

The Planning System & Woodland Social Enterprises: A (very) short guide

About this guide

This guide is based on the report [Woodland Social Enterprises and the Planning System in the UK](#), written by Shared Assets as part of the Making Local Woods Work programme. That report contains much more information than this brief guide can, and also contains a glossary of commonly used “planning terms”. The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the things Woodland Social Enterprises (WSEs) should think about when considering engaging with the planning system.

About the planning system

Purpose

The planning system regulates the way land is used in the UK. Its overarching purpose is to achieve “sustainable development” by ensuring that land use is appropriate. Each UK country has specific planning policies that set the national framework. These policies are: the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) in England, [Scottish Planning Policy](#) in Scotland, [Planning Policy Wales](#) in Wales, and the [Strategic Planning Policy Statement](#) in Northern Ireland.

Local Planning Authorities

Decisions on whether potential developments, or changes to land uses are appropriate, are made by Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), on the basis of their local policies. Your LPA will generally be your local council, and you can find out who that is [here](#).

Forestry in the planning system

“Forestry” is not clearly defined in planning policy, and this can lead to inconsistencies in the way different LPAs deal with

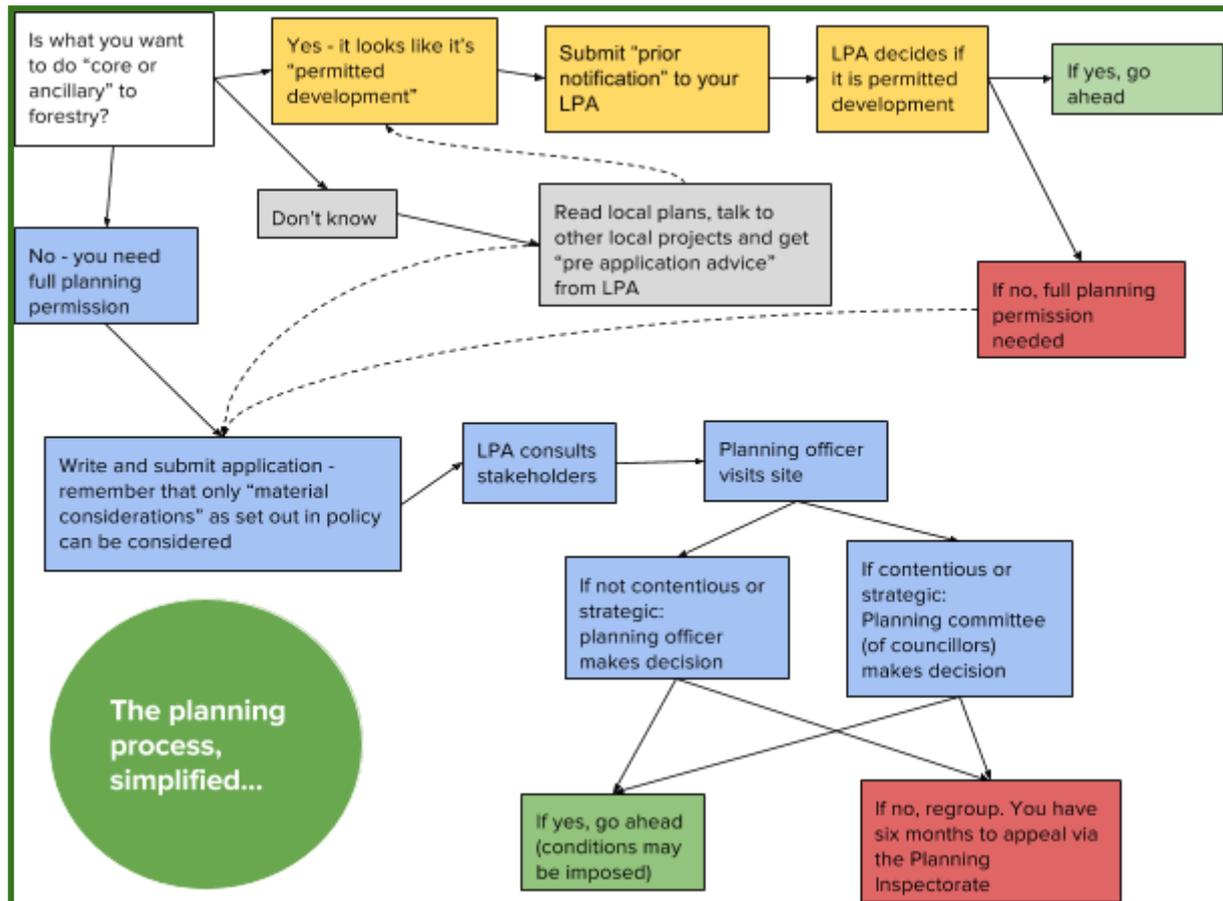
planning applications from WSEs. In general, anything that is considered “core or ancillary” to forestry should be considered “permitted development” and should be approved relatively simply. Things that are considered outside this or “beyond forestry” will need full planning applications and a more thorough process.

About WSEs

A hallmark of WSEs is that they often use woodlands for multiple purposes, from woodland management to recreation, education and healthy living activities. The need for structures to facilitate these activities - from wood-drying sheds to classrooms and toilets, is often what prompts an engagement with the planning system.

Innovative and multiple uses of land that don't fit into neat “planning” categories can cause confusion for LPAs, and WSEs are likely to be very different from other more commercial forestry enterprises they are used to dealing with. WSEs need to consider their interactions with the planning system carefully

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Key things to remember when considering a planning application

Study local policies

The planning system can only take “material considerations” into account, and these will be found in the local and national planning policies. WSEs should also look at planning policies about economic development, and health and wellbeing, and not just focus on the forestry element of their activities.

Consider the time needed

Make sure you and your group are ready to put the time needed into the process. Anything that is not permitted development will need more time and energy, and potentially specialist advice. Do you absolutely need those buildings or that new entrance?

Develop a strong woodland management plan

This is often necessary to make an application in the first place. The [MyForest](#) tool is a good place to start.

Talk to people

Engage with your LPA early. Talk to the the neighbours and the wider community - you really need them on your side. Look for similar projects to learn from. This is the time to be looking outwards!