

Petworth Neighbourhood Plan

Background

The South Downs National Park Authority is the statutory planning authority for the National Park area. We are the 8th largest planning authority in the country in terms of the number of planning applications we receive each year and also one of the largest in terms of the geographical area we cover.

Neighbourhood Plans were introduced by the Government in 2012 in an effort to democratise the planning process by giving local communities the power to shape development in their area.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2>

Once 'made' (adopted) they become part of the development plan for the National Park and the policies and proposals contained within them are used in the determination of planning applications, including appeals.

In 2014, Petworth Town Council approached the SDNPA and requested that they be designated for the purposes of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan. Once designated, SDNPA have a duty to support them in preparing their plan as per planning regulations.



Petworth, West Sussex

The project

The making of the Petworth Neighbourhood Plan is the culmination of many years of work and strong leadership by Petworth Town Council, guided by clear community wishes and with significant input from the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA).

The Plan needed to tackle numerous issues including allocating land for new housing and employment uses; safeguarding shops and the town centre; protecting community and leisure facilities; protection of biodiversity; promoting low carbon technology; supporting development of benefit to younger residents.

It was agreed that a collaborative approach would be most successful, ensuring the wishes of the local community were listened to and observed. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group was set up in 2012 and was made up of residents and town councillors, assisted by five working groups, Nexus Planning (a team of planning and regeneration consultants) and SDNPA Officers.

The public were involved throughout the process through various methods including questionnaires distributed to every household, online questionnaires, three drop-in sessions plus two consultation sessions with young people. These events were attended by around 150 residents. The responses were used to inform the preparation of the Plan's vision and core objectives.

The resulting plan tackled local issues head on, it met the SDNPA's housing requirements and delivered on requirements of the local community, including the provision of a new access to the primary school. On 7th June 2018, the Petworth Neighbourhood Plan successfully passed at Referendum.

“We are absolutely thrilled by the result which is a major achievement and vitally important for the future of new housing development in Petworth. By voting in favour of the Neighbourhood Plan, our parishioners have, for the first time ever, taken control of how development happens and their elected Town Council has a huge say in the outcome of local planning applications.”

Chris Kemp, Chairman of Petworth Town Council

The outcome

Through continuous work, communication and engagement, Petworth Town Council worked with SDNPA to reach a position where both organisations and the community agree. The result is a Plan which secures the delicate balance between local wishes and the protection of a nationally designated landscape. Key lessons learnt include:

- Collaboration

This was not just a plan for Petworth by Petworth, it forms part of the South Downs Development Plan and it is in everyone’s interests that it is well written, supported and deliverable.

- Communication

Relationships were successful because officers regularly attended Steering Group meetings, responded promptly to phone calls and e-mails and were able to speak freely about what was and wasn’t possible. Early and in-depth involvement helped cement better understanding and trust between all parties.

- Compromise

All parties can come to a negotiation with fixed ideas, unwilling to change, but this will not produce a successful plan. The SDNPA had to really listen to the community, consider all available options and focus on the priorities. Landscape and scenic beauty may be the first purpose of the National Park but we also have a duty to our communities and a statutory requirement to deliver successful and sustainable development.

https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Petworth-Neighbourhood-Plan_July-2018.pdf

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2014–19 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 11 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 8: More responsibility and action is taken by visitors, residents and businesses to conserve and enhance the special qualities and use resources more wisely.

www.southdowns.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SDNP-Partnership-Management-Plan-2014-19.pdf

The future

SDNPA will continue to provide support and offer collaborative partnership working to help communities to shape their local plans.

Currently, over 50 Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP’s) have, or are, being prepared in the South Downs National Park.

<https://www.southdowns.gov.uk/planning/community-planning/neighbourhood-development-plans/>

For Petworth, the next stage is to form a new Working Group dedicated to collaborating with the various landowners and statutory bodies to make the Plan a reality, deliver the housing and better serve the growing community.

For further information regarding Neighbourhood planning, please contact:

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