



Briefing Note: Future of Neighbourhood Planning Support Services

Subject: Implications of MHCLG Funding Changes on Neighbourhood Planning Support

Date: 18 June 2025

Purpose:

To provide an update on the future of neighbourhood planning support services in light of recent communication from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and to reaffirm the importance of neighbourhood planning in shaping local development.

Background

Neighbourhood planning has been a cornerstone of localism, empowering communities to shape the development and growth of their areas. Since its inception, over 2,400 communities have initiated neighbourhood plans, with more than 1,000 plans successfully passing referendums. Many of these have been in the West Midlands Region and here in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. These plans have played a vital role in ensuring that development reflects local priorities and character.

The success of neighbourhood planning has been underpinned by a robust support system, including grants and technical assistance, which has enabled communities—often with limited resources—to engage meaningfully in the planning process.

Current Situation

MHCLG has informed us that, due to the outcomes of the recent Spending Review, they are unable to proceed with commissioning new neighbourhood planning support services for the period beyond March 2025. As a result:

- **No new applications** for grants or technical support will be accepted.
- **Existing technical support packages** will be completed by March 2025, with flexibility to extend delivery until March 2026 depending on individual timetables.

- **Support for the Champions Network and learning opportunities** will cease with immediate effect.
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Implications

The withdrawal of funding and support services presents significant challenges for communities currently developing or considering neighbourhood plans. Without access to grants and expert guidance, many groups may struggle to progress or initiate plans, potentially undermining the momentum built over the past decade.

Without funding, the majority of town and parish Councils will be unable to review their existing NPs. According to para 14 of the NPPF (Dec 2024), NPs are only considered up to date when they have been adopted or reviewed within 5 years. Without the necessary funding to keep plans up to date there is a risk losing all of the work and investment to date in NPs.

This change also impacts the broader ecosystem of neighbourhood planning, including the Champions Network, which has played a critical role in mentoring and inspiring new groups.

The Importance of Continued Support

Neighbourhood planning remains a vital tool for community empowerment and democratic engagement in planning. It contributes to:

- **Local ownership** of development decisions
- **Better quality and more sustainable outcomes**
- **Stronger community cohesion and resilience**

Ensuring continued support—whether through alternative funding mechanisms, local authority engagement, or third-sector partnerships—is essential to maintain the integrity and accessibility of the neighbourhood planning process and an essential tool to give local communities more of a say in how development affects its area.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The development and adoption of Neighbourhood Plans are still important, and the sector needs to champion their value. Funding to enable new NP's to be developed and maintain existing NP's is still critical and we need to persuade MHCLG to continue with financial support to encourage other communities to adopt a similar approach.
