



Community Led Plans Guidance Note



Kent Housing Group

KPOG Kent Planning Officers Group



KENT DEVELOPER

Action *with* Communities in  Rural Kent



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Background

Community led plans are initiatives led by local people planning for the future of their village, town, parish or neighbourhood. They do this by producing a common vision of how their community should look or develop in the future and, importantly, set an agenda for working together and with other partners to deliver this through the statutory planning system and/or other means.

There are many different types of these plans; some text based, others map based, others action lists. There are many websites which offer guidance on the different types of plans and one useful one which sets out the different options for statutory and non statutory plans can be found at <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/topics/community-engagement/neighbourhood-planning/tools-for-neighbourhood-planning/> which sets out a number of tools which would be useful to assist in community led planning and offer examples. Another useful website is the Campaign to Protect Rural England's guidance for place shaping, which can be found at <http://www.planninghelp.org.uk/improve-where-you-live/shape-your-local-area/neighbourhood-plans/deciding-if-you-need-a-neighbourhood-plan>

Community led plans are not new and many parishes have produced Parish Plans, Village Design Statements and similar 'local planning documents' in the past, which remain very relevant and, in many cases, are still the most appropriate form of local advice. In more built up areas these may have been called Design Statements, Market Town Health Checks, Town or Neighbourhood Plans.

For the majority of these, there is a similar process involved in the early stages and in engaging with the whole community, but there are subtle differences in the objectives behind different types of community plans and, for Neighbourhood Plans, a new process set out through the Localism Act, there is a more formal statutory process that needs to be followed. This document is aimed at setting out some general advice and guidance and some useful links to enable communities to establish what best suits them. There is no obligation to undertake any form of community led plan, but for those that are interested, this document gives some background and links to resources and information available.

In addition to community led plans covering planning and spatial issues, there are also some similar community based partnerships with other organisations who want to increase local participation and joint working with statutory agencies. These can benefit from a similar approach. One such example operating within Kent is the Environment Agency Water Catchment Partnerships, aimed at encouraging greater local participation across the 93 catchment areas in the UK to achieve more for communities and the water environment. Further information can be found on these partnerships at <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/148312.aspx>



Localism Act

Under the Localism Act, and reinforced by many Ministerial statements, the Government has pledged to make 'neighbourhood planning' the cornerstone of the planning system and has introduced legislation that gives greater weight to community led planning, aiming to make it easier for communities to take the lead in getting things done to shape their own future. The Act gives local authorities the formal legal ability to respond to what local people want, at the same time as giving local people more influence.

There are four **new community rights** contained within the Localism Act, which came into effect in 2012:

Right to challenge gives the right to communities to bid to run local council services where they think they can do it differently and better.

Right to bid gives communities the right to bid to buy and take over the running of local assets that are important to the local community.

Right to build gives communities the right to deliver development that their community wants without requiring a traditional planning application.

Right to plan gives communities the right to have a say in the future of the places where they live, through drawing up a neighbourhood plan.

There is no requirement for communities to undertake any of the above; this is about giving local communities greater choice and say in what they can do for themselves. Community led plans, including formal Neighbourhood Plans, are completely optional. There is no legal requirement for a community to prepare any form of plan. The policies in the Local Plan will still apply to your neighbourhood, whether you decide to prepare a plan or not.

There are formal procedures for all of the above and which are appropriate to use in certain circumstances. The Government has set up a new online site to help local communities with their new 'Rights'. The 'My Community Rights' online hub and advice service run by Locality helps communities to use the Community Rights and also sets out details of any grants available through the Department of Communities and Local Government.

<http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/my-community-rights/>

Briefly, the four rights cover the following areas:

Community Right to Challenge

A right for voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, parish councils and local authority employees delivering a service, to challenge a local authority, by expressing an interest in running



any service for which they are responsible. A local authority must consider and respond to this challenge. The challenge may trigger a procurement exercise for that service in line with the relevant procedure, which the challenging organisation could then bid in, alongside others. The right is part of the Government's aim to create a Big Society.

Community Right to Bid (or Buy)

This will require local authorities to maintain a list of public or private assets of community value put forward for consideration by communities. When listed assets come up for disposal (either the freehold or long leasehold), communities will be given the chance to develop a bid and raise the capital to buy the asset when it comes on the open market. This will help local communities to save sites that are important to that community, which will contribute to tackling social need and building up resources in their neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood Development Orders (NDO) and Community Right to Build

A NDO is a means by which certain types of development within a specified area can become 'permitted', e.g. dormer windows, porches or, in historic areas, reinstatement of missing historic features, such as chimneys. The Community Right to Build is a special type of NDO. This measure will give local communities the power to take forward development in their area without the need to apply for planning permission, subject to meeting certain safeguards and securing the support of 50% of the community through a referendum. It will be for communities to identify suitable land, sources of finance and secure support for their proposals.

Right to plan - Neighbourhood planning/Neighbourhood Development Plans

Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) are a new type of community led plan. These are primarily spatial plans for guiding the future development, regeneration and conservation of an area through setting out policies for the development and use of land to encourage growth and, if agreed through a local referendum, they must be adopted by the Council as part of the Statutory Development Plan for planning decision-making purposes.

The detailed regulations are set out in The Town and Country Planning Act 1990, The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012, which indicates the process by which such NDPs need to be undertaken, although the content of the plans is not prescriptive. All town and parish councils are identified as "*appropriate bodies*" for undertaking such plans and, in non-parished areas, there is guidance as to how neighbourhood forums can be set up, which, provided they are properly constituted, can also be considered as "*appropriate bodies*" for these purposes. **It should also be noted that the Localism Act inserted new clauses regarding neighbourhood planning into the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.**

Neighbourhood Plans need to conform to national policy, local adopted plans and other legal requirements. They do not replace Core Strategies or Local Plans, but can be used to promote more growth than proposed in adopted Core Strategy/Local Plans, but not less. These plans can be used to develop a shared vision through identifying where planned new homes and businesses might go, protecting important open areas and developing new open spaces and setting design parameters. Importantly, they cannot be used to restrict growth or to prevent development that is acceptable under national and local policy, but they can be used to guide that development to certain locations, or to exceed growth proposals planned within local



policy plans. Such Neighbourhood Plans need to be community led, but the emphasis is on working in cooperation with the local planning authority so that any locally produced NDP is in general conformity with policy requirements.

