

WORCESTERSHIRE
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Community Planning Guidance

For Town, Parish and
Neighbourhood Plans

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About the Guidance

This Guidance has been developed for local communities in Worcestershire who are developing, or are planning to develop, a Parish or Community Plan.

The Guidance gives details of the help that is available in Worcestershire to support you in developing your plan and details of further sources of advice and Guidance.

How can the Guidance be used?

The Guidance has been produced in loose leaf format so that it can be added to as necessary to ensure that it is up to date and in line with current developments.

Part One provides information for Parish and Community groups on how to produce a Community or Parish Plan.

Part Two consists of Guidance Sheets written by Service Providers giving useful advice relating to specific areas, such as Planning. It is anticipated that the range of Guidance Sheets will increase and more sheets will be provided. Each District will be able to tailor the Guide to suit their own needs by adding their own Guidance Sheets. Countywide Guidance Sheets will also be added to this section.

Acknowledgements

The Guidance has been produced by Community First on behalf of the Worcestershire Parish Plan Liaison Group. It has been funded by DEFRA through the Rural Social and Community Programme and Worcestershire Infrastructure Consortium with funds from the Home Office Active Communities Department.

We are also grateful to the members of the Worcestershire Parish Plan Liaison Group for their input and support.



This Guidance has been developed for local communities in Worcestershire who are developing, or are planning to develop, a Parish or Community Plan.

Worcestershire Parish Plan Liaison Group (WPPLG)

The WPPLG is made up of the following organisations: Worcestershire County Council, Wychavon District Council, Bromsgrove District Council, Redditch District Council, Wyre Forest District Council, Malvern Hills District Council, Worcester City Council, Worcestershire Partnership, Community First, Evesham Volunteer Bureau, Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils and West Midlands Planning Aid. The aim of the group is to work in partnership to ensure there is a co-ordinated approach to community planning in the county. The group meets bi-monthly and organises training events and seminars, produces Guidance and oversees Best Practice.

Introduction to Parish Plans

What is a Parish or Community Plan?

A Parish or Community Plan should harness everything that is different and unique about the community in which you live and your vision for its future. Parish Plans should provide an opportunity for the community to state its views and provide information regarding how people feel about where they live. The end result should be a document that reflects these views and provides a plan of action. It should also note areas where the Plan may influence, or be influenced by, external factors, e.g. local service delivery.

As well as involving local communities in influencing the services and policies which affect them, Parish Plans also ensure that the District's Community Strategies and the County's Community Strategy reflect the needs of individual communities across Worcestershire.

Context

In 2000, the Government's Rural White Paper, "Our Countryside – The Future", suggested that all rural communities should develop 'town, village and Parish Plans' to identify both problems and opportunities for rural services and to provide community input into the new planning system. In Worcestershire, so far, approximately half of the parished areas of the county are involved in Parish or Community Planning initiatives.

Since the launch of the Parish Plan initiative, a lot of progress has been made in the development of these plans and this Guidance aims to reflect the changes and refinements to this process. It will ensure that Parish and Community groups undertaking a Plan have a clear understanding of what they can achieve through the Parish Planning process and offers a step-by-step guide as to how to go about it.

Parish Plans should provide an opportunity for the community to state its views and provide information regarding how people feel about where they live.

Who writes the plan?

A Parish Plan is written by the community and for the community. It is essential to get support from the Parish Council. The process involves setting up a Steering Group which should consist of members of the community and the Parish Council. A wide community membership is useful to ensure the views of the whole community are expressed through the plan.

What does writing a Parish Plan involve?

(1) Consulting your community

This can often be the most interesting part of Parish Planning. The issues that are important to you, your parish council or steering group, may not be shared by the rest of your community. This is an opportunity to find out what other people think and to hear the views of a wide variety of the population. It is an opportunity to identify the key issues to include in your plan. See Principles of Involving Communities and Techniques for Consulting and Involving your Community, for more information on a range of consultation techniques.

(2) Engaging with Local Service Providers

The consultation should have highlighted key issues of concern or areas for improvement in your Parish. At this stage, discuss your findings with Service Providers to ensure that actions identified from this information are appropriate and realistic and to find out areas in which you can get assistance. Service providers can be statutory, voluntary or private sector agencies.

(3) Writing an Action Plan

The next stage is to prepare an Action Plan based on the key issues from your consultation and from the discussions with Service Providers. Those that are most important to your community should form the basis of your Action Plan. The Action Plan is a vital part of the process as it sets out what needs to be done to achieve the vision set out in the plan. See Action Planning for more details.

(4) Implementing the plan

Now the Parish Plan is completed, it is time to implement the actions identified by the local community. The Parish Council and/or the Parish Plan Steering group can monitor and evaluate these actions.



How can a Parish or Community Plan be used?

Parish Plans can be used for a number of benefits. Key ways in which they can be used may include:

- To take action to improve the quality of life in an area through practical projects, such as running a community transport scheme, or setting up a youth club.
- To manage change, and address local needs through the planning process, such as supporting the protection of community facilities or building affordable housing.
- To bid for funding for local initiatives and to encourage effective partnership working.
- To help influence and inform plans, policies and services of a range of organisations and service providers.
- To enhance a Parish Council's community leadership role, in line with quality Parish ethos.

Funding and Resources for Parish Plans

Significant levels of community consultation will be required in creating your Plan. The more views that shape your Plan, the wider the levels of impact. The information sheets in this Guidance have been developed to help you through the process of understanding consultation techniques and deciding on those you wish to use.

There are two grants available to contribute to the costs of developing your Plan:

A Parish Plan is written by the community and for the community. It is essential to get support from the Parish Council.

Parish Plan Grants

Funding of up to £1,000 or up to 75% of the cost of producing a Parish or Town Plan (whichever is the lesser) is available from DEFRA to support the development of a Parish or Town Plan. This fund is administered by Community First and will be available until March 2008. For details, contact Karen Humphries on 01684 580708.

