be read [here](#).
- [Duston, Northampton](#):
  - This case study, while in some respects lacking a detailed approach to heritage, sets out the principle of recognising character areas which are of local heritage value, despite not being designated as conservation areas, and sets policies for the improvement of these areas.
- [Baltic Triangle, Liverpool](#):
  - This emerging local plan is a case study which emphasises regeneration in an industrial area of and which looks at design and reuse of industrial buildings as well as having to relate to the adjacent World Heritage Site of Liverpool Historic Docks.
  - The plan is likely to bring forward specific policies for some high profile buildings in need of redevelopment.