

Key stages for preparing a Neighbourhood Plan

Step 1 – Designate a Neighbourhood Area

To designate a Neighbourhood Area, an application must be made by a parish council or a neighbourhood forum (or a community organisation in the case of a Community Right to Build Order) to Stafford Borough Council. This must include a statement explaining why the proposed neighbourhood area is an appropriate area, a statement that the Parish Council is the 'relevant body' for the purposes of section 61G of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990; and a map with the parish boundary (or the part of the parish) indicated on it.

Step 2 – Publicise Neighbourhood Area

The Council publicises the application and statement across the Borough and invites representations from the general public before making a formal decision to designate the area.

Step 3 – Parish Council prepare Neighbourhood Plan

The parish council or neighbourhood forum now become the qualifying / responsible body for the Neighbourhood Plan and can now officially start to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan. It is at this stage the parish council may wish to develop a working group to prepare the plan. To start the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan, a Qualifying Body (QB) should think about what

resources they have i.e. staffing, funding and set out a realistic timetable in preparing your Neighbourhood Plan. Following this, a QB should carry out a robust community consultation to establish what the needs and aspirations of the local community are, involving key stakeholders (business, schools and local services) to help identify key priorities for a Neighbourhood Plan to address. It is good practice for groups to identify an issues and aspirations report to summaries key points which can be used for evidence later on in the stages.

Step 4- Building evidence for your plan

The independent Examination of a Neighbourhood Plan will expect any proposals and policies to be supported by a robust evidence base, if it is to be made. Therefore QB's should approach the Borough Council for guidance on what evidence exists.

QB's should review any relevant technical assessment to identify what future development and infrastructure is needed for the Neighbourhood Area and check to see if there are any links with the needs identified in the community consultation. Providing there is a link, technical evidence would help justify the need for a policy or proposal to deliver future development and help achieve a robust Neighbourhood Plan. Technical evidence can be obtained from the local authority and can include a number of studies i.e. a recent Strategic Housing Market Assessment, Strategic Housing Land Availability

Assessment, transport studies, or conservation appraisals.

Step 5 – Developing a vision, key aims and objectives

Identifying key issues and aspirations, can help set out a vision and key aims and objectives to include in a Neighbourhood Plan. This is not essential but it is good practice as it sets out a framework of how local needs and aspirations will be achieved. This exercise can also help inform options about the type of development that is needed and where, in order to address key issues that have been identified in the consultation.

QB's can start to see what proposals and policies will be required to deliver and support the Vision and aims of the plan. QB's may find that the aim of the Neighbourhood Plan can be achieved through a Neighbourhood Plan Order and not a Neighbourhood Plan. Please click on the hyperlink to learn more about a [Neighbourhood Development Order](#).

Step 6 – Writing the Neighbourhood Plan

There are no set guidelines for what a Neighbourhood Plan should contain, though it is likely that the plan will include a series of policies and or proposals to show where future development is supported and not supported. A Neighbourhood Plan should be easy to use and navigate with so that it is efficient in determining planning decisions. A proposals map is always useful to indicate what future development is supported and where.

In reviewing the evidence base, it is important that QB's are aware of what the Basic Conditions are and how they will be met because it is these that the Examiner will test throughout an independent examination. Therefore, it is good practice to assess existing strategic and local policy (the Plan for Stafford Borough) to understand where and what development is supported and to avoid repetition.

Neighbourhood Plan policies must relate to land use and development and seek to address the key issues identified from the consultation. It is important that proposals and planning policies are SMART; Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time sensitive. Please click on the following hyperlink to see a guide on [how to write planning policies](#).

Step 7: SEA Requirements

One of the basic conditions that will be tested by the independent Examiner is whether the making of the Neighbourhood Plan is compatible with [European Union obligations](#) (including under the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive).

After the QB are certain of the policies and proposals to take forward in a Neighbourhood Plan, the QB must circulate a draft Neighbourhood Plan to the Council at the earliest opportunity and request that a screening assessment is carried out on the draft plan to ascertain if any significant environmental effects are likely to occur as a result of the plan. The Council will carry out a screening assessment to determine if a Strategic Environmental Assessment will be required and invite representations

from Natural England, Environment Agency and Historic England on the assessment.