Awards for All

This is a National Lottery grant scheme aimed at local communities. Grants are available from between £500 and £10,000. Contact: www.awardsforall.org.uk

Resources for printing – Community Resource Centres

These are located around the county and can provide photocopying and scanprinting facilities, plus I.T. resources. There is a small charge for using equipment in CRCs. For more information on your nearest CRCs, contact Community First on 01684 580707.

Contacts

Local organisations involved in Parish Plans are working to ensure that all the communities developing Plans are given the support and advice they need to produce an effective Plan. In addition to written advice, a number of local sources of advice and support are available to you. We suggest you speak to one of the contacts listed here before starting your Plan and throughout its development. They will be able to advise on Best Practice, the process of developing your Plan, and how to get the most out of your Plan. Please contact Community First to get their details.

Community First:

Director of Capacity Building and Service Development
Community Planning Co-ordinator
Development Officer, Community Planning

Worcestershire Association of Local Councils (CALC)

Worcestershire Partnership

West Midlands Planning Aid

Wychavon District Council

Bromsgrove District Council

Redditch District Council, Wyre Forest District Council

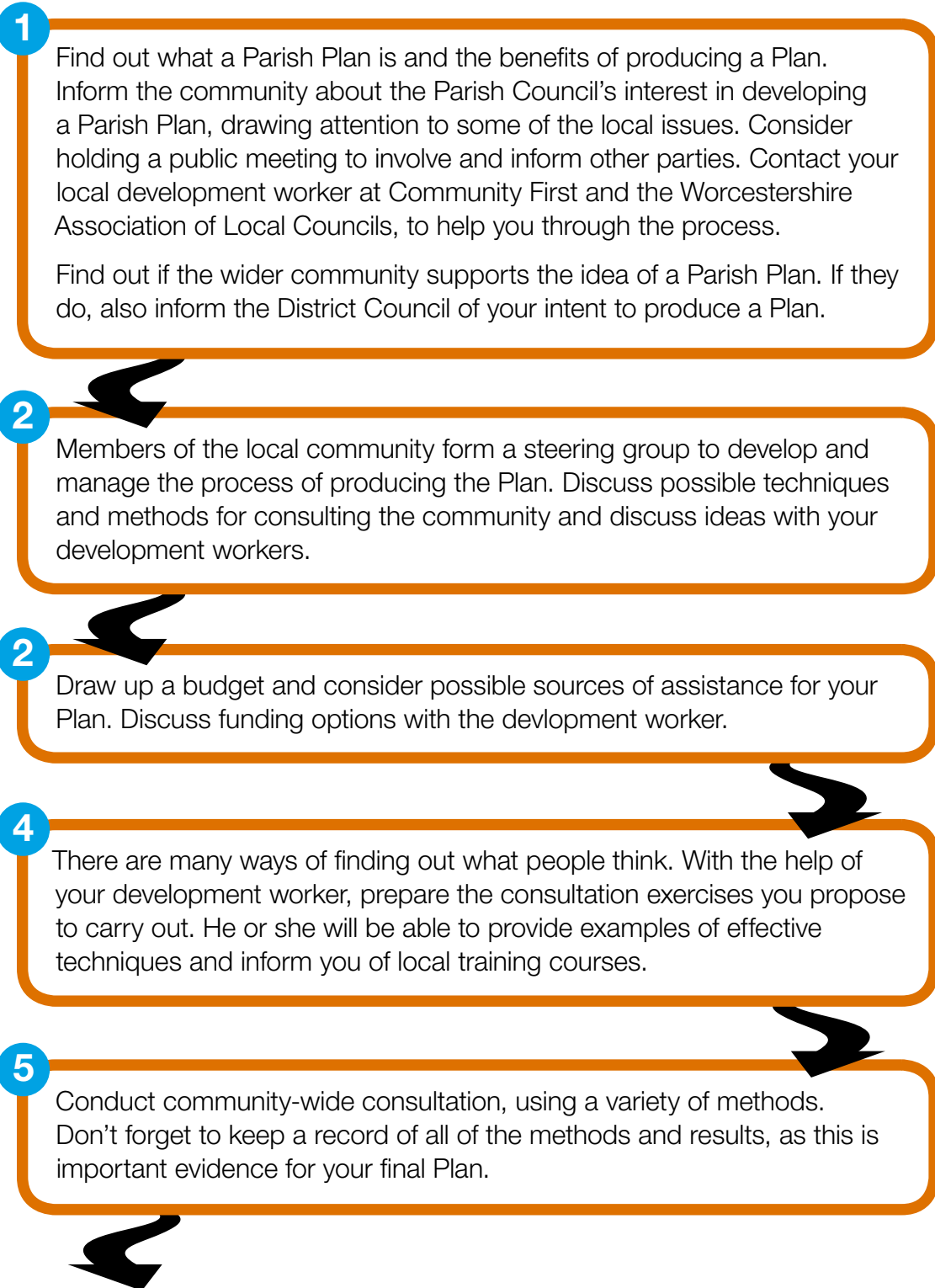
Malvern Hills District Council

Worcester City Council

Evesham Volunteer Bureau

For further information contact Community First on 01684 573334.

The Parish Plan Process



1:3 The Parish Plan Process

6 Input and analyse the information collected from the consultation process. Make sure a wide cross-section of the community has been involved. If there are gaps, alternative techniques may need to be used. Once this stage is completed you can begin to produce a draft Plan. Analysis is a crucial part of the Action Plan - ask the development worker for support where necessary.

7 Feed back the draft results to the community, local groups and other organisations who have been involved in the process. Talk to local and county-wide service providers to see who you can work with to progress the issues and projects highlighted in the consultation exercises. Find out which projects are realistic and how they can be progressed, and with whom they can be progressed for inclusion in the Action Plan. Send copies to the Worcestershire Parish Plans Liaison Group.

