

Neighbourhood Planning Guidance Note 12

Best practice community engagement techniques

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Community engagement is the active participation of local residents and community groups in the decisions that affect their lives. This guidance note explains the benefits and principles for effective community communication, plus a range of consultation methods that can be used for engagement.

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Introduction

For the purpose of this guidance it is important to outline an understanding of the terms 'community' and 'engagement'.

- **Community** refers to a group of people that share a common place (for example, your village, your parish(es) or within your Neighbourhood Area); a common interest (for example, an interest in the environment, sport and health and social care); or a common identity (normally demographic characteristics for example, age). There are also individuals and groups with common needs.
- **Engagement** refers to a range of interactions which are suitable for all parties involved. It could range from simple information giving through to supporting community activity. As appendix 1 shows, it spans a range of activities.

Benefits of community engagement

Well run community engagement will bring extensive benefits to the progression of your Neighbourhood Development Plan and will encourage the involvement of local residents, groups, businesses, developers and a number of agencies. Benefits of meaningful, two way community engagement include:

- Trust – it builds trust between the parish council(s), local people, developers and service providers.
- Opportunity to influence – it gives local people and communities the opportunity to influence decisions that will affect them.
- Knowledge of local issues - it taps into local knowledge and expertise and makes sure your Neighbourhood Plan is as well informed as possible by the people who know its problems best; your local inhabitants.
- Removing barriers – it removes physical, language or social barriers to communities getting access to information or voicing needs or opinions.
- Community understanding – it enables everyone to know about and understand how complex some of the local issues may be. This will help people understand how difficult it can

be to find solutions and help manage their expectations. It also helps your community to understand the neighbourhood planning process and the progress of your plan.

- Satisfaction – it increases the satisfaction with the progress of the plan and the community's ability to shape that future environment.
- A sense of ownership – it supports community spirit and encourages the local people to take control of their own neighbourhoods, which will increase the chances of a successful outcome.

However, some people involved in community engagement have highlighted potential drawbacks. For example, well run community engagement can be very resource intensive in both time and money. It can also be difficult to manage the different views of the respondents.

Importance of recording your community engagement

Consultation will form a very important part of your Neighbourhood Development Plan. Your plan should be a community led document and greater community involvement will assist the progress of your plan through the process and importantly the referendum.

A consultation statement will be required as part of the submission of your Neighbourhood Development Plan. The statement will need to outline the range of consultations which have been undertaken and how the development of your plan has responded to the comments received. Separate guidance is available entitled 'Writing a consultation statement' - guidance note 14.

10 Principles for effective community engagement

The following principles for effective community engagement provide a useful starting point for making your consultation event work.

- The engagement is effectively designed so that it will make a difference.
- Encourage and enable everyone affected to be involved.

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- Plan its delivery in a timely and appropriate way.
- Work with relevant partner organisations.
- Information should be jargon free, appropriate and understandable.
- Make it easier for people to take part.
- Enable people to take part effectively.
- Engagement is given the right resources & support to be effective.
- People are told the impact of their contribution
- Reflect on past experiences to improve your next round of consultation and engagement.

Good community engagement can help create individuals that are active and engaged and who are resourceful, gifted and creative. Likewise, good community engagement can help parishes to be seen by their community as readily and enthusiastically responding to their local communities' desire for involvement and collaboration.

Reaching all sectors of the community

Neighbourhood planning should be fully inclusive within the community. Everyone should be given an equal right to have their views heard and respected. Good community engagement can build new relationships and links, and reinforce existing ones. Therefore, some thought should be given to the best way to reach wider groups and remove barriers to those who are traditionally under-represented in your parish issues and meetings. This will include those with differing views and those who often do not get their voices heard such as younger people, people living in remote rural areas or those whose first language may not be English.

Do not just contact those people who you know or who you think will agree with your views. Make sure that the whole community is aware of your intention to develop a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Ensure that you are realistic about how and when you can engage people. Consultations make

considerable demands on both the organisers and the participants. Many people within your area will have busy lives which makes attendance at meetings difficult. Consider the timing of consultations to ensure the widest range of people can be involved. Identify opportunities to connect with other events within the area; this will save resources and time on your part and ensure you reach a wider audience.

Appropriate communication techniques

Communication techniques can be divided into the direct and indirect. Direct method means face-to-face, letters, email or telephone conversations with individuals. Indirect methods could include leaflets, advertising, radio programmes, articles in newspapers and press reports. These are indirect because they do not involve any direct contact between the person giving the message and the person receiving it.

The influence of indirect communications is always harder to quantify and may rest as much in a change of general 'atmosphere' as in its specific influence on individuals.

Some members of the community may feel apprehensive about being involved in large public meetings and expressing their views in a public arena, especially if they do not have a great deal of experience in that style of meeting.

