

Local Voices, Island Issues

**A Guide on How to Develop Your Neighbourhood
Plan**

November 2011

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1. Introduction

1.1 What is a Neighbourhood Plan

The Localism Bill aims to reform the planning system to give local communities more say in shaping development in the areas in which they live.

This will be achieved through a new type of community-led initiative known as a “*Neighbourhood Plan*”. These plans will set out policies on the development and use of land in an identified parish or neighbourhood area. Once plans are adopted they will become part of the Local Development Framework for the Isle of Wight. This means that they will become a main consideration in the planning system when making decisions on planning applications.

As well as introducing Neighbourhood Plans the Localism Bill is also introducing two other important elements that local communities will be interested in. These are:

1. Neighbourhood Development Orders – these can be used to grant planning permission for a specific location within your parish or neighbourhood area.
2. Community Right to Build Order – this is in effect a sub category of the Neighbourhood Development Order and allows for community-led site development.

In order for Neighbourhood Plans or Orders to be adopted, they will need to conform¹ with planning policies and guidance at the local, national and European level. They will also need to demonstrate support from the local community.

1.2 What are the benefits of developing a Neighbourhood Plan?

Firstly the most obvious benefit is that developing a neighbourhood plan can help your community play a greater role in shaping the future of your area.

Secondly, in actually doing the work, it can bring together residents, businesses, local groups, landowners and developers to share ideas and build consensus on what needs to be achieved in an area.

Thirdly, it can help create lasting partnerships both within and outside of your community.

In particular, Neighbourhood Planning offers your community a direct route for including your local planning priorities and aspirations within the wider Island Plan system.

1.3 Who should be involved?

Whilst it may be appropriate for the local Parish or Town Council to initiate and lead the process this does not mean that it should be developed by them in isolation from the rest of the community.

¹ Neighbourhood plans cannot be at odds with the strategic planning policies that form the Development Plan for the Island. Nor can they be contrary to national and European policies and guidance.

The involvement of a broad range of local interested parties and groups will help strengthen local support for the plan (very important at the referendum stage – see later) and will also help make it easier to implement.

The following is the suggested list that you should seek to involve in the process²

- Residents
- Community Organisations
- Elected Representatives
- Businesses
- Landowners
- Developers

At certain stages in the process it will be necessary to involve officers from the IW Council. This may be to deal with specific local issues (e.g. education, highways etc) and will need to include officers from planning services. This could be to provide advice, guidance or information on a particular issue (e.g. helping you to profile your local community) or to comment on draft documents to make sure that they conform with local, national and European planning policies and regulations.

1.4 How do you develop a Neighbourhood Plan?

To date, there is not published set process for producing a Neighbourhood Plan, although there is a lot of good practice to learn from that has emerged from other community-led planning initiatives (e.g. Parish and Town Plans).

There are some elements of “process” outlined in the Localism Bill and these will become statutory once the Bill becomes legislation. These “statutory” stages relate mainly to process once your plan has been drafted. However there are issues that you will need to bear in mind in drafting your Neighbourhood Plan and these are discussed elsewhere in this guidance.

Considering all the good practice that has already used to develop community-led planning we have developed a suggested “Steps to Neighbourhood Planning” process that we recommended you use in developing your Neighbourhood Plan. These are set out in the diagram on the next page. You will see that the final three stages will be statutory which means that they are obligatory and cannot be omitted if you want to adopt your Neighbourhood Plan.

² This list is not exhaustive and there may well be others that you will want to involve.