8 Re-draft the Plan, including all the feedback from the community and Service Providers. Include a clear and comprehensive Action Plan. The end result is the full final Parish Plan.

9 Send out copies of the Plan or a summary of the Plan to the whole community and to local Service Providers, Community First and any others who may be interested.

10 Develop and implement the Action Plan. This may require formalisation of the Steering Group to take projects forward and source funding. Smaller working groups may be formed to look at specific topic areas or projects. The Parish Council may monitor the projects implemented to ensure they are the projects identified by the Action Plan.

11 Review your Plan annually. Consider new opportunities for addressing unresolved issues.

Checklist for your Parish Plan

Contents

It is helpful to have a contents page for your Plan with separate sections for different topics; for example: environment, transport and housing.

Glossary of Terms

Consider providing a definition of terms used in the document if you are using unusual terms such as Local Development Plan, Planning Guidance, etc.

Methodology

Record all techniques and consultation activities that take place, including any promotion and publicity.

Facts and Figures

Make sure that records are kept to show numbers of people involved. For example, what were the attendance figures for any open or public meetings? What were the age, gender, and numbers of attendees at any events that took place, such as a Planning for Real[®] event? How widely was the event publicised?

Action Plan

Make sure there is a clear and separate Action Plan providing details of what the actions are, who is going to help achieve them, when they will be done, etc.

Service Providers

To get the most out of the plan, it is essential that Service Providers are engaged throughout the Plan process, not just at the end. It is therefore useful to record what contact has been made with Service Providers and the outcomes produced.



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Illustrations and Photographs

These can bring your report to life and show evidence of your consultation activities.

Reference to relevant Policies and Strategies

Reference to relevant local policies and strategies may help to maximise the outcome of your Plan, with regards to Local Service Providers or funders.

Appendices

It may be useful to have appendices to the Main Plan and Action Plan. These can contain full results that you have summarised in the main report - such as full questionnaire results, all the ideas from a Planning for Real® event.

Setting up a Steering Group

- Agree what is to be done and in what order.
- Decide on the different roles needed on the Steering Group.
- Record the initial core membership of the group, making sure that the key roles are filled (see the following Steering Group Model Constitution).
- Draw up a detailed budget.
- Apply for funding.
- Ensure meetings of the group are well publicised, open to the public and welcome new members at any stage.

While awaiting decisions on funding, the lead person for each topic group can start making appropriate contacts, researching relevant information and involving other interested people. Meanwhile, the Steering Group can plan the consultation activities.

Remember that if you are applying for a grant for your Parish Plan, do not spend money BEFORE you receive an offer letter - you will not be able to claim money back for this activity.



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Steering Group Tasks

These may include:

- Deciding objectives, and agreeing a timescale and budget.
- Deciding on communication methods between members of the group.
- Agreeing how decisions will be made in the group.
- Setting up sub-groups to focus on particular themes that arise through the consultation process.
- Securing appropriate funding and resources for the project, managing funds and reporting back to funders as agreed.
- Acting as a point of contact and information for the people of the parish.
- Encouraging the widest possible involvement by all parts of the community.
- Making contact with local council officers and other specialists (for example: youth workers, Rights of Way officers, Planning Department) and keeping in regular contact with them.
- Obtaining advice and information about relevant matters and policies.
- Prioritising actions, using the findings from the consultation process and information from other sources.
- Ensuring that the Parish Plan is formally adopted by the Parish Council.
- Publicising and launching the Plan.
- Considering what happens once the Plan has been launched (implementation).

Steering Group Model Constitution

Here is an example of a constitution you could use, which can be adapted to meet local circumstances.

Name

The name of the organisation shall be the (name) Parish Plan Steering Committee, hereafter referred to as the committee.

Purpose

The purpose of the committee shall be to work in partnership with the Parish Council to carry out the following tasks:

- Investigate and identify support for the Parish Plan.
- Identify sources of funding.
- Take responsibility for planning and budgeting and monitoring expenditure on the Plan and report back to the Parish Council on these matters.
- Liaise with relevant authorities and organisations to make the Plan as effective as possible.
- Identify ways of involving the whole community and gather the views and opinions of as many groups and organisations in the community as possible.
- Determine the types of survey and information gathering to be used.
- Be responsible for the analysis of the survey, the production and distribution of the final report.
- Identify priorities and timescale for local action in the Action Plan, including the lead organisations and potential sources of project funding.
- Report back to the Parish Council on progress, issues arising and outcomes from the exercise.



Membership

- The committee will include up to 15 members.
- No more than three of these members will be members of the Parish Council
- The committee may co-opt additional members at its discretion, provided the total number of co-opted members does not exceed the number of elected members.
- A person shall cease to be a member of the committee having notified the chair or secretary in writing of his or her wish to resign.

Officers

At the first meeting the committee will elect a chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer, a publicity officer and a volunteer co-ordinator. All other committee members should have a specific role, to be agreed by the committee.

Meetings

- The committee shall meet every two months as a minimum, or as required.
- At least five clear days notice of meetings shall be given to members by written notices left at, or sent by post to, the members' last known address. All notices of committee meetings must detail the matters to be discussed.
- Every matter shall be determined by a majority of votes of the committee members present and voting. In the case of equality of votes, the chair of the meeting shall have a casting vote.
- The committee may decide the quorum necessary to transact business – with a minimum of five members.
- The secretary shall keep a record of meetings in a minute book, and circulate minutes to members of the committee not more than 14 days after each meeting.

Working groups

- The committee may appoint such working groups as it considers necessary to carry out the functions specified by the committee. Each working group should have a nominated chair, but this person does not have to become a member of the steering committee.

- Working groups do not have the power to authorise expenditure on behalf of the committee.
- Working groups will be bound by the terms of reference set out for them by the steering group.

