

COMMUNITY LED PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

Community consultations are increasingly important to the running and growth of rural communities. They find out how a village or town feels about itself - its strengths and weaknesses, and how its residents want it to develop. Everyone in the community has a say in the consultation's outcome which will influence local planning decisions and the county-wide structure plan.

Community Led Planning (CLP) is a step-by-step process that enables everyone to participate in, and contribute to, improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of their local area. Already undertaken by over 4,000 communities across England, it represents an unparalleled opportunity for people to take responsibility for making things happen locally. This approach to community empowerment has been developed and refined in rural areas since the late 1970s, largely as a response to the gradual withdrawal of public sector services and the increasing need for communities to look after their own affairs.

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.

One of the defining characteristics of all Community Led Plans is that they are not imposed from above, but instead initiated and led by local volunteers who steer their community through a step-by-step process. A national toolkit, produced by ACRE, is used by WRCC to guide community groups through the process, providing practical advice and resources that help to make the production of any plan a manageable endeavour. As part of this toolkit there are a number of [free Topic Sheets](#).

[Making the most of Community Led Planning](#): a best practice guide for local authorities, produced by [ACRE](#). This guide examines the practical ways that local authorities have already sought to empower communities to take action locally by making the most of Community Led Planning (CLP). The guide is essential reading for anyone who wants to know how localism can work in practice – where communities are supported to come together, research and then implement a plan of action that contributes to the overall wellbeing and sustainability of their neighbourhood.

Every village and parish in England has its own distinctive and characterful historic streets, buildings and landscapes and a wealth of fascinating archaeological remains. This history makes each place cherished and unique but how can local people make sure their heritage is taken into account in the planning system? [Knowing Your Place: Heritage and Community-Led Planning in the Countryside](#) (produced by English Heritage in partnership with ACRE) provides advice to help access information on local history and to identify what matters about it and why. It can help communities ensure their heritage contributes to their aspirations for the future. The [Historic England](#) website has a rural heritage section looking at ways to protect the rural historic environment.

Find out more about the [benefits](#) of Parish Plans and a [step-by-step guide](#) to the Parish Planning process.

The Countryside Agency have produced a guide to [Parish Plans for Town & Parish Councils](#).

[Awards For All England](#) is a small grants scheme making awards of between £300 and £10,000 for a specific project or activity by community or not for profit groups. The programme aims to help improve local communities and the lives of people most in need and accepts applications for Parish Plan funding.

The [Planning Advisory Service](#) has useful guidance relating specifically to Neighbourhood Plans, and the Design Council produces "[Design in Neighbourhood Planning](#)" which is aimed at community groups and local authorities.

[The Source](#) is a CSE initiative to share free resources that are useful for communities taking action on energy but includes useful information such as "[Approaches to community consultation and engagement](#)".

[Contact us](#) if you'd like to find out more about community-led planning.

GUIDE TO NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS & REGENERATION

This 2017 [guide](#) from MyCommunity provides neighbourhood planning groups with information and practical tools to help them address regeneration issues in their neighbourhood plans. This can involve a wide range of issues, including regeneration of housing estates, town centres and industrial and commercial areas.

Neighbourhood plans can provide a positive vision for an area and clear aims. These can then be applied by planning policies and possibly site allocations. This positive planning framework and the process of preparing it can help to build confidence in an area. The neighbourhood plan will normally need to be part of a wider strategy for the area, so it is very likely that it will need to be accompanied by other initiatives, such as environmental enhancement projects, marketing strategies, business support, projects to build skills and employability, community-led development schemes, to name just a few.

To be successful, regeneration strategies must address the specific characteristics and issues of the area and the wider strategic context. For example, in some areas the primary concern may be with attracting employment whereas in other areas shortage of housing may be the key issue

The purpose of the document is to provide practical tools to help with the analysis of an area's regeneration challenges and to help develop solutions in the form of effective planning policies. This tool sets out a framework for analysing the characteristics and needs of an area in regeneration and economic development terms. It then suggests possible content for neighbourhood plans to address a range of local issues and provide a positive framework for growth and development.

