

**NORWOOD PLANNING ASSEMBLY**  
**ESTABLISHING “COOPERATION ZONES”**  
**BETWEEN TWO OR MORE PLANNING FORUMS:**  
**A “COMMON POLICY” PROTOCOL**

Graham Pycock 5 March 2015

## INTRODUCTION

Electoral wards do provide the obvious defined areas from which neighbourhood planning forums can be assembled. Wards boundaries are however artificial and simply create even sized areas for administrative and electoral purposes. There will be exceptions, but a suitable combination of wards with their existing boundaries can be joined to correspond to a town or community with which people can identify. A patchwork quilt of planning forums (and, or CLIP areas) is likely to emerge therefore with these ward-based boundaries. In many cases the ward boundary lines will split roads or junctions, or types of land use, between two or more planning forums. Thus different planning forums will have shared interests in particular shopping streets, junctions or land uses. It is imperative that eventually a common local planning policy emerges, shared by each planning forum for such divided sites and locations. This note proposes that adjoining planning forums identify “cooperative zones” for such locations and adopt a protocol which leads to a common planning policy. Local people are in the driving seat of neighbourhood planning, but they are volunteers. Actual arrangements for cooperative planning must be realistic, practical and time efficient. Early agreement is preferable to dispute resolution later on.

## REQUIREMENTS OF THE 2011 LOCALISM ACT

Lambeth planning officers have advised that clear responsibility for devising the local plan is crucial and there can be no ambiguity. Thus: “*A local authority may designate only one organisation or body as a neighbourhood forum for each neighbourhood area*” (Localism Act 61F, 7(c)). Correspondingly where an adjoining planning forum has an interest in a section of the designated neighbourhood, then this should be classed as a cooperation zone.

## “COOPERATION ZONES”

All the planning forums are subject to the Lambeth Local Plan which supplies common policies. Each planning forum comes into its own however in devising interpretations, enhancements or elaborations for particular land uses and sites within the neighbourhood, but which may continue next door. Where such a particular land use or location is split between forums then an agreed common policy has to emerge. In the first instance the particular land use or location must be explicitly identified and clearly defined by agreement of the neighbouring forums. Thus any “cooperation zone” and its particular planning issues must be defined and agreed. It is relatively easy to identify zones where there are roads or land uses or sites which will be of interest to more than one forum.

## COMMON POLICY PROTOCOL

It would be helpful as planning forums emerge for such cooperation zones to be described and noted at the early stage of applying for area designation by the council. Eventual agreement to a common planning policy is likely to be easiest where neighbouring forums have explicitly agreed to cooperation zones early and started work on the relevant issues together, rather than proceeding separately. Planning forums should ensure that cooperation zones are built-in to the organisation and division of work into task groups or working parties. It is more likely that problems will be avoided if the issues identified in cooperation zones are clearly defined and signposted and are fully incorporated into the forum's working arrangements. This is especially important where thematic policies overlap such as quality of the built environment which occurs throughout the process and in various planning tasks.

The extent of "ownership" and scale of involvement in sites and land uses within cooperation zones may vary between planning forums. Early agreement should be achieved on the status of interests as either "majority", "minority" or "equal". The planning forum with an agreed majority interest will host and take the lead for planning for the cooperation zone. The forum or forums with a minority interest will normally send a representative (or representatives) to planning and public meetings held by the majority partner for the cooperation zone. Their brief is to contribute and to report back. Where planning forums have an agreed equal interest then joint meetings should be held of the relevant task groups or working parties. These meetings and any public meetings should be mindful of the need for mutual discussions leading to clear agreement on policy.

Each planning forum should ensure that progress in its cooperation zone or zones will be checked as part of the management function. Planning activity for cooperation zones should be reported as a standing item on the governing body or steering group agenda. Actual or potential disputes should be identified at the earliest opportunity for resolution by direct liaison between the respective management bodies or steering groups. In any case policies jointly devised for cooperation zones will be monitored for consistency, proper recording and for incorporation with integrity into the draft neighbourhood plan.

### THE COMMON POLICY PROTOCOL

**AIM:** To ensure that sites and land uses, shared between two or more neighbourhood planning forums, are subject to local planning policies which are entirely shared in common by those planning forums. "Cooperation zones" containing such sites and land uses will be jointly defined at an early stage in the planning process.

#### **ENABLING OBJECTIVES:**

- 1) Significant sites and land uses shared between two or more planning forums should be identified and defined and be designated explicitly as comprising a "cooperation zone".

- 2) Neighbourhood planning forums should plan and organise their work with cooperation zone sites and land uses signposted. This is designed to prevent disjointed planning and promote cross-forum working as necessary.
- 3) The significance and share of sites and land uses in a cooperation zone as between planning forums will be agreed. Thus forums will be allocated a status as “minority”, “majority” or with an “equal” interest.
- 4) In the case of a planning forum with a majority interest in the cooperation zone, that forum will host and lead on planning for the cooperation zone.
- 5) A planning forum or forums with a minority interest will normally send a representative to all planning and public meetings run by the majority forum about the cooperation zone, contributing and reporting back as necessary.
- 6) In the case of planning forums with an equal interest, then the forums will organise joint planning and public events, and agree arrangements for convening, running, recording and reporting on planning activities for the cooperation zone.
- 7) The management body or steering group for each planning forum with a cooperation zone will retain the zone or zones as a standing agenda item for monitoring purposes. Regular reporting is intended to ensure that actual or potential disputes between forums are identified early and suitable action by way of resolution is undertaken. In any case management bodies or steering groups are charged with monitoring emerging policy for cooperation zones for consistency, proper recording and for incorporation with integrity into the draft neighbourhood plan.