



# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Dear Town and Parish Councillors,

## RE: THE PREPARATION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLANS

A growing number of communities are getting involved in neighbourhood planning in Stroud district. We are home to the largest number of designated neighbourhood areas in Gloucestershire.

We recognise the hard work communities are putting into the preparation of these plans and we believe Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) have an important role to play, particularly in bringing forward development to meet local needs.

Stroud District Council (SDC) is committed to helping communities that have chosen this path of community led planning to deliver successful plans. The role of SDC in the preparation of NDPs is twofold: providing advice or assistance to the community organisations producing the NDP; and making decisions at key stages in the process.

To date SDC has actively supported neighbourhood planning through a number of measures. These include:

- Funding Gloucestershire Rural Community Council to provide independent support and information to communities thinking about embarking on neighbourhood planning;
- Providing direct support and encouragement through a single point of contact in the form of a dedicated Neighbourhood Planning Officer who has been visiting all Town and Parish Councils to discuss the process and the opportunities that neighbourhood planning can bring to communities;
- Identifying in the Stroud District Local Plan - Development Strategy, the role that neighbourhood planning can play to provide opportunities to meet specific development needs of communities at a local level.

The decision to produce a NDP is unique to each community in the District and we understand that those that choose to pursue this route will progress at their own pace. However, some communities are now reaching a stage where draft policies and draft plans will soon start to emerge. Therefore, we need to look ahead, and start to raise awareness of the very important decisions that lie ahead.

SDC has a duty to ensure NDPs meet all procedural requirements and a set of basic conditions prescribed by the legislation. On submission of a draft NDP, SDC decides whether all procedural matters have been satisfied and the draft plan can proceed to examination. At examination, SDC will decide whether the content of the draft plan meets, amongst other things, each of the following criteria:

- The NDP must have regard to national policy. This means the neighbourhood plan must not prevent the delivery of important national policy objectives;
- The NDP must be in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the Stroud District Local Plan. NDPs should not promote less development than set out in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies;
- The NDP must demonstrate that it contributes to the achievement of sustainable development;
- The NDP must be compatible with European Union (EU) obligations, as incorporated into UK law.

Whilst the consideration of these criteria is greatly enhanced by an independent examination, the recommendations of the examiner are not legally binding; consequently, the decision whether an NDP meets the prescribed basic conditions and can then proceed finally to a referendum lies with SDC.

It is therefore essential that communities preparing an NDP contact our Neighbourhood Planning Officer at an early stage in the process to ensure that their NDP meets all procedural requirements and these criteria, to avoid potential disappointment at the decision making stages.

We have every interest in ensuring that plans currently being produced in Stroud district meet all requirements. To help you with this, we offer the following assistance:

- Our Neighbourhood Planning Officer will work with the community to give practical advice on matters such as consistency with national and local policy. This is so we can ensure NDPs can proceed smoothly through the formal stages. We strongly encourage communities to share draft policies with the Council, at the earliest opportunity to ensure that they do “not promote less development than set out in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies.” (National Planning Policy Framework, para. 184).
- SDC will provide a framework for communities to carry out an assessment and demonstrate their emerging NDPs contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.
- SDC will help communities meet EU obligations. Emerging NDPs can be submitted to the Council so they can be screened for the need to produce a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA).
- For plans that meet all requirements, SDC will offer referendum dates to facilitate the creation of a clear and transparent decision making timetable and to allow communities to project manage their progress and the timing of their submission.

The new Stroud District Local Plan identifies a role for NDPs, particularly for smaller settlements where strategic growth is not planned, in order to provide additional development opportunities to meet local needs. The Local Plan also includes guiding principles, opportunities for growth and a supporting evidence base for the eight parish cluster areas within Stroud district to help communities get started with neighbourhood planning. The Local Plan continues to progress towards adoption, with examination hearing dates set to resume on 12-15 May and 28 May-12 June 2015. On the assumption that the Inspector finds the plan “sound”, we expect the Local Plan to be adopted by January 2016.

We look forward to receiving properly prepared NDPs and approving them for referendum. Please do not hesitate to contact our Neighbourhood Planning Officer Ricardo Rios (01453 754339) in the first instance if you are considering preparing an NDP or if you are preparing one and need further information or assistance before submitting the draft plan for examination.

Yours Sincerely,



Barry Wyatt  
Strategic Head (Development Services)  
Stroud District Council