'Open Space' meetings would allow the participants to create their own agenda and discussions in a less formal setting than a public meeting. Essentially people write down or suggest issues at the start of the meeting and then form smaller groups with people of similar concerns, to talk about the opportunities and way forward. Participants are given the opportunity to move between discussion groups and take part in as many or as few as they feel comfortable with.

To organise an open space meeting you need to:

- Send an open invitation to your community, that explains the purpose of the meeting
- Arrange the meeting chairs into a circle
- Provide a bulletin board or graffiti wall for participants to raise issues and offer suggestions

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- Provide breakout spaces where participants can move freely between discussion/topic groups

The outcomes from the meeting can then be collated and fed back to the whole group.

See appendix 2, a community technique method matrix, which will help you think about various consultation methods, and determine which one is the best method to use at each stage when producing your plan.

It is essential that the content of your Neighbourhood Development Plan represents the views of the wider community, not just those of the project group. In developing your plan there should be a two-way flow of information between the project group and the wider community.

A range of consultation methods that could be used are highlighted below:

- **Public meetings** - A public meeting is open to all, offering an opportunity for people to raise issues and ask questions, and be given answers that can be heard by others in the room. Public meetings are a good way to float ideas and explore possible proposals before they are formalised. A good experience of a meeting can encourage people to become more involved in an engagement process. It can be an excellent way to communicate with large numbers of people, however they can be dominated by outspoken individuals and not everyone is comfortable speaking in public.
- **Roadshows and public exhibitions** - Use the idea that 'a picture is worth a thousand words' to convey information. These can be combined with other events and taken out to where people already are, such as school events or summer fayres. This reduces the need to attract people to specific events. They can appeal to groups, such as young people, who may not respond to document or meeting-based methods. Exhibitions can be used to gather immediate reactions from those who attend.
- **Surveys and questionnaires** - The single most widely used engagement method. Used to collect quantitative answers from which, if the participants are representative, wider public opinion can be deduced. They can also be very useful for gauging public reactions to ideas and

proposals, or understanding what people think about facilities or services. They can be used to gather information from a large number of people. They are also useful for establishing information that can be re-tested to see if results change over time.

Designing a questionnaire can be challenging and time-consuming. Questions need to be framed in a manner which is easily understood, covers all possible options and avoids "leading" the respondent.

To assist you with this process see Guidance Note 29 Creating a questionnaire. Once you have drafted your questionnaire it is a good idea to test it on others before you make it public.

The Neighbourhood Planning team will also be able to give feedback on your drafts.

Consider the following when designing a questionnaire:

- Information required and how it will be used;
- Target participants;
- Questions;
- Test to ensure effectiveness;
- Delivery method(s);
- Collation, analysis and publication of results;
- Thanks and feedback to respondents.
- **Local Workshops** - Designed to enable people to work actively and collaboratively on an issue or task. Although, they may begin with background briefings or presentations, but they are not about providing information or asking questions. Workshops usually run for at least half a day. Workshops can encourage joint working and problem solving, and help to build a sense of ownership of the results.
- **Newsletters/parish magazines** - One of the cheapest and most effective methods of keeping people informed. Using a newsletter or parish magazine in isolation, however, should not be regarded as engagement. They are a useful complement to other forms of engagement, and can be a good way to signpost meetings or

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workshops and report the results of such methods. Newsletters should be kept short and sharp and the style should be lively. It is a good idea to feature pictures of key people, with their agreement, to make them seem less faceless, include photos taken at any consultation events.

- **Open days and drop in sessions** - A way of reaching out to the community and seeking informal contact especially if you piggy-back onto existing local events or venues, such as fetes, markets, redundant shops etc. They can be used to publicise later engagement and can fit into peoples personal timetables. Participants can be given additional information to take away with them. They give people the opportunity to make personal contacts and have individual questions answered.

- **Web-based processes** - In the last few years' web-based engagement processes have begun to be more widely used i.e. parish council websites, Facebook, Twitter, Neighbourhood Planning specific website. They offer a number of advantages: people can participate without having to travel to meetings, it saves paper, enables people to focus on the issues that particularly interest them, and work well for people who feel intimidated by speaking in public. Online methods can be used as stand-alone processes or in parallel to or integrated with offline engagement methods.

- **Consultation documents** - A well written document allows the consulters to set out in detail the whole of a situation and ask specific questions. A document can be used to explain complexity and provide background information. Document-based consultation is safe and predictable, and avoids some of the risks of face-to-face processes. Web-based processes allow comments on documents and responses to questions to be displayed in full. The web-based process enables participants to navigate directly to the parts of the document that interest them.

- **Focus groups** - Groups of 6-12 people carefully selected to be representative of a designated part of the population. Focus groups are qualitative processes which are good for deepening the understanding of how people think and feel about issues. The advantage of this method is members can be carefully recruited to fit specific roles. Focus groups can obtain opinions from people who would not respond to

other methods because they are not comfortable with writing or because of other constraints.

