

Designating a neighbourhood area

1. Introduction

- 1.1. A parish/town council which wishes to do a neighbourhood plan will need to apply to West Berkshire Council for an area to be designated as a 'Neighbourhood Area'.
- 1.2. West Berkshire Council strongly recommend that you have a discussion with us before you decide on applying for a neighbourhood area to be designated. We want to ensure that a neighbourhood plan is the correct tool to achieve the aims you have for your area. You will need to have the support of your local community right from the start.

2. Deciding on a Neighbourhood Area

A. Whole Parish option:

- 2.1. There are advantages to choosing the same area as the parish. These are:
 - If a parish council applies to have its parish as a neighbourhood area this does not need to be consulted upon by West Berkshire Council.
 - It is more likely to be supported by the local community.
 - The choice of area will be easy to justify in your neighbourhood area application form.

B. Alternative options:

- 2.2. The neighbourhood area does not have to follow existing administrative boundaries. There are other alternatives, whereby a neighbourhood area can either be smaller or larger than the area of the parish. For example:

Alternative Scenario 1 - smaller area:

- 2.3. A parish council may decide that one particular area of their parish is particularly cohesive and has its own identity, so might consider having a neighbourhood area specifically for this smaller area rather than for the whole of the area of the parish.

Alternative Scenario 2 - larger area:

- 2.4. Two adjacent parish councils for villages close together may decide that a joint neighbourhood plan, covering both parishes would have benefits because the neighbourhood plan could tackle issues shared by both villages. This can even include a neighbourhood area that covers several parishes and goes across local authority boundaries.
- 2.5. There are benefits to working together as a group of parish councils:
 - Common issues can be tackled together.
 - There will be more people with a wider range of experience that can help with creating the neighbourhood plan.
 - Costs can be shared.
 - It can build upon one or a number of individual parishes' Parish Plans.

2.6. However, there are things that you should consider:

- If you decide a larger area would make sense, you would need all the parish/town councils involved to agree on the neighbourhood area. One parish/town council would then become the lead parish/town council and would make the neighbourhood area application on behalf of all parishes involved.
- A neighbourhood area that crosses local authority boundaries will be challenging as the neighbourhood plan will need to be in conformity with the Local Plan for each local authority.
- You should also check whether there are other neighbourhood areas nearby. If you think part of an existing designated neighbourhood area should be part of your neighbourhood area you will need to talk to West Berkshire Council about how to proceed.
- If a joint plan is to be prepared only one grant can be applied for from Locality as they allocate their support per plan. Each individual parish council would not be eligible for a separate grant.

2.7. Once you have decided on your neighbourhood area you will need to say why you have chosen that area when you make your neighbourhood area application to West Berkshire Council.

3. Making an Application to get a Neighbourhood Area Designated

3.1. To make an application for the designation of a neighbourhood area, the parish/town council should complete and submit the neighbourhood area application form. The form is included is available upon request from the Planning Policy Team.

3.2. The application should be accompanied by a map showing the area that is being proposed as a neighbourhood area.

3.3. West Berkshire Council can provide the map needed to accompany the application if required.

3.4. The map needs to clearly show the proposed area and the copyright permission for the map especially if an OS map has been used. This is because the application form and map will be published on the West Berkshire Council website, so requires these permissions.

3.5. If you need any assistance with completing the neighbourhood area application form or creating the map showing the proposed neighbourhood area, please contact West Berkshire Council who will help answer questions / create maps.

4. Consultation on the Neighbourhood Area Application

4.1. If a parish/town council is proposing the whole of its parish as the neighbourhood area it must submit an application to West Berkshire Council but there is not the need to carry out a consultation.

4.2. If the application is 'valid' the Local Planning Authority must designate the proposed neighbourhood area.

4.3. A valid application will:

- have a map showing the proposed neighbourhood area;
- have a statement explaining why the proposed area is considered an appropriate neighbourhood area; and
- be from the 'relevant body', which for West Berkshire is a Parish Council.

4.4. A consultation is required if the proposed neighbourhood area is smaller or larger than a single parish.

4.5. In these cases, West Berkshire Council will publicise the application by publishing it on its website and also send out notifications to all those on the Planning Policy consultation database.

4.6. West Berkshire Council will ask the relevant parish/town council to help publicise the consultations by sending emails to any of their contacts. West Berkshire Council will also ask for information about the consultation to be published in a parish newsletter and/or on the parish website, if one exists.

5. Designation of the Neighbourhood Area

A. Designating a neighbourhood area for the whole parish:

5.1. If the application submitted by the parish council to West Berkshire Council is valid and proposes the whole of its parish to be designated as a neighbourhood area the area will be designated.

B. Designating a neighbourhood area for an alternative scenario:

5.2. A consultation will be required, and then West Berkshire Council must make a decision on designating a neighbourhood area within the following timescales to meet national regulations:

- Decisions will be made within 20 weeks of the start of the consultation where the proposed area falls across two or more Local Planning Authorities.
- Decisions will be made within 13 weeks of the start of the consultation in all other cases. For example, if only part of a parish boundary is proposed as the neighbourhood area or a few parishes join to form one large neighbourhood area.

5.3. If West Berkshire Council does not make a decision within the required timescale, the neighbourhood area is automatically considered to be designated.