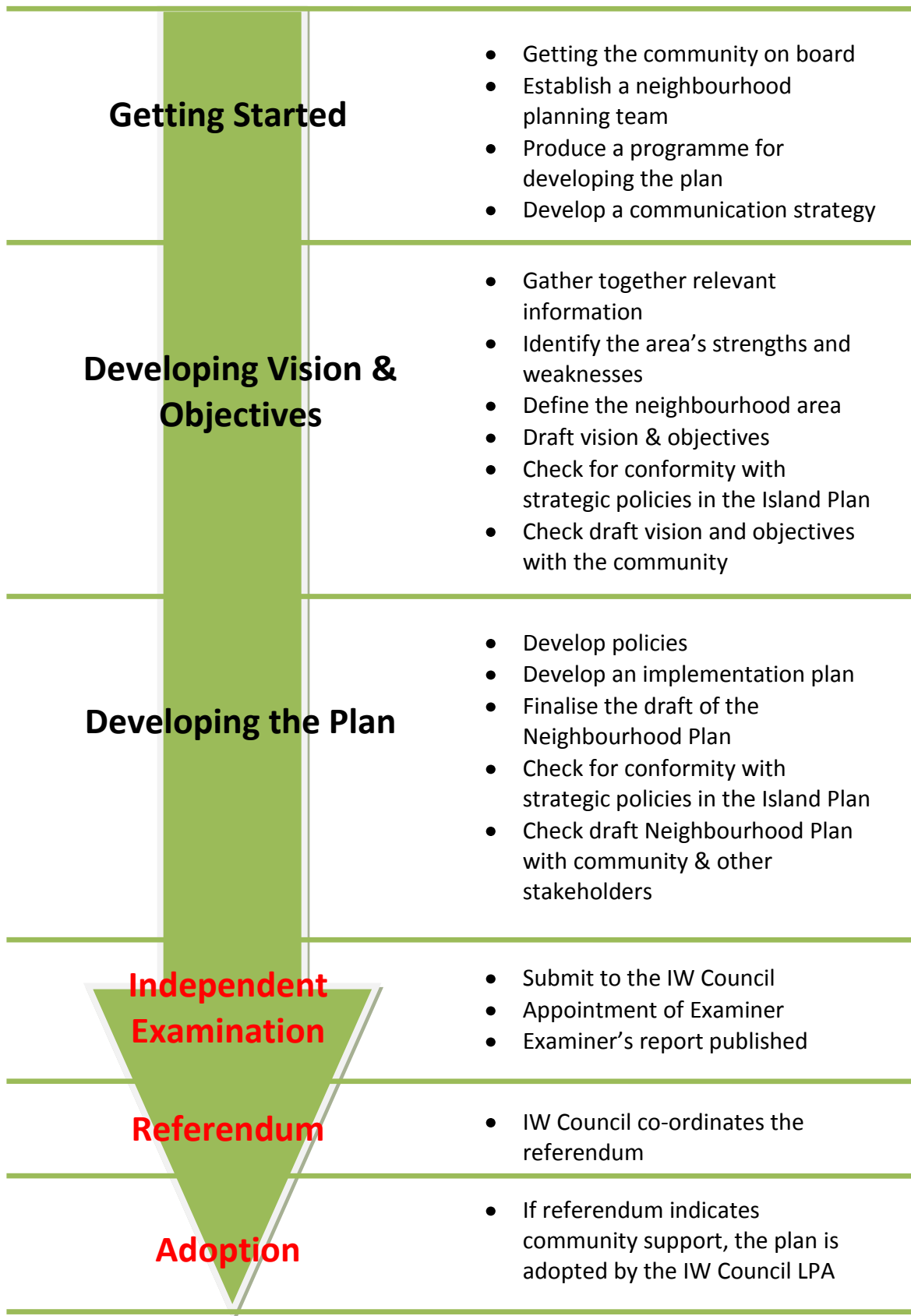


Figure 1: Recommended process for developing a Neighbourhood Plan

2. Getting Started

A Neighbourhood Plan should be community-led with Parish/Town Councils leading the project. The plan will depend on local leadership and partnership to be successful. Before you actually start to develop a Neighbourhood Plan you will need to do some initial preparation.

You will need to apply to the local planning authority (LPA), providing them with a map of the boundary of your Neighbourhood Plan. This would simply need to consist of a plan, and statement to indicate the proposed area, why the area is proposed and a statement that the group submitting the application is capable of being a qualifying body.

The LPA will then need to advertise that your application has been made and allow a period of time (6 weeks) for responses and representations on your application.

