

# COMMUNITY PLANNING COMPANION

Including pullout guide

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# WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide has been developed for people who want to know more about local planning issues. It has emerged from planning workshops and other activities with local residents to make positive change in the local area.

It will use Shieldfield, Newcastle, as an example to show different problems and opportunities in urban planning.

Shieldfield is a diverse and vibrant area, home to many families and residents, businesses and community charities.

Over the past few years, there has been a significant increase in development in Shieldfield due to the building of new student accommodation. There is a risk that Shieldfield will continue to change in opposition to residents' wants and needs, and we must use planning and development to shape the future of the area.

This involves protecting assets such as social housing and play areas. It involves holding to account key decision-makers.

The pullout Guide is designed to introduce you to planning and development and show how you can get involved.

# KEY ISSUES IN SHIELDFIELD

## HISTORY

Shieldfield is a neighbourhood located to the east of Newcastle city centre, separated by a motorway. Prior to the early 19th century, Shieldfield was a farming and horticulture area.



A view of The New Bridge, Pandon Dene 1821, engraved by John Knox from a painting by John Lumsden

The area was urbanised in the 19th century to become a mix of residential and industrial buildings. It had a ropery, a brickworks and a large paint factory. Post World War II, the neighbourhood was redeveloped, with private accommodation replaced by a council estate, bordered with industrial units. The housing type is a mixture of terraces, low-rise flats, 'stilted' flats and high rise blocks. There are privately-rented homes, resulting from the rise in 'buy-to-let' market and the selling of council housing.

# WHAT'S GONE WRONG?

During the last ten years, Shieldfield has seen rapid development of large blocks of student accommodation, and there is a growing population of students. The area is very diverse, with residents from a range of cultural backgrounds. Residents feel strongly about issues such as gentrification, affordability, lack of communal space and student housing. These issues are not unique to Shieldfield but can be seen in cities across the world.



Student Flats



Social housing

*"I want to see the council buy all these houses back and give them to people who can look after their gardens. It is sick when you've got a council house sold to private landlords so they can make money. It's not about dwelling or living."*

Shieldfield Resident



Residents have strong and clear opinions on how to change Shieldfield for the better, maximising the use of underused public spaces and promoting inclusive and positive changes to the urban area.

In future, residents need to be fully consulted and listened to in a meaningful way by decision makers and developers.

*“The student accommodation is not the problem to me. The problem is that no benefit comes to the area because of the student accommodation... no money comes back in... There have been so many consultations. We could certainly get a group together to fight for [change], but to be honest... people get sick because they’ve been promised so much, and it doesn’t come to fruition. You do all this work and then get nothing at the end of it.”*

Shieldfield Worker



# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The piecemeal development of space, lack of consultation with residents, and ongoing neglect of public space in Shieldfield has caused many issues.

It has also meant that Shieldfield no longer reflects its population. Shieldfield residents have many insights, ideas and priorities that could be used to inspire future changes.

The increase in student housing has caused several issues:

- Rapid growth has caused the landscape to change dramatically.
- Increased student population in the area with increasing noise and anti-social behaviour issues.
- Lack of meaningful consultation with residents on new developments.
- Generic building style which does not represent its residents.
- Poorly maintained developments with neglected 'in between' areas.
- Residents feel unsafe around poorly lit areas.
- Empty promises made about positive changes that will be made to the local area.
- Increase in litter and noise pollution.

Shieldfield residents have several priorities for improving the area for the better. They want decision makers to consider these priorities in future planning decisions:

# THEME 1: NEIGHBOURHOOD COHESION

Space for students and long-term residents to mix, share resources and build better relationships.



Conversation at Shieling Design Fest  
Credit: Matthew Denham

“...it isn’t easy as a resident to meet a load of students, to embrace the students. When they lived in the houses on the streets it was different, but now they live in the halls we don’t have a chance. If you are passing people who live near you, you can smile and speak to them, but there isn’t anywhere for us to meet them, say the pub or the community centre, or the club...”