Importantly, Neighbourhood Plans:

- Must be undertaken by an 'appropriate body' (town or parish council or neighbourhood forum)
- Must follow a formal process towards adoption, including an examination and referendum
- Must conform with, or exceed, any levels of growth already set out in adopted Core Strategies/Local Plans and
- Must, if agreed through referendum, be adopted by a local authority as part of the Statutory Development Plans

Further information on preparing Neighbourhood Plans is set out later in this document.

If the issues in your neighbourhood do not relate to the use of land and development, or are solely for the provision of rural exceptions affordable housing, a NDP is probably unnecessary and other forms of community led plan are more likely to suit your purposes.

NB: All Neighbourhood Plans and community led plans that involve specific land use planning content must conform to the adopted Core Strategy/Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework. They cannot be used to stop or restrict growth, but can encourage further growth or proactively plan for growth already planned by determining where such development should take place and what type of development should happen in the neighbourhood.





Frequently asked questions

What is the purpose of a community led plan?

Parish Plans, Village Design Statements and similar 'local planning documents' have been undertaken by many communities in the past and they remain very relevant. In many cases they are still the most appropriate form of local advice.

If community led planning is done well, it can produce many benefits and really helps the community develop in the way that community wants it to and with community support. It can also give structure to finding resources, gaining funding and external support for projects and can be a way of establishing skills and interests already available within the community.

One of the defining characteristics of all community led plans is that they are not imposed from above, but instead are initiated and led by local volunteers who steer their community through a step-by-step process.

There is a really useful toolkit by Action for Rural Communities in England (ACRE). This gives resource sheets and information sheets to assist communities with different types of community led plan.

<http://www.acre.org.uk/our-work/community-led-planning/>

What are the benefits of these plans?

The success of community led plans is that they bring together individuals and groups within the community to joint dialogue about how their community can plan for the future through evidencing local needs, finding solutions to issues raised and implementing their plans. Through doing so, communities become stronger and more sustainable, able to help themselves and in a better position to provide their own needs and to establish joint working relationships with other stakeholders, such as local councils, service providers and utility companies to name a few. This constructive form of two-way dialogue is advantageous to all parties as local knowledge, energy and commitment can benefit other broader initiatives and objectives too.

Some of the benefits may also be financial, as identified plans and projects are more likely to attract financial assistance from grants and, if the local authority has adopted a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)*, funds raised from this can also be used towards the projects identified.

*at present those areas with adopted Neighbourhood Plans (see later) can benefit from 25% of any CIL funds raised in their areas, with those with no adopted Neighbourhood Plans benefitting from 15% of any CIL raised in their area.

Community led plans can also be used to gain an insight into how the whole community wishes to respond to higher level plans, such as the Council's Local Plan. Minster-in-Thanel



Parish Council has recently produced a Community Led Plan (2013) and the following extract is taken from the background section of their plan.

“Minster Parish Council decided to undertake a project which through community consultation would review where the village currently stood in planning terms. It was agreed.....that a Steering Group be formed of volunteers and representative of the Parish Council to actively take responsibility for the production of a community led plan, this being a starting block for the community to have a say in their future. The purpose of the Plan were to focus on how the Village wished to develop in the future and to set out the policies to guide planning growth and development, should that be desired, at a very local level. It would also look more generally at the success, or otherwise, of other local matters. The Parish Council would then use the findings of the consultation with local residents to make recommendations to Thanet District Council for its next strategic Local Plan for the development of Minster and the rural areas.”

The whole Community Led Plan 2013 can be viewed at:

http://www.minsterpc.kentparishes.gov.uk/UserFiles/file/clp/Minster_Community_Led_Plan_2013.pdf



Who can prepare a community led plan?

Any town or parish council, local heritage group, village committee or group of interested individuals can undertake any of the forms of community led plan, EXCEPT a



Neighbourhood Plan, which can only be initiated and led by the town or parish council as the locally elected representatives. In non-parished areas Neighbourhood Plans can still be undertaken through the creation of a Neighbourhood Forum. A Neighbourhood Forum needs to be designated as such by the local planning authority following the legislative guidance for Neighbourhood Plans. It should be noted that a Forum designation ceases after five years and there can only be one Forum for each neighbourhood area.

How do you start a community led plan?

Over the years, community led plans have taken on different names, including Village Appraisals, Parish Plans, Market Town Action Plans and, more recently, **Neighbourhood Plans**. These have developed their own particular characteristics, tending to be used in different geographical contexts.

As set out above already, there are different approaches that communities can take towards local based plans and there is no 'one-size-fits-all'; nor is there any standard format or statutory rules that need to be applied to such plans. This document sets out some of the basic principles behind possible types of locally based plans and gives some examples of how each could be used. There are numerous examples of such plans undertaken throughout the country, many available online. Once a community has established which type of plan may suit them, a search of other similar plans would be beneficial.

Are there any formal requirements?

With the exception of Neighbourhood Plans, which need to be formally considered through local referendum and adopted in accordance with the procedures set out in the Localism Act and subsequent guidance, there is no right or wrong way to undertake a local community led plan. The most important aspect is that it is done by the community and for the community. While communities undertaking Parish Plans or Visions are advised to seek assistance and guidance from their local planning authority, there is no absolute requirement to do so.

More detailed guidance has been set out in the subsequent section on the process of undertaking Neighbourhood Plans, which have a spatial element and which do need to be undertaken in accordance with specific legislative requirements and following a formal process. Neighbourhood Plans also need to be undertaken cooperatively with the local planning authority. Once undertaken and, if successfully supported by the community through referendum, these will form part of the Statutory Development Plan for decision-making purposes and therefore must be in conformity with the principles set out in existing Development Plan Documents adopted by the local authority.

Why do any form of community led planning?

This is a chance for local people to make decisions about how their local community can, and should, develop and can provide the community with an evidence base on which to prioritise local action and investment. In addition to the planning reasons, there are other reasons why there are benefits in undertaking some form of plan for the future:



- The community gets to know each other better and community cohesion can be developed
- It's fun – though also hard work!
- The community is more likely to be able to influence decision making and will feel more confident that they are speaking as 'one body'
- Relationships with the local authority and other organisations will be strengthened and other providers' plans can be shaped
- Confidence building – particularly in relation to what is really important to the WHOLE community
- Builds expertise, particularly in finding solutions and ways of achieving objectives identified
- Can help communities identify other areas of the Localism Act that may be appropriate, e.g. community assets, NDOs, etc.