Finance

- The treasurer shall keep a clear record of expenditure, where necessary, supported by receipted invoices.
- Members of the community who are involved as volunteers with any of the working groups may claim back any expenditure that was necessarily incurred during the process of producing the Parish Plan. This could include postage and stationery, telephone calls, travel cost, childcare costs.
- The treasurer will draw up and agree with the committee procedures for volunteers who wish to claim expenses and the rates they may claim.
- The treasurer will report back to the committee and the Parish Council on planned and actual expenditure for the project, and liaise with the Parish Clerk to set up a petty cash system and enable cash withdrawals and payment of invoices to be made as required.

At the first meeting the committee will elect a chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer, a publicity officer and a volunteer co-ordinator.

Changes to the constitution

- This constitution may be altered and additional clauses may be added with the consent of two-thirds of the committee present.

Dissolution of the committee

- Upon dissolution of the committee any remaining funds shall be disposed of by the committee, in accordance with the decisions reached at an Extraordinary Meeting, open to the public, in the area of benefit, called for that purpose. No individual member of the committee shall benefit from the dispersal.

The return of any unused funding given as grants to the committee may need to be considered if this was part of the condition of the grant.

Planning an Event

What is the purpose of the event and what do you intend to achieve from it? This will affect both the type and structure of your event – for example, do you want something formal or more participative?

When will you hold your event? What time of day is most suitable? Will people have time to get home from work? Are there likely to be childcare issues? Consider the time of year. Will it be cold and dark? Are key people involved in other activities such as harvesting? Are people away on school holidays or are other local events happening?

Where are you going to hold your event? Is it neutral? Some people may be put off attending something held in a church or at the local school. Check that the venue you want is available. Does it have adequate parking? Is it within easy travelling distance? How much will it cost? Other things that should be considered when booking a venue are: does the building have wheelchair access, an induction loop, heating, catering facilities and good acoustics? If you are planning on doing group work, you may require more than one room.

Who are you trying to attract to your event? Different groups of people react differently to different types of events (e.g. old people/young people at different times of the day). Do you want representatives or speakers from various organisations, such as the local authority, police, etc? If so, you will need to give them at least seven weeks notice and give them a clear brief of what it is you are expecting from them on the day.

Who will do what at your event? Which committee members will be responsible for publicity, refreshments, equipment, setting up the venue, etc?



How can you involve as many diverse groups of people as possible? You may need to consider running several different events to make sure that you get everybody's views. Without publicising your event no one will know that it's happening. You need to ensure that your material is eye catching and contains all the relevant information, for example: time, date, venue, reason for the event and who organising it. You also need to consider how you will distribute this information, e.g. leaflets through residents' doors (this will require a number of willing volunteers). Another method is putting an article in the local newsletter or parish magazine, but give at least six weeks notice to ensure there is time to publish your article. Most of these publications are monthly, but check deadline dates. Posters can be pinned to local notice boards, but do not rely on this method alone, as people passing notice boards in cars cannot read them!

Conflict resolution

Emotions may run high at any public event. If you know of any particular people, or issues, that may cause a problem, ensure you have an appropriate strategy in place to manage the situation.

Other considerations

Will you need any help in organising the event? How long is the event going to take? Will you need to have a chairperson to oversee the event and make sure attendees adhere to the planned agenda? Will you need to establish some ground rules from the outset? How much is the event going to cost?

Remember it is vital that all actions decided at the meeting are agreed and noted. Be clear about what will happen next, when and by whom. It is important to keep your community updated on progress and provide people with the opportunity to join in at any time.



Principles of Involving Communities

Involving your community is fundamental to your Parish Plan. The scope of this involvement will affect the content of the Plan and help it meet the needs of the many diverse groups that are involved in determining its aims.

All communities are different. The members of a community have different interests, different ideas and different aspirations... so how can the needs of your own community be assessed? Different techniques can be used to involve communities in identifying problems and opportunities, and in taking action for change. Different techniques are employed to suit a range of different groups. There are, however, some general guidelines that underpin any techniques you may wish to use.

What is a Community?

This may seem obvious but is, nevertheless, probably a useful place to start. A community can be defined by its geographical location e.g. a village or an area of a city. A community could be a 'community of interest' e.g. a sports club or a parent and toddler group. A community can be a group of people with similar lifestyles. There are many different types of community and it is useful to bear this in mind when working with, or trying to engage, communities.

For this reason, different approaches to involving all the disparate groups within your wider community may need to be employed. The more people who contribute to your Parish Plan, the better. Community involvement techniques are there to increase opportunities for people to get involved and to encourage participation by people who may not usually be involved.

Community views are often seen as a sort of soup, as if the diverse individuals in a community had fallen into a melting pot and somehow lost their individual flavours. The reality is somewhat closer to a salad. Each ingredient retains its own identity within the whole and, because of this, it can be difficult to blend these voices into one with which the community can speak. However, if a community voice can be found then the rewards can be great. The best people to identify a community's needs are the community itself. The resulting projects, which come from within the community, are much more likely to succeed than those which are determined from outside.

Key Principles for Community Involvement

- **Make it inclusive.**
Find ways to involve everybody - different ways if necessary.
- **Encourage a sense of ownership of the process.**
Remember, the future well-being of local communities lies in the hands of the communities themselves.
- **The social, economic, environmental and spiritual needs of a community are interwoven.**
- **Use appropriate techniques for each group you are trying to involve.**
Choose a technique that is most suited to the group you are trying to involve. For example, if you want to involve young children and adults and get their views on a variety of subjects. A Planning for Real® event may be better than a detailed survey. Young people may be more attracted to role playing than attending a public meeting.
- **Use the most appropriate technique to get the type of information you require.**
Whether you want qualitative or quantitative information will influence the type of technique or event you use. Some are good for obtaining statistical information (surveys), while others are good at attracting large numbers of people (open days, Planning for Real®).
- **Target certain groups and get their views.**
If you want information or involvement from a particular group e.g. young people, or elderly people, you may have to go to them instead of them coming to an event.
- **Make events easy to attend.**
Everyone's spare time is valuable. People may be put off being involved if an event is hard to get to. Childcare can also be a problem. Either organise events around these issues, or offer childcare facilities or activities.
- **Remember: the process is as important as the end result**
Find non-threatening ways of letting people contribute. Through the process of involvement, people may learn new skills, increase in confidence, build up new social networks and gain in many other ways. These outcomes should not be overlooked in the quest to obtain results.
- **Take time – there are no quick fixes.**
Develop skills, knowledge and confidence. Mighty oaks from little acorns grow!

