



Guidance notes for applicants

Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning
Effective 25 February 2014

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Welcome

We hope that the following guidance will provide you with the information you need to make a successful application for support under the Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning Programme.

The first stage of the application process is to establish that your group is eligible for the programme. If you are an eligible group, you will be asked to provide some contact details. An application form will then be generated and you will receive this overnight as a unique link via email. The programme has proved very popular and we can't work with all groups at once, so from 25 February the number of successful applicants onto the direct support element of the programme will be limited. The Expression of Interest process will be open on the 25 February, 1 April, 1 May, 3 June, 1 July (future dates to be advised). When we have received our maximum capacity of expressions of interest the process will be closed until the following month. This does not affect groups wishing to apply for a grant, and these applications can be made at any time. If you wish to apply for both direct support and a grant you will need to apply for each separately.

We're currently helping over 500 groups and have awarded over £2.4m in grants.

Applications for support will reopen on the 25 February 2014.

We can only accept applications which have been completed using the online form.

About the programme

The Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning Programme is a 2 year, £10.5m support programme for communities developing a neighbourhood plan and / or a neighbourhood development order in England. It is funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The programme is being delivered by Locality, in partnership with the Royal Town Planning Institute (including Planning Aid England), Community Development Foundation (CDF), Urban Vision Enterprise, Eden Project and URS.

We're currently helping over 500 groups and have awarded over £2.4m in grants.

The Localism Act 2011 introduced neighbourhood planning in England. It enables communities to draw up a neighbourhood plan for their area and is intended to give communities more of a say in the development of their local area. These plans will be used to decide the future of the places where you live and work giving opportunities to:

- choose where you want new homes, shops and offices to be built
- have your say on issues like design
- grant planning permission for the new development you want to see go ahead through a neighbourhood development order.

The programme provides support for groups developing neighbourhood plans in two ways:

- grant payments: up to £7,000 per neighbourhood area, to contribute to costs incurred by the group preparing a neighbourhood plan or neighbourhood development order.
- direct support: professional advice and support, tailored to meet the group's needs

You can apply for either direct support or a grant alone or you can apply for both a grant and direct support, though not for the same activity.

The programme is underpinned by activities and resources to share learning, promote good practice, and encourage networking for groups developing neighbourhood plans.

Who is eligible to apply?

Where a town or parish council exists, they are the qualifying body for producing a neighbourhood plan. They will often form a wider working or steering group of community representatives to assist in the process. This helps to ensure that the neighbourhood plan is community-led and engages with a wide range of interests.

Where there is no parish or town council, a prospective neighbourhood forum of at least 21 people must be formed to lead and co-ordinate the plan-making process. Again this needs to reflect the diversity, character and inclusivity of the area. The neighbourhood forum will need to be designated by the local planning authority (usually your borough or district council) to do neighbourhood planning. If you are a Neighbourhood Forum that is applying for a grant, it is important that you identify an eligible organisation to hold the grant for you. More guidance about this is available [here](#).

Town and parish councils, neighbourhood forums and prospective neighbourhood forums preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan or Neighbourhood Development Order in England are able to apply.

This programme has proved really popular and the availability of the direct support element will now be restricted to a limited number of groups each month.

Online eligibility form

Before you are invited to complete the main application form online you need to complete the eligibility form. You will need to fill in a separate eligibility form for a grant and direct support if you wish to apply for both. The eligibility checker will inform you of whether you are eligible to apply or not.

Eligibility questions

- Are you producing a neighbourhood plan or a neighbourhood development order?
- Are you based in England?
- Are you a qualifying body or a neighbourhood forum looking to produce a neighbourhood plan?

You will also be asked to provide some contact details. Please check these details carefully and, in particular, make sure the organisation name and email address you give us are correctly entered and check that you will use this email address when filling in the application form. If your expression of interest for direct support is within our allocated amount for the month you will be contacted either by phone or email to undertake initial screening. If your expression of interest is taken forward you will be

contacted by one of our team. Following this, if you have applied for a grant, an application form will be generated and you will receive this overnight as a unique link via email. If it doesn't arrive in your inbox, please check your junk mail and any spam filters that you use to check that it hasn't been blocked.

