

# **Your Neighbourhood. Your Voice**

A guide to planning in London





# PLANNING

aid for london

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# Why is planning important?

Planning can be complicated with many terms, rules and jargon that most people do not understand. But it plays an important role in creating the places that we see and use every day, so it is important to try and engage with it. **Here are a few examples of the role that planning plays in our lives:**

## Creating healthy neighbourhoods

NHS guidelines recommend that people are [physically active for at least 30 minutes a day](#). One way to achieve this is by incorporating exercise into your everyday life. Planners play a role in making this happen by creating guidance and policies and granting planning permission, so that places are designed and built with walking and cycling in mind. That way, it is easier to live a healthier lifestyle and to encourage people to interact with each other and combat stress.

## Preventing the effects of climate change

Climate change means that we will continue to see more episodes of extreme weather in London. [This means an increase in heavy rain and wet winter days which makes the city more prone to flooding](#). Planning plays a role in combatting this by approving designs for buildings that are energy efficient, in areas with little to no flood risk and creating solutions to manage flood risk in areas that are prone to extreme weather. This includes Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) like rain gardens, road paving that absorbs water rather than letting it run off and green infrastructure like parks, street trees and living walls.

## Managing growth

London is a growing city, with a [population that is expected to reach 9.6 million in the next 10 years](#). Planning plays a role in managing the housing, energy use and waste management that the population increase requires. For central and regional government (for London, that is the Greater London Authority) this means creating policies that house builders must follow to create new homes and neighbourhoods. For planners in Local Authorities, this means creating policies for new housing, transport, the environment and waste management, as well as reviewing planning applications that are submitted by house builders and homeowners who wish to make changes to their homes.

## Protect and conserve heritage

[There are over 370,000 listed buildings in the UK](#) and over 18,000 of these buildings are in London. These buildings are important for historical reasons, and they add local character to an area. Once a building is listed, there are strict rules about any care or amendments that can be made to a building so that it is cared for properly and doesn't alter its historical or social significance.





# Government Planning Responsibilities

**Each tier of government has planning responsibilities.**

This part of the guide will explain the responsibilities for each level of government and how they work together

## Central Government

In England, central government plays a strategic role in the planning system. They:

### • Set planning policy

#### **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**

Central government sets out planning policies that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) should adhere to. This includes the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), a document that sets out planning policies, how housing targets should be calculated, land use, design, environmental protection and management of the green belt. It also emphasizes the need for sustainable development of high-quality homes. LPAs will use this framework to help them develop their Local Plans.

#### **Planning Policy Guidance (PPG)**

The Planning Practice Guidance exists to support the NPPF. It is meant to be used by LPAs to implement the policies that are in the NPPF and provide further information on topics like environmental impact assessments and housing need assessments.

### • Call-in Planning Applications

The Secretary of State can call-in planning applications that are of national or regional significance. Though this is rare, an example of this is the planning application for the demolition and rebuild of the Marble Arch branch of Marks and Spencer. The application was originally approved by Westminster City Council in 2021 but was called in by the then Secretary of State who refused the application. This decision was, however, challenged and then approved for the final time by a new Secretary of State.