How to choose the right technique

- Be clear about objectives, possibilities and outcomes at the beginning.
- Set aims and priorities – what are you trying to achieve by involving people?
- What level of participation do you want?
- What type of information do you want – quantitative or qualitative?
- Be realistic about what you can achieve.
- Resources: what do you need and what is available?
- Who is your client group?
- Who will carry out the consultation?
- When will you have enough time for the chosen method?
- How will you get everyone involved and will they benefit?
- Learn from others – there is lots of experience of this type of work across the county.
- What happens next? Be clear about this at the outset.
- A good way of planning how to progress your Plan is to timetable when events are taking place.

You should state how long you wish to take to complete your plan. Eighteen months to two years is generally accepted as a good timeframe to work towards. Give time limits to particular stages of the plan For example, months 0-3: open public meetings, forming steering groups and raising awareness; months 4-14: community-wide consultation events; months 13-18: creating your Plan.

Techniques for Consulting and Involving your Community

Village or Community Appraisal

A Village Appraisal is a survey of the community, by the community, and for the community. An Action Plan is produced with the findings of this survey to help make recommendations for the future of the community.

What does it involve?

The community carries out a comprehensive survey. The questionnaire will be designed by the initial steering group and in consultation with the relevant agencies e.g. planning, transport.

Information gathered from the survey will be used to:

- Celebrate local distinctiveness of the community.
- Put together community Action Plans which may influence the way the village or parish can move forward.
- Assist with setting priorities and help to target limited resources.

Village Appraisals have helped establish transport schemes, low-cost housing schemes and newsletters, to mention just a few initiatives.

Benefits of the Village Appraisal as a consultation method

- Factual record of local views.
- Reach people who are too busy or unable to get out to a public event.
- Will be designed specifically to ask questions directly related to the current issues in the community.
- Anonymous, therefore people can express views they may not otherwise express.

Village Appraisals have helped establish transport schemes, low-cost housing schemes and newsletters, to mention just a few initiatives.

Planning for Real®

Planning for Real® is an eye catching, hands-on method which people use to assess what needs to be done to improve their neighbourhood.

What does it involve?

A large 3D model of the community is made by the community themselves. This can either be done by local groups (youth groups, community groups, the Steering Group or by children at the local school, for instance). This model is then used at open meetings to suit the needs of the local people.

Participants place suggestions for the community on cards which are then placed at appropriate places on the model. Local service providers can be invited along to these events to talk about possible plans they may have committed themselves to which may impact on the Parish Plan. After this initial consultation an Action Plan is produced which can then be taken forward by the community with the aid of the service providers.

Planning for Real® can be used in many ways, from strategic planning, designing playcare facilities, and analysing safety issues through to developing a Local Agenda 21 Strategy.

Benefits of Planning for Real® as a consultation method

- Visual technique - allows participants to show or visually demonstrate their needs.
- Anonymous - ideas do not get attached to personalities.
- 3D pictorial technique which avoids language and articulation difficulties and gives the opportunity for all ages to have a say, including people who would not normally attend public meetings.
- More fun than a public meeting.
- Compromise and consensus are made easier as the focus is on the model and what it represents, and not on personalities or individuals.
- All ages can contribute to the process thereby getting “ownership”.
- Large numbers of people can be involved.
- People from different backgrounds can be involved.
- Has a social aspect to it and encourages social interaction.

Community Visioning

People think about their ideal vision for their community, how they would like it to be now and in the future, share these visions with others, create shared visions and make an Action Plan to realise these.

What does it involve?

People come together to talk generally about their hopes, fears and concerns for their area and to celebrate the good things about where they live. An independent “facilitator” steers the meetings and makes sure that all those who take part have an opportunity to have their say. The meeting begins by asking open questions, such as: “What would make this area a better place to live? What are the problems? What are its opportunities?” People are asked to write down their thoughts about their community and then stick them onto a giant wall map of “topics”. These ideas are grouped together into rough topic groups; for example, transport/access/traffic could all be linked together. People are then given sticky dots and asked to prioritise the areas that are most important for them, to form the basis for further discussions. People then divide up to form topic groups to discuss the subjects identified from the first stage. These topic groups then relate back to the wider group with positive ideas for action - both by the community and with the help of external agencies. Action Plans are then drawn up.

Successful events can promote active citizenship and make people aware of the issues that affect everyone.

Benefits of Community Visioning

- The agenda is not pre-set but determined at the event.
- A very flexible process - can be adapted to suit different groups.
- Can be carried out in a few hours or over a few days - if plenty of people are involved, a consensus view from the community can result.
- Successful events can promote active citizenship and make people aware of the issues that affect everyone and how they interrelate.
- All age groups can take part.

Facilitated Discussions and Focus Groups

Group discussions and participative exercises are led by a facilitator. They are designed to focus on a particular subject and extract more detailed qualitative information. Participants are invited or selected from a cross-section of the community to represent a range of viewpoints.

What do they involve?

These events are highly organised and structured. Questions or topics are planned beforehand with participants given the opportunity to discuss in detail the relevant topics in detail. The facilitator manages discussions and records the content.

Benefits of Focus Groups

- Allow any topic to be discussed in depth, exploring different sides of arguments.
- Targeted participants can ensure a range of views are represented.

