

Neighbourhood Planning: Basics [July 2026]

Choosing the 'right tool for the right job'

A Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP, or NP) could be the answer but, if the issues your community want to address do not relate to land use planning, there are other community-led solutions that may be more appropriate.

NPs should set out a **positive vision** for how the designated area can develop in ways that meets identified local need. They can be prepared by a single town or parish council, or by a group of parished areas working together. They can identify and allocate site(s) for new homes, employment, or community facilities, and can also offer protection for important local green spaces etc.

Unlike a Parish Plan or Village Design Statement, adopted NPs have statutory weight. They become part of the 'development plan' and are used to help determine planning applications where relevant.

NPs CANNOT be used to stop development.

They must meet a number of test (**the Basic Conditions**). These include * Having regard to National Policy. * Compliance with strategic elements of the Local Plan. * Contribute towards achieving sustainable development. * be compatible with EU obligations.

It is a regulated process. The key stages are set out overleaf.

On average, they take 2 to 3 years to complete. As the relevant LPA, we have a duty to support you, and we are also responsible for organising and paying for the plans examination and the referendum.

At the outset, the majority of the work and the cost of this falls to you. You can use your 'Neighbourhood CIL' to help fund your work.

Think carefully about ... ***"What can our NP do to add real value at the local level?"***

Our webpages contains links to all the NPs being prepared across our two districts:

- <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning>
- <https://www.babergh.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning>

Have a look at the '**toolkits**' published by MHCLG:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/neighbourhood-planning-toolkits>

Planning Practice Guidance is also worth looking at with its helpful Q&A format:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#what-is-neighbourhood-planning>

STAGE 1

- **Designation of N'hood Plan Area (Reg 5)** - as the 'Qualifying Body' only a Town or Parish Council in Babergh / Mid Suffolk can make an application to designate a NP Area. For single parishes, the area can usually be designated without the need for consultation.

STAGE 2

- **Preparing the draft N'hood Plan** - Groups typically employ a consultant for this stage. It is all about community engagement, evidence gathering, and writing the draft plan. BMSDC's role is to provide help and support, but not to do the work for you. **This is also when your NP gets screened to assess its environmental impact.**

STAGE 3

- **Pre-submission publicity & consultation (Reg 14)** - the Town / Parish Council consult on its draft Plan for a minimum period 6-weeks. As a statutory consultee, BMSDC and others will respond highlighting any concerns etc. This stage may have to be repeated.

STAGE 4

- **Submission of N'hood Plan (Reg 15 & Reg 16)** - the Town / Parish Council formally submit their NP to BMSDC. We carry out various checks prior to consulting on the submitted plan for a minimum 6-week period. At the end of this consultation you will be given the opportunity to respond to any new issues raised by others.

STAGE 5

- **Independent Examination (Reg 17)** - Organised and funded by BMSDC. The Examiner will consider whether your Plan meets the Basic Condition tests. It may be accepted as is, accepted with need for modification, or be rejected. 'Post-exam' NPs carry significant weight in planning terms.

STAGE 6

- **Referendum (Reg 18)** - Organised and funded by BMSDC. At least 28 working days notice required. The question asked is: 'Do you want [n] Council to use the neighbourhood plan for [n] to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?' **It is a simple 'Yes / No' vote.**

STAGE 7

- **Making (adoption) of N'hood Plan (Reg 19 & 20)**. If the Referendum delivers a majority 'yes' vote, BMSDC are obliged to formally 'make' (adopt) your NP as part of our Development Plan, and to use when we determine relevant planning applications in the designated area.