To this end, the tool is structured around four main parts. The first part, Regeneration in Neighbourhood Plans, is an overview of neighbourhood planning, from a regeneration perspective. The second part, Regeneration Tool - Analysis, is a tool for looking at and analysing the causes of decline in an area and opportunities for regeneration. The third part, Regeneration Tool - Planning Policies, is a tool for identifying regeneration policies for an area.

The fourth part of the document, Complementary Actions, looks at actions that can be taken in parallel to neighbourhood plans.

Referendum news: In February a total of 17 neighbourhood plans were successful at referendum, including Poole Quays, Uttoxeter and Leiston. In March 13 plans successfully passed referendum, including Langham, Holmes Chapel and Leintwardine.

PARISH PLANS & NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

It is entirely possible for a community to undertake (or combine) both processes and therefore have a much more rounded vision for the future of the community.

Parish Plans

What are the benefits to a Parish Council?

- A Parish Plan gives the Council information which is statistically sound
- The public has an opportunity to be involved and contribute views and opinions
- Local authorities and other agencies have information and the reassurance that the community has been thoroughly consulted and that there is a consensus for action
- Funding may be easier to access as a result of Parish Plan evidence of need

What are the benefits to the people?

- It gives them the chance to say what is needed and wanted and how this could be accomplished
- It allows them to show what elements of the natural and built environment matter to them and should be enhanced
- It gives them the chance to show what development is needed for local requirements and where they can safely take place

Neighbourhood Plans

- Developed by the community for that community – enabling residents, business and users of an area to have their say in shaping the plan
- Evidence based and can use a community plan as a starting point
- Once adopted the plan is a formal part of planning policy; this means it will form the basis of developments coming forward, how they are shaped, and is a key part in deciding if they gain planning permission
- It can identify sites for specific developments or types of development to happen and can set policies that control how things look
- It can be as complex or as simple as the community wish
- The community have the final say in adopting the plan through a referendum
- Once adopted it is enforceable and will be used by the local authority in making planning decisions

If Community Led Planning (CLP) is done well, it can produce many benefits including:

High rates of community participation

The experience of members in the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) shows that participation in Community Led Plans is remarkably high. Normally, 60-80% of households get involved. The support and resources provided by RCAN members ensures that the process is inclusive, with specific effort made to engage people who may find it difficult to get involved in the life of their community.

New volunteers, new community groups and renewed interest in community wellbeing

As Community Led Plans gather momentum, more and more volunteers lend their time and energy to the process, realising the collective contribution they can make to improve things locally. This

renewed interest in community wellbeing can also result in new community groups being set up, ensuring that people continue to work and socialise together long after the plan has been finalised and the projects implemented.

Deliberative decision-making

Critical to the success of any Community Led Plan is extensive deliberation between individuals and community groups, with input from external organisations and service providers where appropriate. CLP's structured approach counters NIMBY attitudes as everyone is provided with the chance to share their views and listen to the needs and concerns of others before reaching collective solutions that benefit the community as a whole.

Constructive dialogue with local authorities and other service providers

Local authorities and other service providers can benefit from CLP if they engage with community groups throughout the process. Providing expert advice and supporting the delivery of some projects, they are able to make sure that the energy and commitment of volunteers compliments broader strategies, informing the transfer of services and assets to communities where appropriate.

New local projects and services taken on by the community

Projects resulting from CLP are diverse and encompass actions that relate to the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the local area. These can range from a litter-pick, the setting up of a youth club, mounting of a community-based emergency plan to proposals for the development of new affordable housing.