2.1 Getting Community Support

If the local community are not supportive of the idea of developing a Neighbourhood Plan right from the start then it will be very difficult to produce a document that reflects the aspirations of the whole local community. This will be particularly important at the referendum stage.

Your whole community needs to be informed about your intentions to produce a Neighbourhood Plan and you need to give them the chance to get involved from the start. Some suggestions for how best to inform and involve people are:

- A public meeting within the neighbourhood to explain the intent to produce a Neighbourhood Plan, to identify broad local issues that the local community would like it to consider and to recruit community volunteers to a project steering group.
- Write to local groups/organisations to notify them of your intentions and identify how interested they are in taking part in developing the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Plenty of good publicity and clear communications at the beginning and throughout the process.

2.2 Setting up a Neighbourhood Planning Team

We would recommend that you set up a project steering group (Neighbourhood Planning Team) to co-ordinate the project.

Although this should include representation from the Parish/Town Council, it is also important that wider representation is sought from the community and the goal of the project is to create a Neighbourhood Plan that reflects the aspirations and vision of the entire community.

The more representative your Neighbourhood Planning Team is the better the plan is likely to be.

You will really need to think about the range of skills, knowledge and experience that your Neighbourhood Planning Team will need. However, it is also important to remember that too large a group will not necessarily be effective.

How your Neighbourhood Planning Team is selected will influence the support that the process receives from the local community. You need to have a selection process that is fair, open and inclusive. For example, if you hold a public meeting then this can provide the ideal opportunity to recruit members to join. Do not be tempted to go around the neighbourhood knocking on doors to invite people to attend.

Once the team is in place you may find it useful to produce some simple terms of reference for the Neighbourhood Planning Team.

2.3 Produce a programme for developing the plan

You will need to programme the work that you think will be needed throughout the process. In particular, you will need to think about:

- What activities will need to be carried out at each stage (e.g. meetings, publicity, surveys etc)?
- What resources will be needed to carry out these activities (e.g. people, materials, funding)?
- How much time will you need to undertake each stage?

You can then use your programme to help focus and monitor the activity of the Neighbourhood Planning Team and to think about what funding you will need to develop the Neighbourhood Plan.

The indication from Government is that it is likely to take approximately one year to develop a Neighbourhood Plan.

2.4 Communication and Information

People are more likely to want to participate in developing the Neighbourhood Plan if they feel that are being given information about it from an early stage and right throughout the process. This is particularly important for Neighbourhood Plans where the support of the community at the referendum stage is crucial to its adoption.

You may like to think about creating a communication strategy, setting out how and when you will communicate with the community and other stakeholders.

3. Developing a Vision & Objectives

This is the important first stage of producing your Neighbourhood Plan.

The Vision should be an overarching statement, or series of statements, describing what the community will be like to live and work in within 15-20 years time.

The objectives should set out what the community wants to achieve in order to deliver the vision.

Detailed policies and actions will the need to flow from these objectives.

3.1 Gathering Information

To help you draft a vision and objectives you will need to have a clear picture of the community's characteristics and understand whether there are any current or emerging proposals that will affect the area.

Community Profiling:

This will involve gathering statistical data on population size, household size, incomes, family composition etc and all of this information helps to build up a social portrait of the community. Some useful resources for finding this information include the [Council's website](#), the neighbourhood section of the [ONS website](#) and the [NOMIS](#) website, which can provide information on labour market statistics.

Identifying Assets:

It may be useful to you to take stock of all the area's physical assets and also note their condition. This could include community centres, village halls, playing fields, sports facilities, footpaths, health facilities etc.

This could be carried out by the Neighbourhood Planning Team and other volunteers by organising a walk (or several walks) through the area to note details. Taking photos of the assets and marking them on a map could then form the start of a "neighbourhood inventory", which you may find useful in later stages of work on the Neighbourhood Plan.

