



ROSCONN
STRATEGIC LAND



Rosconn's Guide to
Neighbourhood Plans

Trusted Transparent Innovative



Working with landowners to successfully promote their land for residential development

1. Introduction

Neighbourhood Planning was introduced by the Localism Act in 2011 and since this time, almost 1,000 neighbourhood Plans have been approved across the country, with many more currently being progressed.

Rosconn Strategic Land have been involved in several Neighbourhood Plans over the last few years, **working with landowners to successfully promote their land** for residential development.

This document has been prepared to explain what a Neighbourhood Plan is and the key stages in promoting land for residential development, using some of our recent case studies to help highlight the role we play in the process.



2. Neighbourhood Plans Explained

What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

A Neighbourhood Plan gives **communities the power to develop a shared vision for their local area and help shape the development and growth within it.**

They should normally cover a period of 10–20 years and include policies that will help deliver that vision, supporting future planning applications for development and use of land to help meet identified local needs.

A Neighbourhood Plan must be in general conformity with both national and local planning policy and should not undermine strategic policies of the adopted Local Plan for an area, ensuring that where there are any conflicts, these are justified with evidence.

Once completed, a Neighbourhood Plan has the same legal status as the Local Plan for the wider Local Authority area and becomes part of the statutory development plan. This means that future planning applications must be determined in accordance with it, unlike a Parish Plan for instance.

Who is involved in making a Neighbourhood Plan?

Neighbourhood Plans are led by authorised local community organisations **known as Qualifying Bodies**, which will usually be a **Parish or Town Council**, or where neither are present, a **Neighbourhood Forum**.

A Steering Group or Neighbourhood Forum is then formed, usually comprising a mix of councillors and members of the local community that are interested in helping

develop the plan. They will however need to engage with the wider community and a range of other organisations and stakeholders to obtain their input throughout the process.

The relevant Local Planning Authority is also legally required to provide support to local communities in the preparation of a Plan, sharing evidence and helping to resolve issues to ensure it has the best chance of success. They also play a key role in the latter stages of the plan-making process.

The Qualifying Body may also need professional and technical support from a range of sources and where necessary, seek funding to do so. Financial support is available both from Central Government and other funding streams to assist in the overall preparation and production of the Plan.

How is it prepared?

The process for preparing a Neighbourhood Plan is prescribed in legislation and requires certain stages to be followed.

Once a decision has been made to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan, the Qualifying Body must apply to the Local Planning Authority to designate their area as a Neighbourhood Area – this normally follows a Parish or Town Council boundary. Once confirmed, the Qualifying Body will need to consider the scope and objectives of the Plan, including whether they intend to allocate sites for housing and other uses. Policies and site allocations will need to be supported by appropriate evidence, the regulations stating that this should be proportionate and robust to support the choices made and approach taken.

Informal consultation will normally take place with the local community prior to completing a draft Plan (Pre-Submission version), but once



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it has been completed, the Qualifying Body must undertake a statutory consultation for at least 6 weeks. Subject to the comments received, amendments may be made prior to completing the final Draft Plan (Submission Draft version). The Submission Draft Plan is then formally issued to the Local Planning Authority who will then undertake a final stage of statutory consultation for a further 6 weeks.

Once consultation has been completed, the Submission Draft Plan, along with its supporting evidence and copies of representations received, is issued to an Independent Examiner for examination.

The Examiner will determine the format and scope of the examination and will decide if a public hearing is necessary, or otherwise proceed via the written representations procedure. If a public hearing is held, the Examiner will decide who will be invited to speak but will normally include the Qualifying Body and the Local Planning Authority. The

independent examination is not as forensic as a Local Plan examination, with the Examiner only required to consider whether the Plan meets the ‘basic conditions’ – principally that it is broadly consistent with national and local planning policy.

At the end of the process, the Examiner will issue a report to the Local Planning Authority confirming whether the Plan has met the basic conditions, and where necessary recommend modifications to ensure it is acceptable. The Local Planning Authority will then decide whether to allow the Plan to proceed to the final stage, with modifications if necessary.