### • Create planning laws

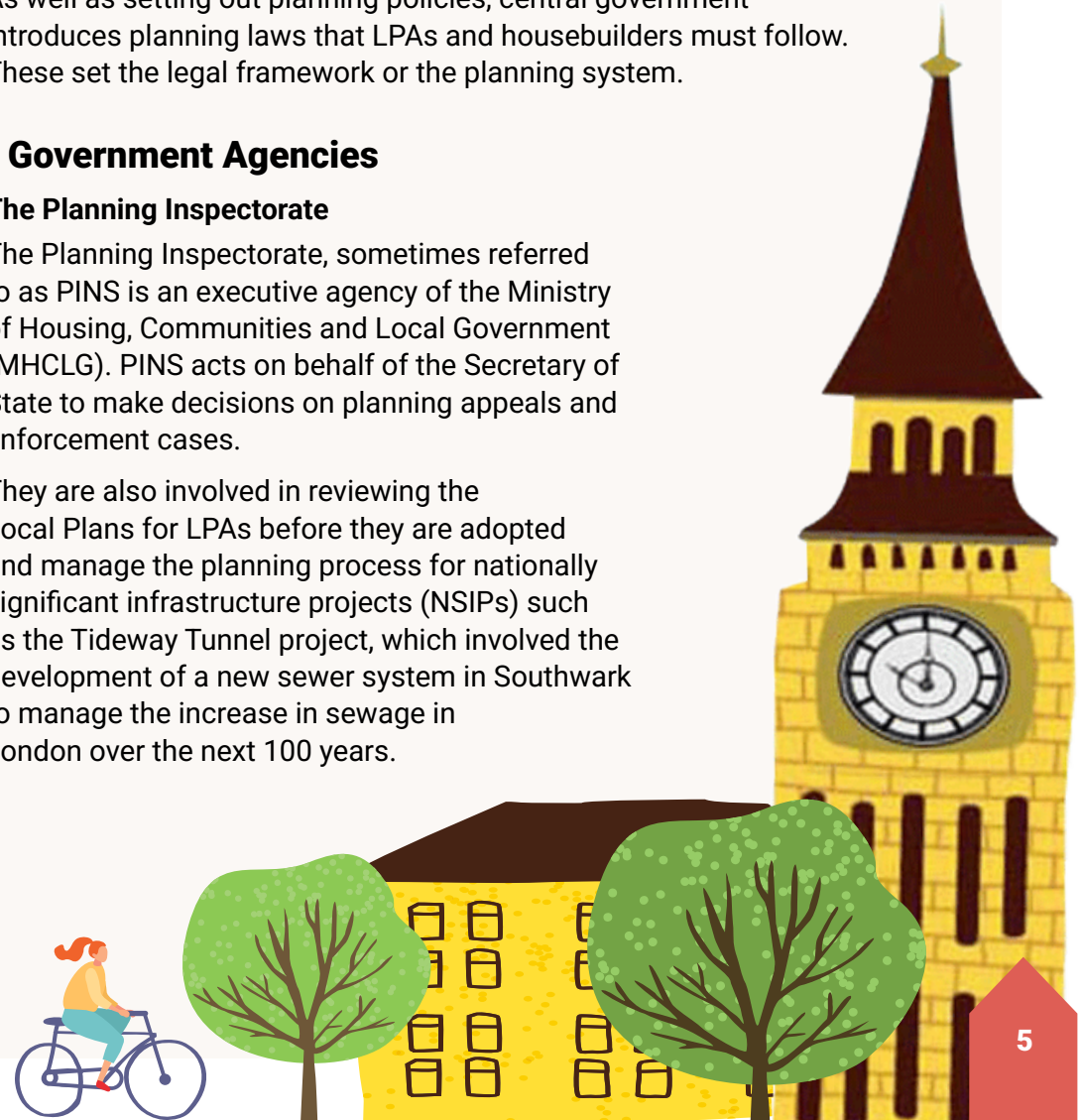
As well as setting out planning policies, central government introduces planning laws that LPAs and housebuilders must follow. These set the legal framework of the planning system.

### • Government Agencies

#### **The Planning Inspectorate**

The Planning Inspectorate, sometimes referred to as PINS is an executive agency of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). PINS acts on behalf of the Secretary of State to make decisions on planning appeals and enforcement cases.

They are also involved in reviewing the Local Plans for LPAs before they are adopted and manage the planning process for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) such as the Tideway Tunnel project, which involved the development of a new sewer system in Southwark to manage the increase in sewage in London over the next 100 years.



## Regional government

Regional government sits between central and local Government.

In London, responsibility for planning, economic development, transport and skills sits with the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority (GLA). The main duties are:

### • Preparing the London Plan

The London Plan is a strategic document. It sets out the vision for land use, development, economic development and transport in London. It is prepared by the GLA and must adhere to the NPPF. In turn, Local Plans prepared by LPAs in London must be in line with the London Plan.