Other Consultation Techniques

Drama as a tool for community involvement

Participatory theatre uses physical movement and creativity to explore people's own experiences. It helps to engage people in a participatory way, exploring the blocks that frustrate and inhibit action, and creating a common vision. Used widely in developing countries, this technique works well with people who are alienated by more formal or verbal participation methods.

Future Search

A highly structured, participative event that involves a large group of community members. Future Search includes exercises to review the past, explore the present, create ideal future scenarios shared visions and create an Action Plan.

Citizens' Juries

Provides a structured way of involving citizens in the decision-making process.

People are chosen to be representative of the community, e.g. mix of employed/unemployed, appropriate mix of ethnicity, etc. There is no self-selection. Topics should be substantial enough to justify several days' attention. A debate takes place and the "jury" hears representations from "witnesses" who give different sides of a particular "argument". Witnesses may include council officers and members of the public with specific concerns and knowledge. Independent moderators help the jury run smoothly. Conclusions are drawn up in the form of a report to the commissioning body.

Community Indicators

A tool for measuring and drawing attention to important issues and identifying local trends that are important to the community, to find out whether things are getting better or worse. It is a six-stage process that uses questionnaires, interviews and workshops to get people involved and find common issues. It then identifies indicators for each issue, which are, in turn, translated into understandable indicators for the community.

Imagine!

Understands and appreciates the best of the past as a basis for imagining what might be, and then creating it. Based on "appreciative enquiry", this technique consists of three stages. Questions are asked during interviews with community members and developed into "stories" about what worked in the past. The outcome of this leads to a set of "provocative propositions" that challenge the notion of what is possible. Each proposition describes an ideal future as if it were already happening. From this, partnerships are formed to take these actions forward.

Participatory Appraisal

A method that creates a cycle of gathering data, reflection and learning, and action. Participants move through different stages looking at their perceptions of the current situation; identifying barriers or gaps for improvement and proposing solutions for change. Methods used are highly visual, e.g. brainstorming, diagrams, timelines, mapping.



When thinking about how to consult with communities, be brave, try something new!.

Parish Maps

Parish Maps provide a way of celebrating the ordinary and everyday features - landmarks, dialect, people and special events – which make a Parish or community unique and special to the people who live there. They can take many forms. Parish Maps have been knitted, embroidered or sewn, painted, modelled, written, acted and sung! The finished maps serve as a reminder of all that is special in that space and the creative process offers a sense of community and belonging as well as encouraging people to take action in shaping the future of their community.

Place-Check

This is a simple participative technique that can be used with people of all ages. Its focus is on the area in which the community lives. It seeks to raise awareness and identify action for change around the local environment. It asks three main questions: “What do you like about the area? What do you dislike about the area? What improvements could be made?” It is a way for people to engage in their “place” or environment in a different way and to make suggestions for change. These ideas then form the basis of an Action Plan that can be worked upon by the group (with the help of outside agencies where necessary).

Using surveys in Parish Plans

When thinking about how to consult with communities, a common response is “Let’s do a survey.” This is understandable as a survey is one of the easiest, quickest and most statistically reliable methods of gauging community opinion.

However, surveys are not always the right method. Certain groups – young people, people with low literacy levels, busy people – tend not to complete them. A survey might be best used alongside other methods that involve all sections of the community (see section on Techniques for Consulting and Involving your Community).

And surveys are not as easy as some might think. There are many issues to be considered when planning and undertaking survey research:

- You need to be clear that a survey is the right approach to use.
- You need to consider whether you and your group have the skills and knowledge to carry out a survey.

Remember, much of the success of your Parish Plan depends on the quality of the community involvement you undertake.

Types of Questionnaire

There are several different types of questionnaire:

Postal/Self completion

These are cheap, give time for respondents to think about their answers, and are not affected by what we call ‘interviewer effects’, where people say what they think the interviewer wants them to say! However, this type of survey requires a certain level of understanding to complete; you cannot control who responds; and it is hard to ask open ended questions, such as “what do you think about your local post office?”

Face to face

These tend to have higher response rates. You can target certain groups and ensure better coverage of your community. Surveys can be longer and more

detailed and you can use more open-ended questions. However, face-to-face surveys are more costly; they tend to take more time; some people will view your questions as prying; interviewing is a skill in itself and there is a danger of “interviewer effects”.

You may wish to talk to your development worker to decide on which option you take.

Tips for Designing a Questionnaire

- Keep the questionnaire as short as possible and use plain language.
- Start with an introductory section explaining the purpose of the survey, how to respond, deadline etc. OR include a covering letter in the mailout.
- Make sure the instructions for asking and answering each question are clear.
- Don't use leading questions.
- Don't include unnecessary questions.
- Make sure questions are clear and unambiguous.
- Don't combine two questions in one.
- Ensure that it is easy to complete the form.
- Begin with general questions; then move on to specific items. Place more important questions in the first part of the form.
- Include questions to check that the respondents are representative of all the people whose views you want to know BUT don't include questions that can lead to individual identity.
- Include a space for respondents to raise their own issues.
- Make the form attractive in appearance.
- Choose the question type carefully: yes / no, multiple choice, single choice, free text, numerical response.
- Always allow an “other, please state” option.
- If you ask for personal data, e.g. age, gender – keep it to the minimum necessary to interpret the results.

Report Writing Tips

Writing your Parish Plan

Report writing is like telling a story. It needs a beginning, a middle and an end. Reports do not have to be technical or be undertaken by experts, they just need to describe why and how an activity was undertaken, the findings that emerge and what actions are recommended as a result of the findings.

Before commencing writing a report, it is recommended that you draft out a logical structure with main headings and sub-headings, so you are clear how the report will flow. Time spent on this at the outset will save time in the long run and will help focus thoughts.

Report structure:

Foreword

The Foreword often forms a personal note from the author and can be used to thank all those that have assisted in the preparation of the report.

Contents page

The contents page will list all sections of the report with corresponding page numbers.

