

# Planning for the environment at the neighbourhood level

The Environment Agency, English Heritage, Forestry Commission and Natural England are the statutory environmental bodies that deliver the Government's work to protect and improve the natural, built and historic environment.

Neighbourhood planning is a new way for communities to shape the future of the places where they live and work. This advice note is for community groups and parish / town councils starting work on a neighbourhood plan, neighbourhood development order, or Community Right to Build Order. It covers:

- ideas on how to improve your local environment through neighbourhood planning
- where to go for information about your local environment
- information on environmental assessment
- when to consult us.

## Starting points for thinking about your local environment

The first point of contact for any neighbourhood planning is your local authority (council). Drawing up a neighbourhood plan is an exciting opportunity to think about improving your local environment.

**You could protect and improve environmental assets and places valued by local people** such as archaeology, historic buildings, green spaces, Local Nature Reserves, and Registered Parks and Gardens. This could include maintaining sites and their heritage assets, promoting the repair and re-use of redundant historic buildings, opening up new opportunities for recreation, access and leisure, and designating Local Green Spaces.



### Improving local heritage within the community

Arnos Vale is a 45-acre cemetery in the centre of Bristol and, is one of the best examples of a Victorian 'Arcadian' garden cemetery. Opened in 1839, it remains a working cemetery and also a heritage attraction and highly valued green space. The cemetery was passed to the Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust in 2003 after falling into decay and closing. Investment was secured from Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and other charitable funders and matched in volunteer hours. Since then the restoration programme has restored some of the listed buildings and monuments, and the Estate is now well managed with habitats and wildlife conserved. Visitor facilities together with learning and interpretation resources have been developed to promote the history, landscape and biodiversity of the site.

**Did you know?** Local Authorities maintain a Historic Environment Record (often available online) with details of all designated heritage assets and other known archaeological sites, historic buildings, landscapes and sites of local value.

**You could identify opportunities for new green spaces or improvements to public space through new development.** This could include linking open spaces to make 'green corridors' for people and wildlife, planting trees, or making improvements to local waterways. You could also encourage good design to ensure that new development reflects and complements the character of the area.



### Adapting to climate risks and creating green space

Mayesbrook Park in East London is a 45 hectare park built in the 1930s, which has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site. Underused and in an area of high social deprivation, it was in a poor condition. Local partners and the community worked together to redevelop the site as a Climate Change Park, to help the local community protect themselves from the effects of climate change. Works including river restoration, wetland creation and tree planting are underway. These improvements will reduce flood risk to homes, create high quality habitat for wildlife, and provide an education and recreation resource. The planned improvements will also help to cool the air, provide clean water and shade.

**Did you know?** Green spaces can attract investment. Public funding of £425,000 in Portland Basin Green Business Park secured over £1.8 million of private investment due to landscaping improvements (CLES, 2007). Many local authorities have green infrastructure plans that tell you more about local green spaces and practical ways to make the most of them.



### Reducing flood risk and improving water quality

Lamb Drove in Cambourne, South Cambridgeshire is a residential development of 35 affordable homes built by Cambridge Housing Society. It successfully showcased sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) as a viable and attractive alternative to more piped drainage systems. The SuDS measures included: water butts; permeable paving; a green roof; swales; detention basins; filter strips; and a retention pond. The scheme has reduced the impact of development on flood risk and improved water quality. The scheme resulted in an enhanced landscape for local residents and improved biodiversity and ecology. For examples of SuDS schemes see: [www.ciria.com/suds/case\\_studies.htm](http://www.ciria.com/suds/case_studies.htm)

You could help your area to manage environmental risks and improve its resilience to climate change through neighbourhood planning. By highlighting local problems and developing policies for land use, you could help your community to manage the risk of flooding by providing landscaping to manage and store water, and by promoting the use of sustainable drainage systems. Planting trees helps to create green spaces can store water, and provide shade for people and wildlife.

**Did you know?** 3.8 million properties could be susceptible to surface water flooding in England and Wales, including around one million also at risk from rivers or the sea.

**You could also help your community save money** through sustainable construction. Neighbourhood planning is an opportunity for communities to encouraging efficient water and waste management systems in new buildings, and use locally sourced wood fuel for heating. You could also help to promote the use of sustainable materials in construction, and encourage energy efficiency measures for new builds. These measures will reduce the cost of construction for developers and help to reduce utility bills for those using the building. This will also help the environment by reducing emissions and improving air quality.