The final stage involves a referendum where local people vote on whether to support the Plan coming into force or not. Where the majority (more than 50%) support the Plan, it must be formally ‘made’ within 8 weeks of the Referendum. Once made, the Plan has legal effect and becomes part of the development plan for the area – any subsequent planning applications must then have full regard to its content.



Key Stages of Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan



How long does it take?

There are no prescribed timescales and it varies significantly, depending on the scope of the Plan and the support a Qualifying Body can call on from within the local community to help with the range of tasks involved. Generally, a Neighbourhood Plan can take between 3-5 years.

Should Neighbourhood Plans allocate Housing Sites?

Initially, there was no guidance on how Neighbourhood Plans should plan for housing, with many either deciding not to do so or otherwise undertaking their own local housing needs assessment to determine what level and type of housing should be planned for. More recently, the Government has updated the guidance which now requires the relevant Local Planning Authority to identify a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas in its Local Plan or otherwise provide an indicative figure to a Qualifying Body when requested.

Whilst Neighbourhood Plans are not obliged to allocate sites for housing, there are many benefits of doing so. Most local communities feel they are better placed to determine the best location for new housing development in their area and may prefer to take on this role rather than leaving it to the Local Planning Authority to do so in its Local Plan. Government guidance is however clear that Neighbourhood Plans should not be used to plan for less housing than is identified, encouraging them to either meet or exceed the housing requirement where possible.

By taking the decision to identify and allocate sites in its Neighbourhood Plan to meet its housing requirement, local communities can direct housing to the most suitable site or sites in their area, informed by local knowledge.

They can also have greater influence on how a site is developed and what is included as part of the scheme to achieve wider local aspirations. It will however need to demonstrate that they have selected the most appropriate site by undertaking an appraisal of individual sites, which will form part of the evidence base for the Plan.

The benefits of allocating Housing Sites in Neighbourhood Plans include:

-  Being able to direct new housing to the most appropriate sites in the area;
-  Securing protection through national policy from speculative developments in its area where the Local Planning Authority cannot demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply;
-  Scope to specify the type of housing provided on a site to help meet local needs, provided this is supported by appropriate evidence;
-  Ability to influence how a site is planned to achieve local objectives, such as securing specific types of public open space or addressing local highway issues; and
-  Greater opportunity to guide the design and appearance of new developments.





**Engage Early...Be Prepared...
Be Flexible...Be Patient**

3. How to be effective in the Neighbourhood Planning Process

Engage Early

Rosconn's experience is that being involved in the Neighbourhood Planning process at the outset is highly beneficial as it provides the best opportunity to fully promote a site.

The initial stage of designating a Neighbourhood Area can be relatively quick, with the outcome reported on both the Parish and Local Planning Authority websites. This is usually the first indication that a Plan is being prepared.

The Qualifying Body may then undertake informal consultation within the local community to raise awareness of the intention to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan and seek suggestions on its scope and a

range of other issues, including whether it should identify sites for housing.

It can then take months or even years before a Draft Plan is prepared, and the local community may not be fully aware of the background work taking place by the Qualifying Body as they gather the evidence base to help support the Plan's preparation.

Once the Pre-Submission version of the draft Plan is published, it can be too late to effectively promote a site as decisions may have already been made, so it is generally advisable to make the Body aware of a suitable housing site as early as possible.

Be Prepared

If a Qualifying Body is intending to allocate a site or sites for housing, their principal evidence base will be the Local Planning Authority's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). This is a



record of all sites that have previously been put forward by landowners for assessment on their suitability for housing. The Body will identify SHLAA sites that fall within its area as a starting point but may also provide a further opportunity for new sites to be put forward. If a site is not included in the SHLAA, the Body may not be aware of the availability of a site, making it even more important that it is brought to the attention of the Body at the earliest opportunity.

