



Engaging With the Community

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out a strategy for engaging with those living and working in the parish and surrounds on the emerging draft neighbourhood plan. This phase of engagement concerns telling people about the plan as well as gathering views on what should go into it. The outcome of this initial period of engagement will therefore provide information to work up the plan objectives and policies alongside the evidence base being collated.

The consultation requirements are set out in Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012 (Part 5 s15) and a Consultation Statement will need to be submitted with the final neighbourhood plan. This statement will contain the following:

- (a) details of the persons and bodies who were consulted about the proposed neighbourhood development plan
- (b) explanation about how they were consulted
- (c) summary of the main issues and concerns raised by the persons consulted
- (d) description of how these issues and concerns have been considered and, where relevant, addressed in the proposed neighbourhood development plan

This strategy helps to identify key stakeholders and interest groups in the parish with a view to engaging as widely as possible to demonstrate effective and meaningful engagement in the plan's development and to support a positive outcome at the referendum.

1 Why engage with the community?

- 1.1 For the final neighbourhood plan to reflect the views of those living, working and running a business in your community, it is important that opportunities to consult on key issues, options and proposals, and to feed into the process of developing the plan, are made available to all who wish to get involved.
- 1.2 Engagement and consultation run throughout every stage of the plan process and adopting an agreed consultation strategy and programme should maximise the use of existing capacity within the Working Group to effectively manage consultation requirements, both statutory and non-statutory, through an agreed approach that evidences how concerns raised through consultation have been addressed.
- 1.3 This is particularly important at pre-submission stage of consultation which must accord with Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and is essential for a robust Consultation Statement to accompany the final plan to the LPA (Regulation 15).

2 First steps of engagement

- 3.1 The SG will have identified the areas it believes are important issues for your parish to consider through its first draft Vision and Objectives. The next stage therefore, is for this to be tested in the community to receive feedback which will ultimately provide evidence for supporting the policies that are put forward through the Neighbourhood Plan
- 2.1 This phase of engagement concerns telling people about the ideas for the plan as well as gathering views on what residents think should go into it. This means presenting the SG's initial thoughts and asking the community their views and whether there are things missing – or whether there are things that shouldn't be included that have been
- 2.2 The outcome of this first period of engagement will therefore provide information to work up the more structured vision and objectives and help you identify the policies which will deliver the objectives

3 How to go about it

- 3.1 The first stage of the consultation process is to identify key stakeholders and interest groups in the parish with a view to engaging as widely as possible to demonstrate effective and meaningful engagement in the plan's development and to support a positive outcome at the referendum
- 3.2 Although it is prudent to send a flyer or some form of communication around every household in the Parish – either by leaflet dropping or contained within a local publication or as a paid “job” you also need to consider writing specific invitation to all the “interest groups” in your Parish, to invite them and their members specifically. You will need to undertake research to identify these within your Parish, however to get you started, they might include any or all of the following groups:

Suggested bodies to engage with

- Voluntary Sector
- Local Government
- Service Providers
- Schools and Colleges
- Local Community Groups
- Neighbouring town/parish councils
- Landlords
- Primary and secondary schools
- Residents Associations
- Major employers
- Disability Groups
- County Council
- Market traders
- Nurseries/pre-schools
- Church and Religious Groups
- Retailers
- Children's Centres
- Older residents group
- Age UK etc
- Highways Agency
- Local Media
- Civic Society
- Arts/cultural organisations
- Sports and Leisure Clubs
- Youth groups (11-18)
- Business Groups
- Chamber of Commerce
- Women's Support
- Developers
- Farmers Groups
- Landowners
- Private individuals

3.3 Although the best way of getting to as many people as possible in the shortest space of time is paramount, and therefore a Community Engagement Event is the most appropriate method at this point in time, there are a number of additional ways you can boost your interaction with the community – not just at the beginning, but during the whole process:

Opportunities & Methods for consultation

- Mailing/Email regular bulletins
- Create Children's competitions
- Build a Neighbourhood Plan website
- Social media
- Local Press, media, displays
- Public exhibitions, drop in days
- Questionnaire
- Face-to-face Surveys (town centre surveys, door knocking)
- One-to-One meetings
- Focus Group meetings
- Promotional activities
- Posters around community
- Radio/local press
- Mail drop leaflets
- Create Email Mailing list
- Regular inclusion in community newsletters

3.4 The above list is not exhaustive, and as you proceed through the process you will use some or all of the methods outlined according to your needs and the demographic of your particular Parish

