



Neighbourhood/Community Planning

If you've ever been frustrated that the planning system doesn't do enough to protect nature and make space for wildlife in your area, now is your chance to change things! The Government unveiled the new Localism Act at the end of 2011, which aims to give people more of a say in planning the future growth of their community. The main headline of the Act is Neighbourhood Planning, which enables people to come together via their Parish Council, Town Council, or Neighbourhood Forum to create a Neighbourhood Plan – a set of locally decided objectives and policies to guide development and deliver a shared vision for the place you live in.

As well as making decisions about new build developments, local communities will also be able to plan for natural developments: from wild play and wild greenspaces to wetlands and woodlands, people can decide what the network of spaces for nature should look like in their patch, and write the policies and take the decision that will make it a reality.

Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) role

SERC is the central source for flora and fauna data within the Somerset. It holds data about statutory and non-statutory sites, habitats and species across Somerset which is used to inform conservation strategy, development planning and for research purposes. SERC's data comes from a variety of sources. SERC welcomes information on wildlife sightings as we are not always aware of the presence of wildlife on a site. Any wildlife records should be sent to sercrecords@somerc.com so we can these to the county database.

SERC has two key roles to play in the planning process;

- it acts as an information centre for ecologists and landowners planning work; and
- it provides data to all planning authorities in Somerset, i.e. the Councils and Exmoor National Park to assist them with their decision making process.
- SERC is not however able to provide planning advice on any specific developments.

Individuals and organisations can also access this information through the data enquiries service.

If your group requires a data search to review the data within your Parish boundary please contact data.supply@somerc.com or call 01823 664450 to discuss your requirements further and for a data search form. There is a small charge for this service which covers the staff time to extract and analyse data into a suitable form. Refer to the Data Search Request Form – Neighbourhood/Community Planning for the current charge.

Next steps

If your Parish, Town or Neighbourhood is already thinking about Neighbourhood Planning, or you would like to find out more about it, your local planning authority can provide further guidance on the process and considerations.

The [Local Government Association](#) planning advisory service has a useful questions and answers section relating to Neighbourhood plans.