Whilst submitting a plan to identify the site may suffice, **Rosconn will generally look to supplement this with as much evidence as possible to demonstrate the site's suitability.**

This can range from a supporting statement, highlighting important attributes of a site to a more comprehensive, evidence-based submission that may include technical reports on issues such as Highways, Ecology and Drainage, as well as an initial Concept Masterplan demonstrating how the site could be developed.

Addressing any potential or perceived constraints on a site will help ensure it is not discounted at an early stage, helping to keep it in contention as a possible allocation.

It may also be possible to identify local issues or aspirations that could be addressed as part of the development that can be incorporated into the Concept Masterplan, demonstrating an understanding of local needs and help differentiate it from competing sites.

Be Flexible

Flexibility of approach is a key element to developing a good working relationship with the Qualifying Body.

Whilst Rosconn fully research every site and prepare a well considered Concept Masterplan, the local community will have a wealth of knowledge about their local area.

It is therefore essential to be willing to revise and amend your scheme to align with local community aspirations throughout the process.

Ultimately, listening to feedback and showing a willingness to revise and amend a proposal to address concerns or to align with local aspirations is more likely to secure local buy-in. Rosconn's experience has shown that adopting such an approach gives the Body greater confidence that on-going discussions can achieve positive results which maximise the benefits for its local community.

Be Patient

Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan can be a daunting task for a Parish or Town Council and the level of commitment from volunteers within the community can in some cases be significant. Whilst often external professional assistance is used to help progress more technical aspects, delays can often occur between the key stages of Plan preparation.



4. The Rosconn Experience

Honeybourne (Wychavon District Council)



Rosconn were initially introduced to the site in 2016 and entered into discussions on a Promotion Agreement with the landowners in 2017. At that stage, the site had no planning status, the Local Plan for the area had recently been adopted and there was a healthy land supply meaning there was no immediate planning prospects to bring the site forward. Rosconn were however aware that the local community had initiated the first stage in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan, providing a potential opportunity to promote the site.

During 2017, Rosconn identified that the early stages of Plan preparation had commenced following the initial area designation in 2015, with the Qualifying Body undertaking a Residents Survey. As further details were published in early 2018, it became clear that the evidence had identified a local housing need and that a site would need to be identified. Rosconn therefore initiated contact with the QB to confirm it represented a local landowner, but they were unwilling to meet in advance of further community consultation. Rosconn therefore began work on a range of studies in order to prepare a Vision Document for the site, including an initial Concept Masterplan. This was submitted to the QB to demonstrate that the site was available, being actively promoted and that there were no constraints preventing its development for housing to meet the village's identified local housing need.

In July 2018, the QB held a Consultation event to seek local input on its draft Vision and Objectives for the emerging Plan, as well as presenting several potential housing sites that could be suitable for allocation. Rosconn's site was included as one of the potential housing sites but was also suggested as a possible Local Green Space meaning it would be protected from future development. Rosconn submitted comments to support its allocation for housing and why designation as a Local Green Space would not comply with national policy.

In August 2018, the QB completed its review of the consultation responses and confirmed that Rosconn's site had been identified as the preferred site by the local community to meet the village's future housing needs. Meetings were then arranged with the QB to discuss the initial Concept and how it could be improved to better align with local aspirations. Rosconn continued to engage with the QB whilst advancing further technical studies to



Key stages :

- September 2015**
Neighbourhood Area Designated
- October 2017**
Residents Questionnaire
- July 2018**
Community Consultation Event
- March 2019**
Pre-Submission Draft Plan Consultation
- August 2019**
Submission Draft Plan Consultation
- November 2019**
Examination
- March 2020**
Referendum
- April 2020**
Honeybourne Neighbourhood Plan Made

help supplement the QB's emerging evidence base and give them confidence that the site was deliverable.

In March 2019, the QB published the Pre-Submission Draft Plan which included Rosconn's site as the sole housing allocation. Whilst this intention was fully supported in our representations, Rosconn did have some concerns with the draft policy and its implications for the site, which sought to limit the quantum of development to 50 dwellings and prevent its delivery until after 2024. These concerns were discussed with the QB prior to making formal comment, to help maintain a positive relationship. Whilst the site's allocation was retained in the final Submission Draft version of the Plan, no changes were made in respect of Rosconn's concerns, meaning the concerns raised were maintained in our final comments.

