

Planning in your Neighbourhood



Who is this leaflet for?

It's for you - if you want to get involved in planning in your neighbourhood. You might be part of a community group, a local business, a ward councillor or a private individual.

If you care about where you live, you should care about planning. The town planning system is about stopping the wrong things being built in the wrong places and making sure that the right things are built in the right places.

If you want a say in your community's future, you need to get involved in the planning system. You already have the chance to influence the Council's local plan as it is written and you also have the opportunity to comment upon planning applications that affect you. Now you can also prepare a plan for your own local area.

If you are interested, this leaflet aims to give you the confidence to get involved.

What are neighbourhood plans?

A local plan for the whole town will be prepared by Stevenage Borough Council. But you can now draw up a neighbourhood plan for your local area. Both plans will shape what gets built in your neighbourhood: both will be used to determine planning applications. Neighbourhood plans will have the same legal status as the Council's local plan.

Neighbourhood plans can help to bring the right people together to get the things that you want locally. This might include tackling a local flooding issue, getting more affordable housing or developing more parks.

So, can we put anything in a neighbourhood plan?

Almost anything that uses land and needs planning permission can go into a neighbourhood plan. But you can only exercise control over those things that the law allows. So, you can control changes from a shop to a chip shop but not from an independent shop to a national chain store.

There are certain rules and processes that you will have to follow but, within reason, you will have the freedom to do what you want.



Isn't planning complicated?

There are specific processes that have to be followed and all the jargon can put people off. But we will explain the processes to you in simple terms and we will write our planning documents in plain English. If you need help understanding anything, we are here to help. There are lots of other sources of advice and support too. These are set out in our on-line guide.

How do I get involved?

In Stevenage, new Neighbourhood Forums will need to be created and there can only be one Forum per neighbourhood area. The Forum must have at least 21 people who live or operate a business within the area to be designated. The Borough Council will need to approve the creation of the Forum and there is a set of criteria the council intends to use for this purpose.

What will I have to do?

How deeply you get involved in the work of your local Neighbourhood Forum is up to you. Creating a neighbourhood plan will take up some of your time but how much time is difficult to predict. There will be work involved in creating the Neighbourhood Forum and deciding its aims and constitution.

When making the plan, the Forum will need to go through a process of evidence gathering, testing options, public consultation, policy writing and checking that the plan meets a variety of statutory tests. The plan will then need to be handed over to the Borough Council, independently examined and subjected to a local referendum before it can be adopted.

Are there other options?

If you think that a neighbourhood plan is not for you, you could get local people involved in something less formal but which still communicates the community's ideas about the future of your area. Other options include things such as Local Community Plans, Neighbourhood Development Orders or Community Right to Build Orders. You can read more about these in our detailed on-line guide.



What does a neighbourhood plan look like?

The plan will include maps and policies which detail how you want to see your local area develop. This might include land for affordable housing, land for new allotments or areas protected for wildlife. How long or short it is and what topics it covers are entirely matters for your Neighbourhood Forum.

Once the plan has been adopted, planning applications in your local area will have to conform to what your plan says. When the Borough Council determines planning applications it will have to take your neighbourhood plan's policies and proposals into account when reaching a decision.



How can I get started?

Firstly, talk to your local councillor. He or she may be able to help resolve your concerns. Then talk to your friends and neighbours. Do they share your concerns? Is there already a local group that you could join? Is there sufficient common ground between you and others to create a plan that is representative of the wider community in the local area?

See the step-by-step guide 'Planning in your Neighbourhood' on our website for lots of useful, detailed information. Now, its over to you...

Further information

See the detailed guide on our website or, if you have any specific questions, email planningpolicy@stevenage.gov.uk.