Review Existing Plans and Strategies:

Gather together information on any existing plans, strategies or studies that have a bearing on the community. This could include:

- Previous versions of any Parish/Town Plans, Village Design Statements, Market Town Healthchecks.
- Island Plan (Planning) documents that can be found on the [Council's website](#).
- Evidence documents that support the Island Plan (e.g. Green Infrastructure Mapping Study; Open Space Audit; Playing Pitch Strategy; Strategic Flood Risk Assessment etc – see link above).
- The Island Transport Plan
- Other strategies relating to health, education, housing, etc.

It is important to understand what implications these plans have for your local community and produce a plan which is in conformity with statutory documents.

Discussions with Stakeholders:

It will be important for the Neighbourhood Planning Team to establish contact with and have initial discussions with a range of stakeholders. This will help you understand if there are any other aspirations for the area that have not yet been developed into a plan or a strategy.

You may wish to have discussions with:

- Local community organisations
- Local business
- Landowners and/or their representatives
- Offices from a variety of services within the IW Council
- Officers from other public agencies and services provides as may be appropriate for your area (e.g. Natural England, Environment Agency, English Heritage, Primary Care Trust etc).

3.2 Identifying your area's strengths and weaknesses

You will need to ask your local community what they think the area's strengths and weaknesses are. This will involve asking residents to give their views and could include:

- Survey (hard copy/web based)
- Community Event (workshops/exhibitions etc)
- Focus groups or discussions at local group meetings
- Techniques tailored for different sectors of the community (e.g. working with the local school, online survey for specific groups).

Questions that you might like to consider include:

- ? What are our strengths as a community?
- ? What do we do well?
- ? What are we missing?
- ? What do we need to make the community a better place to live?
- ? What resources (e.g. people, places, services, land) do we have?
- ? What opportunities exist in the area?
- ? What are the barriers (physical, financial, environmental)?

3.3 Define the area of your Neighbourhood

The neighbourhood area is the area to which the proposed Neighbourhood Plan will relate.

The expectation on the Island is that in most cases neighbourhood areas will follow Parish boundaries. However, if it is necessary, a neighbourhood area can cover only part of a parish or a combination of parishes if necessary.

If the area you are proposing covers more than one Parish, then you must seek consent from each of the affected Parish/Town Councils. This will of course also have implications for representation on Neighbourhood Planning Teams and the scale of the community engagement that will be needed.

A proposal for designating a neighbourhood area must be submitted by the relevant Parish/Town Council to the Isle of Wight Council for their approval in the early stages of developing the Neighbourhood Plan.

Proposals should be submitted to the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services and will preferably be in electronic format.

3.4 Drafting the Vision and Objectives

As your Neighbourhood Plan will ultimately form part of the Island Plan, it would make sense for the vision of the plan to cover the same period as that of the Island Plan Core Strategy – which runs up until the end of March 2027.

Your vision and objectives should be based on information gathered on issues discussed in 3.1 and 3.2 and you could draft options for your vision or draft a single vision.

It is important that the vision is realistic and achievable.

A typical vision might include:

- What the area will look like;
- What facilities there will be and what quality of facility will be in place;
- What the social and economic outlook for the area will be.

Objectives are more specific and they will need to set out how the vision will be achieved. For each element of the vision there could be one or more objectives, depending upon the different priorities of your community.

For example:

Part of your vision may state that you want to see “*accessible, high quality areas of green space ...*”

An objective leading from this may be to “*seek the provision of an outdoor recreation space within easy walking distance of the centre of the village/town/neighbourhood*”.

You may find that in working with your local community some people raise issues that do not really relate to the development of a Neighbourhood Plan (e.g. issues relating to litter; communications; anti-social behaviour etc). It is important that you recognise that whilst these may not be issues that can be addressed in a Neighbourhood Plan they are important issues for your local community and the Parish/Town Council could address them via a different route.

One suggested approach to deal with this type of issue is for the Parish/Town Council to develop a separate action plan to address these wider social issues.

3.5 Check for conformity with strategic policies in the Island Plan Core Strategy or Other Island Plan Documents

Once you have drafted a vision and objectives for your Neighbourhood Plan it will be important to check that it does not stray from or provide a contrary position to the Island Plan Core Strategy or any other relevant planning documents produced by the IW Council.