The Draft Plan was then submitted for Examination and the subsequent Examiner's Report published in November 2019. Both of Rosconn's concerns were accepted in that there was an immediate local need for housing within the community and that it would be contrary to national policy to artificially restrict the full capacity of the site. Modifications were subsequently agreed to address Rosconn's concerns, and the Plan was subject to Referendum in March 2020, and formally 'made' the following month.

Rosconn submitted an Outline Planning Application in June 2020 and secured permission in December, enabling the site to be sold to a house builder the same month. The approved scheme will deliver up to 65 new homes, 40% of which will be affordable and of a mix aligned to meet the local housing needs of the village. 1.32 hectares of Public Open Space will also be provided, alongside over £500,000 in financial contributions towards improvements to local education, transport, sports and leisure facilities.

Desford (Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council)



Rosconn were initially introduced to the site in January 2018 and entered into a Promotion Agreement with the landowner in May 2018. At this point in time, it was clear that the Desford Neighbourhood Plan was at an early stage of preparation, so there was scope to promote the site as a potential allocation. In addition, whilst the relevant Local Planning Authority was able to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply, its Local Plan was significantly out of date and a review had also been initiated. Rosconn therefore recognised the site's planning potential, there being an opportunity to promote the site through both emerging Plans.

Rosconn's first action was to immediately start work on commissioning technical reports to inform a Vision Document and associated Concept Masterplan, to help present the opportunity for consideration to both the Borough and Parish Councils. The work was shared with both Councils and a meeting held with the Borough Council in July 2018, but a meeting with the Qualifying Body (QB) was delayed whilst they completed a Site Assessment Report.

In August 2018, the QB contacted Rosconn to confirm that the Site Assessment had concluded that of all the sites put forward, our site was the most suitable to meet the village's future housing needs. In November 2018, the Pre-Submission Draft Plan was published, and our site was proposed as the sole housing allocation for approximately 70 dwellings. In discussions with the QB, it became apparent that there was significant pressure from speculative planning applications on other sites within the village due to the Borough Council concluding that they did not have a 5-year housing land supply - as a result of the decision to allocate our site, these were likely to come forward in an attempt to pre-empt the adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan. As such, it was agreed to progress an immediate planning application to try and help protect the QB's position.

A pre-application enquiry was submitted to the Borough Council in November 2018 and a planning application was subsequently compiled and submitted in February 2019, with the full support of the QB. Outline Planning Permission for up to 80 dwellings was approved by the

Borough Council in October 2019, enabling the site to be sold to a house builder in November 2019. The approved scheme will secure a mix of house types to meet local needs, with 40% being affordable, and over £1million in financial contributions towards improvements to local education, health, transport, open space and children's play facilities.



Key stages :

- September 2015**
Neighbourhood Area Designated
- May 2016**
Community Engagement Event
- July 2016**
Stakeholder Workshop
- November 2018**
Pre-Submission Draft Plan Consultation
- April 2019**
Supplementary Sites Assessment Consultation
- January 2020**
Submission Draft Plan Consultation
- April 2020**
Examination
- May 2021**
Referendum
- May 2021**
Desford Neighbourhood Plan Made

Sharnbrook (Bedford Borough Council)



Rosconn were initially introduced to this 52-hectare site in August 2018 and having met with the landowner and assessed the site's potential, agreed to enter into a Promotion Agreement with them in October 2018. At this stage, the Local Planning Authority was preparing a new Local Plan which proposed to direct 500 dwellings to the village, albeit it did not seek to allocate sites, the intention being that the emerging Neighbourhood Plan would do so in due course.

Whilst this provided scope to promote the site, the Local Plan had not been finalised and it was evident that there were multiple competing sites around the village.