- **Interviews** - Can involve intensive, face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations or street corner encounters. This is a good way to obtain information from an individual. It's relative informality and spontaneity can help to uncover issues and ideas which can then be fed into more formal large-scale consultations. Questions can be asked to get a sense of the local context, particular issues and the sort of engagement methods that might be most appropriate.

- **Planning for Real** - Is an eye catching, hands-on method which is used to sort out what needs to be done to improve your neighbourhood. It involves a large 3D model or large scale map of the community. The model is used at open meetings to suit the needs of the community. Participants place suggestions for the community on cards or flags which are then placed at appropriate points on the model. Benefits of this method are: it's visual impact, its informality, participants can contribute anonymously and all ages can contribute.

- **Place checks/Reconnaissance trips** - Place audits involve a group of local people in a direct inspection of their Neighbourhood Area. Reconnaissance trips are the same but involve mixed teams of local people and technical experts. They are used to familiarise everyone with the physical environment and key issues in the area and to review progress at intervals. A route is carefully planned to include key local features and issues. The route may be walked or use buses or other forms of transport. It may include visits to buildings or facilities.

Usually a team leader will direct the group and determine the pace. The group make notes, sketches, take photos and talk informally to people in their own setting.

- **Citizens' panels** - Panels of local people are convened to allow regular testing of their opinion on local issues. They overcome the problem of having to recruit for each separate exercise. The composition of panels can be made representative of the population whose views are required i.e. your community. The response rate from panels is usually high, and the panels can also be used to disseminate information.

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- **Community fairs** - Provide a fun occasion that will draw a crowd of all ages and backgrounds. It then provides an opportunity to inform and engage the people within a community at one event. They can create interest from media groups and lead to increased coverage of the issue. The main value of community fairs is for organisations who want to show a different face to the public, such as the police. Community fairs tend to work best if a number of organisations in the community get together to run them.

- **Leaflets and posters** - An effective method of publicising or conveying simple messages regarding a larger consultation or one of the methods already highlighted.

Consultation Do's and Dont's

- **Do** have a plan; **don't** rely on ad hoc meetings;
- **Do** draft your consultation strategy early;
- **Do** allow everyone to have their say and feel involved;
- **Do** think how it is best to reach everyone within your community including those who live and work in the area and local landowners;
- **Do** refine; amend; test the questions;
- **Do** invite others to offer advice; for example third parties/stakeholders;
- **Do** have a method for collecting, collating and displaying all responses transparently;
- **Do** have a method for acknowledging responses and telling people how their responses have been acted upon;
- **Do** keep excellent records;
- **Don't** just talk to those who are friendly or who share your views;
- **Don't** get into arguments on the substance.

Review consultation successes

Consultation within your community should not be a one-off event. Ensure that people continue to

be involved in the process by sharing consultation responses and views with them. Remember to review the method you have used and reflect on which elements worked well and where there are gaps. Are there any sections of the community who did not engage and were there reasons why. Share your experiences with other parishes and help build a shared knowledge of techniques and good practice.

Useful community engagement web resources

Eden Project: How to plan your own neighbourhood
<http://www.edenproject.com/blog/index.php/2011/09/how-to-plan-your-own-neighbourhood/>

Developing your comprehensive community engagement strategy
<http://www.navca.org.uk/publications/cces>

Involving People: A practical guide
<http://www.vawcvs.org/downloads/practical-guide.pdf>

Participation Cymru: National Principles for Public Engagement and other information and resources, including training
<http://www.participationcymru.org.uk/national-principles>

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The Five Levels of Locality Engagement				
Increasing level of community engagement > >				
Informing	Consulting	Involving	Collaborating	Empowering
Providing information to localities to enable them to understand problems, alternatives, opportunities and solutions.	Obtaining locality feedback to inform decision making. Obtaining feedback on formal proposals.	Working directly with the locality to ensure that issues, concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	Working in partnership with localities on all aspects of decision making including development of options and identifying preferred solutions.	Placing final decision making in the hands of the locality.
The intention is to...				
Keep the locality informed.	Keep the locality informed, listen to their views and provide feedback on how their input influenced decision making.	Engage with the locality to ensure that concerns and aspirations are reflected in decisions and service delivery. We will provide feedback to the locality on how their input influenced decision making.	Look to the locality for advice and innovation to find solutions. We will incorporate locality contributions to the maximum extent.	Facilitate localities to take responsibility for designing and delivering services themselves.
Techniques...				
Brochures, websites, news releases and newsletters to raise awareness. For example: Council Tax information leaflet, council website, Facebook or Twitter.	Annual surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, telephone, postal or face to face (interview) surveys, using social media, e-mail, website, SMS mobile or Facebook surveys.	User panels e.g. Planning for Real area forums, public meetings, citizens panel, local member / councillor surgeries or network meetings.	Community needs analysis, focus groups or service user forums.	User led commissioning e.g. delegated budgeting, community asset transfer or direct service delivery.

