



## Planning: What are 'Neighbourhood Plans'?

Neighbourhood plans represent a central part of the new Localism Act. According to the current Government, the plans will enable communities to have more control over planning and housing decisions in their local area by, for example, selecting where they want new homes and offices to be built, influencing the design of developments, and designating areas to protect from development.

However, Neighbourhood Plans must adhere to the policies and development plans set down by the relevant local authority. A community can approve an equal or greater level of development than that already outlined in the local authority's Local Development Framework [LDF] but it cannot approve less development.

In addition, in an important change to the planning system, local communities can submit Neighbourhood Development Orders [NDOs] outlining developments communities want to see. Any proposed development that is consistent with an order would not need to apply for full planning permission.

### How it will work

- In areas with a town or parish council, the Neighbourhood Plan is initiated by the council. In other areas, a suitably qualified body applies to become a neighbourhood forum covering a neighbourhood area. The local authority will approve and ensure that there is no overlap of neighbourhood areas
- The local community develops the Neighbourhood Plan setting out the general planning policies for development and land use in a neighbourhood. It is submitted to the local authority accompanied by a draft Neighbourhood Development Order



- An independent qualified person will check that the plan and the development order meet a number of criteria, e.g. local and national planning policies
- Once conditions are met, the neighbourhood development plan can be voted on in a local referendum. If proposals pass the referendum (achieve more than 50% of the vote), the local planning authority will be under a legal duty to bring them into force, and the Neighbourhood Development Plan will be a 'material consideration' when Local Authorities determine the outcome of planning applications in the area

### More information is available in:

[DCLG's Plain English Guide to the Localism Act](#)

[DCLG's Neighbourhood Planning](#)

[PAS Neighbourhood Planning: Frequently asked questions](#)

[Local Development Orders: Can they contribute to the new planning agenda?](#)



## Including wildlife in Neighbourhood Plans

There are currently no restrictions as to what kind of content can be in a Neighbourhood Plan. There is much scope and opportunity therefore, to ensure that wildlife, biodiversity and the environment are included in the neighbourhood planning process.

### Local communities can:

- Ensure that policies within the Neighbourhood development plan aim not only to protect important wildlife habitats and species, but to enhance existing areas and seek to identify and create new wildlife areas and corridors to link important habitats
- Ensure that conditions to protect and enhance wildlife are included within Neighbourhood Plans and Development Orders. This should strengthen the need for developers to make provision for wildlife within the development before they are granted full planning permission through a neighbourhood order

## 1. Where can I find out about my local wildlife and wildlife sites?

### Designated wildlife sites

There may be a number of sites in your area that have already been designated for wildlife either through legislation (statutory designations) or by local policy (non-statutory designations), i.e. local authority Local Development Framework documents. In many localities, local wildlife sites may cover a much larger area than statutory designated areas. You can use a number of resources to find out where they are:

- MAGIC (Multi-agency Geographic Information for the Countryside): mapping of statutory and non-statutory designations, e.g. Local Nature Reserves [LNRs], Sites of Special Scientific Interest [SSSIs], areas with public access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, habitats, important sites for birds and mammals etc.

- Local Authority websites: information on non-statutory designated sites may be provided via interactive maps (e.g. Doncaster Council), LDF documents
- Local Records Centres: these hold the citations (reasons for designation) and often more up to date information on local wildlife sites

Whilst statutory designations are protected by law, non-statutory designations such as Local Wildlife Sites [LWSs] are only protected by the planning system. LWSs are wildlife-rich sites which have been selected for their local nature conservation value. They vary in shape and size and can contain important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species. They play a critical conservation role by providing wildlife refuges, protecting threatened species and habitats, and acting as links and corridors between nationally designated sites such as nature reserves and SSSIs. Neighbourhood plans are therefore vitally important in protecting, enhancing and linking up these important sites.

Local communities play an important role in ensuring the protection of designated sites by ensuring that policies to protect them are included in Neighbourhood Plans. For example, by:

- requiring that potentially damaging developments are steered away from such areas
- implementing 'buffer zones' around sites to minimise the impacts of nearby developments
- identifying opportunities to create wildlife corridors between sites

### Non-designated wildlife sites

Sites and areas without designated nature conservation status may still be important for wildlife, particularly in a local context. Through Neighbourhood Plans these areas (and areas with potential to support wildlife) could be formally identified and provision made for habitat protection, enhancement and creation schemes or policies. The National Planning Policy Framework



[NPPF] provides protection for Local Green Space. Local Green Space does not have a single definition but it must be 'in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves', 'local in character', 'not an extensive tract of land', 'demonstrably special' and of 'local significance' to the community. Examples of local significance include 'richness of its wildlife' alongside beauty, tranquillity, recreation and historic values. If you live near such a site that is important for your community it may be possible to get it into your local plan.