There are a number of community planning toolkits, one of which can be found at <http://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/community-planning>. This focuses on providing resources to support the community and voluntary sectors' involvement in Community Planning processes.

Shropshire Council's website has a toolkit to help you decide which type of plan best suits you. [http://shropshire.gov.uk/planningpolicy.nsf/viewAttachments/EWET-936L8C/\\$file/community-led-planning-guidance.pdf](http://shropshire.gov.uk/planningpolicy.nsf/viewAttachments/EWET-936L8C/$file/community-led-planning-guidance.pdf)

What is Community Infrastructure Levy? How does this affect us?

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a new system of funding infrastructure through a charge that the Council can ask a developer to pay for new building projects. It only applies to newly built floor space and may not apply to all types of use. The money raised can be used to fund a range of infrastructure within an area.

Not all local authorities have a CIL in place yet as there is a strict procedure to follow and some may choose not to adopt CIL at all. Where a CIL is in place, a percentage of money derived from CIL has to be handed back to the Town or Parish Council responsible for the area in which the new growth has occurred and for which CIL has been claimed. Parishes with a Neighbourhood Plan will receive 25% of any CIL arising from developments in their area compared to parishes without a Neighbourhood Plan, who will receive 15%.

How can we ensure everyone gets involved?

An important consideration is timing; not only in the sense of "is this the right time to be undertaking any form of community plan?", but also in terms of allowing sufficient time for proper engagement and allowing for community events over a range of different days, weeks and times of day to ensure maximum opportunity. It is also really important to think about why you are doing this and what you hope will be the outcome.



There are a number of simple do's and don'ts to being successful:

DO

- Engage with, and work with, the local planning authority, particularly if you are thinking about a Neighbourhood Plan. Establish a good working relationship and understanding of each other's remits
- Ensure there is sufficient commitment from the organising group to undertake a series of community meetings/workshops/exhibitions and publicise these really well
- Ensure those organising the events have sufficient knowledge about what is proposed and why the event is occurring, think about training or use of outside facilitators if appropriate
- Ensure there is a good method of capturing information received and that everything is properly recorded
- Know who 'the community' is; are there groups that may be difficult to engage, e.g. school children, those in residential institutions, business interests and how will these become involved? Is a special event required for any of these groups?
- Be prepared for some negativity and accept this may be a long-term process to build trust and enthusiasm
- Ensure willing helpers and supporters are kept up to date so their keenness is not lost for later stages
- Know how you are going to analyse and use information gathered for future stages. It is really important to plan the process in advance, particularly the dissemination of information to the community. Use of a community website is a good idea
- Have a sufficient budget for what is anticipated may result – certainly sufficient to cover the information gathering stage

DON'T

- Set too short a timescale. The most successful plans will come from a considerable amount of initial work, where aims of the plan are identified, skills within the community harnessed and links with other organisations made. This early stage may take 3-12 months, but is worth doing to ensure there is a good level of support generated
- Try to do this with just a few 'key' personnel – this needs wide community involvement and buy-in both to the process and to identifying objectives and outcomes
- Become disheartened. Poor attendance at meetings or lack of enthusiasm may be because the events were not properly publicised or the community do not understand the process or are apathetic about what differences this could make to them. Take time to rethink the strategy and try again



Types of community led plan – common factors

All types of community led plans have a number of similar attributes. As stated above, the most important aspect is that they are led by the community, for the community and with the community setting the agenda. These attributes would be expected in any type of community led plan:

- Wide public engagement, with everyone in the community given the chance to have a say. It is therefore important to choose an engagement method (or methods) to try to achieve this
- The plan will focus on the issues that are important to the community, as they define them; but Neighbourhood Plans will tend to have a spatial basis, whereas community/parish plans are likely to be more wide ranging in terms of topics covered
- They rely on voluntary effort from members of the community, although they may have other support
- They must be based on evidence, which must be robust
- The plan expresses a common vision for the community and sets out ideas or actions towards achieving and implementing this vision

Brief overview of different types of community led plan

The best way to find out more is to undertake a web search on each named type of community led plan, which will reveal a plethora of types of plan format in a variety of locations across the UK. These can be looked at and compared to something that an individual community envisages to be appropriate for its needs. Many local planning authority websites will also contain information about existing plans within their areas.

The descriptions below are very general and are aimed at explaining the different formats that community led plans might take.



Parish Plans

These tend to be called this even in 'town' areas, as they are often based on the whole of a parish, with various communities within the parish (if there is more than one) having a separate chapter/section.

Growth in interest in these has occurred since the Rural White Paper 2000 and there are over 3,000 of these plans of a diverse nature and size throughout England. These give communities an opportunity to say how they wish to see their community develop and, importantly, to identify how their aspirations can be implemented. The key to their success (or otherwise) lies in implementation to achieve the objectives.

Parish Plans can give a community the opportunity to identify what they want to see over a vast range of issues from local services, new development, leisure activities and highway improvements and to plan for how these can be implemented. These allow local residents to interpret and present their output in a diversity of ways, some text based, some map based, some a mixture. There are also ones based on appliqué quilts! Most seem to be undertaken through traditional word-based documents, some identifying short term, medium term and long term objectives and also identifying issues that need partnership working or that can be brought to the attention of third party providers. Many also have a map identifying locations of projects. Some also consider options for funding or fundraising to secure their objectives.

Communities of any size can produce a Parish Plan and these can be undertaken for a single community or for clusters of communities. They tend to focus on more than just planning issues and, importantly, set out proposed remedies, even where these require outside assistance. Many include chapters on design issues, creating and sustaining the local environment, leisure and recreation matters such as circular walks, halls and allotments, community services such as youth groups, clubs and societies and employment opportunities.

Communities are growing and changing all around us and not everyone will agree that change is for the best, whatever form that change may take. Parish Plans give everyone in a community the opportunity to influence the development of their surroundings, what they like/don't like about their community and to have a say in how best to achieve suggested outcomes.