Shieldfield Resident and Volunteer

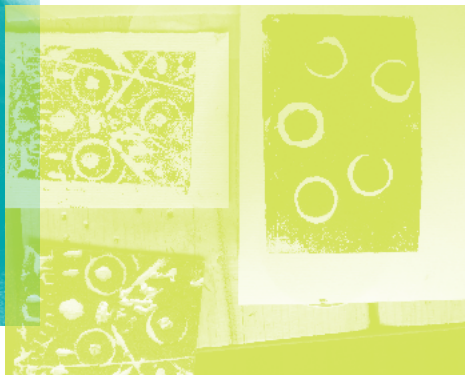


## THEME 2: PLAYFUL SPACES

Improved play spaces and dedicated youth areas to ensure young people of Shieldfield can play safely outdoors.



Child playing at Car Free Day  
Credit: Matthew Denham



Hotspur School  
printing workshop

*"...for everyone to love where they live is very important. If we have a community, it's kind of finding your soil to put your roots down. I believe that is important... community is everyday life, not just for a project, or a party... How do we make this happen? I know it takes time and money, energy. If people... have a thought and are willing to do a little bit, I believe it will happen."*

Dwellbeing Staff Member and Resident

# THEME 3: PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Environmentally-friendly developments that respect the ecology of Shieldfield and provide space for growing fruit, vegetables and herbs.



Growing local produce

Digging a wildflower meadow



*“We want to create shared common spaces which are connected with the earth and the natural environment, instead of in opposition to them. This means using local materials, skills and resources to create them”*

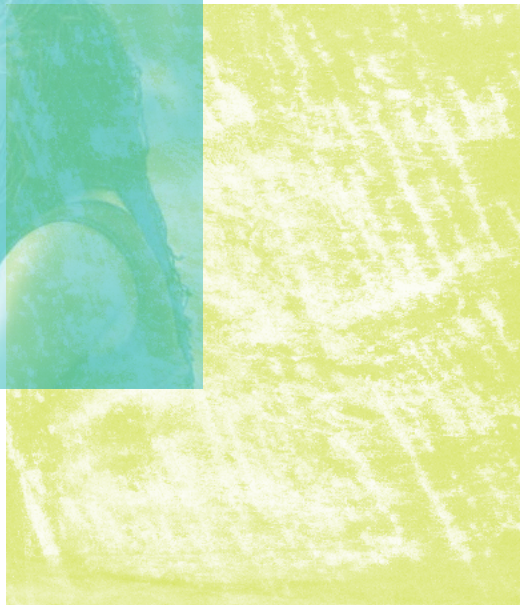
Dwellbeing Staff Member

# THEME 4: COMMUNITY SPACE

Accessible space for community celebrations, organising and socialising to improve neighbourly relationships, build friendships and decrease loneliness.



Car Free Day,  
Credit: Matt Denham



*“We want to make a positive impact within the community and bring people who are isolated together and to help them to take action in what they see as an issue.”*

Dwellbeing Shieldfield Member and Resident

There is a risk that the visual and physical identity of Shieldfield will continue to develop in opposition to residents' wants and needs, and we must use planning and development to stake a claim to space and to shape the future of the area.

There is an urgent need to protect this for future generations and improve life in Shieldfield today. This involves protecting assets such as social housing and play areas. It also involves holding to account those that contribute to the degradation of the area, such as housing providers and private landlords, who neglect maintenance on their buildings and the spaces which surround these.

There are strong community assets present in Shieldfield through existing organisational structures such as Caring Hands, Shieldfield Art Works and The NewBridge Project, and the residents' community itself through organisations such as Dwellbeing Shieldfield and the Forum Café. It is important that we, as a community, safeguard these assets. Getting involved in planning is a way to do this.



