

Guide 1

What is Planning?



Who is the guide for?

This guide is for anyone interested in how and why their neighbourhood changes. Planning is about designing new homes, protecting buildings you value, improving parks, making space for local food, and dealing with climate change. If done well, it can help us to live healthier, less polluted, and more connected lives. When done badly, planning can cause ill-health, a lack of social cohesion and people feeling frustrated because their views have not been respected.

Planning is complicated, but it is your best chance at influencing decisions that matter to you. As London's free planning advice service, Planning Aid for London is here to help you do that by creating this guide that explains:

- What planning is
- The main actors in the planning process
- Reasons to get involved
- How to find a community group

What is Planning?

Planning is about shaping the changes in our communities so that they benefit the wider public. Examples of this include:

- Genuinely affordable housing
- New parks and green spaces
- Public roads
- Bus routes
- Community centres
- Schools
- Doctor's surgeries
- Shops
- Businesses

Planning also determines:

- How land and buildings are used
- If you carry out building work on your home
- Combating climate change
- Improving health
- Creating jobs

Planning has an important impact on your life and your community. You have the right to participate in it.

The main actors in the planning process

[Most building work requires a planning application](#). Your Local Planning Authority (LPA), usually the planning department of your council, manages most development within its area and will decide on planning applications for development. [Knowing who your LPA is and what they are doing can help you understand when decisions are made](#).

Larger and controversial planning applications are decided on by the planning committee. This group of appointed councillors will approve or refuse the application, based on:

- The advice of planning officers
- The applicant (usually a developer or housing association)
- Third parties (including members of the public)

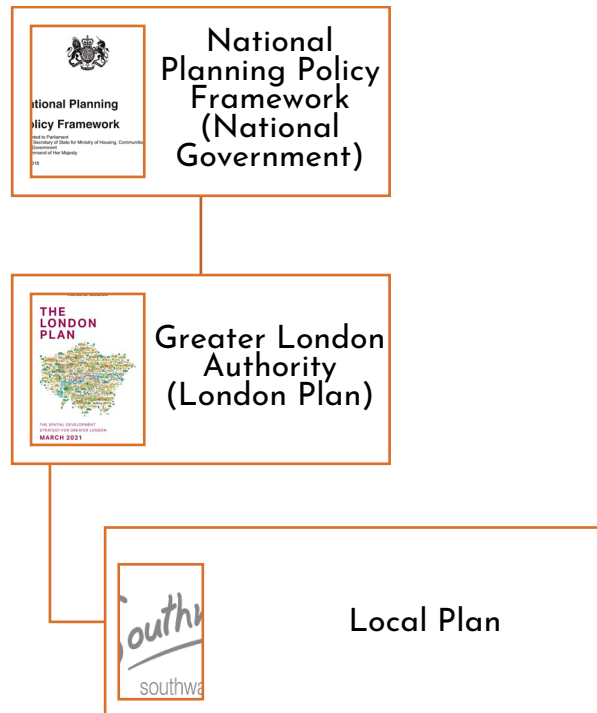
Councillors are elected politicians and should represent the views of their constituents, as well as the wider public interest, when they decide on an application. Councillors that sit on the council's planning committee can help when you need further information, [so it is important to know who your local councillors are and how to contact them](#). Lobbying your councillor can also be a useful tactic. You can respond to planning applications to share your views on a proposal, but it is even better if you can engage with your Local Plan. This will give more time to have your say in the development of your local area.

Local Plans

A Local Plan consists of policy documents that shape future development, usually for a period of 15 years. Prepared by council officers and approved by councillors, your Local Plan should:

- Be a vision for your area
- Set out development plans, including housing, business construction and infrastructure (roads, facilities, etc)
- Inform whether planning applications will be approved or not

Every council's Local Plan should be up to date. The decisions that planning officers and the planning committee make must consider the Local Plan. Getting involved in the development of a new Local Plan increases your chances of having a say in what changes in your area.



Your Local Plan should conform to the [London Plan](#), which should then conform to the [National Planning Policy Framework](#). The London Plan regional plan for London, which the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority prepare. Every Mayor of London will produce their own London Plan. The plan identifies [Opportunity Areas](#). These are areas where significant development will take place to meet London's housing needs and economic growth targets.

Why should I get involved?

It can be easy to feel discouraged about planning when decisions do not coincide with your thoughts, but it is important to remember that planning officers and planning committee members balance different private and public interests when they make decisions. They should consider the interests of community groups, residents, and small businesses when they decide on planning application or Local Plan. But if you understand:

- The basics of planning
- How to ask the right questions
- When you can have the most influence

You can have a say on planning decisions. But if you do not make your voice heard, those decisions might not take your opinions into account.

There might be many issues that affect your neighbourhood that you want to change. The planning process is then an opportunity for you to have a say about these matters and on topics such as:

- The design of new buildings in your neighbourhood
- The number of new homes build in your neighbourhood
- The protection of green spaces
- The extensions of homes
- Protect trees that might be at risk due to development
- Give further protections to locally listed buildings

But there are also many issues that planning does not have an influence over:

- Roads and traffic management
- The maintenance of parks
- The listing of historic buildings
- [Permitted Development](#) (decided by Central Government)

What you can do

There are different ways you can have your say and get involved in planning. The five main ways to do so are:

- Respond to planning applications in your neighbourhood
- Report breaches of planning law and regulations to your council
- Give your views on the consultations for the Local Plan
- Develop your own Neighbourhood Plan or community plan
- Develop your own campaign

Join a Community Group

It is often easier to get involved in planning together with neighbours or as part of a group. You can always join an existing group in your area, who might be involved in planning already. Groups to look out for are:

- [Local history and heritage groups](#)
- [Local community groups](#)
- [A neighbourhood forum](#)
- [Local amenity societies](#)
- [Tenant or resident associations](#)

If there is no group interested in planning active in your area, you can set up your own together with your neighbours. We might be able to help with this.

Further reading

Organisation	Topic	Link
Friends of the Earth	Guide to community rights, environment and planning laws	https://friendsoftheearth.uk/system-change/guide-community-rights-environment-and-planning-laws
Friends of the Earth	The English planning system: An overview	https://cdn.friendsoftheearth.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/English%20Planning%20System%20an%20overview%20FoE.pdf
Friends of the Earth	How-to: Running local campaigns guides	https://campaigning.friendsoftheearth.uk/resources?_ga=2.179486500.143575968.1609936271-906712487.1609936271
Planning Portal	About the planning system	https://www.planningportal.co.uk/info/200127/planning/102/about_the_planning_system
The Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government	Plain English guide to the planning system	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plain-english-guide-to-the-planning-system
Tony Burton	Local Plans and the planning system	http://www.merton.tu/2020/12/christmas-day-lecture-local-plans-by-tony-burton-25-december-2020/

Planning Aid for London

Planning Aid for London is a registered charity and company. We help communities and people who cannot afford professional advice with planning matters. In doing so, we support Londoners to get involved in planning. Our advice is independent, professional, confidential, and free of charge. Due to limited resources, we limit our services to those who need it the most.

Find out more at planningaidforlondon.org.uk

