

Background note - The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) Approach to Neighbourhood Planning

SDNPA supports the active involvement of parishes, town councils and other local groupings in all of our activities. This will be fundamental to the production and delivery of our Management Plan and Local Plan.

Community led planning is not limited to the production of Neighbourhood Plans, there are a wide range of tools available to communities to assist them in taking a more active role in their community. The South Downs National Park is preparing a community led planning toolkit to help communities understand what options are available and which plan is most appropriate for their needs. The toolkit will contain guidance and information on all community led plans including Local Landscape Character Assessments, Village and Town Design Statements and Parish Plans. The toolkit will also set out very clearly what communities can expect from the National Park Authority in terms of support when producing a community led plan. The National Park Authority will work closely with partners (including Local Authorities) in the production and use of this toolkit, to ensure that the offer is consistent with our partners approach.

The SDNPA's current approach to Neighbourhood Planning is to actively support the concept as promoted by Government where there is a strong local demand for greater involvement. It is likely that the bulk of support for Neighbourhood Planning will be for areas which anticipate development occurring.

The SDNPA current offer for communities proposing to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan includes advice on policy conformity, a review of draft policies, running workshops as training sessions, providing evidence and data and attending meetings where possible. Currently there is one full time officer in the planning policy team and one strategy lead officer (working approx 3 days per month) working in this area.

It is clear from the Localism Act that communities are free to decide whether they want to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan and that, where they do, it is the responsibility of the relevant authorities to support them. The SDNPA approach is to engage in an open and non-committal discussion with any community proposing to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan before they decide to produce one. Our advice is open, frank and very clear about the potential costs and pitfalls, also advising on other forms of community led planning available. We see it as a key role of the National Park Authority to ensure that all communities engaging on Neighbourhood Planning do so on the basis of a full understanding of the facts and of the latest best practice.

Given the size of communities in the National Park and the sort of issues they are likely to address in their Neighbourhood Plan it is not envisaged that an absence of an up to date local plan negates the value of Neighbourhood Planning.

We encourage a joint approach with parishes working together wherever possible. This maximises the use of resources, shares the workload and increases the strategic impact of the resulting shared Neighbourhood Plans. It can also have wider advantages in terms of connecting communities and providing strategic local input to the National Parks own priorities and plans.

A recent announcement (29th August) from DCLG has confirmed that there is new funding available for local authorities which will contribute towards the costs for examinations and referendums. Some of this money will assist Authorities in supporting communities that decide they want to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan.