



Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service (NPIERS)

Information Guide



What is NPIERS?

Communities are able to produce Neighbourhood Plans for their local area, putting in place planning policies for the future development and growth of the neighbourhood. This puts communities centre-stage, encouraging collaboration on planning at an accessible level.

A number of industry bodies came together to develop the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service (NPIERS) which provides access to expert and impartial Examiners when they are needed and is designed to support communities through this process.

This resource has been developed by the following organisations, with support from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG):

- the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)
- the Planning Officers Society (POS)
- the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)
- Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)
- Locality

Communities and Local Authorities can make applications to NPIERS free of charge to obtain an Independent Examiner from a panel of experienced and competent professionals. We use professionals who are highly qualified and regulated by professional bodies.

By using NPIERS, you are guaranteed:

- Access to highly professional, independent Examiners with a wide range of skills, knowledge and expertise specifically related to neighbourhood planning.
- An accessible service with guaranteed high levels of knowledge, professional standards and integrity.
- An application service designed to determine the amount of time an Examiner is likely to spend on the Examination, and as you will know their daily rate, you will have a clear idea of the cost and time commitments involved.

Why use NPIERS?

The Service, which is managed and administered by RICS, provides cost-efficient, quick and easy access to impartial and highly qualified Examiners on an “as needed” basis.

You are able to apply to NPIERS for a pre-submission Health Check review of the neighbourhood plan, or for the referral of Examiners who are able to undertake the Examination of the neighbourhood plan.

There is a set fee for Examiners, which provides transparency and clarity on how much an Examination will cost. A real benefit of the service is that you only pay for the time you use the Examiner, there are no retainers or other employment costs normally incurred by employing an expert or a consultant.

The benefits of using NPIERS:

- NPIERS provides quick and simple access to an independent Examiner who has been trained, assessed and interviewed, and is regularly monitored by RICS and RTPI.
- NPIERS is supported by DCLG, which has contributed to the training and reassessment of the independent Examiners.
- NPIERS gives you access to information and guidance on the process, and gives easy access to qualified Examiners who are knowledgeable on planning issues.
- NPIERS is administered by RICS, who provide a range of services including complaints handling and a free appointment service.
- NPIERS has a dedicated point of contact, providing consistency and confidence in the service.



NPIERS Examiners:

RICS manages the appointment of NPIERS Examiners. The Examiners are professionals drawn from across the planning professions, and have specific skills and expertise in neighbourhood planning.

NPIERS ensures that Examiners:

- Have the necessary qualifications, expertise and knowledge to undertake specific tasks.
- Are able to work within timescales and other criteria required by the communities and local authorities.
- Are free from financial or other conflicts of interest in the outcome of the Examination.
- Have appropriate professional indemnity insurance to undertake the relevant tasks.
- Maintain CPD through ongoing quality training and education.
- Are continually monitored and undergo reassessment to ensure they maintain performance and standards.



If, after an appointment is made, the Examiner is unable to undertake the task as required (for example, due to sickness), as soon as NPIERS becomes aware of the problem, it will endeavour to appoint another Examiner as quickly as possible.

The NPIERS Service:

You are able to apply for two services:

- A pre-submission Health Check review of your neighbourhood plan.
- A referral of an Examiner to undertake the Examination of your neighbourhood plan.

The Health Check:

Obtaining a Health Check before submitting your plan can give you valuable insights into whether your plan meets the basic conditions and whether it would be likely to proceed to the referendum stage.

A lot of time and effort goes into preparing a neighbourhood plan, and undertaking a Health Check before submitting the plan will reassure you that it is on the right track. If the plan is not ready for Examination, the Health Check will provide clarity on what changes need to be made.