Many of these projects can be implemented by the community itself. For example, during seven years in the East of England region, a database used by RCAN members listed 231 communities that had produced plans, between them containing over 9,000 individual projects that could improve their local area. 47% of these projects were able to be taken on by the community themselves without external support. Of the remainder, 34% required negotiation with public service providers to bring them to fruition.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS – FURTHER INFORMATION

Neighbourhood planning empowers communities to shape the development and growth of a local area through the production of a neighbourhood development plan, a neighbourhood development order or a Community Right to Build Order.

Neighbourhood planning can be taken forward by two types of body - town and parish councils or 'neighbourhood forums'. Neighbourhood forums are community groups that are designated to take forward neighbourhood planning in areas without parishes.

Neighbourhood forums and parish councils can use new neighbourhood planning powers to establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood. These are described legally as 'neighbourhood development plans.'

In an important change to the planning system communities can use neighbourhood planning to permit the development they want to see (in full or in outline) without the need for planning applications. These are called 'neighbourhood development orders.'

Local councils will continue to produce development plans that will set the strategic context within which neighbourhood development plans will sit.

Neighbourhood development plans or orders do not take effect unless there is a majority of support in a referendum of the neighbourhood.

They also have to meet a number of conditions before they can be put to a community referendum and legally come into force. These conditions are to ensure plans are legally compliant and take account of wider policy considerations (e.g. national policy).

Conditions are:

- they must have regard to national planning policy
- they must be in general conformity with strategic policies in the development plan for the local area (i.e. such as in a core strategy)
- they must be compatible with EU obligations and human rights requirements.

An independent qualified person then checks that a neighbourhood development plan or order appropriately meets the conditions before it can be voted on in a local referendum. This is to make sure that referendums only take place when proposals are workable and of a decent quality.

Proposed neighbourhood development plans or orders need to gain the approval of a majority of voters of the neighbourhood to come into force. If proposals pass the referendum, the local planning authority is under a legal duty to bring them into force.

The [Neighbourhood Planning Roadmap](#) from Locality is a comprehensive guide to producing a Neighbourhood Plan and is an excellent starting point. It takes you through the process step by step, from first deciding to join with people from your local community to create a Neighbourhood Plan, to submitting the finished article. The Roadmap also comes with a series of worksheets containing further information and helpful lists of tasks and checklists.

Answers to the most frequently asked questions are available from [DCLG:Neighbourhood planning – frequently asked questions](#) and Locality have produced a guide to [General Conformity with Strategic Local Policy](#) to help communities ensure their Plan is in general conformity with strategic local planning policies, which is one of the basic conditions to be met.

The Planning Advisory Service has a number of guides, tools, templates and case studies to help local authorities to support neighbourhood planning which groups themselves will find helpful: [Neighbourhood Planning](#)

[An Introduction to Neighbourhood Planning](#) from DCLG explains what neighbourhood planning is, why it matters and how it will work and provides information about the sources of advice and support for communities interested in doing neighbourhood planning.

The [Community Right to Build](#) enables local people to bring forward small scale, site specific, community-led developments including homes, shops, businesses or facilities. It will be for communities to determine the type of development they want to see, including the type and tenure of any housing, including affordable housing. These developments could come through a [Community Land Trust](#), a community-led organisation that provides land and buildings to meet the long term needs of its community.

The [My Community Rights](#) online hub introduces the Rights contained in the Localism Act (2011). Part of a national support service on the Rights (including Right to Build, Right to Bid, Right to Challenge, Right to Reclaim Land and Neighbourhood Planning), it provides information, inspiration, resources and ideas, helping communities to understand the Rights and how they can be implemented. It provides support for communities at all stages of their journey, be it the initial stages, seeking legal advice or with a specific question for a Community Rights expert.

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT GUIDE

Local communities have a unique appreciation and understanding of their own place and a Village Design Statement (VDS) is based on this knowledge. By describing the qualities and characteristics that people value in their villages and surroundings, local communities can have an input into the planning process.

What is a Village Design Statement?

The focus of a VDS is to describe the character of the local area and include guidance to influence change and improve the physical qualities of your area.