**Did you know?** The Read Report (2009) suggests there is the potential to save an additional 10 million tonnes of carbon by using wood products in the UK's new and refurbished homes by 2019.



### Reducing fuel bills and using local resources wisely

Barnsley's Communal Biomass Heating scheme uses waste wood from a local woodland management project to heat homes in the local community. It is the largest scheme of its kind in the UK. This has achieved savings on heating costs for residents and has reduced emissions from fuel combustion. The scheme helps to improve air quality, produces no soot and virtually no noise. [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/yh-casestudies-barnselybiomass.pdf/\\$FILE/yh-casestudies-barnselybiomass.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/yh-casestudies-barnselybiomass.pdf/$FILE/yh-casestudies-barnselybiomass.pdf)

## Where to go for information about your local environment

Information held by your local authority and used in the preparation of Local Plans is often the starting point for neighbourhood plans or orders (depending on how relevant and up to date the information is). Your local authority will be able to advise you further on this.

Other useful information may be available from local environmental records centres, the Historic Environment Record Centres or local environmental and amenity groups. You can also access a range of information and maps about the local environment on the following websites – see:

<p><b>What's in your backyard?:</b> Provides access to environmental data at a local level</p> <p><a href="http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/37793.aspx">www.environment-agency.gov.uk/homeandleisure/37793.aspx</a></p>
<p><b>Your Right to Know:</b> Public Registers of environmental permits and licences</p> <p><a href="http://www2.environment-agency.gov.uk/epr/">www2.environment-agency.gov.uk/epr/</a></p>
<p><b>Natural England:</b> Publications, maps and data on the natural environment</p> <p><a href="http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/default.aspx">www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications/default.aspx</a></p>
<p><b>Nature on the map:</b> Maps about nature, including the location of designated sites</p> <p><a href="http://www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk">www.natureonthemap.naturalengland.org.uk</a></p>
<p><b>Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside:</b> Interactive map of environmental information</p> <p><a href="http://magic.defra.gov.uk/">http://magic.defra.gov.uk/</a></p>
<p><b>The Land Information Search:</b> Map based tool on land designations or features</p> <p><a href="http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/inf-d-6dfkmm">www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/inf-d-6dfkmm</a></p>
<p><b>English Heritage:</b> Finding and managing your local historic environment</p> <p><a href="http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/">http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/</a>, <a href="http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk">www.heritagegateway.org.uk</a> and <a href="http://www.helm.org.uk/">www.helm.org.uk/</a></p>
<p><b>Data on the historic environment</b> (Heritage Counts, Heritage at Risk):</p> <p><a href="http://hc.english-heritage.org.uk/">http://hc.english-heritage.org.uk/</a> &amp; <a href="http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/heritage-at-risk/">http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/heritage-at-risk/</a></p>
<p><b>Guidance on heritage and community-led planning:</b> <a href="http://www.helm.org.uk/communityplanning">www.helm.org.uk/communityplanning</a></p>

## Environmental assessment

Neighbourhood plans may require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). Neighbourhood plans could also lead to the need for a Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating SEA) and/or a HRA to be carried out on any significant amendments made to the relevant Local Plan. Neighbourhood development orders may require a more detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Your local authority will be the first point of contact for discussions on environmental assessment and will be able to advise whether such assessments will need to be carried out. This will depend on whether the plan or order is likely to result in significant environmental risks.

The Environment Agency, Natural England and English Heritage are statutory consultees in England for SEA and EIA. Natural England is a statutory consultee for HRA and may be involved in providing data and information. In most cases it is likely that information from appraisals of Local Plans will be used in neighbourhood planning, depending on how up to date it is. Further information on environmental assessments is available at: [www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageld=152450](http://www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageld=152450)

## When to consult us

Your local authority will be your first point of contact, as your neighbourhood plan or development order will need to reflect the character and strategic elements of the Local Plan. In some cases you may be advised by your local authority to consult us prior to submitting your plan or order, as there may be particular risks relating to heritage or the natural environment which require our expertise.