Neighbourhood planning methods matrix

Method:	Neighbourhood planning phase:										Notes:
	Getting started/awareness raising	Establish steering group	Evidence gathering	Developing plan issue to vision	Writing policies	First draft plan	Final plan	Referendum	Adoption	Implementation and monitoring	
Public Meeting											
Questionnaire											
Newsletter/ Parish Magazine											
Parish or Village Website Page											
Consultation Documents											
Street/Fete Stall											
Leaflets											
Posters											
Exhibition											
Door Knocking											
Planning for real ^o											
Study Tour											
Social Media: Facebook/Twitter/ YouTube/Blogs											

Workshop instructions:

- Identify preferred methods to use in each phase and record on matrix.
- Place coloured dots within squares, indicating priorities as follows:

● = Favourite,
 ● = Useful,
 ● = Limited.

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Appendix 3: Glossary

The following terms are often used in relation to consultation. You may therefore find these explanations of terms useful when carrying out your environmental assessment.

Citizen Panel	A collection of 'citizens' who have offered or been selected to form opinions or express indepth views on particular issues. It requires some time and resources, careful organisation, transparency and provision of information. Citizen panels work particularly well for complex issues.
Collaborating	The fourth rung on the ladder of Engagement. This involves partners working together closely to identify issues and hopefully see ways forward using ideas and innovation that arises from within the partnership.
Consultation	The second rung on the ladder of engagement. Having given people information, consultation gives an opportunity to gain feedback from them about preferred options etc. Typically these options have been generated outside the community itself.
Empowerment	To give someone authority or power. In community work it is an outcome of a process that includes sharing information, learning skills, gaining confidence, being inclusive and organised and working cooperatively.
Engagement	The act of joining with or bringing others into an activity such as a process or discussion.
Evaluation	Evaluating your consultation activities is particularly important as it will provide valuable evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of your consultations. There are numerous simple methods that can be used. Contact your supporting officer for further advice.
Facilitator	A person who acts as a neutral enabler of a group discussion. Rather like a chair they make sure everyone contributes and understands what is being said, and clarifies issues for everyone. However, unlike a chair they do not get involved in content, express their own views or judge what is being said. Nor are they allowed to vote on any issue.
Forum	A commonly used technique, they are a place or opportunity for people to meet to discuss or share views on particular issues. They can be actual (meetings, workshops etc.) or virtual (web-based or via social media) and are usually guided by a facilitator or moderator.
Information	The first rung on the ladder of engagement. At the very least people need to know what is being planned on their behalf but also need information to act on or express opinions about.
Involvement	The third rung on the ladder of engagement. This involves parties working together directly to identify their own concerns or aspirations etc.
Open Space (Technology)	A format for an inclusive meeting in which the participants decide the agenda, provide the content and determine its usefulness.
Planning for Real	A well-tried technique for consultation and involvement, using a map or model of a neighbourhood that allows participants to place comments and ideas on it for others to add to or discuss.
Plenary	A meeting of all participants at an event, in one group.
Spider Diagram	A diagram like a spiders web. The spokes of which represent criteria and scores on which are joined up.
Stakeholder Map	An organised list of people or organisations that you want or need to involve in your consultation. One way of organising it maybe as a matrix according to their level of likely interest and influence.
Time Line	A listing of events in sequence, often with approximate dates. A visual way of explaining a timetable, pinpointing your position on it and revisiting it during your process.

Neighbourhood Planning guidance notes available:

Deciding to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan

1. Which is the right tool for your parish
2. What is a Neighbourhood Development Plan
3. Getting started
4. A guide to procedures
5. Funding

Plan Production

6. Developing a Vision and Objectives
7. Generating options
8. Writing planning policies
9. Environmental Assessment
10. Evidence base and information requirements
11. Implementation and Monitoring
12. Best practice community engagement techniques
13. Statutory consultees
14. Writing a consultation statement
15. Planning and other legislation
16. Web enabling your plan
17. Using OS based mapping
18. Glossary of planning terms

Topics

19. Sustainable Water Management in Herefordshire
20. Guide to settlement boundaries
21. Guide to site assessment and choosing allocation sites
22. Meeting your housing requirements
23. Conservation issues
24. Recreational areas
25. Renewable energy
26. Transport issues
27. Community Infrastructure Levy

Additional Guidance

28. Setting up a steering group
29. Creating a questionnaire
30. Community facilities
31. Conformity with the Local Plan (Core Strategy)
32. Examinations of Neighbourhood Development Plans
33. Guide to Neighbourhood Development Plan Referendums
34. Tourism
35. Basic Conditions
36. Your plan - Contributing to sustainable development