It can give a clear statement of what is special, unique and distinctive about the character of your village.

A VDS adds local detail to development plan policy and, once approved by your local authority, it can be used as material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

It is a tool that can influence the people who live and work in the village, increase local pride and encourage care when making changes to the appearance of property.

A VDS can help improve physical change and is a positive opportunity to suggest environmental improvements to enhance your area.

It can observe how the qualities of the village have evolved and help to explain current conditions.

A VDS can provide an understanding of how the land uses, employment and social make up have influenced the village and its physical qualities.

It is **not** a general community plan, such as a parish plan, neither is it a statutory planning document, a tool to generate or prevent development, or an appraisal of social or economic issues. It cannot take away people's rights to make alterations to their property, nor can it make direct orders for action.

There should be wide involvement in its production so that the finished VDS represents the views of the village or community as a whole.

Writing a well organised and focused statement

Aim for a document that is simple to read, easy to navigate and to find information, short and snappy, and visually interesting.

It also has to be effective as a tool; influencing and guiding people making changes in the village. It is important to be clear about the four types of text that should be written:

- Background information
- Character description
- Identifying issues and objectives
- Guidance - village wide - for specific character areas - for specific sites

The background information and character description text is a result of desk top research and assessment of local character. The identification of issues arises from community involvement in the VDS, and will provide the reasoning for the guidance.

The local authority will be most interested in the wording of the guidance points as these will be considered in the determination of planning applications. The lasting value of the VDS will depend on the quality of the statements of guidance. These should be realistic and focused.

Effective use of illustrations and maps

Carefully chosen images can convey information about the character of an area whilst avoiding the need for writing a mass of text. The images should relate to, and support, the guidance.

The advantage of producing freehand sketches is to illustrate what you consider to be good and bad examples of design: avoiding showing a photograph of a specific building. Include captions that spell out what message you want the reader to take from the picture or diagram.

Think about maps from an early stage; what you want them to show and who will provide them. You may need several maps to show different things. Maps can be hand drawn and stylised to represent your village. If using Ordnance Survey (OS) based maps you will need to consider licensing implications. You may be able to use maps produced by the local authority.

What you can and cannot say

The VDS cannot create new planning policy or conflict with existing planning policy. Guidance has to accord with local authority policies and it should genuinely add a local level of detail to that policy.

Think about who the audience of your VDS will be and what influence they have in your village, for example:

- local people
- householders
- building designers
- developers
- highways authority
- utility company
- parish council
- planners

Your guidance has to be practical and realistic. When writing a particular guidance think about who you are targeting – is it householders, developers, the highway authority or utility companies that you want to comply with the guidance?

Make direct statements, for example 'householders should ...' rather than using looser terms such as 'the community welcomes ...' This will help make the VDS guidance more effective. Use terms such as 'should' and 'encourage'; avoid using terms such as 'must not'.

Each guidance statement should have clear justification; it should be derived from the issues and objectives highlighted by the community involvement in the process. Include this justification prior to the guidance.

It is best for the guidance to be clearly identifiable from the other types of text throughout the VDS, e.g. in shaded or coloured boxes. You might also want to include a separate list of your guidance for ease of reference. If so, this could be placed at the end of your VDS.

The guidance is used by planning officers to help determine development proposals for which planning applications are submitted. It is important to remember that some alterations are known as 'Permitted Development' and do not require planning permission. The VDS can influence permitted development by encouraging property owners to assess the impact of their proposed changes in the light of local character described in the document.

Contents of a VDS document

Introduction

Explain what the VDS is for, how it was written and summarise your main objectives.

Scope of the VDS

State the area covered by the VDS i.e. the built environment of the village, the whole parish, a number of hamlets or parishes.

Purpose of the VDS

State your reasons for preparing a VDS and who it is aimed at. This should focus on the community as a whole caring for the village and ensuring that change contributes positively to local character. It should outline the purpose of the guidance statements which contain the key messages of the VDS.