Where a Neighbourhood Plan is likely to have a significant effect on the environment a Strategic Environmental Assessment must be carried out and an Environmental Report must be prepared in accordance with [paragraphs \(2\) and \(3\) of regulation 12 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004](#).

Step 8 - Pre-submission Consultation

At this stage, a Pre-submission Neighbourhood Plan should be prepared for consultation. Under Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 Neighbourhood Plans are required to undertake a minimum of 6 week consultation inviting representations from local people, neighbouring councils and other statutory consultees.

The Regulations state Neighbourhood Plans must be:

- Publicised in a manner that is likely to bring it to the attention of people who live, work or carry on business in the neighbourhood area". The Parish Council needs to include:
 - a. Details of the Neighbourhood Plan proposals;
 - b. Details of where and when the Neighbourhood

Plan proposals can be inspected;
c. Details of how to make representations; and
d. The date by which any representations must be received, being no less than 6 weeks from the date of publication.

- Consult any 'consultation body' referred to in [Schedule 1](#) who may be affected by the proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan
- Send a copy of the Neighbourhood Plan to the Council.

It may be useful for the QB to consult on a summary of the Neighbourhood Plan which focuses on the proposals and policies instead of the whole Neighbourhood Plan.

Please note: Groups should consult the Borough Council before the final draft is publicised for consultation. This is to ensure the final draft including its proposals and policies are compliant with the Basic Conditions and there are no underlining issues or uncertainties.

Step 9: Submission of Neighbourhood Plan

Following the pre-submission consultation, the QB's should prepare a Consultation Statement, which should include the following details:

- Details of people and organisations consulted
- Details of how they were consulted

- Summary of the main issues and concerns raised through the consultation process
- Descriptions of how these issues and concerns have been considered and addressed in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The QB must also prepare a statement explaining how the Neighbourhood Plan fulfils the Basic Conditions. The basic conditions are set out in [paragraph 8\(2\) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#) and state that a Neighbourhood Plan:

- Must be appropriate having regard to National Policy
- Must contribute to the achievement of sustainable development
- Must be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan for the local area
- Must be compatible with human rights requirements
- Must be compatible with EU obligations.

The submission of the Neighbourhood Plan to Stafford Borough Council must include the following:

- A map or statement which identifies the area to which the plan relates
- A consultation statement: explaining the consultation undertaken in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan
- The proposed Neighbourhood Plan
- Statement of the Basic Conditions Statement

- A copy of a Screening Assessment or Environmental Report (if necessary).

Step 10 – Publication Consultation and Independent Examination

On submission of the Neighbourhood Plan and the associated documents stated above, the Council checks that the submitted documents satisfy the legal requirements before the Neighbourhood Plan is subject to a minimum 6 week public consultation.

During the consultation period, the Council will arrange to appoint an Independent Examiner in agreement with the QB. The Council will submit the Neighbourhood Plan and the associated documents along with the representations received for independent examination.

Please note: During the examination, the Examiner will test that the Neighbourhood Plan fulfils the Basic Conditions (as stated above) and nothing else.

The Examiner will issue a report for the Council to publish and consider. The Council must consider the Examiner's report and reach a decision whether to refer the Plan to public referendum or refuse the plan.

Step 11 – Referendum and Adoption

In reaching a decision, the Council will publish a decision statement and make arrangements to organise a public referendum. Not less than 28 days before the date of the referendum, the Council must publish on their website and make available an information

statement and specified documents in relation to the referendum. This information must be available throughout the referendum period.

Where a referendum results in a majority yes (over 50% plus 1) the Council must make (adopt) the Neighbourhood Plan as soon as possible, unless the Neighbourhood Plan is considered to breach EU obligations or Convention Rights.

Once the Neighbourhood Plan is made, it then becomes part of the Local Plan for Stafford Borough.