Parish Plans are intended to be evolving documents, outlining how a community would like to develop over the next ten years, and usually include an action plan detailing how these developments can be achieved and who else might need to be involved, such as county and local councils and other statutory bodies. They need to be based on evidence and need to be widely supported; otherwise the actions identified are less likely to be implemented.

How are these undertaken?

They are usually led by a dedicated group of individuals, not normally the parish council directly (which is in line with national guidance and different to NDPs, which have to be parish council led). However, they should be endorsed by the parish/town council. These types of Parish Plans will often be supported through advice from the local planning authority, but not normally funded in any way.



In the past there has been a varying degree of support for integrating these into planning decision making, but this will very much depend on the nature of the plan and its contents and on individual local planning authorities. Some infrastructure providers have also been willing to take on board information collected for Parish Plans as part of their future service provision, although there is no obligation to do so.

As with all community led plans, they need to be widely consulted upon within the local community and it is recommended that any spatial planning objectives are separated out from other broader based community objectives. Such Parish Plans are quite often undertaken with themed chapters, with headings such as 'planning', 'transport', 'environment', 'business', 'youth facilities', 'recreation', etc, or with separate settlements having their own chapters, with these as sub-headings within each settlement chapter.

Some Parish Plans are a summary report of questionnaire responses sent out through a community questionnaire; others are more detailed action plans resulting from village meetings or specific working groups' reports and many are a combination of all of these. There are numerous ways community engagement can take place and there are a number of websites with information and suggestions on different engagement tools. Two examples are:-

http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/community-engagement-toolkit?page_id=&page=1

<http://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/community-engagement>

Advantages and Disadvantages

The main advantage is that any of these types of plan can bring the community together, although they can also identify real rifts and divisions that may pre-exist. This is not necessarily negative, as such plans can then seek to find solutions to such matters and forge better relationships working towards joint aims. There is therefore a need to be quite open minded about what a plan might throw up at the outset and not start from pre-conceived ideas.

Parish Plans are also relatively quick to update and can be refreshed as different 'settlement chapters' or on a topic basis when required, as they do not need to go through a formal process. Many are regularly updated on a 2-3 year basis. They can also act as a framework for seeking grants and funding for the implementation of specific projects by the community. Having a plan allows the community to set priorities with a large degree of community backing.

While there are many good examples of Parish Plans, Otford Parish has a comprehensive website, complete with the various stages of work identified as to how their Parish Plan has been formulated and also a useful FAQs section. There is also some guidance on how Otford has identified possible funding sources. The Otford Parish Plan can be found at <http://www.otford.info/parishplan/>

The main disadvantage is that Parish Plans are not statutory and rely on solutions from within the parish and need to be driven by the parish itself. Local planning authorities and statutory



providers often need to be reassured that these are 'quality documents' based on credible evidence and that they have wide community support.

The range and type of such plans is so broad that 'anything goes', which does mean they can become a set of aspirations and 'wish lists' without true focus. The important thing is to get commitment for implementation after the plan has been produced.

Having a clear implementation strategy is essential if the Plan is to achieve any of its objectives. Etchingham, East Sussex has adopted a Local Action Plan 2007 to identify how the objectives raised through work on their community led plan will be, and have been, implemented. This is currently being updated (2013) and their website provides useful information about the plan itself and progress made on implementation of the projects identified and who has assisted with this process. The Parish website can be found at <http://www.etchinghamvillage.co.uk/> and follow the link on the menu to Action Plan.

Village Design Statements/ Town Design Statement/Parish Design Statements

The purpose of Parish, Town or Village Design Statements is to ensure that any proposed change in the landscape or buildings in the area is properly managed and to give detailed design guidance to the character of the town or village which needs to be respected. These documents are focussed solely on design issues and thus are less strategic in nature than Parish Plans. For ease of reference below, Village Design Statements are solely referred to, but this information would apply equally to the other types of Statements.

Village Design Statements (VDS) set out clear and simple guidance for the design of future development in a parish and look at both the built form of existing buildings and the open spaces within which these sit. VDS are community prepared documents, which give guidance to developers and individuals to encourage good design of the type that will enhance and protect the individual character of the locality, without preventing future growth. They can be quite prescriptive, but are useful tools, particularly where there are historic areas or typical characteristics of buildings and open spaces between them in the locality that local people feel should be protected and enhanced. Many VDS documents also contain useful information about landscape character, topography, materials and sometimes ecological issues.

The main objectives of a VDS are to identify and describe the distinctive character of the village and surrounding countryside in its landscape setting; to identify the village shape and form of the built and non built environment and the nature of the buildings within it; to draw up design guidelines to ensure appropriate new development or alterations based on the existing character of the village; and to work with and assist in guiding planning decisions and future policies particularly on design for the village.

Successful VDS must be well written documents and have often been led or instigated by a local architect, historian, conservation group or civic society. If done well, these can complement existing planning guidance to give communities a recognised voice in the planning process. Preparing a VDS may lead to a better understanding between the local



community and the planning authority and assists the parish council in commenting on planning applications.

VDS documents are usually full of illustrations or photographs showing the 'do's and don'ts' for the area and will often link to other conservation statements or external guidance, such as that produced by English Heritage. The statements can also provide a source of local information about vernacular design, local builders and specialists and sources of materials. They will often consider the small but vitally important aspects of design for a specific area, which can be the difference between a quality new building or extension and a mediocre or poor one.

In some areas, VDS may be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents and become part of the planning process. This should be discussed with the local planning authority to ensure such plans meet the aspirations and requirements of the both the parish and local authority.

VDS can be used as a tool to make sure that new development in the village/town respects the distinctive visual character of the place. However, they do not determine or detail what type of development should take place in a village or where it should go, how individual buildings should be managed or maintained, or the state of local services and facilities; they are only concerned with the visual characteristics of a village and how these might be protected or enhanced.



Advantages and Disadvantages

VDS are useful as a source of local information to inform comments on planning applications and to direct future design in a settlement. They are often in addition to other plan based documents. They can provide very detailed guidance and a main advantage is that anyone in the village can take the lead in starting one up and they do not necessarily have to be backed by the parish/town council, although this would be helpful. Many are started by local



architects/civic or conservation groups and become part of a bigger picture for the community. If well written and supported by the local planning authority, VDS may be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents and thus given greater weight in decision making.