Community involvement process

Explain that the VDS is led and produced by the community. Outline the timescale involved, the efforts made to be inclusive, the response and representation in the final document.

Status of the document

Outline how the VDS will be used by the Parish Council in commenting on planning applications. State that the VDS can be used as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. Explain how the character descriptions and guidance can be used by property owners to help ensure that any changes they intend to make to their properties are in keeping with local character.

Planning policy context

Provide a brief account of the planning system within which the VDS operates. Explain that the VDS supplements existing policy. Outline the relevant policies covering your area.

Plans and illustrations

- Plan/map showing the location of the area covered by the VDS and its relation to the local towns
- Plan/map showing the area covered by the VDS, showing place names and boundary of its coverage
- Photographs of local people taking part in design workshops or at exhibitions
- Pictures drawn by children showing elements of village character

- Plan/map showing key spaces and trees with preservation orders (possibly included on the character area map provided it does not become too cluttered)
- Photographs of important spaces and characteristic features
- Sketches/photos of distinctive street furniture, highway and other infrastructure
- Sketches of other features that are considered appropriate for your area.

Background

This section of the VDS can help everyone understand the origins and current nature of the area, and should be succinct as it is not the focus of the VDS.

History

Describe briefly the area's history; explain how economic influences, social changes, transport links e.g. the railway or major roads, have influenced the development of the area.

Settlement pattern

Describe the overall shape and layout of the village. Is it linear, radial, dispersed? Are there clear edges? How has history influenced its shape? Describe also how the village location and shape have been influenced by topography, geology, local climate, availability of water and local materials.

The village today

Describe briefly the area as it is now; the types of housing, community activity, local services, economic activity. Is there any activity that is special or unique to the area? What are the key features of the village? How does the design of the village influence cultural and social activity?

Character assessment

This section defines the different 'character areas' of the parish/village based on their landscape or 'townscape' qualities. A 'character area' is an area with its own identity in terms of use and appearance. There may be several areas with distinct character, or just one for the built area of the village and one for the surrounding countryside. The strengths and weaknesses of each character area should be highlighted, based on its landscape or 'townscape' qualities:

- Landscape character areas – this is what you see and experience when you are in a particular part of the countryside. Describe the shape of the land; ridges, valleys, plateau, coast. Describe special features or habitats such as woodlands, watercourses, meadow, wetlands etc. Describe the use of the land and how rural buildings sit within the landscape. Describe views across the landscape and into the village.
- Townscape character areas - this is what you see and experience when you are in a particular built environment. It can be defined as the changing view of building groups that you experience when you walk along the street or through open spaces. Each character area will have broadly consistent townscape qualities. For each character area, describe the qualities. Describe the relationship between buildings and spaces, layout and density. Describe the street scene. Are the roads straight, curved, narrow, wide? Are there pavements? Are buildings set back from the road? Standing back from the buildings, look for vertical and horizontal rhythms. What are the proportions of the windows, doors, rooflines? Describe the skyline and roofscape. Describe open spaces.

Buildings and design features

Which are the key buildings and building groups? Are there buildings that act as landmarks? What are the different types of buildings – housing, retail, community buildings? What are the distinctive styles of buildings? Which period?

Building form: what is the shape, size and height of the buildings; number of storeys, terraced or detached, with flat, hipped or pitched roofs, gable ends, dormer windows, chimneys, extensions, porches?

Layout and Orientation: are building frontages on the road or set back? Are they at an angle? What are the plot sizes – are there front and back gardens, and provision for car parking?

Materials: are certain materials characteristic such as timber framing, red brick, flint walls, thatch, clay tiles? How are modern materials used and could they be used more effectively?

Distinctive features: are there particular door and window designs, sash windows, lead works, stained glass, specific shapes and styles? Are there distinctive details such as pargetting, stone carvings, and so on? Do the rooflines have particular characteristics or detailing? Are there noticeable features such as water pumps, railings, walls etc?