Due to the overwhelming success of the programme we need to restrict numbers on to the direct support element of the programme each month.

When should you apply for Direct Support?

The process for submitting an Expression of Interest in receiving direct support will open on: 25 February, 1 April, 1 May, 3 June, 1 July (future dates to be advised). This process will be open until we have exhausted our resources for that month.

Therefore as of Tuesday 25 February 2014 we can accept applications for direct support from groups who:

- are writing a Neighbourhood Plan
- are based in England
- and are an eligible body to produce a plan. Town and Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Forums and prospective Neighbourhood Forums meet this last criteria.

Grant funding

All groups are still able to apply for grant funding, including those also applying for direct support.

We are unable to fund any activity which took place prior to the date of the grant agreement.

Applications for a grant are assessed on how well they meet the fund criteria and it is important that you do not rush your application. Make sure that you focus on the content of what you write. And although each application will be looked at on a first come first served basis, it is the quality of an application that will determine whether or not it will be recommended for funding.

Before you start

There is various information that you need to provide us with, and you may find it useful to gather this before you start to complete the application form. This section describes the information that you need to provide, whether you are applying for direct support, a grant or both.

If you have already received your application form, once you have started to complete it you can leave it at any time and it will automatically save the information you have entered provided that you have clicked the 'next' button on the relevant page. This link will remain open for up to 30 days. Once you have pressed the submit button on the final page you will not be able to make any further changes, although you will still be able to access a copy of your application. Please provide as much information as you think we need.

We will reject applications which lack detail and you will have to reapply.

Applying for grant support

How much grant funding can you apply for?

Neighbourhoods undertaking neighbourhood planning or preparing a neighbourhood development order can apply for grants of any amount from £500 to £7,000 per neighbourhood area (as long as you have a plan for how to spend it and the costs cannot be met from other sources.)

Costs might include start-up costs, training sessions, a contribution to required studies, expert advice and incidentals such as printing costs.

You should apply for the full amount of funding you need to deliver your project, so for example if you need £2,000 now and a further £3,000 in a few months' time you only have to fill in one application form.

Both groups that have received support in the past and groups that are new to the neighbourhood planning process are eligible to apply for a grant.

How many times can you apply for a grant?

You can apply for grant(s) of up to £7,000 per neighbourhood area, this can be a single application for £7,000 or a number of applications at different stages of your neighbourhood planning process totalling £7,000.

If you are a parish or town council that is designating more than one neighbourhood area in the parish, you can apply for up to £7,000 for each designated area.

Conversely, if you are joining with one or more parish councils to create a joint neighbourhood plan you will only be able to apply for one amount of £7,000 for the plan, not a separate grant for each parish.

The timescale of the planned activity

We cannot fund activities which are scheduled to take place after December 2014.

What can the grant money be spent on?

The money can be spent on costs associated with developing the neighbourhood plan or neighbourhood development order, such as:

- start-up costs, these might include setting up a neighbourhood forum in an unparished area, or developing a website
- training sessions for members of the steering group
- help with putting together a project plan
- help with developing the evidence base and analysing it to identify issues and aims for your plan
- undertaking a household survey
- engaging an external facilitator for community consultation and /or workshops

- Contributions to required studies for example housing need, environmental assessment
- engaging a planning expert to help you to draft relevant policies
- support for making site allocations
- support with undertaking the six week pre-submission consultation
- support with collecting and analysing responses from the six week pre-submission consultation and deciding how to modify the neighbourhood plan
- help with understanding whether your plan is ready for examination (meeting the basic conditions and other legal requirements)
- providing training in the legal requirements which will be tested at the examination stage (the basic conditions)
- venue hire, publicity materials, printing and other costs associated with public engagement and consulting on the plan.

Applying for a grant to pay for consultancy support

If you are using the grant to engage consultants to support your neighbourhood plan, you are strongly advised to ensure that they are appropriately qualified for the work, whether it be facilitation skills for community engagement, or planning expertise. This would mean using a qualified planner, preferably a chartered member of the Royal Town Planning Institute (MRTPI), to provide advice on planning legislation, policy and issues. Similarly there are a range of specialists who might need to be involved in a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) or habitats regulations related work. If in doubt, please take advice from your local planning authority, which should be able to provide you with advice on the need for / scope of any SEA.