4 The Community Engagement Event

- 4.1 This important event in the process of creating your Neighbourhood Plan will launch the Plan proper for you and will be the first real opportunity you will have to gather information from the community about their thoughts and aspirations
- 4.2 Although there is no “right way” to conduct this event you should consider the following points:
 - 4.2.1 Select the right venue(s). Many Parishes are widely-spread, so you may need to have more than one event in two / three places
 - 4.2.2 Think about when you should have it, although the weekend is best for most people, there will be some for whom this is not convenient, so you should consider having a separate event maybe on a weekday evening to give everyone the opportunity of attending
 - 4.2.3 How will you ensure that the widest range of people attend the event? Consider the following:
 - 4.2.3.1 Access for people with physical disabilities
 - 4.2.3.2 How will you ensure that people who have difficulty reading / writing can engage?
 - 4.2.3.3 How will you ensure involvement of older residents / younger residents?
 - 4.2.3.4 Is your event timed so that most groups of people can attend? i.e. night workers / shift workers / carers of young children / older people
 - 4.2.4 Consider how you are going to gather the information at the event itself– the easiest way is to use flip charts and post it notes, so you will need to make sure these are available together with pens
 - 4.2.5 It is useful to have a variety of maps showing the Parish, think about how you will get these – the Local Authority should offer to do these for you as part of their technical support
 - 4.2.6 Think about whether you will offer refreshments – and if so, what. Are there facilities for hot drinks or do you need to provide everything?
 - 4.2.7 Will you run something like a children’s “design a Neighbourhood Plan logo” competition. If so how might you do this?
 - 4.2.8 From the first draft Vision and Objectives the SG have created, identify the key points and ask the community questions about them. This is best done by putting the questions around the wall of the room you are using on Flip charts or similar and using post it notes to gather the views of the community
 - 4.2.9 Remember to keep the questions targeted on the topic area without being too leading – you want information that is useful to the Plan
 - 4.2.10 Although there is nothing wrong with people highlighting topic areas that aren’t directly related to the Plan i.e. the “dog poo bin” type of issue, they can be added to a community Aspiration Appendix which can accompany the final plan. It is, however, important for the community to understand that the focus of the Plan is on planning and land use and that it will be a statutory document that informs planning decisions in the future

4.2.11 In addition to specific questions related to the SG draft Vision and Objectives, you might ask people additional questions such as:

4.2.11.1 What makes [your parish] a good place to live?

4.2.11.2 What issues affect your decision about remaining in the area?

4.2.11.3 What changes would you like to see?

4.2.11.4 What would you like the future in the parish to look like?

4.3 In addition to activities and the groups to target, you will need to consider what resources you might need for your engagement activities. This might include any / all of the following:

Resources

- Venue hire
- Maps
- Flip charts
- Powerpoint screen/laptop
- Images / photographs
- Refreshments
- Pens/post-it notes

4.4 It is important that members of the SG or other interested volunteers are available to answer questions and to ensure that attendees understand the purpose of the drop-in days

4.5 Remember to collect demographic data at the event – it is important that you know where people have come from so that you can work out where to target if there are gaps, so asking for peoples postcodes is a good idea

4.6 Remember, this is also your opportunity to recruit volunteers so have a separate list of people who might be interested in either joining the main SG or focus groups, or who might just be interested in helping in smaller ways, maybe by undertaking leaflet drops etc

4.7 The final thing is to have a plan about how you are going to deal with the feedback you have received. Free text which is what most of your comments will be are difficult to analyse. Their purpose though, is to help you develop the next stage of consultation which is a far more targeted questionnaire which identifies the issues that the SG believe the Neighbourhood Plan should address, based on the draft Vision and Objectives and the feedback received from the drop-in events

5 Questionnaire

- 5.1 Once you have the feedback from the community you will need to narrow it down in order to firm up the vision and Objectives from which your Policies will flow
- 5.2 To do this, you should send out a questionnaire to the whole community with more targeted questions relating to the feedback you have received and what you think the neighbourhood Plan should deal with
- 5.3 Re-use the lists of stakeholders and interest groups you have compiled for the engagement days
- 5.4 The process for this needs to be as wide ranging as the engagement event and ensure that all residents have the opportunity to comment. This is best undertaken in both hard copy and through the use of Survey Monkey
- 5.5 Questions this time will be designed to elicit mainly “yes / no” answers for ease of analysis
- 5.6 There needs to be a range of collection points for receiving hard copies of questionnaires
- 5.7 Once the cut off date for receipt of the completed questionnaires has passed, you will be in a position to analyse the information received which will enable you to firm up your vision and Objectives and start identifying the policies you will need to achieve them.

6 Next steps:

- 7.1 From this point onwards, it is a question of starting to pull together the policies and identify and gather what evidence is required to support them
- 7.2 During the process of policy development there will be informal consultations at which you will receive feedback to help you adjust your policies to meet the expectations of the community
- 7.3 Once the draft Plan has been written and given a general approval by the community it will start to undergo the formal processes:
 - Screening – to determine whether your Plan needs to be supported by an Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)
 - Production of the above documents if required
 - Regulation 14 first formal consultation
 - Adjustment to Plan following Regulation 14
 - Regulation 15 Submission of the final Plan – including the production of the formal documentation which needs to accompany the Plan itself i.e. Basic conditions Statement and Consultation Statement
 - Regulation 16 – second formal consultation undertaken by the Local authority, the comments of which go directly to the Examiner
 - Appointment of the Examiner by the Local authority
 - The examination
 - Adjustments to the Plan following Examiners feedback
 - Preparation for referendum
 - Referendum