The Island Plan Core Strategy can be viewed from the [Council's website](#).

IW Council Planning Services will provide advice to the Neighbourhood Planning Team on whether the draft vision and objectives are in general conformity.

3.6 Check the draft vision and objectives with the local community

It is essential that you check that the community supports the draft vision and objectives for the area.

Ways in which you could approach this include:

- Making copies available for public distribution and asking for comments;
- Meeting with community groups and asking for their feedback;
- Organising informal discussion groups;
- Holding public meetings or drop-in events;
- Publishing information in the local newsletter/on a website and providing an address to receive feedback.

Following consultation, any necessary amendments can be made before moving on to developing the detailed content of the Neighbourhood Plan.

4. Developing the plan

You can now start to think about the detailed content of the Neighbourhood Plan. This will include policies, proposals maps and possibly even an action or “implementation” plan for the area.

Once drafted you will need to check with conformity with the strategic policies of the Island Plan Core Strategy and other relevant planning documents and check that the content is supported by the local community (as set out in 3.5 – 3.6 above).

4.1 Develop policies

The Government is clear that the intention of Neighbourhood Plans should be to set out policies on the development and use of land and that policies should be credible, justifiable and achievable.

There are different types of policies that you may like to consider developing. For example:

- Policies that allocate specific sites for particular types and scales of development (e.g. residential, employment, retail etc).
- Policies that provide specific requirements or criteria that have to be met (e.g. landscaping; location of open green space, assessments needed etc).
- Policies which specify sites to be protected or enhanced (e.g. environmental assets or areas of landscape character).
- Policies that are generic and apply to future development (e.g. local design policies, transport and access etc).

Policies should be drafted by the Neighbourhood Planning Team and will need to be based upon information gathered during previous stages of work. You will need to think about what policies will be needed to achieve each of the objectives you have drafted.

For example:

The objective may be to “seek the provision of an outdoor recreation space within easy walking distance of the centre of the village/town/neighbourhood”.

A policy leading from this may be “an area of approx x ha off Local Road is allocated for recreational open space”.

Policies need to be achievable and thought will need to be given to how the above example can be delivered – e.g. through the Parish Council purchasing or leasing land from a landowner, or perhaps in conjunction with development elsewhere in the area.

The need to ensure policies are achievable particularly applies to those that relate to the future use of particular sites. Site related policies will need to be drawn up in negotiation with the relevant landowners or site promoters.

Check conformity with strategic policies within the Island Plan and other Planning Documents

At this stage we would recommend that you ask for advice from IW Council Planning Services to help you identify what could be achievable in terms of developing policies. This will also help ensure that emerging policies are in conformity with the local planning authority's policy documents.

Site Proposals Maps

For site allocations and site-related policies, the Neighbourhood Plan will need to include a map(s) showing proposed site locations and boundaries.

Parish/Town Councils may already have Ordnance Survey licenses and software, and so may already be able to produce and manipulate maps. However, if not there are other options available for having access to mapping which the IW Council Planning Services can advise upon.

Sustainability Appraisal and Appropriate Assessment

There is a legal requirement to undertake a Sustainability Appraisal on planning documents before they become part of the adopted development plan for an area.

A Sustainability Appraisal looks at the possible economic, environmental and social impacts of an emerging plan and should result in a final plan which has the least negative impact possible in an area.

The Government has indicated that Neighbourhood Plans should be subject to this requirement, and so Neighbourhood Planning Teams should be aware that the sustainability appraisal will need to be planned for early on in the process.

It is important that the appraisal is started when work starts on the plan so that emerging ideas, content and policies can be assessed in order to inform the final plan. If the sustainability appraisal is done too late, it will not be able to inform the final plan and this will increase the risk of legal challenge at a later stage.

Appropriate Assessment follows a similar principle and this is something that may be relevant to some Neighbourhood Plans. This specifically considers the wider impacts of particular emerging policies and plans on European sites of ecological importance within the area.