Executive summary

If the report is long, an executive summary is helpful. It should be no longer than one side of A4. It should explain the purpose of the report, the methodology and the main recommendations.

Introduction

This should explain the purpose of the report, why the exercise is being undertaken and, very briefly, the areas that the report will cover.

Aims and Objectives

It is useful at the outset to establish what the report wants to achieve. Aims provide a general direction for the report, explaining what the report is trying to achieve, under which a set of more specific objectives should be provided explaining how these aims are to be met. For example, an aim could be to undertake the preparation of a Parish Plan and an objective could be to assess local needs.

Sometimes groups choose to include a vision of how they see their community evolving.



The Middle

The middle section of a report should form the main bulk of the document and should be divided into sub-sections. This part needs to explain how the exercise was undertaken, with a summary of the findings and recommendations that have emerged. This section needs to be concise and to the point. The report's findings should justify the recommendations.

Action Plan

The recommendations of the report need to be placed into an Action Plan which has a realistic timetable attached. Volunteers from the community need to be responsible for progressing individual actions to ensure projects are rolled forward. This Action Plan needs to be regularly updated and made available to the local community so they are kept informed.

Conclusion

This should summarise and make clear the recommendations that are justified in the main part of the report and link back into the introduction and purpose of the report - so you have gone full circle.

Appendices

To keep the report as concise as possible, make use of appendices to store background information. For example, the full results of an event could be appended, with a summary of the event results being included in the main body of the report.

Glossary

If any technical terms have been used within your report it is useful to include a glossary which will provide clear definitions of these terms.

Helpful Tips

- Your report needs to be eye-catching and interesting. This can be achieved through a layout that incorporates a good balance of text, drawings and photographs. Photographs and drawings should be used to support points being put forward in the text.
- The language of the report needs to be clear and simple to avoid any confusion. Consideration needs to be given to the font type. It needs to be attractive and large enough to be easily read. Paragraph numbers should be included to assist in the use and referencing of the document.
- After writing the report, make sure it is a "living" document, i.e. well circulated and publicised. It has not been written to lie on a shelf gathering dust!
- It is important to regularly update and monitor the report to ensure it remains alive and relevant to the aspirations of the community.

Action Planning

After the consultation, the Action Plan is a very significant and important part of the plan. Simply put, it is a record of what needs to be done, who is going to do it and when. Having the Action Plan as a living document will ensure that the Parish Plan does not sit on a shelf somewhere gathering dust – project completed. It is important that it is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-framed. Below are some tips for writing the Action Plan and a template (overleaf).

Preparing your Action Plan

Some tips on preparing an Action Plan:

- Keep it simple - the simpler it is, the easier it will be for people to work from.
- Keep it separate. There is no reason why you shouldn't refer to what you plan to do throughout your Parish Plan, but for future ease of use for yourselves, your parishioners and for service providers, it is strongly recommended that you create a separate section which draws together all of your intended actions.
- Arrange the actions into themes, such as environment, crime, health.
- Set clear timescales for each action.
- State who is responsible for delivering each action
- Be clear about what you can achieve as there may be barriers. For instance, is there funding available to support the action identified?
- Be ambitious - but don't go over the top. If you put in some simpler actions these can be achieved quite quickly and progress can be made while working towards tackling the bigger issues.
- If there are a lot of actions in the plan, they will need to be prioritised.
- Include details of how you will monitor and review progress.

Action Plan template (See page 38)

There is no one way to write an Action Plan and the format may vary. Below is a guide to the kind of headings to include in your Action Plan to ensure it is as clear and easy to follow as possible.

The Required Outcome

This is a brief description of what you want to achieve. It is important to log these wants even if you don't have a plan of action to achieve them at this point in time. The reality is that circumstances change: new grants may become available; European, national, regional and local government priorities may change; innovative solutions to your problem may be thought up by other groups, community development workers or Service Providers. An example of how to log an outcome without an action is shown in the attached Action Plan Template.

The Action

What is the action that has been identified by the community through the community consultation? An example of how to log an outcome with an action is shown in the attached Action Plan Template.

Who will do it?

Will it be done by members of the community, the Parish Council, community members with the help of voluntary sector or a combination of these? Will a separate person be responsible for co-ordinating the activity?

Timescales

Is it a timed one-off action that can be booked in February (for example) or an ongoing issue, e.g. every Tuesday starting in March? When is the action likely to be completed?



Cost

What is the cost of this project or piece of work? Keep a note of finance and other resource implications.

Funding Sources

Grants available. Names of funders and funding deadlines. Fundraising targets.

Agencies who can assist with funding.

Who will apply for funding?

Name people or lead contact to co-ordinate funding and fundraising activity.

Who will monitor and evaluate progress?

Will this be done by group as a whole or by the Parish Council? How will the actions be evaluated and how often will the action be revisited for evaluation (quarterly?).

Priority

Is the action a high, medium or low priority? The wider community can be involved in the prioritisation process, once the plan is completed. It can be a way of re-engaging the community after the initial consultation has taken place and the Plan is in draft form.



Required outcome	The Action	Who will do it	Partners/ Dependencies	Time-scales	Cost	Funding Source/s	Who will apply for funding	Who will monitor/ evaluate progress	Priority (H,M or L)
e.g. Verges, hedgerows and ditches will be kept in good order. The state of road surfaces will be reported to the Parish council on an annual basis.	Employ a Lengthsman to keep the parish attractive and tidy.	Parish Council	District Council	Jan. 2007	£1,600 per year for 1st 3 years, £1,200 per year thereafter.	District Council	John Smith	Parish Council	H
e.g. Provide a recycling service or facility within the parish to reduce waste and environmental impact.	No current service or facility identified, but review annually.	Parish Council	District Council	Annual Review	Not currently known.	Not currently known.	N/A	Parish Council	M

Implementing your Parish Plan

Now your Plan is complete your community has a plan for the future. The actions in the Plan will improve the quality of life for your parish in the way the Parish Community has said it wanted. The actions outlined in the Plan will vary very much from parish to parish.