The current draft for the new London Plan is meant to provide guidance for the next 20-25 years. Despite this, The London Plan must be reviewed and then updated every five years so that it is fit for purpose and addresses current housing needs.

[Each London Plan goes through multiple public consultations](#), which you are welcome to participate in.

### • Call-in Planning Applications

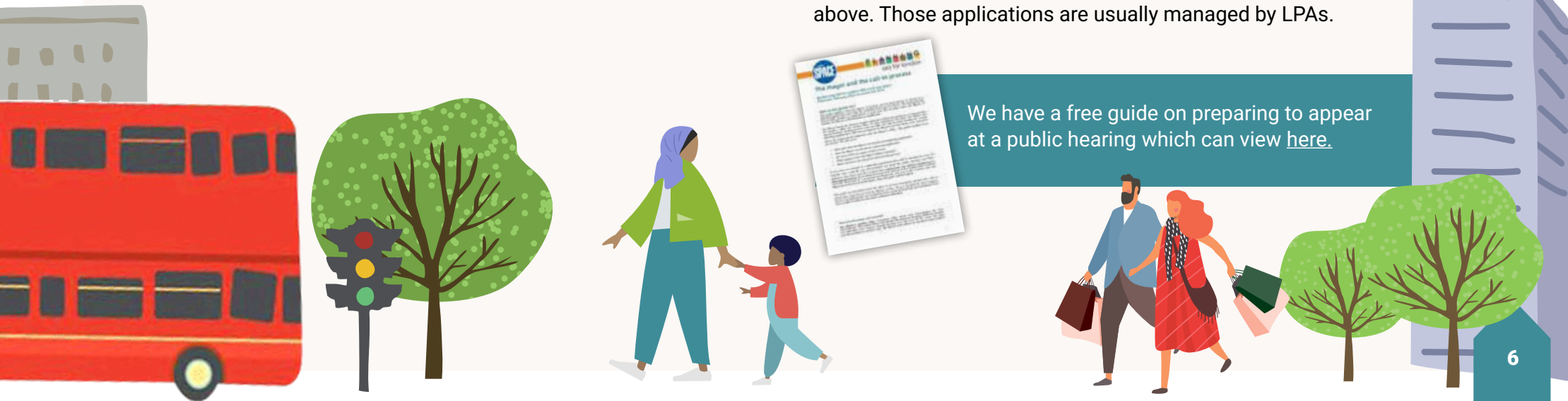
[The Mayor of London Order \(2008\)](#) gives the Mayor the right to [call in Planning Applications](#), in the same way as the Secretary of State but based on the following criteria:

- A development of more than 150 residential units
- Over 30 metres in height (unless the development is in the City of London)
- Development on Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land

Members of the public can speak at a Representation hearing for cases.

The Mayor does not have the power to comment or intervene on planning applications that do not meet the criteria set out above. Those applications are usually managed by LPAs.

We have a free guide on preparing to appear at a public hearing which can view [here](#).



## Local government

LPAs are probably the government arm that you will interact with the most when discussing planning issues or concerns. As present, there are 36 LPAs in London. Their planning duties involve:

### • Preparing local plans

Local plans are a series of documents produced by LPAs that set out a vision for the local authority area. They usually address the use of land for development, housing needs, the economy and community infrastructure. They also manage historic sites and buildings, climate change adaptation, and the natural environment, including parks, playgrounds and trees.

Though called a 'Local Plan' they are rarely one document and are often a series of documents that provide a strategic plan for the topics listed above.

A Local Plan must have regard to Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 as amended as well as Regulations 8, 9 and 20 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 which lays out the specific rules that the local planning authority should stick to when preparing a local plan. However, it is worth noting that each Local Plan must also be created in accordance with the London Plan and the NPPF and PPG.

As for time scale for preparation, each Local Plan will be prepared for 15 years with a review every five years to ensure that it is up to date and that the policies for housing numbers are still relevant.

**The process for developing a Local Plan is set out here.**

### Evidence Gathering

Involves finding up to date information on housing needs, employment needs, Infrastructure delivery, Transport needs and assessments for sites, flood risk, viability and strategic environment.