Rosconn recognised that it needed to act quickly to raise the profile of the site in view of the progress being made by other promoters through the Local Plan process. Work started immediately on preparing an initial evidence base to better understand the local context, with a view to developing an initial Concept Master Plan to demonstrate how the site could be developed. At this stage, although the site could potentially accommodate the entire 500 dwellings potentially being directed to the village, this remained to be confirmed through the Local Plan process and even then, the subsequent Neighbourhood Plan could well consider it more appropriate to allocate a number of smaller sites to achieve its Local Plan housing requirement. As such, Rosconn prepared a number of Master Plans showing a range of options including one for a 500 dwelling scheme.

Prior to submitting the Local Plan for Examination, the Borough Council undertook a final Call for Sites. Rosconn assisted the landowner's agent to prepare a submission for the site to demonstrate its potential for up to 500 dwellings in December 2018, whilst also copying the information to the Neighbourhood Plan's Qualifying Body (QB). This enabled the Borough Council to provide evidence at the Examination that there were a range of options for the village to meet its housing requirement.



Key stages :

- September 2017**
Neighbourhood Area Designated
- January 2018**
Community Launch Event
- September 2019**
Residents Questionnaire
- January 2020**
Developers/Site Promoters Presentations
- August 2020**
Pre-Submission Draft Plan Consultation
- January 2021**
Submission Draft Plan Consultation
- Summer 2021**
Examination
- October 2021**
Referendum
- November 2021**
Sharnbrook Neighborhood Plan Adopted

This proved critical in undermining a competing site's case that it was the only site capable of meeting the housing requirement and that it should therefore be allocated in the Local Plan. The QB were therefore able to demonstrate at the Examination Hearings in May 2019 that it had options and that it was their preference to identify sites themselves through its Neighbourhood Plan. The Inspector's Interim Findings were published in July 2019, supporting the Local Plan's approach in respect of Sharnbrook.

Rosconn's attention then turned to the Neighbourhood Plan and a Vision Document was prepared to demonstrate our understanding of the key local issues, a Concept Plan indicating how 500 dwellings could be accommodated on the site and the range of benefits that could be provided. This was issued to the QB and an initial meeting took place in September 2019. The proposal was well received with the QB acknowledging that the site and general concept aligned with many of the objectives identified by the local community. A number of suggestions were made by the QB to refine the Concept, including the provision of a principal access point from the A6 and the need to engage with the local Primary School about future capacity. Rosconn were able to resolve both issues quickly by engaging with the Highway Authority and meeting with the School Governors to identify acceptable solutions.

In January 2020, the QB held a series of Q&A meetings with the Promoters of all potential development sites.

Rosconn were able to present its final Concept Plan which had been refined to address many of the issues previously identified. This coincided with the Local Plan's adoption, confirming that Sharnbrook was required to allocate a site or sites in its Neighbourhood Plan for 500 dwellings.

Rosconn kept in continual contact with the QB as they completed their evidence base and preparation of the Pre-Submission Draft Plan, further refining the Concept Plan and updating our evidence base to address issues that arose as and when necessary. Discussion also took place with Borough Council officers on a range of technical issues and a number of virtual meetings were held with local residents immediately adjoining the site to understand their concerns and address these through further iterations of the Concept Master Plan.

Whilst progress with the Plan was delayed due to the pandemic, the QB were able to complete their work and the Pre-Submission Draft Plan was finally published for consultation in August 2020, with the site identified as the sole draft allocation to meet the 500 dwellings required by the adopted Local Plan. Rosconn accordingly submitted supporting representations and subsequently undertook its own virtual public exhibition with the local community to complement the work of the QB and help identify any additional local issues.

The QB continued its momentum by submitting the final Submission Draft Neighbourhood Plan to the Borough Council in January 2021, with the final stage of public consultation ending in April 2021. The Borough Council proceeded to issue the Neighbourhood Plan for Examination and following a successful outcome, it proceeded to Referendum in October 2021 where 84.5% of the local community voted in support. The Sharnbrook Neighbourhood Plan was subsequently formally made by the Borough Council at its Executive meeting on 24th November.