Their main disadvantage is that their single focus is on the visual characteristics of the settlement and not on more spatial planning matters or how much, or where, growth should or could go.

Many Parish Plans also include a chapter on design, but there is also no reason why a Parish Plan and a Village Design Statement couldn't be produced for the same area.

Natural England (www.naturalengland.org.uk) has made available some basic guidance on effective Village Design Statements.

Neighbourhood Design Statements

These are the same in principle as Village or Town Design Statements, but focus on a smaller area. These are particularly used within larger towns where specific design features associated with different areas or neighbourhoods can be identified. These have been formulated to look at the different characterisations within larger settlements which have grown over many years and thus been subject to different eras of development style and character. These Neighbourhood design statements are useful in terms of identifying the particular local vernacular in a particular area to assist with redevelopment or new development proposals.

Community Visions

These are most commonly used as an alternative title for a Parish Plan or Neighbourhood Plan.

Interestingly, the first formally adopted Neighbourhood Plan at Upper Eden in Cumbria calls itself a Community Vision. Community Visions can often get assistance from the Rural Community Council.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Community visions tend to be shorter and more focused documents than Parish Plans, often relating to specific projects/visions and ways in which these can be achieved. They are beneficial for specific projects as they effectively form a project plan from inception of an idea, through engagement and into implementation. Several individual projects may form part of a community vision and timelines as to how each project will be delivered can assist in budgeting and fund raising for projects. The project management style approach also allows the focus to be retained and such visions are less likely to lose momentum.

Town Visions

These tend to be undertaken by more all-embracing organisations, more like a residents association or business community 'vision'. This works well as a lobbying organisation, but can also have a vision or aspirations for the community, which is widely supported. Like the community visions above, these tend to take a logical approach to delivering a series of projects or aspirations for the community, setting out clear objectives over a period of time. They are very effective in keeping the community engaged and keeping the momentum.



These also allow for individual projects to be carried out at different stages, which is helpful for budgets and resources. One example is from Buxton in Derbyshire. This is what they say about their organisation:

“Vision Buxton is a membership organisation which brings together local businesses, community groups and individuals who are all passionate about making Buxton an even better place to live work and play. Our organisation plays an important role within the community and the commercial life of our town. We are frequently invited by High Peak Borough Council to offer a view on new proposals affecting the town. Vision Buxton organised the recent Spring Gardens consultation which identified vital improvements to be made in this important area. We arrange the publication of the annual Town Guide and operate the Visit Buxton website.

Most recently, in collaboration with other organisations, we submitted a bid for Portas Pilot funds with the aim of revitalising all Buxton’s retail areas. Our bid may not have been successful but crucially it leads to the formation of a Town Team. As a key member of the Team, Vision Buxton will continue to work tirelessly to reinvigorate the town even if funding does not materialise immediately.”

This indicates that such ‘Visions’ tend to be more focused on particular aspects of community life, such as employment or environmental issues.

Action for Market Towns (AMT) is a not-for-profit company and charity with national membership to support small towns with the problems they face, such as congestion, impact of out-of-town retailing and other threats to vitality and viability. Their website contains a considerable amount of information <http://towns.org.uk/> and they have produced a guidance document with particular reference to Neighbourhood Planning, although the advice given can also be used for other forms of community led plan.

<http://www.communityplanning.net/pub-film/pdf/AMTNeighbourhoodPlanningBriefing.pdf>

Town Vision Statements

These tend to be the Americanised version of Parish Plans, but are similar types of community led plans aimed at larger towns or parts of towns which are unparished and have often been driven by a Civic Society or local Forum.

Market and Coastal Town Initiatives (MCTi)

The Market and Coastal Towns Initiative was a specific community led development programme, which operated in England between 2000 and 2005/6, almost entirely in the South West Region. Despite this, the work done at that time remains of use and examples of the documents produced can still be found. The primary focus is for local people, with professional input, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their country towns. The areas usually identified were the local economy, environmental aspects and the social strengths of the town.



The MCTi was essentially regarded as a tool to encourage vitality through “*job opportunities, new workspace, restored high streets, improved amenities and transport facilities and help with community needs*”. It was regionally organised and nationally coordinated, but locally led through partnerships. Many aspects of this initiative remain of relevance for Neighbourhood Plans and Town Visions.

MCTi was encouraged for country towns with a population size of 2,000-20,000, with its foundations in the Rural White Paper (2000). The creation of the MCTi was further encouraged by local people’s concern over the state of their rural towns due to the growth of out-of-town shopping centres and supermarkets. These plans are similar to more recent Town Visions and tend to be led by dedicated individuals. One such example is in Chard, Somerset, where it was the Action for Chard Town (ACT) that initially joined the MCTi programme. The organisation was made up of volunteers drawn from the community, with links to organisations and activities within the community supported by other voluntary members and district council officers and a Community Enterprise Unit.

The staged approach of MCTi still has relevance, particularly for community led plans focusing on town centres and regeneration issues: The stages are:

- 1) A town ‘health check’ to address the key issues within the town (essentially a step-by-step examination of local strengths and weaknesses). The health check engages with the local community through analysing the needs, thoughts and attitudes of the community. It tends firstly to consult with all sectors of the community and then identifies the issues from the consultation process and collects data evidence to confirm the issues identified. The disadvantage is that this can result in it being based on a snapshot in time.
- 2) Partnerships between interest groups within the community are formed, very successfully bringing together those with common interests to focus on project delivery, funding and their future role. Partnerships are established in a number of ways, some through the initiative of local authorities, others evolving from existing partnerships, groups or regional representatives. There tends to be strong public sector representation but little private sector, an issue which is more relevant in today’s economic climate.
- 3) Funding actions identified through the original MCTi are primarily funded through local authorities, the Countryside Agency and Rural Development Agencies (the latter two of these no longer exist). Other sources of funding include voluntary and charity organisations, the lottery, European funding, as well as private sector and national organisations such as English Heritage.

Advantages and Disadvantages



The advantages and disadvantages of MCTi programme were much the same as for Parish Plans and in this context much can be learned from them. Local community cohesion developed and many newly formed partnerships have been a continued success. There have also been benefits from improved relationships between the local authority and the community. The Chard example in Somerset has had the more spatial elements of the Action for Chard Town document taken forward through the Local Plan and subsequent Chard Vision, adopted by the local authority.