### Consultation (Regulation 18)

The first opportunity for the public to partake in a consultation on the information found during the evidence gathering stage. This usually lasts for six weeks. The feedback that is collected from this consultation will feed into the draft Local Plan.

### Proposed Submission (Regulation 19)

The Draft Local Plan is published. Stakeholders including local amenity groups, statutory consultees and the public will give feedback on the plan.

### Submit to Secretary of State

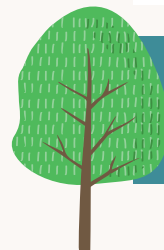
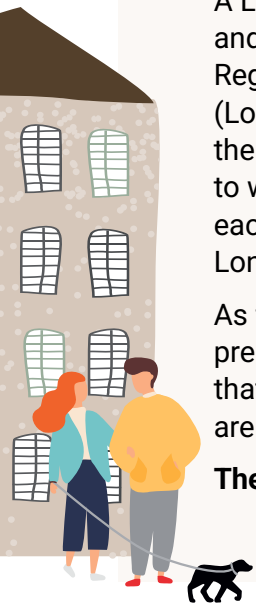
The responses collected during the regulation 19 consultation will be incorporated into the Local Plan. The documents will then be submitted to the Secretary of State who will delegate the review to the Planning Inspectorate.

### Examination

The Planning Inspectorate will appoint an examiner to assess the Local Plan. At this stage a plan can still go back to the Local Planning Authority if it is deemed unsound or legally non-compliant. Members of the public who have participated in the regulation 19 consultation may be asked to participate in the hearings and provide a statement on the soundness of the Local Plan.

### Adoption (Regulation 26)

If the plan is successful then the examination will be formally adopted by the LPA.

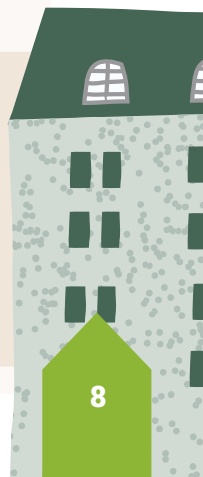
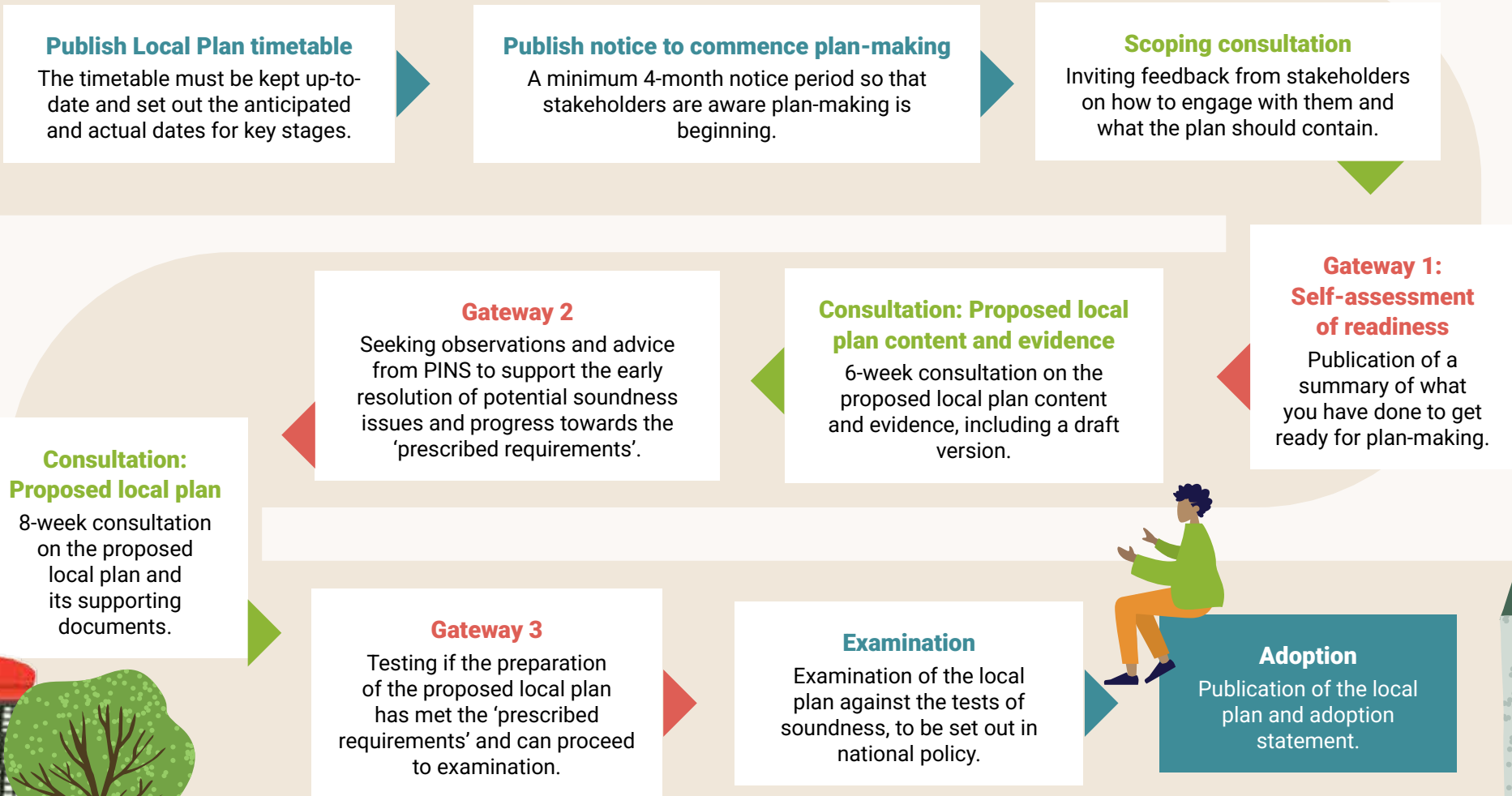


