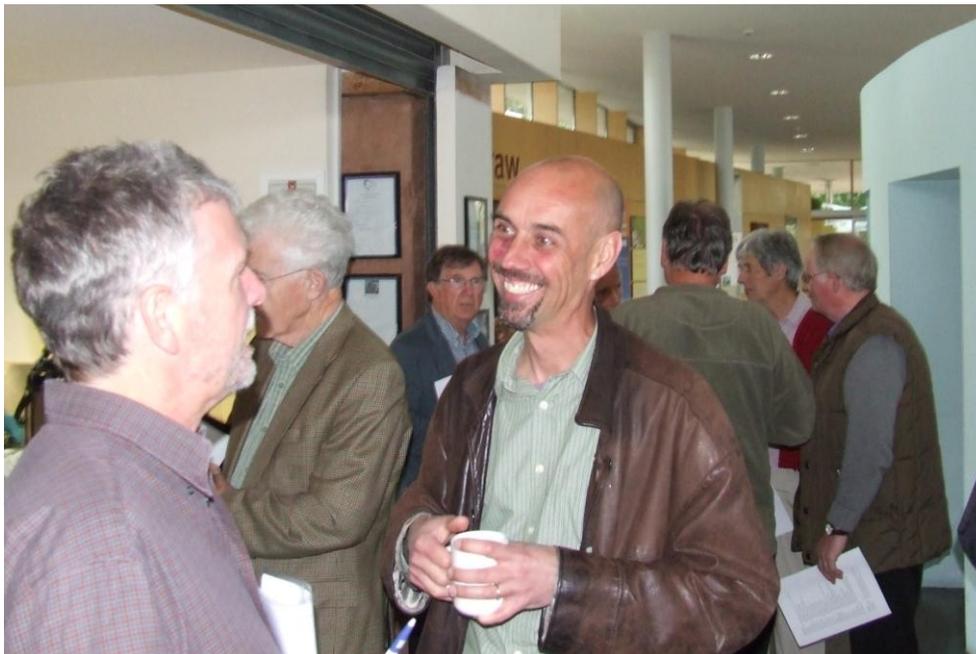


Forum Event Report

Neighbourhood Planning – Why & How?

25th September 2012

32 people, including representatives from 15 towns across Somerset, attended this event at the Genesis Centre, Somerset College, Taunton.



Speakers and attendees networking before the presentations

First to speak was [Ann Rhodes, Policy Officer \(Planning & Development\) at Taunton Deane Borough Council](#). [You can view Ann's presentation here...](#)

She outlined the various ways that communities can influence development, Neighbourhood Planning (NP) being one of these. She reminded attendees that it is the Core Strategy which set out principles regarding the development and use of land in a local planning authority's area, such as the amount of development for each locality. The Site Allocations Development Plan allocates sites for housing, employment and other land uses, and identifies planning designations such as Wildlife sites or Protected Open Space.

These documents (part of what was formerly know as the Local Development Framework, but can be combined to form the new Local Plan) are led by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) but communities should be involved in shaping them. How is set out in the LPA's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), but also speak to your Planning Policy Officers. For example, TDBC is involving communities in a review of settlement boundaries over winter 2012/13. This isn't set out in the SCI because it comes before any formal consultation, which is covered by the SCI.

Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP's) cannot contradict local planning policy; so they can not be used to stop development or argue for less, they can allocate more development and/or add detail to the existing planning policy, for example in terms of the design of a development if appropriate. If prepared according to the Regulations, pass independent examination and a majority support the document in a referendum they will become local planning policy and a statutory document for planning application decisions.

The Statutory minimum of support that Local Planning Authorities (LPA's) have to provide to Neighbourhood Planning bodies is set out in the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations;

- Ensure that the "qualifying body" meets the criteria set out in the Act
- Designate the neighbourhood and/or business area
- Publicise the name of the "qualifying body", map which identifies the area and name of the neighbourhood area.
- Publicise the Plan for pre-examination Consultation for 6 weeks, with representation forms, guidance notes, details of where it can be viewed, notify any statutory consultees and those on the consultation statement;
- Appoint and pay for an Examiner
- Publicise Examiners recommendations and LPA decision on Plan
- Pay for referenda
- Adopt Neighbourhood Plan



Ann presenting – view her presentation above

It is early days for Neighbourhood Planning; as a result it's not clear how successful they will be. They do have potential, their scope is limited, but the signs are encouraging that this can strengthen community involvement in the planning system but communities need to be sure that they are the right tool for what they want to achieve.

There are other opportunities to influence development;

Community Plans are much wider in scope than NDP's, are not part of the statutory planning system so can encompass a wider range of things both social (environmental issues, sense of community, health and well being etc) and land-use (allocation, type and scale of development) based. They can influence planning policy by contributing to the Sustainable Community Strategy, which is part of the evidence base for the Core Strategy/Local Plan. If prepared correctly Community Plans (or specific documents based on a Community Plan) could be used as Material Considerations in planning application decisions, they would not be statutory documents as Neighbourhood Plans are but they could be advisory documents.

Town or Village Design Statements have a similar status to Community Plans, unless adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents. Supplementary Planning Documents are compliant with planning law and are often Planning Authority Officer led.

