

Establish a Steering Group

It is recommended a steering group approach is used when developing a neighbourhood plan. This should be led by the parish or town council(s) for the area being considered and also have wider representation from the community to make sure there is a balance of interests so that social, environmental and economic interests are represented. This will help give confidence to local communities that the work is being taken forward by people providing a broad representation of the community as a whole.

Clear terms of reference should be agreed at the outset. The steering group might include local residents, local business owners and other key stakeholders including schools and religious or cultural groups. At this stage you might want to consider how the steering group is going to consult with the wider community and begin to prepare an action plan and timetable for the following stages.

Develop local objectives, priorities and a vision

Your neighbourhood vision will define what you want to achieve for your community today and in the future. Creating your vision will give you a chance to identify the key issues of concern at an early stage in the plan-making process. The results will determine the range, detail and terms of reference to be addressed by any subsequent approach. In forming the vision consider the following questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there?

To answer these questions you might want to:

- gather information about your area
- assess your area's strengths and weaknesses
- identify a series of objectives.

Designating a Neighbourhood Planning Area

If a neighbourhood plan is considered the most appropriate approach to deliver your vision and objectives, the first stage is defining your neighbourhood area.

The steering group should consider the most suitable area to plan for. A good place to start is a large scale map of the area and a discussion with the steering group.

You might want to consider:

- the physical boundaries of the area
- social, economic and other characteristics of the area
- and most importantly, interactions with neighbouring town and parish councils.

If the proposed neighbourhood area covers more than one parish, then consent must be sought from each of the affected parish and town councils. This will also have implications for representation on the steering group and the scale of community engagement that the process will require.

Neighbourhood Planning Area Designation Application

An application to designate a Neighbourhood Planning Area should be made to Swindon Borough Council and must include:

- a map which identifies the neighbourhood area
- a statement which says why this area is considered appropriate to be designated as a neighbourhood area
- a statement that the application is made by either a parish or town council or a neighbourhood forum.

To ensure that all the information submitted for the designation of a Neighbourhood Area, in a Parished area, meets the requirements of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) regulations 2012, an Application to Designate a Neighbourhood Area - Parished should be used.

The application will be publicised on our website and we will make sure it will be brought to the attention of people who live, work and undertake business to which the area application relates.

At this stage the information submitted to support the neighbourhood area application will be made publicly available for comment for a period of not less than six weeks.

The application will then be considered alongside any representations made to the neighbourhood area. The qualifying body will be notified of the outcome and the decision will be published on the council's website.

Developing a draft Neighbourhood Plan

Although there are no set guidelines for what a neighbourhood plan should contain it is likely that a plan will contain a series of policies, associated explanatory text and maps which detail the policies and proposals.

The policies must be linked to the development and use of land. Your neighbourhood plan might:

- identify areas of land for housing and/or economic development in accordance with the [Swindon Borough Local Plan](#).
- outline specific requirements for development including characteristics such as design and density
- include distinct local policies to help meet the specific issues and challenges identified through the scoping exercise.

Policies and proposals contained within a neighbourhood plan should be realistic and achievable. They must also follow some ground rules including:

- generally conforming with local and national planning policies
- being in line with other laws including various [EU Directives](#), namely Environmental Impact Assessment/[Strategic Environmental Assessment](#)/Water Framework Directive/Habitats Directive.

Consulting on the draft Neighbourhood Plan

At this stage the lead qualifying body must publicise the draft plan in a manner which is considered likely to bring the plan to the attention of people who live, work and undertake business in the neighbouring area.

This qualifying body must provide and publicise:

- the neighbourhood development plan
- details of where and when the plan can be inspected
- details of how to make representations on the plan
- the date by which representations must be received, allowing not less than six weeks

If your plan needs [Strategic Environmental Assessment](#), or has other legislative requirements, this should also be made available for consultation at this stage.

You will need to provide details of how to respond to the draft plan and how to make representations on it. This should include a 'representation form' for people to submit their comments on. The steering group could also consider making this available online.

You will also need to consider if your plan will affect any of the '[statutory consultees](#)' listed within the Neighbourhood Plan regulations, guidance on this is available. You will need to consult those who may be affected and also to submit the plan to Swindon Borough Council.

When you submit your plan for independent examination you will need to provide the responses made on the draft plan and detail what changes have been made in light of the representations made. As a result it is important that the steering group prepare for, and organise, this stage of the process carefully.

Finalise and submit a Neighbourhood Plan to Swindon Borough Council

At this stage the steering group should review the consultation responses and make any necessary changes to the plan. It is likely that the independent examiner will want to review the representations made and see how you have addressed these issues and concerns. The steering group should, therefore, consider how to present this information in an accessible form which can be distributed easily and made publicly available.

Once you are ready to submit the plan you must include the following with your submission:

- a map or statement which identifies the area to which the proposed neighbourhood development plan relates
- an environment scoping assessment of SEA to comply with environmental regulations.
- a consultation statement which:
 - contains details of the persons and bodies who were consulted about the proposed neighbourhood development plan
 - explains how they were consulted
 - summarises the main issues and concerns raised by the persons consulted
 - describes how these issues and concerns have been addressed in the proposed neighbourhood plan.
- the proposed neighbourhood development plan
- a statement explaining how the proposed neighbourhood development plan meets the requirements of [paragraph 8 of Schedule 4B](#) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Swindon Borough Council will validate and verify the submission documents with the qualifying body as soon as possible after receiving the proposed neighbourhood development plan, including all of the documents referred to above.

Swindon Borough Council will then publicise the proposal for consultation for a period being not less than six weeks. Any representations made during this period will be passed to the independent examiner.

Independent examination

Once the consultation period has ended and the council has collated all of the representations made to the plan an independent examination will be arranged.

The examiner will be appointed by Swindon Borough Council in agreement with the parish or town council(s). The examination process is described as being 'light touch' and it is, therefore, likely to be a written exercise, although the examiner can decide to hold a public hearing.

The independent examiner will assess:

- the plan against national policy
- whether the plan is in general conformity with policies in the Wiltshire Local Plan
- whether the plan is compatible with EU obligations and the proposal is consistent with the convention for human rights
- the geographical extent of the referendum.

The examiner will also consider any representations made to the plan and how these issues and concerns have been addressed. The examiner may recommend changes to the plan or order. If significant changes are suggested you may need to re-consult your community to endorse these changes.

If the independent examiner recommends that a referendum is held, the Borough Council must hold a referendum. However, the examiner may also recommend that your plan does not proceed to referendum if the plan is not aligned with:

- the strategic elements of the local development plan
- legal requirements
- national policy

Swindon Borough Council will notify the qualifying body whether a community referendum will be held or not in light of the independent report.

Community referendum

If the examiner has recommended that the neighbourhood plan should proceed to referendum, and any necessary changes have been made based upon his/her findings, Swindon Borough Council will arrange for a community referendum. Individuals will be eligible to vote if they are on the electoral role for the plan area. If the proposals affect a wider area the referendum will be reflective of the areas concerned. Where more than 50% vote in favour, Swindon Borough Council will have a duty to make the plan or order.

Make the plan (Becomes part of the development plan for Swindon Borough)

If the referendum has been positive, we will make the plan and it will become part of the development plan for Swindon Borough.

We will publish the plan on its website and provide details of where the plan can be viewed. The neighbourhood plan will also need to be made available at council offices for members of the public to view.