Know your neighbourhood: Providing the facts that support your plan

A neighbourhood isn’t a point on a map - it’s an area within which communities grow and interact. When developing a neighbourhood plan you need to show you have a good understanding of the area and have taken proper account of those communities.

This will help to form the aims of your plan and the policies to help achieve those aims. Without a background of solid evidence, neighbourhood plans run the risk of getting into trouble at examination.

Here we explain how open data tools can help you when building an evidence base for your neighbourhood plan.

Natural Neighbourhoods - A free service that describes real life neighbourhoods

The Local Government Association (LGA) hosts a service where anyone can define the boundary of an area they want to describe (including a neighbourhood plan area).

You can use it to add your own areas, but will probably find that most areas have already been added by someone else. These include “official” geographies like local authority and ward boundaries, plus unofficial ones which often identify real life communities better than the areas used by government statisticians.

You’ll find most designated neighbourhood plan areas have already been defined. You can see a map with them all, zoom in on your area. If it’s not there, you can add it yourself or ask the Support Team to do it for you.
Figure 1 - Local Government Association, designated neighbourhood areas
You can also pick your own area and see the official statistical areas – “Output Areas” (OAs) or “Lower Level Super Output Areas” (LSOAs) - that come within it. These statistical areas are important because you (or someone on your behalf) can access official data for them and so calculate values for your plan area.

Figure 2 - Map of the Redcliffe neighbourhood plan area and the output areas it contains.
Neighbourhood Planning

Getting basic facts on your area

The LGA automatically generates two free “Basic facts” reports describing each area.

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<td>The following documents and links are related to Redcliffe and were uploaded by users of this tool.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic facts about Redcliffe</td>
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<td>Basic facts about Redcliffe broken down by LSOA</td>
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Figure 3 - Redcliffe basic facts reports

The “Basic facts” reports bring together some key statistics (population with age and gender breakdown, households by tenure, employment levels, etc) on your area and show them in the form of an interactive report which can also be downloaded as a PDF document.

Although this style of report is designed primarily for use by councils describing the areas they manage, the reports provide a great start when collating information for a neighbourhood plan. The data is calculated by aggregating statistics for the official OAs and LSOAs that fall within each neighbourhood plan area.

If there’s not an exact fit, values will be approximations. Non-exact fits of OAs are rare and where they occur there’s usually a greater than 90% fit of “best fit” OAs to the area as a whole.
Gathering more information

The “References” section at the end of each report shows where the report takes its data from. You can go directly to these sources to get further information for the OAs and LSOAs making up your area.

“Accurate, reliable and instant evidence for neighbourhood planning

We sent a map of the Highams Park Plan area, they did all the rest. We tried creating this report ourselves but it was time-consuming and in some cases we weren’t sure where to source the data. We were very pleased.

Gordon Turpin, Chair, Highams Park Planning Group

Alternatively, you can ask Porism, the company managing the service, to gather data for you. Porism manages the LGA service and provides its own Know My Neighbourhood service to give a more detailed and up-to-date portrait of your neighbourhood.

This service was used by the Highams Park Planning Group for evidence to back up their understanding of the area - types of housing, transport, amenities, relative wealth, available land, etc - so that they were in a position to propose the types of development that would fit the area and identify any issues such as lack of transport, schools, GPs etc.

The Group already understood the key issues from living there but wanted some hard evidence to support their own knowledge.

Porism references hundreds of datasets from approximately 50 official sources. It extracts or calculates the statistics pertaining to a neighbourhood plan area and compares values with regional and national averages to help identify the special characteristics of your neighbourhood (eg high pollution, population decline, high unemployment).
All the information is available from open public sources but it takes time to find and collate the data. You may want to supplement the data with local or regional data that supports the objectives of your plan.

**In conclusion**

You may think you know your area, but you need hard substantiated facts to back up your assertions and set a base-line for your plan.

The Natural Neighbourhoods service and links from it can give you some useful statistics and show where you might go for more. This can help build the foundations of a well evidenced neighbourhood plan that is both robust and defensible.

Mike Thacker,

Porism
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