Neither of these documents needs to be complicated and they are tasks that IW Council Planning Services will provide advice on. We would advise you to contact planning.policy@iow.gov.uk at an early stage in the process to ensure that we can provide you with as much advice as possible.

4.2 Develop an Implementation Plan

You may like to think about doing this so that you can show what action is needed. This does not have to be part of the neighbourhood plan itself but could be a separate document, or an appendix, which you can update as actions progress or new ones emerge.

You will need to make sure that actions are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely). Issues to consider when think about actions are what priority they should be given; who will be responsible for leading on delivering the action; what date they will need to be carried out by; who else may need to be involved and what additional resources may be required.

4.3 Finalise the Draft Neighbourhood Plan

There is no rule on what your plan should look like, but we would advise that it should contain clear policies and accompanying maps where needed so that it is easy to read.

At this stage, you will need to produce simply an accompanying report on the Sustainability Appraisal and Appropriate Assessment (if needed) and IW Council Planning Services will be able to provide you with advice on this.

Once you have a draft document, fully worked up, we would suggest that you undertake a quick check on conformity with the Development Plan, with the IW Council and that you also consult on the whole of the draft document with the local community and other stakeholders that you think need to be involved.

When you receive comments, you will need to analyse what is being said and consider whether any amendments need to be made to your Neighbourhood Plan before you submit it to the Island of Wight Council ready for examination.

5. Independent Examination

5.1 Submit to the Isle of Wight Council

Once you have made any necessary amendments, you will need to submit your plan to the Council, and this should include a summary of the proposals.

The Council will conduct a check to ensure that due process has been followed and will then arrange for independent examination of the document.

5.2 Appointment of Examiner

The Isle of Wight Council will, in collaboration with the Neighbourhood Planning Team decide on who to appoint to undertake and Independent Examination of the Plan and this will be paid for by the IW Council.

The aim of the Examination will be to check conformity with:

- The strategic content of the LDF – the Island Plan Core Strategy and other adopted documents
- The National Planning Framework and/or other national guidance
- European Directives
- National and International Designations
- Any Neighbourhood Plans for neighbouring areas.

As far as possible the examiner will consider written representations during the examination rather than oral presentations, however it will be at the Examiner's individual discretion as to whether hearings should be held, and these will need to be held in public.

5.3 Examiner's Report

Once the examination has been undertaken you will receive a report from the Examiner and it will contain one of the following recommendations:

- That the draft plan should proceed to a referendum
- That the draft plan should proceed to a referendum subject to certain amendments
- That the draft plan should be refused

The report will be sent to you and the IW Council will also receive a copy and arrange for it to be published on-line.

It will be for the IW Council to decide whether or not the recommendation from the Inspector should be followed and the Council will notify you of its decision and publish its decision.

6. Referendum

Assuming that the IW Council decides that the draft plan can proceed to a local referendum then the Council will co-ordinate and fund this part of the process.

The referendum will normally be open to any individual registered to vote in the Parish, but the Examiner may take the decision that the referendum should be extended if certain policies within the plan have implications for surrounding communities.

If the majority of those who vote on the adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan vote favourably, then the plan will be adopted by the IW Council.

7. Adoption

Once adopted, the Neighbourhood Plan will become a supplementary planning document within the Local Development Framework. This means that it will become a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

8. Support Available

Isle of Wight Council, Planning Services is able to provide the following support to help you with your Neighbourhood Plan:

- General advice on how to get started
- Advice on planning community and stakeholder engagement
- Advice with some of the technical, planning-related aspects
- Signposting to relevant contacts within other Council Services
- In-kind support through the provision of materials (maps, display boards etc)
- Funding the examination and referendum

If you have any queries please contact:

Planning.policy@iow.gov.uk

Planning Policy Section
Planning Services
Seaclose Offices
Fairlee Road
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The planning policy team will also be able to provide you with contact details of other organisations and groups that may be able to assist you with your Neighbourhood Plan.