Like many other community led plans, the lengthy time process and lack of funding affects confidence in the process and the original initiative also raised unrealistic expectations within the community, due to some communities not focusing effectively on the issues they wished to address.

It is important to note that MCTi was primarily a regional tool that no longer exists, and was derived at a time of a more flexible economy. As such, the difficulties in securing sizable funding through private partnerships over public partnerships are of significance, but the principles behind the work, the outcomes and the process of formulating ideas may be appropriate for some community led plans today, particularly where focusing on regeneration and town centre issues.

Further details of the Chard Plan can be found at:

www.somersetmarkettowns.co.uk/uploads/documents/chard_mcti.pdf

An example of partnership working in the MCTi programme is Garstang, Lancashire and is available at: http://www.garstang.net/includes/pdf/gdp_newsletter.pdf

A useful resource discussing the approach of the MCTi:

www.alancaldwellassociates.co.uk/images/stories/docs/about_mcti.pdf

Neighbourhood Development Plans/Neighbourhood Plans

The fundamental differences between Neighbourhood Plans and any other form of community led plan are that they:

- Must be undertaken by an 'appropriate Body' (town or parish council or neighbourhood forum)
- Must follow a formal process towards adoption, including an examination by an independent Inspector and a referendum
- Must conform with, or exceed, any levels of growth already set out in adopted Core Strategies/Local Plans and
- Must, if agreed through referendum, be adopted by a local authority as part of their Statutory Development Plans

A Neighbourhood Plan is therefore the only form of community led plan that has any statutory basis. Communities with such a plan will also be able to gain more in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) from appropriate new development undertaken within the Parish



area. At present, the percentage of CIL money that would be returned to Town and Parish Councils with a Neighbourhood Plan is 25% and those without a plan 15%.

Neighbourhood Plans can take a range of different forms and may be very similar in content to other non-statutory forms of community led plan, but they were primarily introduced by the Government through the Localism Act to allow those communities who have growth planned for within Local Plan documents produced by their local authority, to actively plan for that growth or to exceed the levels of growth already planned through a community plan. If the Neighbourhood Plan is supported through the local referendum stage, the Neighbourhood Plan **has** to be adopted by the local council and will form part of the statutory development plan against which future planning decisions will be assessed.

It is important to note that a Neighbourhood Plan cannot be used to reduce levels of growth already planned for within Core Strategies and Local Plans, but can be used to take additional growth or to pro-actively plan for levels and locations of the growth identified.

If your community is seeking development of land and a Neighbourhood Plan seems to be the appropriate course of action for your community, here is some guidance to assist you.

A flow chart showing the process and summarising the stages, is set out at the end of this section (Figure 1).

Starting a Neighbourhood Plan

The local planning authority is required to approve a 'neighbourhood area' for which the plan is being produced and to approve the local group that wants to prepare the plan as the appropriate body to do so (the 'qualifying body'). In parished areas this has to be the parish/town council, but in non-parished areas it can be a neighbourhood forum, provided that it meets certain criteria. The neighbourhood area would normally be expected to follow a parish boundary, but there may be cases where more than one parish joins up to undertake a joint plan, in which case the consent must be received from both parishes. While the neighbourhood area may well cover the whole parish, the plan itself may concentrate on only part of the parish; for example, the main settlement within the parish and not the surrounding rural area. This will very much depend on the nature of the proposals to be contained within the Neighbourhood Plan.

Getting the wider community involved

While wide community engagement is recommended for any type of community led plan, it is vital for a Neighbourhood Plan, as ultimately the plan is going to be considered by the community through a referendum, so consensus is more likely to be reached with more people able to participate in the preparation of the Plan.

The following are specifically recommended for Neighbourhood Plans:

- Use a Steering Group to coordinate the development of the Plan and, if possible, have a dedicated Coordinator who will act as the main point of contact. The Steering Group



should feature wide representation from the community and neighbourhood area and, if possible, include a broad spectrum of ages, interests and expertise, particularly those which may feature in the Plan, e.g. business groups, voluntary organisations and local residents. No one group; including the parish/town council (or neighbourhood forum in non-parished areas), should dominate the Steering Group although the final plan will need to be endorsed and taken forward by the 'qualifying body' (namely the Parish/Town Council or Neighbourhood Forum) and thus may choose to take a leadership/chairing role

- Give everyone an opportunity to be involved at the outset through holding an initial exploratory event to establish interests and possible skills that can be used
- Explain what a Neighbourhood Plan is and what it is hoped can be gained by having one. It is useful to have clear objectives at the outset, although there needs to be flexibility to adapt and adjust these objectives in light of wider community participation and the Plan is likely to be an evolving process
- Encourage the community to consider strengths and weaknesses of a proposed Plan and to establish the main broad issues to be considered. This may include defining the boundary for the plan area if it is not to be the whole parish

Being Organised

There are a number of factors to consider as the Steering Group starts out:

- Develop a programme and time line for progressing the Plan. Identify the key tasks that are already known, accepting that others may be identified, consider resource implications in terms of both time and finance and who you might need to work with to gain advice
- Develop a strategy for communications, particularly ways in which you will communicate with the wider community and ensure they are continually involved in the process. You will get more interest in the Plan if people are informed and able to participate. This could involve regular community meetings or village days, use of a website or section specifically for the project within the parish website, a newsletter, social media, notices in the parish magazine, or on noticeboards or in the local press. The process could take in excess of two years and keeping momentum going is vital
- Keep notes of any community meetings or consultation events undertaken and assess what works and what doesn't as you go along
- Establish who will be your main contacts in the local planning authority and county council and establish links to the business community, local Councillors and other statutory bodies who may be involved. This may include agencies such as Natural England, English Heritage and the Environment Agency. Contacts with local Housing Associations may be relevant if affordable housing is being considered. Experience from the 'Frontrunners Programme' on the first few Neighbourhood Plans indicated that it is really important to get your local Councillors involved from the beginning.