As Sustainability Appraisals (SA) are not legally required for neighbourhood plans, we do not normally fund them through the grant programme. However, if your group wishes to use a sustainability appraisal approach to consider how your plan meets sustainability requirements, you may be able to use grant funding for this. Please explain this on your application form.

If you are commissioning expert support, and already know who you want to work with, you are asked to provide the details and qualifications and professional memberships of the expert(s) you intend to use. In addition to this, please attach a copy of the quotation or estimate in the space provided.

Applying for a contribution to a larger budget

Groups can apply for a grant of up to £7,000 where it is a contribution to a larger overall budget. However, you will need to apply for specific items and only include these, and the related costs, in your application. PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT THE ITEMS INCLUDED IN THE GRANT APPLICATION DO NOT EXCEED £7,000.

The items you apply for should ideally be those which will start at least one month after you submit your application (to allow time for the assessment and grants offer and acceptance process to be completed) and must finish by 31 December 2014. The maximum grant that can be awarded to a group across the lifetime of the programme is £7,000.

Please also include information about other sources of funding that you have or will apply for to achieve the total budget.

What can't the grant money be spent on?

There are a number of items of expenditure which are not eligible for a grant under this programme. These are listed below:

- funding salaried posts or compensating for loss of earnings, this includes paying additional hours for an existing member of staff and / or employing someone on a casual or freelance basis at an agreed hourly rate. The only exception to this is where you are engaging a planning consultant, or someone to deliver specialist, technical support, on an hourly basis, although even in these circumstances you may prefer to get a fixed price quote for the work to be undertaken
- paying for volunteer time, however reimbursement of reasonable out of pocket expenses is eligible
- reimbursing expenditure which has already been incurred, we recommend that you only apply for funding for activities that start at least one month after the date of your application
- capital items - generally this means that a purchase results in owning a lasting asset such as computers, photocopiers or digital projectors
- any other activity which is not directly associated with developing the neighbourhood plan or neighbourhood development order
- in addition, we cannot fund a general contingency for unknown costs or cost overruns.

You should not undertake any activity which is dependent on funding from this programme until you have received confirmation that your application is successful, and returned signed copies of the grant agreement and any other documentation required.

VAT

Activities which are funded by a grant are outside the scope of VAT and so the VAT cannot be recovered by groups, even if they are registered for VAT. Parish and Town Councils should refer to Notice 749 from HMRC which explains the special rules which apply to public bodies and should allow you to reclaim VAT in some circumstances.

Please take this into account when costing your grant application.

Applying for direct support

'Direct support' enables you to receive expert advice to help you to complete the various stages of the neighbourhood planning process. This support is provided through Locality and the RTPI / Planning Aid England. The majority of the support will be given by qualified planners, although their work may be supplemented by community engagement specialists.

The amount and type of support that you can receive will vary depending upon:

- what stage you have already reached in preparing your plan
- the nature of the neighbourhood planning area: relevant factors include

population size, whether you are parished or unparished, the level of growth that is anticipated in the area, landscape and habitat characteristics.

From February 2014 access to direct support is limited as described above. Following a successful Expression of Interest you will be invited to complete a full application form. Following this we will contact you to arrange a phone conversation with one of our assessors. The purpose of this call is to find out more about your group, the progress that you have made so far and the next steps which you plan to achieve. This phone call will take place during normal working hours and will help us to:

- better understand the context for your neighbourhood and the issues and opportunities that you face
- find out about the working relationship that you have with your local planning authority and the interface with local planning policies
- examine your planned timetable for completing the work, and how to overcome any barriers that you face.

Completing your application

Some of the questions on the application form are required fields and some are optional. If you leave a required field blank, you will not be able to continue to the next section of the application form until you have completed it. We provide you with text boxes to add any details that you think are relevant.

The information that you need to provide in your application will include the following for all applicants:

The main contact for the group, this should be someone who is leading the neighbourhood planning process, particularly if you are applying for direct support. This person will be contacted by telephone as part of the assessment and needs to be available during normal working hours.

Progress with the plan - when you are describing the barriers which you face in developing your neighbourhood plan, please distinguish between those which are immediate and those which are a longer term feature of the process.

