Paul Ainsworth, Chair of Pub Campaigns



What are Neighbourhood Plans?

Neighbourhood Planning was introduced In England under the Localism Act 2012 and empowers local communities to make Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) for their areas. These plans can be taken forward by the Town and Parish Councils or, where these don't exist, by specially-established Neighbourhood Forums.

The Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 included provisions to improve the adoption process along with other measures which give extra weight to Plans. The first stage in the process for those promoting the NDP is to agree the area it will cover with the Council which is their local planning authority (LPA). Next there will be evidence collecting and consultation leading to the drafting of the set of policies which will form the basis of the NDP. It will then be examined independently to make sure it has been correctly prepared, after which the wider community will be asked, through a referendum, to approve the Plan – to achieve approval at least 51% of those who vote in the referendum need to be in favour. The Plan then immediately becomes part of the LPA's Local Development Plan. This, in turn, means that the Plan policies have significant force and the LPA will be expected to decide planning applications in accordance with those policies.

It is important to distinguish between NDPs, which have statutory authority, and Village or Parish Plans, which are purely advisory.

What can be in one?

NDPs are concerned with the use and development of land in their area and associated social, economic, and environmental issues. They can deal with matters like housing, employment, transport and community life but can also just focus on a few issues of particular local importance. There are, inevitably, significant constraints on what an NDP can contain. In particular, they must be in "general conformity" with the strategic policies in the Local Plan for the area, as well as being consistent with national planning policy. Policies can't block development which would be in accordance with the Local Plan – but they can shape where such development would go and what it would look like. They can also expand on Local Plan policies.

The Story So Far

Neighbourhood Planning was slow to get going but is now picking up pace. As of April 2017, 2103 neighbourhood planning areas had been designated (i.e. stage one of the process), 680 full draft plans had been produced for consultation and 308 had been passed at community referendums and adopted. A map showing the locations of all the Plans and the stages they're at can be found

from: www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/about/npa_area_list

Potential Benefits for Pubs

NDPs can contain policies specifically about pubs or about community facilities in general, provided these don't conflict with anything in the Local Plan. Unfortunately, many Local Plans have rather feeble or woolly policies around protecting pubs/community facilities so the NDP offers scope to enhance them with more detailed requirements like proving nonviability before allowing change of use, how and where pubs should first be marketed as going concerns, availability of alternative facilities and so on. This could make it much more difficult for developers to obtain planning permission resulting in the loss of pubs.

Looking through the NDPs which have so far been adopted, there's a frustrating lack of such policies. The Plan for Lympstone, Devon says that local retail and meeting facilities meet an important need, especially for older people, and should be supported. Much Wenlock's states that proposals which would results in the loss of community facilities will not be supported unless specified conditions are met. Others are silent on the issue. Fortunately, two excellent Plans have recently been prepared in so we do now have a couple of (different) models which other can follow. The Plan for Epperstone in Nottinghamshire (still in draft at the time of writing) has strong policies on protecting community facilities, which includes the village pub – see https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B18_M8qhUvJBdGt1SHY3ZV9CbzA/view?usp=sharing. In Somerset, Freshford's Plan also has an effective policy on protecting community facilities like pubs. It can be found at: www.bathnes.gov.uk/neighbourhoodplans

CAMRA's Approach

We encourage our Branches to take a keen interest in Neighbourhood Planning taking place in their areas and to try and ensure that plans address the issues around protecting community facilities. Ideally you'd find a member living in the neighbourhood itself to front up this input but, if that is not possible, you can still comment as an interested party. Your local Council should be able to tell you about any activity underway in their areas or you can consult the map linked to above.

More Information

Several websites offer information and guidance on the neighbourhood planning process. The Forum for Neighbourhood Planning site – www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/home – is especially comprehensive.

Contact



If you need any advice or guidance on any aspect of involvement in the process, including suggested wording for policies, please don't hesitate to contact us:

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