

# First Aid for Planning

## Guide 2: Finding out what is happening in your area.

### Who is this guide for?

This guide helps you find information about the planning and development proposals in your area. By knowing what is going on and where to look for further information, you are in a much better position to respond to future development. Finding the right information can be difficult: all development proposals are not listed in one place and information can be technical and complicated. It But do inform yourself about planning, so you can get involved on time. This will help you make your voice heard.

Along this guide, it is useful to also have a look at:

- Our first guide in our First Aid for Planning series, called [Guide 1: What is planning?](#).
- The section 'Your Local Planning Authority' in our online planning library on our website, which links to different webpages and documents from your Local Planning Authority:

### Who is Planning Aid for London?

Planning Aid for London provides free advice and training on town planning to people and community groups who cannot afford professional support. We help people understand and get involved in decisions about your neighbourhood: on topics such as housing development, regeneration and transport infrastructure, so they can have a say in the future of their neighbourhoods.

### Finding your Local Planning Authority

Your Local Planning Authority (LPA) oversees planning in your area and will have information about most planning activities. Your LPA usually is the planning department of your council. You can find out who your council is on [www.gov.uk/find-local-council](http://www.gov.uk/find-local-council). You can find your LPA on the Planning Portal: [1app.planningportal.co.uk/YourLpa/FindYourLpa](http://1app.planningportal.co.uk/YourLpa/FindYourLpa)

## Finding the information you need

Where you need to look depends on your question; unfortunately the information you need can be in multiple places. This is a list of the main information sources on planning in your area. For each source, it is briefly explained what you can find.

- Your council's online planning database – search and comment on planning applications
- Your council's Duty Planner – helps you with your question on planning in your local area
- Your council's Consultation Hub – view ongoing consultations in which you can share your views about the future of your neighbourhood
- Your borough's Local Plan and other policy documents
- The London Plan – London's regional planning policies
- The National Planning Policy Framework – planning policy for England
- Planning Portal – helps you assess if you need planning permission for building work to your property

### Planning database

Your Local Planning Authority (usually the council) has an online database on planning applications and development proposals in your borough. The database helps you find:

- Live planning applications, for which an applicant is looking for planning permission from the Local Planning Authority (LPA). You can search for planning applications using a reference number, address or postcode. You can comment on a planning application, if a decision has not been made yet. You can also find the planning history (including past planning applications and planning conditions) for a property.
- Find out what the steps are for the planning application process, if you are looking to make a planning application yourself.
- Get planning advice from the information service or Duty Planner. You can also get advice about a listed building (a building protected for its historical or architectural value).
- Apply for planning permission and find the required forms to make an application.

## **Duty Planner**

Every council should have a Duty Planner to explain planning applications and basic planning matters to members of the public. You can contact them via the council's website. They can:

- Check if you have all the documents you need for your planning application.
- Give you general advice on a planning application.
- Explain what development is permitted under national legislation and already has consent.
- Discuss relevant planning policy in your area.
- Tell you who the case officer is for a planning application that you have seen on the planning database.

You might have to make an appointment with the Duty Planner for further advice, for which the council can charge a fee. The Duty Planner can often not give you detailed information on a planning application someone else has made; major planning applications have a case officer (a planning officer working for the council) who knows the details of the application. You can ask for the contact details of the case officer.

## **Consultation hub**

Your Local Planning Authority (LPA) must ask for your views on a new Local Plan, Area Action Plan or other planning policy. The consultation hub on your council's website will show you when consultations are live: these are defined moments where you can give your views. The formal consultation period is only 21 days, so it is easy to miss it. You can sign up to the council's newsletter to stay informed about when a Local Plan will go up for consultation. Once the consultation closes, you can also find its results on the consultation hub.

## **Local Plan and planning policy**

The Local Plan guides what development should go where and how it should be designed. It contains:

- A map of the site allocated in your area for development
- More detailed policy on topics such as affordable housing
- A long-term view for your borough

The Local Plan will form the basis for decisions made on planning applications. If you influence the Local Plan development, you might avoid having to respond

to multiple planning applications. You find the Local Plan on the website of your council. Your local library and the council usually have a paper copy of the Local Plan. What your council has to do in order to make information accessible has changed because of Covid-19 pandemic. The government is also further changing the regulations that set out what councils have to do to make information accessible to the public.

The Local Planning Authority may review, update or replace the Local Plan at any time. The Local Development Scheme (LDS), also available on the council's website, gives a timetable of which planning documents will be prepared when. The LDS may be out of date, so it is important you check the exact timeline of the development of a Local Plan with the planning department of the council.

### **The London Plan**

The London Plan is the Mayor's planning strategy for London. The policies in the plan are usually less detailed than in the Local Plan but set important requirements for future development. The London Plan designates Opportunity Areas and Intensification Areas, which are places earmarked for largescale development and regeneration. The new plan is due to be published by the Mayor of London and will replace the 2016 version of the London Plan. The London Plan is available on the website of the Greater London Authority, the regional public authority for London.

### **National policy**

Local plans must conform to national policy. Government has set out national policy on planning for England in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). Knowing something about national planning policy can be helpful when talking to a planning officer or objecting to a planning application.

You should read the NPPF and the PPG together, as the PPG helps explain parts of the NPPF. Both the NPPF and the PPG are available on the website of the government.

### **Planning Portal**

The Planning Portal is the official online source of planning information for England ([www.planningportal.co.uk](http://www.planningportal.co.uk)). You can find:

- Whether you need to apply for permission from your local planning authority for the works you want to do.

- Helpful guides for when you need permission for loft conversions, extensions, conservatories, outbuildings, porches and other works to your own property.
- How to make a planning application for your development plans and find a planning consultant or other built environment professional.
- How to make a building control application to get approval that your plans comply with building regulations. Building control is different from planning permission, and you might need both for your project.

### What to do when you cannot access information?

It can be difficult to find the information that you are looking for. Planning portals are often difficult to navigate, planning applications may consist of many online documents and the Local Plan is simply a very long document. The amount of information can be baffling. Don't give up: knowing what is going on in your area is key in order for you to use the planning system at your advantage when possible. You can always contact your Local Planning Authority or your councillor for help: you have the right to know what is happening in your area and access publicly available information.

What to do if you are part of a campaign and want to do your own research? If you need information that the council is not willing to disclose initially, you can do a Freedom of Information request (FOI). The Freedom of Information Act gives you the right to see information held by public authorities. For example, in some cases, you can request to see the email correspondence between the planning department and the developer regarding a proposed development. The Friends of the Earth have produced two guides that explain how you can make a FOI request.

## Further reading

**Friends of the Earth**, Your Right to Know: Part 1 – What information can you ask for and how to ask for it (October 2020)

[https://cdn.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/October%20\\_2020\\_Your\\_Right\\_to\\_Know\\_Part\\_1.pdf](https://cdn.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/October%20_2020_Your_Right_to_Know_Part_1.pdf)

**Friends of the Earth**, Your Right to Know – Part 2: Information requests: refusals, exemptions and appeals (May 2020)

<https://cdn.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/Your%20right%20to%20know%20part%20%20information%20requests.pdf>

## Need further help?

Find more information on our [website](https://www.planningaidforlondon.org.uk) or contact us at:  
[info@planningaidforlondon.org.uk](mailto:info@planningaidforlondon.org.uk)  
030 077 29 808

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