Type of guidance

Consider what design issues developers and applicants should pay special attention to when drawing up proposals to ensure development contributes to the character of your village. This could be design guidance for specific building types, new buildings, infill, extensions or alterations.

Identify design guidance that could improve the street scene. Some small changes to building exteriors might not require planning permission but the VDS is a way to give local people some guidance.

Spaces and signage

Spaces in the village are as important as its buildings. Not all spaces are immediately obvious as they can be green soft spaces or hard surface spaces. Spaces include greens, allotments, parks and recreation grounds, ponds, riverbank, the churchyard, gardens to the front, rear and side, streets and lanes, car parks, footpaths and bridleways. Assess the quantity, quality and accessibility of the green and open spaces.

Public open space: Is there a village green; one main public space or are there lots of separate or connecting spaces? Are they green spaces? Do they have ponds, rivers, vegetation, distinctive wildlife?

Public highway: How do roads and lanes contribute to character? What materials have been used for surfacing? Do they have footways, cyclepaths, kerbs, soft verges, drainage ditches, hedges? Are there painted lines, traffic calming and signage – how do these impact on visual qualities? Are there particular streets with a strong character?

Street furniture: Are there bus shelters, public seating, waste bins, overhead cables or other utility structures? What designs have been used? Are there light columns – is there any light pollution?

Private space: How do private gardens contribute to village character? What is the size of front and side gardens (and back if easily visible).

Boundaries: What are the characteristic boundaries of different spaces? Are there distinctive walls, fences, ironwork, hedges? Are there any unique structures or other characteristic features within any space – memorials, sculpture, village sign? Are there particular tree groups or individual trees that are prominent or act as an important focal point?

Identify: green spaces and open spaces of great importance and encourage their protection (quality and quantity); appropriate boundary treatment and encourage its use; places where street furniture and signage could be improved.

Recommend use of specified styles of furniture design and surface treatment (hard and soft landscaping) appropriate to your area.

Social and economic activity

Buildings and spaces are designed to accommodate industry, agriculture, shops, schools, places of worship, health, community meeting halls, recreation. Are these buildings and spaces located at the centre or core of the village, or on the edge of the village? Are important community spaces at separate ends of the village?

How do these buildings and spaces contribute to the character of your village. How important is the retention of these activities and their associated buildings and spaces?

Movement within, to and from the village

Lanes, roads, car parks, footways, cyclepaths, bridleways and footpaths are designed to meet the need for movement within, to and from the village to accommodate residents, visitors and those employed by local businesses.

How do these routes impact on the character of the village and surrounding area? Is traffic and parking a significant issue? Do traffic calming measures exist? Are there sufficient 'safe' routes as an alternative to the car?

Suggest ways to respect, maintain or improve the distinctive appearance of local business activity – aim specific guidance towards shop owners, businesses, the school etc as appropriate.

Suggest ways to respect, maintain or improve the design of spaces and buildings where social events and activities take place.

Suggest appropriate designs for traffic calming measures as well as appropriate designs and surface treatments for footways, footpaths, car parks etc.

Summary /Overview

Stipulate what is special, distinctive and unique about the area and what sort of place it is to live and work in. Also set out its weaknesses, threats and challenges for the future; the hopes and aspirations of local people Make general recommendations covering the unique, special, distinctive qualities of the VDS area that everyone undertaking physical change should respect and care for.

Acknowledgements

This is a section to thank everyone who has contributed to the VDS. You may want to mention particular individuals but take care not to leave anyone out. Acknowledge organisations that provided grant funding or help in kind. You may be requested to include logos. Provide details of

how to acquire further hard copies of the VDS and also state whether the VDS is available on a website (recommended).

Additional information about Village Design Statements

Examples of Village Design Statements across Stratford upon Avon district can be found on [SDC's website](#).