



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning 2013-15

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If you have any enquiries regarding this document/publication, email contactus@communities.gov.uk or write to us at:

Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 030 3444 0000

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Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning 2013-15

A new 2 year, £9.5m support programme for communities doing neighbourhood planning¹ will be launched on 15 April 2013.

Town and Parish councils, neighbourhood forums and emerging neighbourhood forums preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order in England will be able to apply.

The programme will be in two main parts:

- Grant payments – up to £7,000 per neighbourhood area, to contribute to costs incurred by the group preparing a neighbourhood plan or order.
- Direct support – advice and support, tailored to meet the needs of supported neighbourhoods.

The programme will also offer opportunities for those interested in and involved in neighbourhood planning to share learning, including through Planning Camp events, workshops and online forums.

The programme will be delivered by Locality, in partnership with RTP/Planning Aid England, Community Development Foundation, Urban Vision Enterprise, Eden Project and URS.

Communities will have a single entry point to the programme through the website www.mycommunityrights.org.uk with pages dedicated to this programme and an enquiry service. Full information about the programme will be published on 15 April. Communities will be able to submit applications for direct support and/or grants from 1 May.

Q: What are the small grants?

A: Grants will contribute to costs incurred by the body preparing the neighbourhood plan or order. This is likely to include, for example, start-up costs, training sessions, community engagement costs, contribute to required studies, and incidentals such as printing costs.

¹ More details about what neighbourhood planning is and the process involved can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning>

Q: What is direct support? What kind of direct support can we get? E.g. will someone write our plan for us? Undertake technical studies?

A: Direct support involves providing professional planning support to groups to assist them in preparing their Neighbourhood Plans. Our role is enabling groups to create their own plans. Training, advice and specialist support and guidance will be provided to assist groups to get their plans in place. The support provided is bespoke and tailored to particular needs and requirements and can be delivered in a range of ways, such as training (neighbourhood planning processes, policy writing, legal requirements, consultation methods), remote advice and face to face advice.

The support provided is designed to help reach the various milestones in the neighbourhood planning process, with the overall aim to help prepare a plan that not only reflects the vision of the community but which is robust enough to meet the legal requirements as set out in the Localism Act.

Q: How many groups can the programme help?

A: Direct support to groups will vary according to their individual support needs. The number of groups supported will therefore depend on demand.

The number of groups awarded grant funding will depend on how many access the maximum £7,000. If all groups access the full amount the programme budget would support 528 groups over the 2 years. We expect to support a greater number as not all groups will apply for and receive £7,000.

Are we eligible?

A: Town and Parish councils, neighbourhood forums and emerging neighbourhood forums (in non-parished areas) will be eligible. You need to be based in England and preparing or committed to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order.

Q: We have received support previously – are we eligible?

A: Yes. But you will need to justify the need for direct support/grant.

Q: We are considering starting a neighbourhood plan – are we eligible?

A: If you are at an early stage of developing or thinking about developing a neighbourhood plan you are eligible to apply for support but will have to demonstrate a level of commitment to progress.

Q: We don't know if we need direct support or a grant – what do we apply for?

A: All groups will answer some initial questions. This will test if you are eligible for some form of support. It will also help us advise you whether to apply for direct support, grants, or – for some – both. Communities will not be offered direct support and grant funding for the same specific activity. Subject to this, groups may apply for both. Full guidance will be available from 15 April.

Q: What will we need to do to apply? How long will the application process take?

A: Your responses to initial application questions will help us assess what your support needs are. This will help us advise you to complete an application form for direct support, a grant, or both. (We will not ask for the same information twice). The application form will ask what you need the support/grant for. Grant application forms will ask how you plan to spend the grant. In most cases applications for direct support will be processed (including diagnostic) within 15 – 20 working days and applications for grants will be processed within 10 working days.

We will look to offer support and grants to a range of neighbourhood planning areas, but those most likely to make good progress will be prioritised. When assessing grant applications we will look at the group's ability to progress, how the group propose to spend the grant, value for money, timescales, etc.

Those successful in applying for direct support will receive a full diagnostic interview to identify a bespoke package of support to be agreed by all parties.

Q: Can we apply for support throughout the whole neighbourhood planning process?

A: Neighbourhoods may apply for support to progress through one of the following three stages:

1. Getting started: designating the neighbourhood area and/or forum.
2. Designation to concluding consultation on the pre-submission version of the draft Neighbourhood Plan.
3. Completion of pre-submission consultation to the independent examiner recommending that the Neighbourhood Plan proceeds to referendum.

Neighbourhoods will have varying support needs. In most cases we would not expect neighbourhoods to need support at all three stages, though they may apply for support at any or all of these stages. The programme has a limited budget which we want to use to support as many communities as possible.

Q: How will our application for support and grants be assessed?

A: Grant and direct support applications will be assessed based on factual information and scored qualitative information. Full details of the assessment criteria will be published when the programme is launched. The programme will be marketed to ensure applications are received from a range of parishes and forums, as well as from a range of geographical areas, relative prosperity/deprivation and rural/urban areas.

Q: What can I spend a grant on? Can I buy support from others?

A: We will publish clear, simple guidelines on eligible grant expenditure when the programme is launched. Communities should have high discretion as to what they need to spend funding on to be able to progress their neighbourhood plan. Ineligible expenditure would include, for example, funding permanent salaried posts (e.g. Parish Council clerk), loss of earnings, paying for volunteer time, and referendum campaign costs.

Q: We're part way through completing our neighbourhood plan – can we apply for grants to reimburse us for what we've spent?

A: No. The programme will only fund future activity to help neighbourhoods to progress their neighbourhood plans.

Q: Will everyone get £7,000? How will the amount be decided?

A: Not everyone will apply for or receive the maximum £7,000. The assessment process will look at whether the costs are reasonable, whether the group has the ability to progress, and if the timescales are achievable. It may in some cases be better for groups to receive direct support instead of a grant, or vice versa. The application process will help determine this.

Q: If we apply for a grant of under £7,000 can we apply for more later?

A: Yes. If you have received a grant of less than £7,000 you may apply for further funding until you have reached the £7,000 cap. However this is subject to availability of funds.

Q: £7,000 won't cover the costs of preparing our neighbourhood plan?

A: Neighbourhood planning is a right, not an obligation. Whilst it is not Government's role to fully fund the costs of neighbourhood planning, we know relatively small amounts of funding can help groups to progress their plans.

Neighbourhoods should also be clear that they will not need to fund costs of arranging the independent examination or the referendum – these costs are funded by the Government's new burdens payments to Local Planning Authorities. The Department wrote to local authorities in December 2012 explaining arrangements for paying new burdens funding; this is available at:

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

The cost of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan will vary according to many factors, including its complexity. This programme will share learning on the costs of neighbourhood planning and share insights into how communities are raising funding to progress their Neighbourhood Plans.

Q: Will there be conditions attached to grants?

A: We will issue grant agreements to town and parish councils and incorporated neighbourhood forums. Unincorporated forums will need to either incorporate or nominate a trusted body to manage the grant on their behalf in order to be awarded the full grant amount. We will ask groups to publish details of the grant awarded and spend. We want this transparency to encourage good value for money, and to help others understand likely costs associated with neighbourhood planning.

Groups receiving direct support and/or a grant will need to commit to work to an agreed timetable. This supports the programme aim to help groups to progress their neighbourhood plans and orders. Whilst there will be exceptional circumstances whereby groups will be unable to meet key milestones, in such cases we will consider whether to continue to provide support and grant funding.