Advice from the Frontrunners Forum can be found at

<http://www.ourneighbourhoodplanning.org.uk/resources>

- Your local planning authority has a duty to support you in preparing your Plan, but may not be able to provide financial assistance or significant time resources. You should check with your own council as to what support will be given. The planning authority will have a significant amount of background information, usually known as an ‘evidence base’ on which you may be able to draw and this should be available on their website
- Be aware of the legislation you need to follow. There is a whole section on the following website linked to the most up to date legislation: www.gov.uk/government/policies/giving-communities-more-power-in-planning-local-development
- Start the process rolling with a submission to define your proposed Neighbourhood Area
- Set out a budget for the different elements of the plan preparation and identify possible sources of funding. Various estimates of cost have been produced since the legislation was brought in, but the cost will very much be dependent upon the size, scale and complexity of the plan being produced. The best Government estimate seems to be currently upwards of £17,000 although many of the early frontrunners have estimated a much higher figure than this. Local business interests or landowners may be willing to assist financially where this may help them secure planning permission. Breaking these costs into component elements may be of assistance, with community consultation and publicity and preparation of the Plan itself being the key elements. Do not underestimate how much running community consultation events might be and ensure adequate funds are put into this element as you will be required to undertake an independent examination and referendum, which could be a very costly exercise if there is then inadequate support for your proposals. The cost of the examination and referendum will be funded by the local authority.

There is a considerable amount of advice and various regular updates about publications to do with neighbourhood planning and any financial help that may be available from Government (this changes regularly) on <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>. Put the key words “*neighbourhood planning*” into the search engine. Other useful guides and potential sources of funding can be found through the two bodies currently assisting communities with such plans, the Royal Town Planning Institute - Planning Aid and Locality.

<http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning/>

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid/neighbourhood-planning/what-is-neighbourhood-planning/>

<http://locality.org.uk/resources/neighbourhood-planning-roadmap-guide/>



Background Evidence and Information

You will need to establish a profile of your community and its characteristics, as well as undertake any specific studies for your proposed uses. Useful work to establish a good baseline would include to:

- Undertake an audit of existing infrastructure
- Find out the community's aspirations for new growth and service provision
- consider whether previous studies such as Parish Plans, Village Design Statements or Community Visions can inform the new process and whether they contain up to date information
- Consider the need for additional studies, including Housing Needs Assessments, Sustainability Appraisal, Appropriate Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessments and how these will feed into the Plan
- Consider existing national and local planning policies contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the local planning authority's Core Strategy or Local Plan and any Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)
- Look at the Sustainable Community Strategy and your local authority's own Vision to see if it includes anything of use for your own area
- Check what evidence or information about your community is already available from the local authority or local interest groups, such as local history or archaeological societies. This could include details of land availability, employment, retail or housing needs studies and infrastructure plans, both from local authorities and infrastructure providers themselves
- Check and ensure your Plan conforms to existing policies at national and local level
- Identify any specific studies that may be required to support your objectives, such as ecology, ground conditions, transport analysis, local needs survey for affordable housing, archaeology, flooding and flood mitigation, noise and pollution surveys

Drafting the Neighbourhood Plan

The Plan needs to be based on a broad consensus among the community. Wide community involvement is very important at this stage. The Steering Group will need to:

- Draft the vision and objectives for the area
- Describe the aspirations for the area for the next 10-20 years, or in a period to coincide with the Core Strategy/Local Plan and consider what challenges need to be addressed
- Focus the objectives, setting out how the Plan is to achieve these
- Consult widely with the community on the draft Plan to ensure there is general agreement with the Plan
- Consider whether the Plan should be accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal. Appropriate Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessments may be needed in certain circumstances



The Plan will also need to include policies and proposals for meeting the objectives and aspirations set out and these will vary according to what is proposed. Some will also need timescales attached. There is also the ability to have a 'do nothing' option, which is what would be the case if there were no Neighbourhood Plan.

There may be more than one draft of the Plan; an initial version and then one with preferred choices included. Consultation with the wider community should occur at each stage and the Plan reviewed as a result of the consultation.

Policies and Proposals

The policies and proposals need to be chosen for the final Plan to support the objectives. These can be written and shown on a map, and may include an action or implementation plan. Each objective should have policies to show how it is being delivered or achieved. It is important that all policies and proposals are achievable and, where these relate to future use of land, there needs to have been agreement with the landowner that this is the case. It may be useful to consider policies and proposals in terms of what can be delivered in the first few years, what are medium range projects and what are longer term objectives. Those requiring substantial cooperation with other stakeholders or with landowners will usually not be the 'quick wins' due to the length of negotiations required.

The type of policy or proposal will vary according to the nature of the Plan, but may:

- Allocate specific sites for a particular use
- Specify particular requirements in relation to each allocation, for example the access point, landscaping
- Specify areas NOT to be developed or to be retained for open uses or protected, such as environmental areas or areas of special landscape character
- Be more generic and apply to all future development in an area, such as design policies or materials

It is important that policies conform to the Local Plan and to national planning guidance, so this should be checked and rechecked.

Finalising the Plan

The final stages of preparation require the following:

- They should be written in plain English and should include:
 - A summary of the issues/challenges facing the area
 - The vision and objectives
 - A description of the proposals and policies preferred, explaining what they are seeking to achieve for the use and development of land
 - An explanation of how the wide community has been involved and what methods have been used to engage with them (use the notes of past consultation events to support this)



- The policies and proposals in relation to a specific site or area requiring special protection
- A policy or proposals map showing the areas where development should take place, or where it is protected from development, e.g. open space or allotments
- A strategy for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the plan
- An implementation strategy that outlines actions, identifies who will be responsible for undertaking the actions, the level of priority, timetable and sources of funding. This could also set targets and indicators as to whether a proposal or policy will be achieved once the plan is made
- The final Sustainability Appraisal report
- The Environmental Impact Assessment, Appropriate Assessment, Habitats Regulations Assessment, where needed

Next stages

The Plan then needs to be submitted to the local planning authority for their consideration and more community consultation is also required. In addition, consultation is needed with all statutory agencies, such as the Environment Agency, the Highways Authority (Kent County Council), Natural England and English Heritage. This consultation should include:

- An explanation and the results of the consultations and any changes to the draft Neighbourhood Plan
- A plan/statement showing the neighbourhood area
- A written statement about how the Neighbourhood Plan meets the relevant legislation and
- A statement about who has been consulted

The local planning authority will then need to publicise the proposed Plan for a period of not less than six weeks and any representations received will be sent to the Inspector examining the Plan.