Engaging directly with developers (including Housing Associations) is a worthwhile activity though can vary widely in difficulty. This may be a way of influencing development if your LPA already has a Core Strategy and Site Allocations Document adopted, making them statutory planning documents, and they will only be amended at a review, usually 5 years after adoption, and then only if there is evidence which shows there is a need to amend a policy or allocation. Speak to your LPA about engaging directly with developers, they can advise you.

For all of the above, communities should be aware that most Local Authorities resources are stretched in this economic climate. This means they will unlikely be able to attend every Parish Council Meeting or hold a week long exhibition in your community on the emerging local planning policy. At the very least they should be able speak to you and advise how you can effectively influence development.

You can read information about [TDBC's approach to Neighbourhood Planning here...](#)

Julian Mellor from 2MD Ltd and Positive Development Trust then briefed us on the progress to date of the Lynton & Lynmouth Neighbourhood Plan. [View Julian's presentation here...](#)



Julian Mellor, 2MDLtd and Positive Development Trust

Within the Exmoor National Park, Lynton has a population of around 1500 but the popular seaside village of Lynmouth has only 80 residents, only one of whom is a child.

The initial driver for the Plan was the need outlined in the Community Plan for affordable housing (the twin communities took part in the Market & Coastal Towns Initiative in 2006). Positive Development Trust, which is based in Lynton and develops low cost housing in rural areas, instigated the Neighbourhood Planning process with Lynton Town Council and Exmoor National Park. The bid was successful and the National Park as planning authority was awarded £40,000; some of it is being spent on National Park Officers who are working on the Plan, some to Positive Development Trust and some will be retained for the examination and referendum costs.

To ensure the process was community-led, the project steering group held a launch with 15 Neighbourhood Representatives who both promote the process and are a channel to feed back information. A survey was used, which had only 5 questions, all of which were about housing. There were 125 responses, a moderate rate of around 12% of the population.

Another way for residents to input is the website, which includes a feature to locate land that may be available. View the Lynton & Lynmouth Neighbourhood Planning website [here...](#)

Julian said that checking your findings is key; the survey results (which showed the need for a broader approach than just local housing needs) were shown to residents and comments requested. Following this, a draft Plan was created. This is being written by Positive Development Trust's Planner – the document has to be in the technical language of the planning system.

He feels that the initial narrow focus of their Plan was a strength as is a focus on issues that the town can influence and deliver. Furthermore, the NDP is just a policy plan – the most important document will be the Delivery Plan that shows how development will be achieved.

Tim Cook, Community Development Officer at South Somerset District Council, then concluded the presentations with a look at the Queen Camel Neighbourhood Development Plan. [You can view Tim's presentation here...](#)

Queen Camel is a village of around 1000 people. It completed its Parish Plan in 2005, and the Parish Council set up working groups on the themes identified in the Plan. Their NDP is building on the work already completed in the Parish Plan – this included a need for affordable housing, to relocate the school to a better site, reuse the existing school building and relocate the Community Centre.

Tim and the Fronrunner steering group used Planning for Real as a method to engage residents and identify the key issues. This involves building a scale model of the locality and adding comments & suggestions on notes on the map.

Alongside this, a Detailed Housing Needs Survey was conducted (by who?); 20 affordable homes and 2 market value homes was the amount identified.

With these two elements completed, the preferred options were drafted and consulted on. At the same time, a Community Land Trust was established in the village, which could be the vehicle to deliver the housing.

Tim has some concern that the NDP route puts 'all the eggs in one basket' – increasing the risk to the individual projects – but that by taking the opportunity that arose with the Frontrunner status to engage the community and focus on the issues, a good deal of work has been completed and the various projects are moving forwards.

Mark Robertson of the Lymptone Neighbourhood Planning group in East Devon joined the speakers panel to answer questions;

- *Does the Dawlish experience mean there is no point in doing an NDP unless there is an adopted Core Strategy?* It was acknowledged that the Dawlish frontrunner had intended the NDP to influence the emerging Core Strategy; as there was no adopted Core Strategy the Examiner had no option but to reject it.
- *Neighbourhood Development Orders – are these for a single site only?* Matt Day agreed to research this: "The order may make provision in relation to all land in the neighbourhood area, or any part of that land, or a site in that area specified in the order." ClarksLegal.com "A 'neighbourhood development order' is an order which grants planning permission in relation to a particular neighbourhood area specified in the order (a)for development specified in the order, or (b)for development of any class specified in the order." Legislation.gov.uk
- *How will it work if neighbouring parishes want to do NDP's?* Nothing stopping them, though it may be more sensible for a cluster of parishes to undertake one. One Parish would have to be the lead Council for the application. Eden Valley in Cumbria has a Neighbourhood Plan area of 17 parishes.
- *Local Authority in Sidmouth wants to sell off 2 sites it owns; community wants the sites used for specific purposes. Example of conflict between LA wants and community needs as evidenced in Neighbourhood Plans.*
- *What is the latest Frontrunner round about?* Successful applicants can apply for up to £30k, and have up to 18 months to deliver an NP process. Existing Frontrunners can also apply for some of the funding.

My observations; NP groups should use evidence of community needs from existing Community Plans and other community-led documents rather than reinventing the wheel; identify what your aim is and choose the most appropriate tool to achieve that (one of which are NDP's).

Many thanks to all participants.

Matt Day
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