## Useful resources include the following:

- UK Biodiversity Action Plan: the UK BAP describes the biological resources of the UK and provides detailed plans for conservation of these resources. Action plans for the most threatened species and habitats have been set out to aid recovery
- Local Biodiversity Action Plan: Check to see if your local authority has a Biodiversity Action Plan, a document which identifies certain habitats and species as local conservation priorities
- MAGIC (Multi-agency Geographic Information for the Countryside): information can be found on rural land-based schemes, with which local landowners are receiving government funding to manage their land for wildlife, and also on the habitat inventory which indicates potentially important habitats such as ancient woodland
- Local communities may also want to protect features such as allotments, gardens, public greenspace, ponds, wetland habitat, and hedgerows

## Protected species

Some species of animals and plants are protected by international and national legislation due to their significance or vulnerability (see our [planning leaflets](#) for more information). Often, the habitat that supports the species is protected as well. A local planning authority has a duty to take the presence of a protected species into account when considering a planning

application. However, through forward planning and the Neighbourhood Plan it may be possible to identify habitat creation and enhancement opportunities for these species that would maintain or increase their population status in the local area.

## Good resources in this regard include:

- You can obtain records of protected and notable species in your area through your [local records centre](#)
- Local wildlife groups e.g. bat or bird watching groups are likely to have a great deal of knowledge on areas important for particular species in your locality such as locations of important bat roosts, rare breeding birds etc.

## 2. How can my Neighbourhood Plan contribute to conservation on a bigger scale?

Once you have identified important areas for wildlife, try to take a strategic outlook, and consider opportunities to link wildlife sites, habitats and areas of greenspace together in your neighbourhood area, and also adjacent areas with wildlife corridors (benefiting wildlife on a larger scale).

Wildlife corridors are areas of habitat connecting wildlife populations normally separated within the landscape, so that animals can move between them. Corridors can include: hedgerows, areas of scrub, drains, wildflower margins and grass strips which have not being mown.

## Useful resources here include:

- [The Wildlife Trusts: A Living Landscape](#)
- [B-Lines](#)
- [Natural England's Green Infrastructure Corridors](#)



### 3. How can my Neighbourhood Plan incorporate sustainable development?

There is no reason why, even in areas that may be allocated for development that wildlife cannot benefit. Communities could specify, within their Neighbourhood Plans, that developments in specific areas or of a specific type incorporate wildlife enhancement measures. Even small scale developments could contribute significantly to creating and enhancing local wildlife habitat, for example:

- Including bird and bat boxes on new buildings
- Using native plants in landscaping schemes
- Using climbing plants on walls which can provide shelter and foraging opportunities for wildlife
- Adding a green roof to new buildings, e.g. Sheffield City Council have a special [habitat action plan](#) for green roofs
- Creating new habitat such as woodland, wetland, wildflower meadows or other wildlife habitats
- Creating sustainable urban drainage schemes which have wildlife benefits

### Useful resources include:

- [Local Authority websites](#): Some local authorities have produced Supplementary Planning Documents that outline good practice guidelines in terms of developments and wildlife (e.g. Doncaster)
- Biodiversity for Low and Zero Carbon Buildings: A Technical Guide for New Build
- Biodiversity Planning Toolkit <http://www.biodiversityplanningtoolkit.com> (particularly the forward planning section)
- PAS 2010: Planning to halt the loss of biodiversity, Biodiversity Conservation Standards for the planning system in the United Kingdom. This is guidance issued by the British Standards Institution in 2006
- Natural England [Standing Advice](#)
- Guide to Green Infrastructure [http://www.ywt.org.uk/sites/yorkshire.live.wt.precedenthost.co.uk/files/TWT%20Green-Infrastructure-Guide-TCPA-\\_0.pdf](http://www.ywt.org.uk/sites/yorkshire.live.wt.precedenthost.co.uk/files/TWT%20Green-Infrastructure-Guide-TCPA-_0.pdf) or as a download from the planning page
- Susdrain website <http://www.susdrain.org/> which has some excellent information on drainage