

BENINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

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Neighbourhood Plan

When Neighbourhood Plans (NPs) were introduced in 2012 some members of Benington Parish Council (BPC) were invited to a presentation by East Herts Council who explained how they were expected to work. East Herts also outlined the somewhat complex and costly nature of producing an NP. Finally they explained that the Plan could not be produced by BPC, but that it had to be produced by an independent committee.

BPC duly asked the residents of Benington if anyone was prepared to take on producing a Neighbourhood Plan. So far there have been no takers. Since then a number of residents have asked us what BPC are doing about an NP. In response BPC has decided to write up a background to the NP and a precis of how to produce one in the hope that a committee can be persuaded to form.

For a Parish to prepare and adopt an NP a fairly prescriptive procedure must be followed. The NP cannot be created by the Parish Council. It must be generated by an independent committee. The committee or Forum will need a Chairman and a secretary and must 'reflect the inclusivity, diversity and character of the area'. The Forum then has to present itself to the district council for approval. The Forum must also agree with the district Council the boundary of the area of influence to be included in the proposed NP. Having been approved, the next step is to build the evidence base. This will include socio economic data, technical reports, transport studies, mapping, appraisal of conservation areas, and plans from public bodies. At the same time, the committee must show evidence of community engagement. In practice this means a collection of volunteers who are prepared to leaflet all houses in the village. Just putting it on the village website is not considered sufficient. Having gathered all necessary data in a manner approved by the District Council, the Parish can then write up its NP. Any policies written into the NP will require separate documentary evidence of community engagement. They will also need to reference the existing local and National Planning Policy framework (NPPF). There then follows (do keep up at the back....) a pre-submission consultation. As well as the Parish, this consultation will need to include the Local Council, the County Council, the Environment Agency, Natural England and English Heritage. It is then the duty of the Local Authority to subject the NP to an independent examination. This may lead to modifications. If the NP is found to be satisfactory it must then be put to the Parish for a referendum. 'If more than 50% of those voting in the referendum vote yes, then the council will bring the plan into legal force'.

It must be stressed that the above is a summary. For more detail there is more than enough to satisfy even the most dedicated NP enthusiast on the internet. Other communities who have achieved an NP say it takes about 3 to 4 years, and costs about £20,000 though there are grants available.

Anyone interested in forming a committee is requested to please contact the Parish Clerk.