In late 2025, the government launched a new framework for delivering Local Plans. This was meant to speed up the development of Plans and make it easier

for them to be digitised. Each LPA will now have 30-months to create a new Local Plan, unless their current Local Plan has been submitted for examination by the end

of 2026 . During 2026, LPAs will therefore need to decide about whether getting to that point is realistic. If it is not, they will need to work within the new system.

**The new Local Plan preparation will look like this:**



- **Determining planning applications for householders and developers**

About 90% of planning applications are decided by Local Authority planners using delegated powers.

**These are usually decided within 13 weeks and follow these stages**



### Pre-Application

Some LPAs will give applicants the opportunity to receive advice from them. This can help applicants to find out the likelihood of success and what is required.

### Submission and Validation

Planning applications will be submitted on the planning portal. The LPA will then check that the application has all of the required documents.

### Consultation and publicity

If a document is complete, it will be registered and then publicised. This usually involves posters placed on lampposts, letters sent to neighbours and posts made in local newspapers. Neighbours and community groups can make comments and objections within 21 days.

### Assessment and Determination

A planning officer will assess the application and see if it adheres to local, regional and national planning policies. They will then prepare a report and a recommendation for the application to either be approved, rejected or approved with conditions.

### Decision

Householder applications will usually be decided by a planning officer at an LPA.

A larger or potentially controversial planning application will be decided by an LPA planning committee which is made up of Local Councillors.

## • Planning enforcement

When a development occurs:

Without a planning application

Without required notice (for permitted development rights)

With non-compliance with planning conditions

With unauthorised change of use-class

With work carried out on listed buildings

With work carried out on listed trees

With Illegal advertisements

**This can be reported to an LPA. An investigation will be carried out by planning enforcement officers.**

If a potential breach occurs and the LPA deems it appropriate to act, then an LPA can:

- Submit an enforcement notice
- Require that a retrospective planning application is submitted

A houseowner can also submit a lawful development certificate.