School children looking at maps of Shieldfield



## Actions we can take as a community include:

- Submitting objections to planning/development proposals.
- Responding to public consultation about proposed changes.
- Applying for funding from the City Council
- Lobbying elected members such as local councillors.
- Voting on neighbourhood plans in a referendum



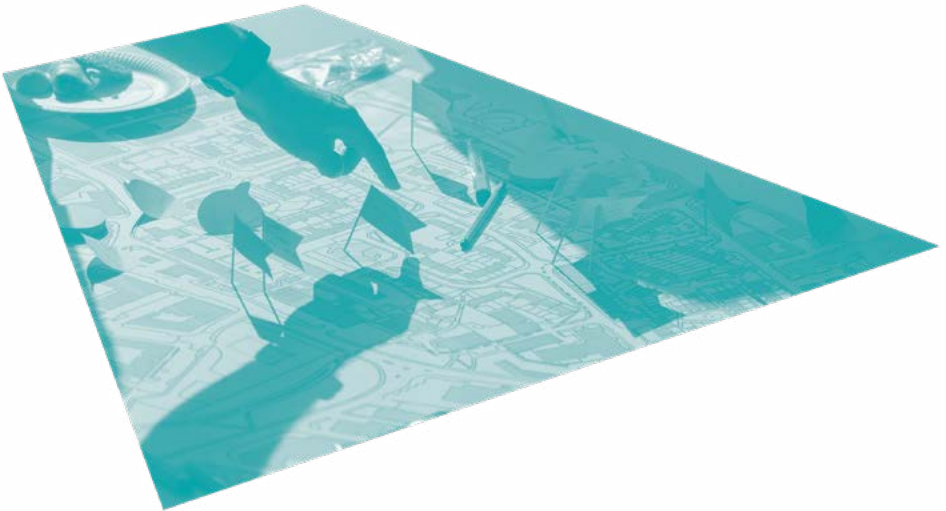
Garlic planting



Botanical Walk



# A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE PLANNING SYSTEM





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# DECISION MAKERS

## WHO MAKES DECISIONS?

Understanding the planning and development process is key to influencing it. The more we understand about planning and get involved in the process, the more opportunity we will have to deliver a community vision for our area.



# KEY STAGES

## Assembling Investors

- Developers usually buy land or leaseholds themselves and use this to attract investors.
- Banks sometimes fund developers, but after the 2008 financial crisis this is less common.

## Role of Investment Funds

- Wealthy individuals put money together to pay for the development through a fund, which allows the developer to build.
- Money changes hands from investment fund to developer at different points throughout the development and then a final Development Management Fee is paid to the developer once the development is complete.
- When the development is complete the investment fund owns the development.
- A typical investment fund last around 5 years, at which point the development will be sold on (sometimes to a new investment fund). The profit made will be shared out amongst the individuals in the fund.

## Role of the Developer

- Developers are responsible for carrying out the development.
- Developers will organise land, pay the architect, and organise contractors to build the development
- Developers make money once the site is complete.

# KEY POLICIES

There are several policies which effect local planning and development issues. Below is a summary of the national and local policies that can influence development.

The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** is a set of national policies which cover the economic, social and environmental aspects of development. This framework highlights the importance of sustainable development and covers topics such as housing, business, economic development, transport and the natural environment.



Shieling Design Fest. Credit: Matthew Denham

**Local Plans** set out decisions and plans for the development of local authority areas. They guide what can be built where. When deciding whether to accept or reject a planning application, planning officers will refer to the policies set out in the Local Plan to make their decision.



Neighbourhood planning offers communities a way to shape the way their local area is developed through the use of **Neighbourhood Development Plans**. They set out planning policies for a local area and were introduced through the **Localism Act** of 2011. You can find out more information about Neighbourhood Plans on page 18.

**Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)** are used to give more detail about the Local Plan. These documents usually refer to specific issues (such as tall buildings or student accommodation) or deal with a specific geographical area which will undergo change.

**Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessments (HELAA)** show how much suitable land is available in an area to build housing and other developments. Councils are required to complete this type of assessment to prepare a Local Plan. They help local planning authorities understand how much growth they can plan for and where this can go. A HELAA cannot decide if land should be allocated for development, or if planning permission should be granted.

# RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Planning obligations are legal mechanisms whereby councils secure financial contributions from developers to mitigate the impact of development. This money can be used to support the development of affordable housing, schools, green spaces, other infrastructure works or training opportunities.

**Section 106** is a legal agreement between developers and a local planning authority about what the developer can do to reduce any negative impacts on the local community and environment as a result of development. This is meant to be fair and proportionate to the development taking place. Examples could be a developer donating X amount of money towards public art, street furniture or landscaping in the area in question.

Newcastle City Council holds sums of money from Section 106 put aside to improve local areas that have been subject to new development.

*“We need some of that [Section 106] money...give the kids in Shieldfield somewhere to go. To put pride in the place.”*

Shieldfield Resident



*“...there are certain monies that haven’t been spent, but to get access to these monies is extremely difficult and I can honestly say that because I have tried.”*

Shieldfield Worker

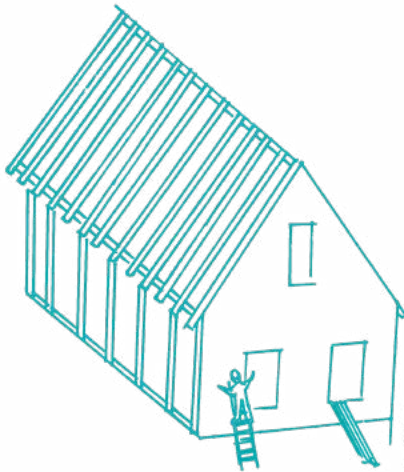


Children surveying  
Shieldfield

**Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)** is a charge that some developers have to pay to the local authority as part of their planning permission. This charge helps authorities to pay for key infrastructure and ensures local communities can benefit from developments. Some developments are exempt from CIL, such as self-builds, residential extensions and developments of less than 100 square metres.

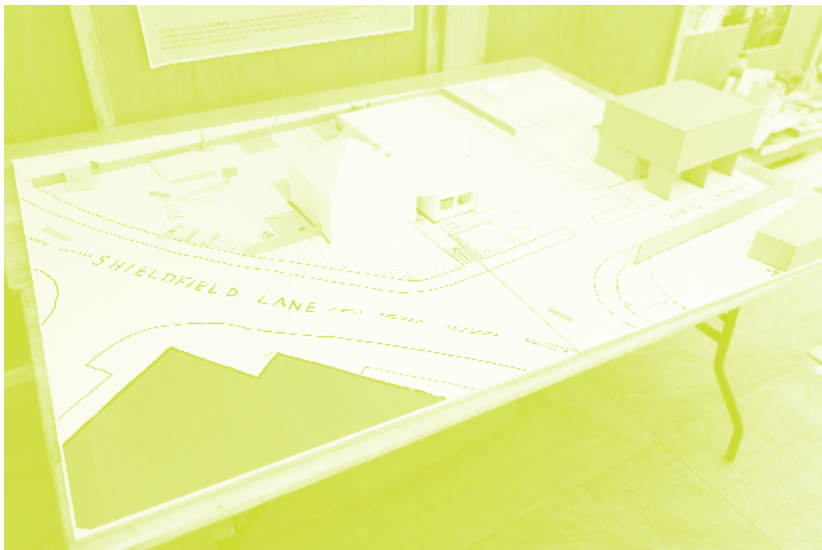
The **Localism Act** of 2011 was designed to move power from central government to local authorities and communities. There are a number of ways the Localism Act supports communities to make decisions about their neighbourhoods. This includes:

- **Right to Challenge** gives communities the right to run local services where they think they could manage them more effectively than existing service providers.
- **Right to Build** gives communities the right to initiate and deliver small developments, allowing for communities to decide what is built in an area. Profits gained from these developments stay within the community and these schemes are often utilised as part of larger initiatives, such as Community Land Trusts (see page 19).



Deciding on planning priorities with young people in Shieldfield.





