



A neighbourhood development plan (NDP) should be prepared by the community that lives in, works in and uses the area. Neighbourhood planning can build relationships within a community, strengthen civic pride, help to reinvigorate local democracy and bring people together around a common set of aims. However, to achieve its full potential any neighbourhood planning process needs to be properly organised and supported with a clear plan for engaging with the community.

A NDP will be an important document which will influence planning decisions. As a result it is important to demonstrate how you have tried to reach all sectors of the community and engage them in the neighbourhood planning process. For example, when deciding how to publicise and run community events it will be important to think about:

- who you will engage with (covering the different sections or groups within the community);
- what you will do to engage with the different community groups;
- when you will engage (at which points in the process); and
- how you will communicate progress, publicise activities and invite comments.
- Where you will do this – this could be at existing events, going door to door delivering questionnaires, exhibitions in village halls or organising activities at the local school etc.

You should think about the needs or restrictions of the people you will be consulting with, for example whether they may have time restrictions that limit their ability to participate, lack of literacy, lack of permanent address, disability etc. Your community events should be designed to engage all sectors of the community.

A separate task group or working group could be set up to prepare the communication and engagement strategy and to oversee its implementation.

Step 1 – Understanding your community

The first step is to define the neighbourhood's community. That might seem obvious – i.e. the people who live within the neighbourhood area – but an NDP requires a more comprehensive understanding of the community. The community of your area will contain different groups and people in varying social and economic circumstances. It is likely that the people initiating the neighbourhood planning process will know their area and the different groups within it well. The consultation process should make a concerted effort to reach all groups and not simply rely on the 'usual suspects' who will respond to leaflets, press notices and advertisements.

To start the preparation of your communication and engagement strategy, simply list all the different areas and groups of people within your neighbourhood area and think about whether they need to be contacted and communicated with in different ways. For example you may need to communicate with young people through youth groups, schools or social media. They are unlikely to attend open public consultation events. Elderly or disabled groups may be keen to be involved but the venue and time of consultation should be carefully considered.

The community also includes local businesses, which might be run by people who live



Step 2 – How to engage with different groups

The communication and engagement strategy should indicate how the various groups will be involved – what methods will be used to a) communicate with them, and b) interact with them so that their views are expressed, heard and recorded.

The publication and organisation of community events can be one of the most demanding parts of a neighbourhood planning process, and it is likely that your resources will be limited. One of the easiest and cheapest ways to engage people is to 'piggy back' other events going on in the parish, for example the village fete, carnival, harvest festival, Christmas fayres etc.

Keep to simple techniques unless your group has special skills, for example in IT. Face to Face interactions which are properly recorded work fine. So whilst it would be fantastic to have a Twitter consultation or Facebook site to engage with young people, you might get just as useful feedback by setting up a stall at lunchtime in the local school and interviewing children about what they like and dislike about their area.

It is important to note that there are legal issues associated with some forms of engagement. For example the collection of personal data must comply with the 1998 Data Protection Act and people working with children may need to have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. The Cornwall Association of Local Councils can give you guidance on these sorts of issues <http://www.cornwallalc.org.uk/>.

A lot of guidance on how to engage people is available online. One of the better guides is the 'Eden Project Community Engagement Guide' available at: <http://www.edenproject.com/whats-it-all-about/places-regeneration/creative-community-engagement>

Each of the bodies officially appointed by the Government to provide support to neighbourhood planning bodies can also provide advice on how to engage people:

The Prince's Foundation:

<http://www.princes-foundation.org/content/enquiry-design-neighbourhood-planning>

Locality: <http://locality.org.uk/projects/building-community/>

The Royal Town Planning Institute: <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planningaid/>

The National Association of Local Councils, in partnership with the Campaign to Protect Rural England: <http://www.planninghelp.org.uk>; www.cpre.org.uk www.nalc.gov.uk

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE): <http://www.acre.org.uk/rural-issues/community-planning>

The Department for Communities and Local Government: www.communities.gov.uk



A good way to think about who to engage with and how to do it is to prepare a simple table, such as the one below, in which you list each group you want to reach, how you can publicise neighbourhood planning events to them and what sort of event is most likely to encourage them to engage.

Group	How best to publicise	How best to engage
Younger children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Notices and announcements through schools and children's groups ■ Events and activities aimed at parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 'Making' events and parent/child activities ■ School projects – model making ■ Competitions run through the local community, radio or newspaper ■ Simple interactive website game
Young adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Notices and announcements in schools, sports/social clubs and organisations ■ Local champions – interested young person publicising the process through their peers ■ Facebook ■ Twitter ■ Local radio ■ Parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interactive website and social media questionnaires and activities ■ School projects ■ Photograph or video what they like and dislike about the Neighbourhood
Working people and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ etc

Step 3 – Programme

The final element of the communication and engagement strategy should be a programme of events so that you are clear on when to communicate and when events will be held. This will tie in with the main programme for plan preparation and will enable schools, clubs and organisations to plan ahead, and venues to be booked for events.

Whilst it will be for the community to decide how many events to hold, a **minimum** number of events and engagement processes are essential to a successful neighbourhood planning outcome:

- an initial event early in the process to secure wider community support and buy-in to the neighbourhood planning process;
- an event to enable all sectors of the community to feed their ideas into the neighbourhood planning process;
- an engagement process to obtain the views of businesses and other interested parties who may not engage with community events;
- an event to enable all sectors of the community and other interested parties to comment on draft policies before they are finalised.



The neighbourhood planning regulations include a set of formal consultation requirements which must be satisfied. These are set out in the guide note 'Neighbourhood Planning Process Timetable'.

The neighbourhood plan programme needs to be communicated to the community. It is crucial that people are kept up to date as the plan progresses. If this does not happen, people can lose interest and bad press can be generated. Websites can be used to communicate and update people cheaply and effectively. Simple website templates can be bought and designed at very low cost.

A good way to encourage use of a website is to make it the key way that information to interested parties is disseminated. For example, if you collect names and email addresses of all people wishing to be involved in, or informed of, the neighbourhood planning process, you can easily keep them up to date via email and direct them to the website for new information and consultations. Such an approach should be supplemented by traditional communication means such as leafleting and mail-outs for those who don't have access to the internet.

Stage 4 - Recording community consultation

It's really important that you record all of the consultation events that you carry out in your community so that you can demonstrate that you have consulted widely and attempted to engage all sectors of your community. One of the final stages in the approval of your plan is a formal examination process with an external examiner. The examiner will review whether there has been sufficient community engagement and you will need to be able to demonstrate that your plan is representative of the views of all of the community so it is important to record all consultation events.

It should be easy to demonstrate responses to surveys (be sure to also keep details of the number of surveys distributed and the number returned) but for other events, such as stalls at the Christmas Fayre, exhibitions and public meetings etc., a photographic record, along with some information on the feedback given is a good way to do this. Photos can also be used in the local press and on your website which can generate positive publicity for the Plan.