Neighbourhood Planning - Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is a neighbourhood development plan?**

A neighbourhood plan focuses on very local areas and can be prepared by either a parish or town council or, in areas without a town or parish council, a neighbourhood forum. The plan is prepared with the assistance of the Council.

Policies included in a plan will need to be related to the use of land in the area, or to spatial matters (i.e. aspects that affect how a place works). The plan might specify, for example, what green spaces should be protected, where new shops, offices or homes should go and what they should look like. If adopted, it will form part of the overall development plan for Wakefield and be used when considering planning applications in the plan area.

2. **What is a neighbourhood development order?**

A neighbourhood development order can directly grant planning permission for certain specified kinds of developments within a neighbourhood area. Permission could be full or outline, could have conditions attached and could be site specific or grant more generalised development rights across the neighbourhood area.

3. **What is a community right to build order?**

The community right-to-build process is instigated by a ‘community organisation’ where the community decides to bring forward specific development proposals for the benefit of the community. This might include community facilities and affordable housing. Proposals which have the agreement of the local community through a ‘community referendum’, and meet minimum standards, will not need to go through the normal planning application process.

4. **What are the processes for preparing plans and orders?**

The processes for preparing neighbourhood development plans, neighbourhood development orders and community right-to-build orders are very similar. So, although the information provided here refers to neighbourhood plans, much of the information presented is relevant to the preparation of orders as well.

If you require further information on these orders please use the contact details provided in question 20 to contact the Spatial Policy team.

5. **What does a neighbourhood plan do?**

A neighbourhood plan gives local people a chance to create a planning document that guides and shapes development in their local area, and to influence what facilities are provided in the area as a result.

6. **What might a neighbourhood plan look like?**
It is up to each community to decide what to include in a neighbourhood plan and how much detail they want it to have. The plan will need to be related to the use of land in the area or to ‘spatial matters’ which are designed to ‘bring together and integrate policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they function’.

7. **What can be included in a neighbourhood plan?**

A neighbourhood plan must comply with a number of European Union Directives and be in line with both national policy (which is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework) and Wakefield’s development plan. When a draft plan has been prepared, an independent examiner will consider whether it is consistent with these requirements.

At various stages of the preparation of the plan there will be opportunities for people (not just local) to make comments on what is proposed for inclusion in the plan. Following the independent examination, a referendum will be held and the whole local community will have an opportunity to vote on whether or not to adopt the plan. If the plan includes things that the local people do not agree with then there is a risk that the majority may vote not to adopt the plan as a statutory planning document.

8. **Can development be stopped from happening in an area?**

Neighbourhood plans cannot be used to stop development in an area and should not promote less development than set out in the Council’s development plan.

9. **Who can produce a neighbourhood plan?**

Parish and town councils are regarded as ‘qualifying bodies’ and have an automatic right to produce a neighbourhood plan. In areas that do not have a town or parish council a plan may be produced by a designated neighbourhood forum made up of local people. Neighbourhood forums cannot be created in areas that have a parish or town council. Once designated, a neighbourhood forum also becomes a ‘qualifying body’.

10. **What is the process for starting a neighbourhood forum?**

Local people will need to decide which organisation should lead on coordinating the local debate. In some places, existing community groups may want to put themselves forward. In other places, local people might want to form a new group. In any case, the group must meet the same prescribed criteria.

The criteria for establishing neighbourhood forums are being kept as simple as possible to encourage new and existing residents’ organisations, voluntary and community groups to put themselves forward. A forum must consist of at least 21 members who live or work in the area or are an elected member for any part of the area. It is the role of the local planning authority to agree who should be the neighbourhood forum for the neighbourhood area.
It is the Council’s responsibility to keep an overview of all the different requests to do neighbourhood planning in their area. This includes checking that community groups who want to take the lead on neighbourhood planning meet the right criteria. The Council may refuse an application if, for example, the organisation is too small or not representative enough of the local community. A neighbourhood area can only be covered by one neighbourhood forum.

11. **What is a neighbourhood plan area?**

A neighbourhood plan area for a town or parish council would normally cover the whole parish. However, the area could cover a smaller area or more than one parish area, if this is justified and providing all the parishes involved agree to this. An application for a neighbourhood plan area has to be submitted to the Council for designation.

In unparished areas the process is initiated by a neighbourhood group. Careful consideration must be given to such neighbourhood plan areas to ensure that they do not overlap with adjoining neighbourhoods who also wish to prepare a plan for their area. They have to submit to the Council an application for the designation of a neighbourhood area at the same time as their application for the designation of a neighbourhood forum.