Co-design workshop. Credit: Matthew Denham

- **Local Referendums** can be held to decide on local matters, such as whether a Neighbourhood Plan will be used to inform local planning decisions.
- **Assets of Community Value** are buildings or assets that support the social wellbeing and interests of the local community. Once listed as an Asset of Community Value, local groups and parish councils have the opportunity to bid to purchase the property.
- **Right to Bid** gives communities the power to submit 'assets of community value' to a list held by the local authority. This right was developed to prevent private investors from buying key community buildings, such as pubs or community centres, before the community has had a chance to raise their own funds.

# WHAT CAN WE DO?

## HOW TO OBJECT TO PROPOSALS

“If we are going to get angry let’s get angry at the issues, not at each other.”

Shieldfield Resident

For a planning objection to be taken into account, it must relate to ‘material’ issues.

Examples of ‘material’ issues are listed below:

**Overlooking** - The proposal would lead to previously private areas being overlooked and made less private.

**Overshadowing** - The height or proximity of the development would mean unreasonable overshadowing would occur.

**Disturbance** - There would be unacceptable intrusion in the form of noise nuisance, general disturbance, odour, etc. This does NOT include noise or disturbance caused from the building works themselves.

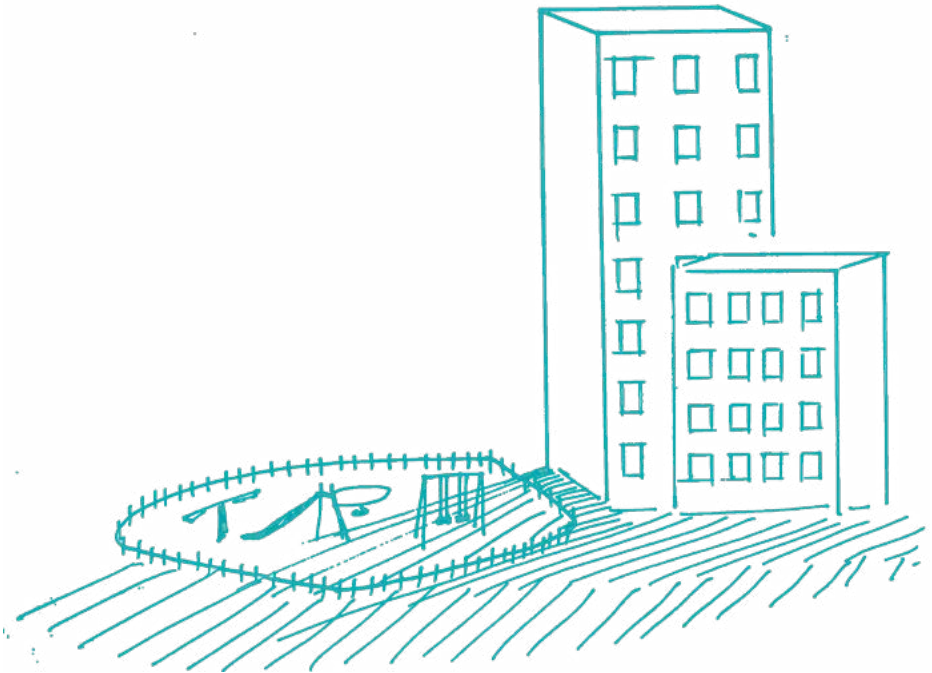
**Overbearing** - The scale of the works means that the property/premises has an oppressive impact on surrounding areas/houses.

**Out of character** -If the design of the development, for example its scale and use, is out of character with the surrounding area and developments.

**Road safety** -If the development may lead to a significant impact upon road safety or the convenience of road users.

**Conservation Area or Listed Building** -If the development has an adverse effect on the character, appearance and/ or setting of a Conservation Area or Listed Building.

**Against existing planning policy** - If the proposal goes against national, regional or local planning policy.



# COMMON MISTAKES

The most common mistake that is made when people submit planning objections are using reasons that are 'irrelevant' to planning policy. This means that many of the things that communities care about can not be taken into account when deciding on, for example, a new multi-story car park.