Rosconn have already engaged with the Borough Council through pre-application discussions, and is now progressing an Outline Planning Application for up to 500 dwellings, a 2 Form Entry Primary School, Community and Retail floorspace and associated sports pitches, public open space, landscaping and supporting infrastructure. The development will also deliver 30% of the dwellings as affordable housing, and secure significant financial contributions towards the upgrade of local social, community and physical infrastructure.

Sharnbrook Draft Concept Masterplan



5. Conclusions

The Government continues to support the role Neighbourhood Planning plays in the English planning system, helping communities to plan how their local areas grow by giving them power to decide where new development goes, what it looks like and what infrastructure is needed to support it.

However, the Government is clear that Neighbourhood Plans are not a tool to prevent or restrict development, and should align with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area. In real terms, this means that local communities have a choice as to whether they take greater control of how their local area grows by taking the opportunity to prepare their own Neighbourhood Plan, or otherwise defer the responsibility to the Local Planning Authority to plan for that growth in the Local Plan.

The task of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan is no small feat, and many local communities **may be daunted by the scale of the task**, requiring strong leadership, resourcefulness and commitment.

The benefits of taking control of planning for a local area can however be significant, helping to secure development that maximises the positive contributions of development and providing greater protection from unacceptable development.

Rosconn's experience of Neighbourhood Planning over recent years has been very positive, demonstrating that maximizing

value for our landowners and securing high quality sustainable developments that will leave a positive legacy for the local community are not mutually exclusive objectives.

Our approach, as shown by the case studies detailed in this document, highlight the key factors that are important to adopt when involved in the Neighbourhood Planning process, as summarised below:

Engage Early – whilst not always possible, Rosconn's experience is that the earlier you engage in the process, the better. This provides the best opportunity to highlight the availability and suitability of a site to the Qualifying Body so that it can be properly considered at the start of the process. This also provides time to address site specific concerns as and when they arise by undertaking further technical work to identify potential solutions. It is often the case that sites are promoted late in the process when the Qualifying Body has completed its initial evidence base and decisions on site selection have been made.

Be Prepared – A comprehensive understanding of a local area and the challenges that its community faces is an essential starting point for each project Rosconn takes on.

Key local issues can then be identified, helping to focus more detailed technical work, which in turn can **inform a robust and well-informed Concept Master Plan**.

Collating a comprehensive evidence base to cover issues such as transport, drainage, ecology and other key disciplines that support the proposals provide confidence to the Qualifying Body that there are no 'showstoppers' and ultimately, that the scheme is deliverable.

Be Flexible – it is always important to approach every project with a degree of flexibility, particularly as the local community will often identify issues that are not immediately apparent. Whilst Rosconn will prepare an initial Concept Master Plan, this is always presented as draft with a willingness to refine where necessary to address a particular concern or achieve an identified objective. Flexibility also helps to build trust with the local community, promoting a collaborative approach where feedback is welcomed and responded to throughout the process.

Be Patient – Rosconn understand that preparing a Neighbourhood Plan can be one of, if not the most significant challenge a Qualifying Body can undertake. It can be a very steep learning curve and take a number of years from start to finish so patience is therefore essential. Understanding the process and knowing when key milestones are approaching is therefore important, as

this ensures that engagement at the right time avoids periods where the Qualifying Body need to focus on specific tasks. Regular updates and sharing of information is however helpful to both parties and again, help build a collaborative relationship.

Rosconn Strategic Land has established a proven track record in working successfully to promote its clients land through a number of Neighbourhood Plans across England.

This experience has brought forward high quality, sustainable sites to not only help meet locally identified housing needs, but also maximise benefits for the wider community by ensuring that our proposals align with a range of aspirations, either through on-site provision or providing funding for local projects.



We continue to work collaboratively with Neighbourhood Plan Groups across England on behalf of our clients and are always happy to provide our initial thoughts on potential opportunities where we can add value in promoting sites through either the Neighbourhood or Local Plan process. Please do get in touch!





We are **passionate**
about **creating sustainable communities**

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