As a guide, you may need to consult us if your plan or order concerns the following issues:

Issues	Environmental Body
<p>Development near the coast (if located within a 'coastal change management area').</p> <p>Development which is carried out on land within flood zone two or three, or where critical drainage problems have been notified to the local authority.</p> <p>Development on land which could be contaminated land, or is in the vicinity of a permitted site.</p> <p>Development near a main river or controlling the flow of any river or stream, including hydropower schemes.</p>	<p><b>Environment Agency</b></p> <p>Telephone: 03708 506 506</p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk">www.environment-agency.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk">enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Development that may affect European wildlife sites or Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).</p> <p>Development that may affect protected species.</p> <p>Development within, or that may affect, a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.</p>	<p><b>Natural England</b></p> <p>Telephone: 0845 600 3078</p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.naturalengland.org.uk">www.naturalengland.org.uk</a></p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:consultations@naturalengland.org.uk">consultations@naturalengland.org.uk</a></p>

<p>Development within 500m of an ancient woodland.</p> <p>Woodland creation, deforestation, forest road operations and tree felling.</p> <p>Grants for woodland planting.</p>	<p><b>Forestry Commission</b></p> <p>Telephone: 0845 3673787</p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.forestry.gov.uk">www.forestry.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Email: Email: <a href="mailto:fcengland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk">fcengland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Developments which affect: the setting of a Grade I or II* listed building; the site of a scheduled monument; the character or appearance of a conservation area (over a certain size or height); or a Grade I or II* registered park or garden.</p> <p>Listed building consent applications relating to a Grade I or II* building, or for total or substantial demolition of a Grade II listed building.</p> <p>All applications for scheduled monument consent.</p> <p>Greater London – a wider range of applications, including the demolition of a building in a conservation area.</p>	<p><b>English Heritage</b></p> <p>Telephone: 0870 333 1181</p> <p>Website: <a href="http://www.english-heritage.org.uk">www.english-heritage.org.uk</a></p>

## Glossary

<b>Biodiversity</b>	The living component of the natural world, encompassing all plant & animal species.
<b>Biomass</b>	Biological material from living, or recently living organisms, useful as an environmentally friendly fuel
<b>Community Right to Build Order</b>	Gives local people the power to deliver the development that their local community wants
Designated heritage asset:	A valued component of the historic environment
<b>Environmental Impact Assessment</b>	As assessment of the possible positive or negative impacts that a proposed project might have on the environment, also includes social and economic considerations.
<b>Flood zone</b>	Flood zones divide the floodplain into 3 areas which represent different levels of flood risk. Flood zone 1 is the lowest risk; flood zone 3 is the highest risk. See the Environment Agency website for more details.
<b>Habitat</b>	Place in which species or a community of species live, with characteristic plants and animals
<b>Historic Environment</b>	All aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, landscape & flora.
<b>Historic Environment Record</b>	Provides access to resources relating to the historic environment for public benefit and use. Available through your local authority or from the Heritage Gateway website.
<b>Habitats Regulation Assessment</b>	An assessment of the likely significant effects of a plan or project on a European wildlife site. Part of EU law.
<b>Local Green Space Designation</b>	Protects green spaces of particular importance to local communities
<b>Local Nature Reserve</b>	Places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest to a local area
<b>Local Plan</b>	Development plan for the area, setting out strategic development policies and allocating sites for development, prepared by the local authority
<b>Local Wildlife Site</b>	An area of special importance to local nature conservation
<b>Neighbourhood Development Plan</b>	A document outlining general development policies and allocating sites for the development of land in a neighbourhood.
<b>Neighbourhood Development Order</b>	Gives planning permission for specific developments or types of development the community wants to see in the neighbourhood
<b>Registered Park and Garden</b>	Site designated to be of national importance whose preservation must be considered when determining planning applications for development on or affecting the site.
<b>Scheduled Monument</b>	Scheduled on a list of nationally important archeological sites & monuments. English Heritage takes the lead in identifying sites in England which should be placed on the schedule by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport There are nearly 20,000 scheduled sites with legal protection under this process.
<b>Strategic Environmental Assessment</b>	A system of incorporating environmental considerations into policies, plans & strategies. Part of EU law.
<b>Sustainable Drainage Systems</b>	A system designed to drain surface water in a more sustainable fashion, helps to improve water quality, enhance the environment, and reduce flood risk.
<b>World Heritage Site</b>	Area designated as important to heritage under relevant national legislation. The list of Heritage sites for England can be found on the English Heritage Website