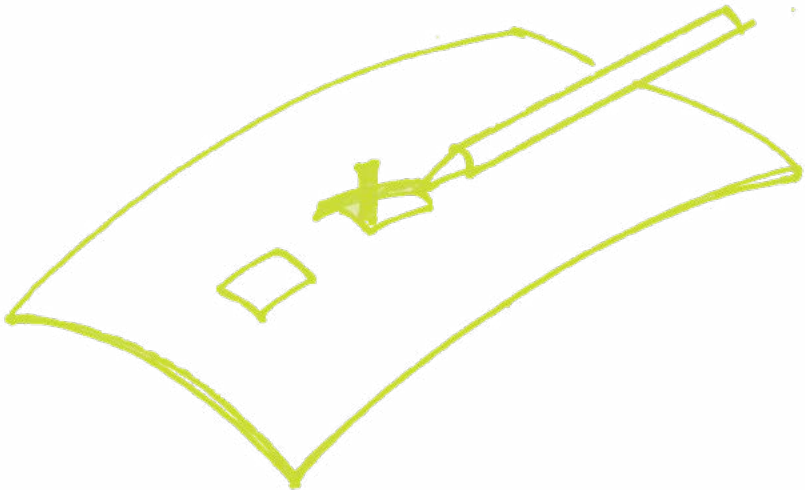
In this example, residents might want to object to a new multi-story car park because it blocks existing residents' view of a park and would create high levels of noise pollution and dust during construction. Neither of these reasons could be considered towards the objection.

Below are a list of issues that local authorities can NOT take into consideration ('immaterial issues'):

- Impact on the view.
- The applicant's personal circumstances or other private matters.
- The applicant's ethnic origin, religious beliefs, their sexual orientation, political or other affiliations.
- Boundary disputes or other unresolved civil disputes (unless their cause/content is specifically related to the planning proposal).
- The reason that the applicant is applying for planning permission.



- Any profit that is likely to be made.
- The attitude or behaviour of the applicant or their representatives.
- Matters relating to past infractions, such as previous nuisances caused by the applicant or site occupiers.
- Effect on the value of properties in the area.
- Possibility of future problems.



“We need as much support as we can to get this community back on its feet...we can't magic green space, but we can keep the little bit we've got left and just rebuild. But we need help, desperately.”

Shieldfield Resident

# TIPS ON OBJECTING

- Read the local plan.
- Cite policy provided in the local plan and national planning framework.
- Use sentences which clearly show how the plan goes against existing policy.
- Don't use personalised reasons.
- Propose alternative suggestions that meet the policy referenced.



A resident surveying building designs at the Shieling Design Fest. Credit: Matthew Denham

## Example Letter to a Planning Authority

Use this template to help structure your comments:

RE: [Insert the planning application reference number here]

First paragraph: Clearly state the reason for your letter and your overall concerns (if they relate to the 'material conditions' listed previously).

Main text:

- List your objections, starting with the strongest.
- You must give a reason for each of your points. The reason must relate to relevant policies such as the Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework. For example: 'The removal of a footpath goes against Policy A which states that Newcastle City Council aims to improve infrastructure for pedestrians'.
- Make suggestions for changes to the proposal or conditions on the development. For example: a condition to improve paths for pedestrians or the installation of bike storage.

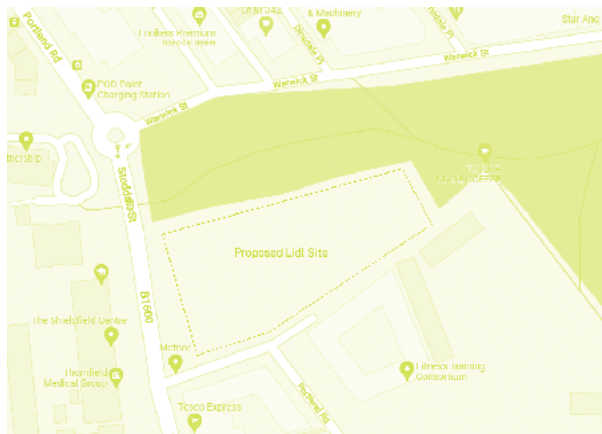
Conclusion:

- Finish by briefly summarising your reason for sending the letter and clearly state that you believe the planning application goes against the policies you have referred to.