12. **Is it compulsory to produce a neighbourhood plan?**

Although every parish or town council will have the right to produce a neighbourhood plan not all will want to do so. It will be up to each parish or town to decide if a neighbourhood plan would benefit their area and this will depend on local circumstances.

13. **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 plan. However it is anticipated that on average the process from inception to adoption is likely to take around two years.

14. **How much work will be required to prepare a neighbourhood plan?**

The level of work required will largely depend on how much detail the plan goes into. This will be decided by the local community although there are minimum statutory requirements such as sustainability appraisal that will need to be completed. A sustainability appraisal is a technique used to assess whether the policies and proposals in development plan documents reflect sustainable development objectives, including social, environmental, and economic factors. The preparation of the plan and any supporting evidence will be the responsibility of the body preparing the plan.

The Council will have a duty to support and advise town/parish councils and neighbourhood forums that want to do neighbourhood planning. The extent of support and advice provided will be different in each area depending on the skills, resources and needs of the Council and the group preparing the plan.
15. **How much will it cost to produce a neighbourhood plan?**

As there is no fixed format or template for a neighbourhood plan the cost of preparing a plan is therefore likely to vary depending on the complexity and size of the proposed plan.

The cost of advertising, independent examination and referendum which will be paid for by the Council. The costs that will have to be met by the group preparing the plan may include preparing evidence (particularly if consultants have to be appointed), consultation, undertaking a sustainability appraisal and advertising/printing/distribution costs.

A plan will cost as much or as little as you want it to – it depends on your ambitions for its scope, its evidence base, the nature of your public engagement and the standard and style of production.

For example:

- One Parish Council spent a total of £4,220 with the majority of the money being spent on printing which cost about £3,500. Time-wise from designation to referendum was 15 months.

- Another Parish Council spent £10,450 with £6,500 of that being for consultants. Their plan took 11 months to reach referendum from designation.

16. **What financial support is available for the preparation of neighbourhood plans?**

The creation of neighbourhood plans is a partnership between the local community and the Council with the Council’s role being to advise and support the process. Support could include providing evidence, helping to procure consultants (but not paying for them), facilitating the public consultation and the arranging and holding of the independent examination and the referendum.

The Government provides funding to help those undertaking neighbourhood planning. Information can be accessed through the [My Community Rights](http://mycommunity.org.uk/programme/neighbourhood-planning/) link or by going to the website at: [http://mycommunity.org.uk/programme/neighbourhood-planning/](http://mycommunity.org.uk/programme/neighbourhood-planning/)

Further information will be provided in the ‘Latest Updates’ as it becomes available.

17. **Who decides whether the plan is the right one for the area?**

Community involvement is a very important part of the plan preparation. The Council has a duty to consult the wider community (including statutory bodies) at various stages in the plan preparation process to allow people to comment on the plan. When the draft plan is submitted to the Council it will have to be checked to ensure
that it is generally in line with local and national planning policies and any other relevant legislation.

An independent examiner is then appointed to check that it meets the right basic standards.

The final decision as to whether the plan is the right one or not lies with the people who live in the area covered by the neighbourhood plan. A referendum will be held asking one question with a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ answer:

“Do you want Wakefield Council to use the neighbourhood plan for [insert name of neighbourhood area] to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?”

For the plan to be adopted by the Council more than 50% of the people who vote must answer ‘Yes’ to the above question. If it is less than 50% then it cannot be adopted.

18. **How does a neighbourhood plan get adopted as planning policy**

If the plan achieves support from more than 50% of the vote at the referendum, the Council will adopt the neighbourhood development plan. Once a neighbourhood plan has been adopted it becomes part of the statutory development plan for Wakefield and will be used when considering planning applications alongside all other national and local policies.

19. **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.

20. **How do I get further information?**

If you require further information or wish to speak to someone about neighbourhood planning please contact us:

Spatial Policy  
Wakefield Council  
Wakefield One  
PO Box 700  
Burton Street  
Wakefield  
WF1 2EB

Telephone: 01924 306417  
Email: ldf@wakefield.gov.uk
Useful Websites and Documents:

Government Neighbourhood Planning website: http://www.neighbourhoodplanning.org/


Planning Portal – Neighbourhood Planning: https://www.planningportal.co.uk/info/200130/common_projects/42/neighbourhood_planning


CABE/Levett-Therivel and URS Scott Wilson - 'DIY SA': Sustainability Appraisal (including strategic environmental assessment) of Neighbourhood Plans: https://levetttherivel.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/diysa.pdf

Relevant legislation:


Relevant National Planning Policy