An examination by an independent Inspector will then take place. The Inspector will review the Plan to ensure that it:

- Meets European obligations
- Conforms to national planning policy and that it is in general conformity with the local authority's own Plan
- Is compatible with any adjoining Neighbourhood Plans
- Contributes to sustainable development

Once the examiner has carried out the examination he/she will prepare a report either recommending that the Plan proceeds to referendum, that it proceeds but with amendments, or that it should not proceed.



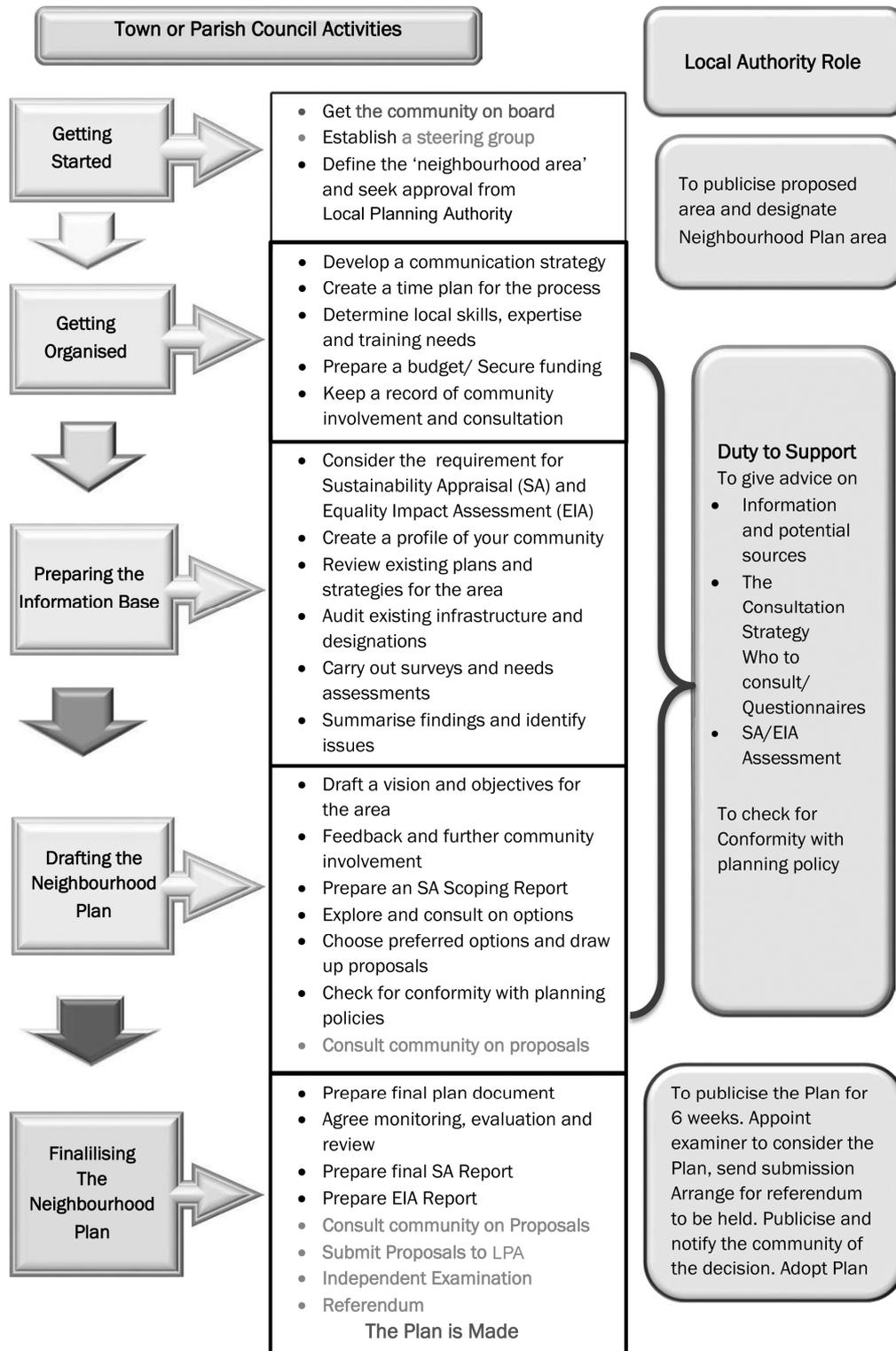
Providing it is acceptable to proceed, the local planning authority will then organise and pay for a referendum. All those registered to vote in elections in the parish, or area covered by the Plan, will be included in the referendum. To agree a Plan, a majority of 50% is required. Once the referendum is concluded (provided a majority of over 50% is achieved), the local planning authority will adopt the Neighbourhood Plan and it will then become a material planning consideration in the determining of planning applications and be part of the adopted Development Plan for the area. If the Plan is not supported through the referendum, the parish still have the opportunity to use the Plan in the same way as a Parish Plan, but it will not have the formal status of an adopted Development Plan Document.

In addition, development granted permission by an adopted Neighbourhood Development Order or Community Right to Build Order may be implemented.





Figure 1: Flow chart showing stages of the Neighbourhood Plan process





External Assistance

At present, two bodies have been given the responsibility by DCLG to help those neighbourhoods and communities who are thinking about producing a Neighbourhood Plan. Each of these has produced guidance and their websites give a multitude of information. These are set out below.

RTPI Planning Aid Tel: 0203 206 1880 Email: info@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk Website: http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planningaid/	Locality The Building Community Consortium Tel: 0845 458 8336 Email: neighbourhoodplanning@locality.org.uk Website: www.buildingcommunity.org.uk
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These can offer advice and guidance about the process and how to get started, and are free to communities. There is also advice on the DCLG website and the Planning Advisory Service website and from the two bodies previously providing advice to communities:

DCLG www.communities.gov.uk

Planning Advisory Service www.pas.gov.uk

The two organisations previously directly supporting communities are no longer able to do so, but do have information available on their websites. These are:

The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment www.princes-foundation.org/our-work/supporting-communities-and-neighbourhoods-planning and

Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) in association with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) www.cpre.org.uk and www.nalc.gov.uk

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