## Dwellbeing Case Study: The Lidl Planning Application

An example of a well-written objection to planning permission can be seen in the case study below.

In November 2020, supermarket chain Lidl proposed to build a single-storey shop and car park for 85 cars in Shieldfield, off Stoddart Street. A map indicating the proposed development can be seen below.



The development proposal drew comments from local residents, councillors and nearby business owners. The majority of commenters thought that access to more affordable food would be a positive thing for Shieldfield and were pleased the development would create local job opportunities.

There were, however, concerns raised about the impact on the local environment through an increase in traffic and lack of infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists. Dwellbeing submitted comments on the Lidl planning application on issues including design, waste and traffic.

## **An extract of the objection letter submitted can be seen below:**

“...there is a need for landscaping which is more diverse and that will attract and support pollinators... well-loved cherry and plum trees have already been felled along the site periphery on Stoddart St.

The proposal to fell these trees contravenes Paragraph 12.51 of the Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan which states, ‘There will be a presumption in favour of the retention, protection, and enhancement of woodlands, trees and hedgerows, as well as, where appropriate, additional provisions by new developments’.

We propose that:

- Instead of ornamental shrubs along the periphery of the site on Stoddart Street, which will have little benefit to pollinators or the local community, these are replaced by similar fruit bearing trees to those that have already been felled.
- Harmful pesticides and weedkillers should not be used on site which can impact pollinators as well as provide an unsafe environment for local people.

This links to Newcastle City Council’s Bee Friendly Verges initiative as well as this area being within the Wildlife Enhancement Corridor.”

# ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO PLANNING

The process we have shown through this Guide is common. That said, there are lots of people across the UK designing alternative approaches to development. These can be more creative, democratic ways to make changes to places.

Below you will find some hopeful examples of people doing things differently.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

Neighbourhood planning is a right for communities to shape the way their local area is developed through the use of **Neighbourhood Development Plans**. It sets out planning policies for a local area and was introduced through the **Localism Act** of 2011.

The benefits of Neighbourhood Plans include increased powers and input from local people. This means having a say on:

- Choosing where new homes, shops and offices can be built.
- What new buildings should look like.
- What infrastructure should be provided.
- How key buildings are preserved or protected.



Mapping planning priorities for Shieldfield

## COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS (CLTS)

A CLT is a non profit organisation that owns and develops land for the benefit of the community.

- They typically provide affordable homes, community gardens, civic buildings, pubs, shops, shared workspace and energy schemes.
- They are long-term in nature and ensure homes and land are permanently affordable and accessible.
- They are led by local people and groups.
- CLTs can be found all over the world.

CLTs are used to give local people power to build and develop spaces that are suited to their needs. In some places, this means building good quality, affordable homes in low value areas that developers might ignore.



# FUNDED SOCIAL HOUSING

Social housing is provided by local councils or housing associations and is therefore generally cheaper, more secure and longer-term than privately renting.

Council homes and estates have been historically developed and paid for through central government and local authorities. However, due to governments investing less in housing, and encouraging home-ownership through schemes such as **Right to Buy**, the availability of social and council housing has decreased significantly since the 1980s.