Previous and on-going support, the application also asks for information about any support that you have already received. This might be as part of the preceding programmes funded by the Department of Communities and Local Government, from your local authority or by using other funds including any local precept. Groups which have already received support are very much encouraged to apply to this programme so that they can continue to progress their plans.

Capacity of the group, we will ask you to say what level of expertise, volunteer time, staff and other resources or funding you can bring to the neighbourhood planning process. Applicants are encouraged to identify what other support they have for the neighbourhood plan. This could include funding, volunteer hours, or in-kind support such as pro bono services or free use of meeting space. However, this is not a requirement and your application will not be rejected if you are not able to identify additional support.

Context for the area, please provide an estimate of the population in your neighbourhood plan area. This figure should include local residents of all ages, not just

those who are of voting age. If you are unsure of this figure, particularly if you are setting up a neighbourhood forum, please either speak to your local planning authority or, if you are still at a very early stage, give us your best guess to the nearest thousand.

Support needed, we provide the opportunity for you to describe any barriers that you are facing in progressing the plan and set out the tasks that you think you want support with. These do not have to be very detailed as, if you are applying for direct support, they will be developed further through the in-depth phone conversation that you have with one of our planning advisers. If you are applying for direct support and the neighbourhood area is already designated and you are in a parished area or have a designated neighbourhood forum - we will ask you for further information about your progress on the plan including:

- preparation of the evidence base
- community engagement
- identifying issues and setting aims
- writing policies and the plan
- pre-submission consultation
- updating the plan in the light of consultation.

If you have completed the public consultation on the draft plan - we will ask you a number of questions about the preparation for the independent examination and / or referendum to help us understand what work still needs to be done.

Supporting documents - If you think there are important documents which add background to your direct support application, please make this clear in the relevant comment box. We will ask you to email them to us if we want them.

For grant support - we will ask you to identify what you want the grant for and how it will help you to move your plan forward. We will also need to know how long it will take you, and how much each item/area of work will cost. If you are applying for grant support for consultancy, please attach a copy of the quote. Where you have more than one quote, please merge them into one document and upload this.

How are the applications assessed?

Grant support

Applications for a grant from eligible applicants will be assessed based on the information provided in the application form and against the following criteria:

- is all the proposed expenditure eligible? (we will reduce the total amount of grant awarded for any items of ineligible expenditure)
- is there a clear need for the project spend?
- is there evidence of how the planned activities will help you progress towards a neighbourhood plan for your area?
- is the project realistic and achievable? Can the activities be delivered in the timetable given?
- are the project costs reasonable and do they add up?
- does the project demonstrate value for money in terms of the relationship between costs and benefit?

Direct support

The programme has proved very popular and we can't work with all groups at once, so from 25 February the number of successful applicants onto the programme will be limited. Should you be eligible for support you will be contacted by one of our assessors who will arrange a telephone call to find out more about your group, the progress that you have made so far and the next steps which you plan to achieve. This phone call will take place during normal working hours.

Following this you will be sent a link to the application form which you will need to submit electronically. Please see above for the information you will be asked to complete. You will need to complete this application form within 10 working days (2 weeks).

On receipt of your application form you will be contacted by one of our assessors.

The purpose of this phone call is to:

- better understand the context for your neighbourhood and the issues and opportunities that you face
- find out about the working relationship that you have with your local planning authority and the interface with local planning policies
- examine your planned timetable for completing the work, and how to overcome any barriers that you face.

It is crucial that your response is open and honest to help us to develop a realistic assessment and a plan for the support package which will help you to progress. Our assessors are experts in neighbourhood planning and will also be able to answer questions about how you can best progress a neighbourhood plan in your area.

As a result of the information provided on the form and in the phone call, the assessor will make a recommendation about whether your group should be supported through the programme. They will develop a proposed package of support which will be delivered through Locality or Planning Aid England.

Once the assessor has decided whether to recommend that your group receives direct support and has developed a support package, this will be submitted for approval to DCLG and we will then make an offer to you.

