

GODALMING TOWN COUNCIL



PRESS RELEASE

OUR TOWN, OUR FUTURE

THE LAUNCH OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN FOR GODALMING & FARNCOMBE

Every resident of Godalming (that's the GU7 postcode) is invited to a public meeting to be held at the Borough Hall, Godalming on Thursday, 23 January 2014 at 7.30pm. This meeting is the launch of the Neighbourhood Plan for Godalming & Farncombe and will inform people about the process, how the plan will be taken forward and most importantly how individuals can get involved. It is essential that the whole community has a voice in the future shape and growth of the town and all will be welcome at the meeting.

Chris Bowden of Navigus Planning, an independent consultancy that specialises in providing support to communities undertaking neighbourhood plans, will lead the meeting and provide an insight into how the process will work in Godalming.

Recent media stories locally about large housing estate developments, surrender of the greenbelt, and a "developers' charter" tend to create the impression that local communities can do little to influence what development happens around them. That need not be the case. Neighbourhood planning is an important tool created by the Government to give local communities a clearer, stronger and more proactive voice in planning. Communities can use the process to say where new homes and businesses should be built and what they should look like. Godalming Town Council believes that the people of Godalming and Farncombe should seize the opportunity and the Council will do all it can to help the community bring a neighbourhood plan together. Speaking recently Councillor Jane Thomson, Chairman of the Council's Neighbourhood Planning Working Group, said: "there is no substitute for sound local knowledge and understanding, so who better to create the neighbourhood plan than the people who live and work in our community?"

The process is likely to take two years and it is intended that the Neighbourhood Plan for Godalming and Farncombe should be tested by referendum in May 2016.

To find out more everyone is urged to attend the meeting on 23 January 2014.

Ends

In case of query please contact:

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Release Date: 13 January 2014

Notes for Editors

1. Navigus Planning (www.navigusplanning.co.uk) is a consultancy that specialises in providing support to communities undertaking neighbourhood plans. Since the inception of the Localism Act, and the opportunity to produce neighbourhood plans in November 2011, Navigus Planning has worked on approximately 15 neighbourhood plans across the country. This includes several in Surrey and West Sussex. Chris Bowden is the company's director and founder
2. Neighbourhood planning is an important part of the Government's localism agenda and the powers and regulations relating to neighbourhood planning were enacted in the Localism Act 2011 and came into effect in April 2012.

The process for developing a neighbourhood plan is a lengthy one. The key stages are:

Stage 1: Defining the Neighbourhood

In areas with a parish or town council, the parish or town council will take the lead on neighbourhood planning and the first action required is to apply to the local planning authority for designation of the neighbourhood area. Godalming Town Council applied to Waverley Borough Council for the designation of the whole of the Town Council's administrative area in March 2013 and the area was designated on 16 July 2013.

Stage 2: Preparing the Plan

A neighbourhood plan must follow some basic ground rules:

- it must generally be in line with local and national planning policies
- it must be in line with other laws
- if the local planning authority says that an area needs to grow, then communities cannot use neighbourhood planning to block the building of new homes and businesses; they can, however, use neighbourhood planning to influence the type, design, location and mix of new development
- neighbourhood plans must contribute to achieving sustainable development

With a neighbourhood plan, communities are able to establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood. They will be able to say, for example, where new homes and offices should be built, and what they should look like. The neighbourhood plan will set a vision for the future. It can be detailed, or general, depending on what local people want.

Stage 3: Independent Check

Once a neighbourhood plan or order has been prepared, an independent examiner will check that it meets the right basic standards.

If the plan or order doesn't meet the right standards, the examiner will recommend changes. The local planning authority will then need to consider the examiner's views and decide whether to make those changes.

If the examiner recommends significant changes, then the parish or town council may decide to consult the local community again before proceeding.

Stage 4: Community Referendum

The local planning authority will be responsible for organising a referendum on a neighbourhood plan that meets the basic standards. This ensures that the community has the final say on whether a neighbourhood plan or order comes into force.

People living in the neighbourhood who are registered to vote in local elections will be entitled to vote in the referendum.

If more than 50% of people voting in the referendum support the neighbourhood plan then the local planning authority must bring it into force.

Stage 5: Legal Force

Once a neighbourhood plan is in force following a successful referendum, it carries real legal weight. Decision makers are obliged to consider proposals for development in the neighbourhood against the neighbourhood plan.