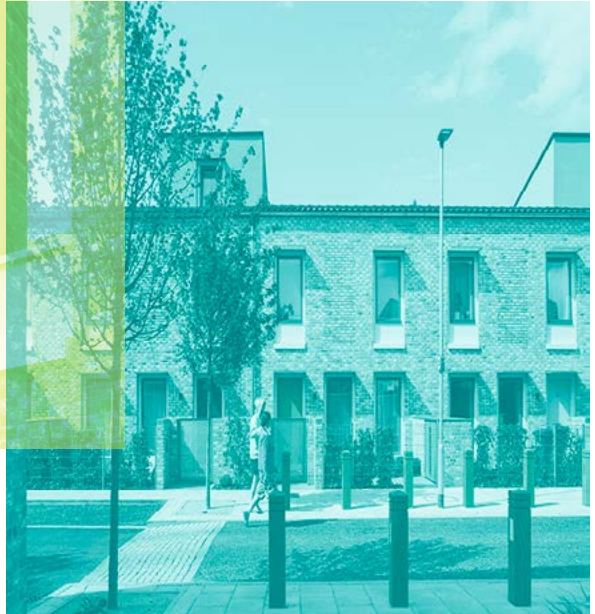
The proportion of privately-rented homes has pushed up average housing costs and, as a result, affordable housing options are increasingly limited and homelessness is high. Local authorities are finding alternative ways to fund council housing.

Shieldfield children exploring housing styles on a walk





Goldsmith Street,  
Nowich  
Credit: Tim Crocker



In 2019, Norwich City Council completed the development of 102 affordable ‘Passivhaus’ homes. These homes were built to an extremely high standard including south-facing gardens, well-insulated structures and efficient heating systems to keep energy costs low.

The development has since won the Sterling Prize from the Royal Institute of British Architects due to its excellent architecture. It is only the second time since the prize was created that a social housing development has won.

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- **Adopted Plan:** A final plan which has statutory status by a Local Planning Authority
- **Co-operative:** An organisation which is owned and run jointly by members
- **Emerging Plan:** A local plan not yet approved
- **HMO:** House in Multiple Occupation
- **Immaterial objections:** Issues which cannot be considered when reviewing planning objections
- **Intentional Community:** A community designed around collective values and interests
- **Local Amenity:** Something that makes it comfortable or enjoyable to live or work somewhere e.g. a swimming pool
- **Local Authority:** A public organisation responsible for a range of vital services
- **Local Plan:** A guide of planning rules
- **Material objections:** Issues which can be taken into account when reviewing planning objections
- **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):** A guide which sets out planning policies for England and how these should be applied
- **Neighbourhood Plan:** Community-led plans which set out visions for an area and contain planning policies for the use and development of land
- **Statutory:** Required by legislation or law
- **Supplementary Planning Document:** Documents which provide guidance about a Local Plan

# KEY ORGANISATIONS

- **Community Land Trusts**  
Web: <https://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/>
- **Community Led Homes**  
Web: <https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/>  
Tel: 020 3096 7795
- **Council for the Preservation of Rural England**  
Web: <https://www.cpre.org.uk/>  
Tel: 020 7981 2800
- **Homes England**  
Web: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/homes-england>
- **Local Trust**  
Web: <https://localtrust.org.uk/>  
Tel: 020 3588 0565
- **Locality**  
Web: <https://locality.org.uk/>  
Tel: 0345 458 8336
- **Planning Aid**  
Web: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-advice/>  
Tel: 020 7929 8338
- **Town and Country Planning Association**  
Web: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/>

Dwellbeing Shieldfield is a welcoming community group and co-operative for people of all ages and backgrounds. We share life together, support our neighbours and celebrate our community. We enjoy regular social events and educational activities such as group walks, coffee meet-ups, planting and growing food, youth activities, and making improvements to our neighbourhood. Our aim is for community members to play an active role in shaping life in Shieldfield. Through these actions we aim to move Shieldfield (and other neighbourhoods like it) towards self-reliance, resilience and interdependence.

### Get in touch to find out more:

**Website:** [www.dwellbeingshieldfield.org.uk](http://www.dwellbeingshieldfield.org.uk)

**Email:** [info@dwellbeingshieldfield.org.uk](mailto:info@dwellbeingshieldfield.org.uk)

**Phone:** 07593 769 129 (Edyta)

07761 909 669 (Ken 'Community Bee')

**Facebook:** @DwellbeingShieldfield

**Instagram:** @dwellbeingshieldfield

**Twitter:** @DwellbeingS

