



Neighbourhood Planning Guidance

Neighbourhood Planning: Community Engagement and Neighbourhood Plans

South Cambridgeshire District Council

September 2017

This document includes hyperlinks to a range of websites, and the hyperlinks can be accessed using the published version of this document, which is available to view via: [www.scambs.gov.uk/npguidance](http://www.scambs.gov.uk/npgguidance). Every effort has been made to ensure that these hyperlinks are up-to-date, however as websites change these hyperlinks can become invalid.

Herefordshire Council has kindly given permission for us to provide links to their guidance on neighbourhood planning.

Huntingdonshire District Council has kindly allowed us to take inspiration and wording from their Neighbourhood Planning Guidance.

If you have any queries relating to this document, please contact us via neighbourhood.planning@scambs.gov.uk or 01954 713183.

Community Engagement on your Neighbourhood Plan

A parish council wishing to do a neighbourhood plan will need to ensure the wider community is involved from the outset. There are a number of reasons for this:

- It is a **statutory requirement** that publicity and consultation take place. When you submit your neighbourhood plan it will be accompanied by a **consultation statement**, demonstrating that the legal requirements have been met.
- Early engagement is essential in developing support, understanding and **consensus**. Delayed engagement can cause conflict, additional costs and delays. The possibility of a 'no' vote at **referendum** is greatly reduced if people have ownership of your plan and an opportunity to shape it, rather than merely having the opportunity to accept or reject it in its entirety.

It is impossible to write **realistic and deliverable** policies for a community without first understanding that community. Finding out what people know and think is an important part of developing an **evidence base**.

Top Tips

Before you embark on your neighbourhood plan:

- speak to SCDC Development Officers for tips on community engagement,
- contact other neighbourhood planning communities to seek their advice about involving the local community and recording their input.

What does 'Community Engagement' look like?

The process of engagement is nearly as important as the plan itself. Engagement activity can happen at various levels (often described as rungs on a ladder) including:

- 1. Informing** – giving people knowledge so that they are informed, e.g. via leaflets and newsletters, posters, information stalls, news releases, web-based information, social media.
- 2. Consulting** – asking people what they think so that decision-makers can make even better decisions, e.g. via questionnaires and surveys (online or printed), focus groups, events, feedback on written plans.
- 3. Involving** – acting together with the local community, e.g. through devolved decision-making (sub-groups of a neighbourhood plan Steering Group with community members involved), round table workshops.
- 4. Empowering** – supporting the local community to take action on its own, e.g. via devolved responsibility for evidence gathering, sourcing local knowledge and opinion, policy writing.

Guidance and Regulations

[National Planning Practice Guidance regulation 14 and regulation 21](#)

Other Resources

You might find it useful to look at what others have done: [Sutton St Nicholas Consultation Statement](#)

Who should be involved

Steering Group – ideally between 6-9 people with knowledge of the community, including some with experience of project management and, where possible, planning. Members may change, leaving when they complete a time-limited piece of work. More information can be found in the SCDC guidance document 'Getting Started'.

Sub groups – some themes will emerge from your early community engagement which may evolve into working groups, with volunteers to look at and lead on each. Beware of these groups becoming talking shops and stay focussed on the task at hand.

Developers, Businesses and Landowners - are all a vital part of your community. They should be involved in any consultation events and receive bespoke information. In many cases, they are invited to be part of a Steering Group or Subgroup because of their invaluable perspective. Some developers, businesses and landowners have expressed an interest in helping with the costs of developing a neighbourhood plan, particularly where they have an interest in the land within the declared boundary. Care is required to avoid the impression of inappropriate influence.

Residents and residents' associations – local people can be reached through a variety of engagement activities and key to this is to go to them. Piggy-back on existing events where possible and don't expect people to respond or come to you unless you have identified the 'WIIFM factor' – What's In It For Me?

Outside the Neighbourhood Area – you may have communities or business parks lying close to but outside the neighbourhood area you have designated. Consulting on your proposals with them and with neighbouring parishes demonstrates that you have considered the impact of your policies on others.

Other Resources

[Locality Roadmap](#) pages 30-38

[The Consultation Institute](#)

[SCDC Neighbourhood Planning webpages](#)

... and when?

1. Early engagement – this will help to form the plan's vision, objectives and aims.
2. Mid-stage engagement – this could be a detailed discussion about the pros and cons of a policy or site proposal.
3. The completed plan – a requirement of the planning regulations. Give stakeholders the option of commenting on the full plan.

Top Tips

Community engagement takes time. Allow for this in your project plan and adjust your timeline

accordingly.

Ask open questions: e.g. what is good about the area? What needs to change?

When devising your questions for surveys, **take time to plan** how you'll analyse and use the information you get back.

Young children can be involved through school, by drawing their answers.

Maintain momentum and feedback to consultees.

Look at 'made' plans for examples of engagement.

Keep good records of your community engagement activities, what, where, when, attendance and outcomes. This will help you complete your consultation statement for submission with your plan towards the end of the plan preparation process. Sometimes you may want to capture names and contact details if you want to get back to people later.