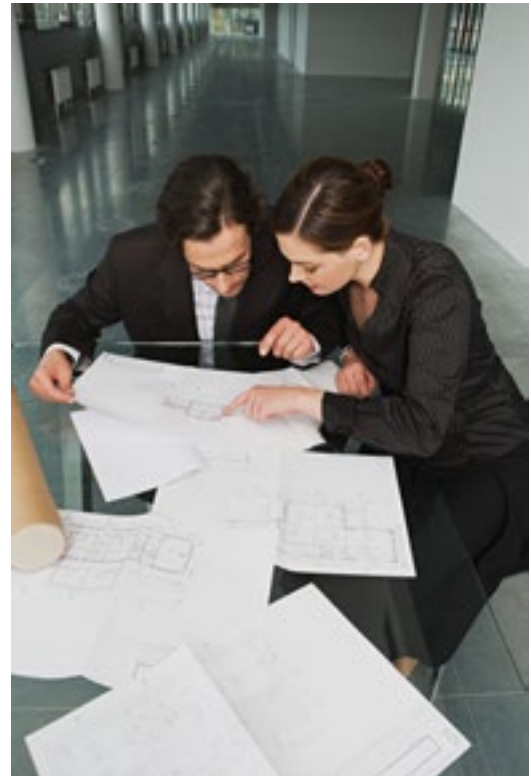
Using an Examiner to undertake a Health Check before submitting a plan will give you an insight into whether the draft plan meets the basic conditions and is ready for Examination. If the plan is not ready for Examination, the Health Check will give advice on what changes need to be made to ensure it meets the basic conditions.

A Health Check does not guarantee that the plan will get through an Examination, but it is designed to give it the best possible chance of being ready.

Costs:

NPIERS makes no charge for you to apply for a Health Check. However, the Examiner will charge £375 plus VAT per day (plus any reasonable expenses) to undertake a pre-submission review (Health Check) of your neighbourhood plan. These fees are paid by the group writing the neighbourhood plan.

Groups writing a neighbourhood plan or neighbourhood development order are eligible to apply for a grant of up to £9,000 from Locality. Groups facing a range of complex issues may be able to apply for further support from the programme.





The Neighbourhood Plan Examination

The Examination service allows for access to impartial Examiners as and when needed. Once a draft neighbourhood plan or order has gone through its pre-submission consultation, you should be thinking about sourcing an Examiner.

The Examiner will consider the submitted documents and any

comments made during the consultation period on the submitted plan or proposal. The independent Examiner will examine whether the plan meets the basic conditions and other relevant legal requirements (e.g. consultation).

The Independent Examiner may recommend that the plan proceed to the referendum stage (i.e. that it meets all the legal requirements) or may suggest that modifications are needed to the plan before it can proceed to the referendum. Undertaking the pre-submission Health Check before submitting the plan for Examination will give your plan the best opportunity of being approved.

Costs:

NPIERS makes no charge for you to apply for an Examination. However, the Examiner will charge £750 plus VAT per day (plus any reasonable expenses) to undertake the Examination of the neighbourhood plan. These fees, plus any associated costs such as room hire and other costs of a public hearing, are paid by the Local Planning Authority.

Experience to date suggests that a typical written representations-only Examination will take around 4-6 days to complete and if the Examination requires a public hearing this can take approximately 9-11 days.

How do I apply for the appointment of an Examiner?

To request the referral of an Examiner (or Examiners) who is able to undertake the Examination of your neighbourhood plan, please complete the application forms available on our website: [rics.org/npiers](https://www.rics.org/npiers) or contact the team on npiers@rics.org.

You are only required to supply details of the official web link to the plan with your application. No further supporting documentation is needed at this stage.

Quality Assurance

The performance of Examiners is monitored by the NPIERS Governance Board. Members of the Board are drawn from a range of professions and their role is to:

- Set the membership criteria and standards for Examiners on the panel.
- Oversee the proper management of the recruitment of Examiners to the panel.
- Ensure the administration of the referral services comply with quality and performance standards set out in a service level agreement.
- Oversee complaints handling and other soft services undertaken by RICS.

Service Level Agreement (SLA):

The performance of RICS in its role of manager of NPIERS is measured against an SLA. The SLA is subject to regular review, initiated by the Board. The review will normally include a consideration of the following:

- Whether NPIERS Examiners are delivering to reasonable expectations.
- Whether there has been efficient management of operational service-based complaints and other customer service issues.
- Whether there are changes needed to the SLA to reflect changing policy, working methods etc.
- Any other such matters that are considered by the Board, RICS, RTPI, the POS and users of the service to be relevant.



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