

What is a neighbourhood plan?

A Neighbourhood Plan is a community-led framework for guiding the future development, regeneration and conservation of an area. It may contain a vision, aims, planning policies, proposals for improving the area or providing new facilities, or allocation of key sites for specific kinds of development. It may deal with a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues (such as housing, employment, heritage and transport).

A Neighbourhood Plan will be part of the statutory development plan for the area. This statutory status gives Neighbourhood Plans far more weight than some other local documents, such as parish plans, community plans and village design statements.

Why do we need one?

Having a Neighbourhood Plan helps to make it more likely that our area will remain a lively, diverse and vibrant area into the future. The policies in the Plan will be devised to protect the things we as a parish value. Without a Plan the future of our area would be determined by Durham County Council and every planning application in our area would only be assessed against the national and district policies, taking no account of our local housing needs, parking and traffic issues, and all the other policies likely to be included in the Plan.

Many other parishes in County Durham and neighbouring parishes are working on their own Neighbourhood Plans and there is a possibility that developers could in future begin to take advantage of areas without one in force. It is vital that we ensure the future of our parish is in the hands of our community and that our voice is heard so we that can protect the quality of life we currently enjoy and ensure the parish remains a vibrant, beautiful place to live for the next generation.

Do other neighbourhood plans exist across Durham County Council?

Great Aycliffe, Whorlton and Sedgefield currently have adopted neighbourhood plans and nearly all of our neighbouring parishes are undertaking plans.

How long does the process take?

It is likely to take around two years however the parish council has been working on gathering evidence and information for the past year so we are well into the process.

Can I contribute?

Volunteers are also needed to help with tasks ranging from leaflet delivery through to contributing on a particular area of the NP. Enthusiasm is often more important than particular skills. To express an interest please email our clerk at gainfordlangton@aol.com .

Is this government's latest attempt at giving power back to the people? Does this initiative have longevity?

The Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 has elevated the role of neighbourhood plans. The Act means that neighbourhood plans have now become part of the development plan as soon as they have been approved by local people and businesses in a referendum, without having to be brought into legal force officially by the relevant local planning authority. This initiative is here to stay.

Can the neighbourhood plan be used to allocate land for green belt?

Neighbourhood plans cannot alter green belt policy. They cannot seek to extend green belt boundaries or allocate areas of land for development within existing green belts.

Neighbourhood plans can identify Local Green Space. Designating land as Local Green Space, local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances. However, plans must identify sufficient land in suitable locations to meet identified development needs and the Local Green Space designation should not be used in a way that undermines this aim of plan making.

How important are my views?

Your views are vital and will play a fundamental role in the development of the neighbourhood plan. Those that live and work within the Parish know the area better than anybody else.

As part of the submission, we also have to submit a Consultation Statement. This will demonstrate how engagement with the community and others has shaped the development of the neighbourhood plan.

What sort of things can a neighbourhood plan contain?

It cannot be used to prevent development, although it can be used to guide where development takes place, what sort of development it is and what it looks like. It can also be used to protect important local open spaces and facilities such as community centres.

Durham County Council's Local Plan has been delayed, how will that affect our plan?

The Government wants local councils to get plans in place without delay to reflect the development needs of their area. Durham County Council has advised that we progress with a neighbourhood plan.

Will it make a difference?

Neighbourhood Development Plans when adopted carry the same legal weight as the adopted Local Plan. They will be used side by side when officers come to determine planning applications in these areas. It allows us to ensure our community's voice is heard in planning decisions.

Will this replace our Parish Plan?

A lot of the content that was in the 2008 Parish Plan will directly inform the evidence base for the neighbourhood plan. Parish Plans are useful but are not a 'planning tool' unlike a neighbourhood plan and have no statutory basis.

What timeframe will it cover?

Neighbourhood planning provides the opportunity for communities to set out a vision for how they want their community to develop over the next 10, 15 or 20 years in ways that meet identified local need and make sense for local people. They can put in place planning policies that will help deliver that vision.

How will it be made real?

Once completed the plan will be subject to a parish referendum and if successful will be a legal entity.