The amount and type of support to be provided depends upon the progress you have made with your plan and also upon a number of factors including:

- the population of your area
- the scale of planned growth, the number of sites to be allocated and the level of interest from prospective developers
- the landscape and environmental context
- whether the area is parished or unparished
- community capacity

Who makes the final decision?

Recommendations about who gets the grants are made by Locality's assessors based on how well the application criteria have been met. Each recommendation will be reviewed before approval or rejection for funding.

Recommendations for direct support are made by our assessors and have to be agreed with DCLG.

Letting you know the outcome of your application

We will inform you by email whether you have been successful or not. We aim to assess all applications for grant only within 15 working days. We will keep you up to date on the progress of your application via email. If the decision takes longer than this we will send you an email to let you know.

What happens if you are successful in being offered a grant?

You will receive an email from our grant management partner, the Community Development Foundation (CDF). They will email you offering you a grant setting out the detailed terms and conditions and requesting copies of any further documentation required.

Once you have accepted the terms of the grant and we have satisfactory details about who will hold the monies, we will pay you 90% of the amount awarded. The final 10% will only be payable at the end of the grant term and after you have provided us with a monitoring report.

Successful applicants will be asked to provide regular financial and activity monitoring reports. Full details of reporting requirements will be provided with the terms and conditions.

On completion of the planned activity you will need to provide a report about what progress you have made as a result of the funding and submit this along with invoices and receipts for any items of £1,000 or more. Any unspent funds will need to be returned to us.

What do you need in order to receive funding?

Financial information, if you have a bank account with two signatories, you will need to provide your bank details and attach a copy of a recent bank statement (within the last three months) in this section.

If you are a town/parish council, or an incorporated neighbourhood forum with a bank account you can receive the funding directly into your account.

If you are a prospective/unincorporated* neighbourhood forum, you will need to nominate an incorporated organisation/charity to hold the grant on your behalf. You will need to provide details of this organisation and they will need to agree to hold the grant on your behalf.

If you are an incorporated neighbourhood forum, and you do not have a bank account (with two named signatories), you will need to open one in your organisation's name or nominate an incorporated organisation/charity to hold the funds on your behalf. You will need to provide details of this organisation and they will need to agree to hold the grant on your behalf.

Incorporated organisations have a separate legal status, such as Company Limited by Guarantee, Community Interest Company (CIC), Industrial & Provident Society, etc. If you are unsure whether your neighbourhood forum or nominated fund holding organisation is incorporated, please check using the Companies House web check tool. If it is incorporated it will be listed on this website. Further information can also be found on the Charity Commission website.

*a neighbourhood forum that does not have a separate legal status.

Important notes

Data Protection Act

By submitting information via the application form you agree that Locality and our partners in the Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning Programme may use the data you have provided. Wherever your personal information may be held by us, we will take reasonable and appropriate steps to ensure the information you share with us is protected from unauthorised access or disclosure.

If you are a member of Locality we may pass your details to selected third party organisations who we believe you will be interested in hearing from. These third parties are obliged to keep your details securely, will use them only to fulfil the request and will dispose of the details when the request is complete.

If you would like to discuss how your information is stored and used by Locality and our partners in the Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning Programme please contact communications@locality.org.uk.

Public Liability

Most organisations undertaking a neighbourhood plan will already hold public liability and other appropriate insurance. However, if you are a prospective or designated neighbourhood forum, you may need to include this item in any grant application.

Please consider carefully the activities you will be undertaking throughout your grant funded project, and whether any of the activities pose a risk to members of your organisation or the public. Remember risk can take many forms - injury, financial loss, reputational damage, etc. If you feel there is risk in any activities you will undertake, you will need to consider whether insurance is required, an insurance broker or financial adviser will be able to give guidance on this.

Equalities duties

Neighbourhood planning groups should seek to involve people from all sections of the community in developing the neighbourhood plan, and may periodically check that the profile of people who are responding to the consultation are representative of the profile of your local community. Advice on good practice for involving harder to reach

groups is available from a range of sources including the Neighbourhood Plans Roadmap Guide.

Contacting Locality

If you have any questions about how to complete your application, send an enquiry by using the 'get advice' button on the My Community Rights website. Alternatively, please call the My Community Rights advice line on 0845 345 4564 which is open from 9.30-12.30 from Monday to Friday.