

## Neighbourhood Planning Blog...

One of the fundamental provisions and possibly the most exciting part of the Localism Bill is the introduction of a legislative framework for neighbourhoods to create their own plans through community empowerment, innovation and creativity.

Neighbourhood Plans are intended to create a local, grass roots level tier in the planning system. Instigated and developed entirely by the local community with the help of the local authority, this represents a unique and unprecedented opportunity to set out proposals and policies in a formal plan which will be put forward for approval in a local referendum.

Neighbourhood planning will for the first time give the community a real voice in deciding the look and feel of future development in the town. Local people will be able to have their say on the location of new homes, the design of buildings, the shops they want to see in the High Street, and the green spaces that should be protected.

It is explicit in the Localism Bill that there is a requirement for the Neighbourhood Plan to be in general conformity with the strategic content of the council's Local Plan or the Core Strategy when it is adopted as well as national and international law and guidance.

A Neighbourhood Plan which is at odds with the strategic vision of the council's policies or national and international law and guidance is likely to be found 'unsound' and will not be binding. For example, the Neighbourhood Plan cannot propose less housing or infrastructure than is stipulated in the council's adopted planning policy.

There are a number of key stages in the process of preparing and implementing a Neighbourhood Plan:

- 1) Define and propose a Neighbourhood Area and submit to the local authority
- 2) Establish a working group (Neighbourhood Forum) of key members of the community
- 3) Undertake public consultation with the local community
- 4) Produce and submit a draft plan to the local authority
- 5) The local authority will assess it against a validation checklist
- 6) Draft plan is submitted to an independent examiner for assessment
- 7) Written representations are submitted to the independent examiner
- 8) The independent examiner will publish a report with recommendations
- 9) Modifications to the plan are made and if necessary with further consultation
- 10) A referendum is held over whether the plan should be adopted/approved
- 11) If 51% vote in favour of the plan it will become an adopted plan

Over the last few months the Town Council has hosted a number of public meetings. A Neighbourhood Forum has been established with nearly 40 volunteers with different backgrounds and specialisms representing a wide range of sectors of the community, including arts, health, education, charities and businesses. The Neighbourhood Forum meets in the evening on the last Thursday of each month at the Town Hall. Members of the public are invited to attend and participate.

The purpose of the Neighbourhood Forum is to design and oversee a process that will result in the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Stratford-upon-Avon in order to preserve and enhance the quality of life, environmental attributes, economic growth and special historical characteristics of the neighbourhood through the empowerment of local people and communities.

A Neighbourhood Area has been informally drawn up and work has already begun on gathering information and data on aspects of town life which will form a basis of discussion for potential inclusion in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plan will be a formal document which contains a number of policies which the Council will be required to have regard to when considering proposed developments in the town. As yet the content of the Neighbourhood Plan has not been decided but it is envisaged that a wide range of topics identified by the Neighbourhood Forum and the local community will be included.

A series of public consultation events will be held over the coming months to seek the views of the local community on what should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The following topics may be included:

- New and improved pedestrian and cycle links and networks
- Increased access to affordable housing for local people
- Retail and business improvements
- Provision of new and protection of existing green open space
- Provision of new and protection of existing allotments
- Use of sustainable technologies in the design of new buildings and extension
- Enhanced public realm
- Reduce unoccupied premises and homes including upper floors in the town centre
- Provision of youth facilities within the town
- Protection and enhancement of the natural environment
- Identify areas in need of regeneration
- Increased public safety