It is important to note that a planning breach is rarely illegal and if a breach goes undetected for up to ten years it might become lawful.





# How can people partake in planning

Despite the complexity of the planning system, it is important that the public engages in it. By doing so, the public can help to create developments and neighbourhoods that are sustainable, healthy and suitable for the population in an area. Planning Aid for London exists to help people understand the process and partake in it meaningfully.

**Here are three ways to do that**

## Join a Community Group

The great thing about planning is that lots of people care about the development of a neighbourhood.

By joining a local amenity group, you can work with others to develop ideas, actions and responses to planning applications that can make a difference.

**You can even create your own community projects like this:**

### Mini case study: GrowN22

Luke Newcombe founded GrowN22 in 2019 after noticing parts of his neighbourhood that had been neglected. In Wood Green, GrowN22 partnered with London National Park City Initiative and the Future Wood Green Business Improvement District, secured funding from the Mayor of London's Grow Back Greener Fund and turned a previously unused section of the road near Noel Park School into a parklet. With further funding, they were able to build on the first project and develop a nature reserve, a rooftop fernery and a wildlife garden.

Find out more here:

<https://planningaidforlondon.org.uk/stories/grown22>



## Partake in LPA consultations

As part of Local Authorities statutory obligations to consult the public, most local planning authorities will publish opportunities to consult on their website.

If you sign up to this, you will receive notifications for new major planning applications, local plans, thoughts on design changes to public places like parks or town centres or new policies like Article 4 Directions.

### Mini Case Study: Age UK East London and City & Hackney Older People's Reference Group (OPRG)

Age UK East London has had a presence in Hackney for over 30 years. In 2015, noticing the population shift to young professionals and a lack of facilities and activities for older people, Age UK worked with OPRG to develop policy solutions to tackle this. This involved a series of workshops, mapping the local area and partnering with other local groups to develop solutions to consultations and ideas for policy influence. This work led to improvements to communal areas in estates that lowered heat costs for tenants, better seating in Woodberry Wetlands and plans to continue participating in policy design.

Find out more here: [https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/CH\\_AgeUK\\_EL\\_InfluencerReport\\_Web\\_24.06.19.pdf](https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/CH_AgeUK_EL_InfluencerReport_Web_24.06.19.pdf)



## Mini Case Study: Kensington & Chelsea Social Council and Just Space

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) went out to the public for consultation on their new local plan in 2022. Community groups in the area felt that the process was complex and required a lot of time without a guarantee that their input would be considered. With help from Kensington & Chelsea Social Council and Just Space, residents were supported through the consultation process and given support to understand the technical language and use their experience to shape a response. As a result, the Local Plan included a new Charter for Public Participation, which includes co-design and meaningful engagement, prioritising accessible and safe community spaces and support for community-led development.

Find out more here:  
<https://www.kcsc.org.uk/news/community-guide-influencing-planning-and-development-kensington-and-chelsea>



## Mini Case Study: CoCo Collective, Lewisham



Set up during the pandemic, CoCo Collective's Ital Community Garden is a food growing collective in Bellingham, Lewisham. To bring the local community together and tackle loneliness, Valerie Goode arranged community events and gardening sessions on a disused allotment. Since 2021, the group has expanded and now runs gardening classes for all ages, community art sessions and food growing sessions.

Find out more here: [https://linktr.ee/COCOCOLLECTIVE\\_ORG](https://linktr.ee/COCOCOLLECTIVE_ORG)



# Contact Planning Aid for London

If you come across a planning notice, or an advertisement for a public consultation and want to find out how to get involved or understand more about it, then please get in touch! We can help you to:

- Understand what is being proposed in a new planning application and related planning policies
- Help to review a response to a planning application or share thoughts on the design for a new development
- Provide guidance on navigating the planning process for community-led projects like community gardens, orchards or other green spaces

## Glossary

Planning comes with lots of unfamiliar of technical words and terminology. Planning Aid for London's glossary explains the most common planning terms in plain English.

Browse our glossary [here](#).



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[planningaidforlondon.org.uk](http://planningaidforlondon.org.uk)