

## **Neighbourhood forums**

The notion of a neighbourhood forum came into law through the Localism Act 2011. Under that law a local group is allowed to negotiate with adjoining groups and the relevant local authorities to define the boundaries of its neighbourhood area and formulate a neighbourhood development plan for the area. Under certain conditions the local authorities may then designate the local group as a neighbourhood forum and adopt the plan. The area may straddle the boundaries of multiple local authorities; if it does not, then only one local authority is relevant.

A neighbourhood forum must have at least 21 members, drawn from people who live, work or act as councillors in the neighbourhood area. However, there are no rules about the voting rights of members; in particular, the rights can depend on whether members act for themselves, act for groups (such as businesses, such as churches or residents' associations) or act as councillors.

For the local authorities to adopt the plan, it must be consistent with their local plans, approved by them and an independent inspector, and favoured by a majority in a referendum in the neighbourhood area. If the local authorities designate the area as a business area, there must be two referendums (one for individuals and one for businesses); the plan may then be adopted if it is favoured by a majority in one of them. After the local authorities adopt the plan, it is used in the local development plans to determine planning applications, monitored for effectiveness of implementation and updated appropriately.

The Localism Act 2011 was passed by the Liberal and Conservative coalition government.

The motivation for it was ostensibly to allow more local decision making in planning policy; another motivation might have been to reduce the roles of local authority planning departments. However, having neighbourhood forums both redistributes and increases the work and time involved in devising local development plans: local groups, as well as planning departments, need to apply considerable effort and experience.

More details are available from the government website<sup>1</sup> and the planning portal website<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Neighbourhood planning - GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>.

<sup>2</sup> Neighbourhood planning - Planning Portal. <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/permission/common-projects/neighbourhood-planning/introduction>.