Who is responsible for taking forward the actions outlined in the Plan?

When the Plan is completed, it goes to the Parish Council for approval or adoption. This does not mean that the Parish Council has to take forward all the actions outlined in the Plan. There will be some actions to be implemented by other people in the parish: local groups may be approached to take forward certain actions; service providers (both statutory and voluntary sector) may assist in the implementation of certain actions.

The Parish Council can monitor these actions through the Action Plan and make recommendations on how to implement them.

What support is available to assist us in taking forward these actions?

As outlined above, support could be provided from the Parish Council to help implement the actions outlined in your Parish Plan. In addition, support can also be provided through your local Development Workers (for details see Contacts list). Service providers will also assist in the progression of certain actions.

Check on progress at your Annual Parish Council Meeting.

Working with service providers

Service providers does not just refer to statutory bodies such as the County and District Council. Other statutory and voluntary organisations may also be able to assist or work with parishes to implement actions from the Parish Plans. These may include: the Primary Care Trust, the Police, and voluntary organisations such as Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Evesham Voluntary Bureau, or Community First, for example.

It is recommended that you speak with as many people from as many organisations as you can when developing your Plan. These organisations will then be aware of what you may want to do from the outset and can assist with developing the Plan and will know exactly what assistance you will require when it comes to implementing the actions in your Plan.

It may also be useful to keep a log of phone calls, emails and letters including the dates, who you talked to and who said what. This will help with tracking responses.

Have you identified priority areas and actions?

Once your plan is completed and you have an Action Plan, actions should be highlighted in terms of priority for the parish. Some actions will be long-term, such as housing and planning issues that may be a priority for action but will take some time to deliver e.g. affordable housing.

Other actions can be achieved relatively quickly, e.g. improvements to a footpath or a “rubbish ‘pick”.

It is useful to include some short-term actions as top priority items. Your parish will then quickly notice the benefit of having a Parish Plan.

In some instances, you may have uncovered an issue or concern for which you haven't been able to identify a suitable solution. It is important to log this in your Action Plan. It can then be noted by community development workers or a service provider, who might have a solution that you have not thought of.



Parish Plans and the Development Planning Process

Introduction

A new development planning system was introduced by the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act. It is important that parish councils and parish plans are fully geared up to influence the new style development plans.

The Development Plan System

The new system has two levels of planning: regional (in our case the West Midlands) and local (based on district councils in Worcestershire and Herefordshire). Structure Plans at County Council level have been abolished.

At local level, the Herefordshire and Worcestershire planning authorities are now completing the review of their development plans under the old system. At the same time, a Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands is being reviewed in stages. This will provide strategic policies and specific targets (notably housing numbers and employment land areas) on which Herefordshire and the Worcestershire districts will base their new style development plans.

There are two main types of local-level Development Plan Documents (DPDs):

- Core Strategy DPDs will contain the council's most important policies.
- Site specific DPDs will allocate land for different purposes.

The two types of plan may be combined.

Where needed, more detailed Area Action Plans will be produced. These will focus on specific areas where a high degree of change needs detailed management (e.g. a town centre).

The Worcestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council will produce DPDs for minerals and waste as well as giving strategic planning advice to the regional planning body (the West Midlands Regional Assembly).

Planning authorities now also have the option of producing Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). They are essentially supporting planning documents providing more detailed Guidance in support of DPDs. They cannot be used to allocate land. SPDs may take the form of design guides, area development briefs or master plans for specific developments. Unlike the former Supplementary Planning Guidance that they replace, SPDs are statutory documents and, therefore, carry greater weight.

Under the new system, all local planning authorities have to produce three other documents for Government Office approval:

- A Local Development Scheme – this is essentially their project plan which sets out what development plans they intend to produce and over a three-year timescale.
- A Statement of Community Involvement – how the council will consult with the community and other organisations on the preparation of its development plans.
- An Annual Monitoring Report – an end of year report on progress and intentions for the forthcoming year.

Characteristics of the New System

The new development planning system has the following important characteristics:

- It is statutory at both regional and local level – policies and site allocations carry substantial legal significance. Councils cannot ignore or alter them lightly.
- It is “top down” – all types of local development plan must conform to Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which is published by Government Office as an expression of the Government’s own planning policies.
- It is “spatial” – old style plans could only deal with land use and transportation matters. The new plans can address anything that influences the nature of places and how they function; e.g. economic development policies and Environment Agency river catchment plans.
- It is “front loaded” – there is more opportunity for people to influence the preparation of plans in their early stages.

Opportunities for Parish Involvement

Government Office for the West Midlands have recently confirmed the importance of Parish Plans to the new development planning system described above. This system lays great emphasis on “front loading” – that is, wide consultation at the early, informal stages of plan preparation. Parish Plans may be considered as part of the evidence base developed by the local planning authority and/or the focus of community involvement in the preparation of a particular development plan document.

In the later and more formal stages of development plan preparation, parish plans will also be significant. They will enable responses to be made to formal consultations on the issues and options and preferred options stages that demonstrably carry the weight of the local community behind them. They will not just be ad hoc responses made under pressure of time to meet the consultation deadlines. Later on still, when the development plan reaches the Public Examination stage, written submissions to the appointed inspector will be much easier to prepare because the work will already have been largely done. (Parish Plans that are held electronically will enable text to be directly “cut and pasted” into a proof of evidence).

Under the new arrangements, the appointed planning inspector will use a Pre-Examination Meeting to confirm:

- those who wish to exercise their right to attend a public examination and be heard
- how their evidence will be dealt with.

Parish Councils will be entitled to attend these meetings. They may find, as a result, the opportunity to combine their case with others who wish to express similar views. In such circumstances, it would be appropriate for the Parish Council, as the local body with a democratic mandate, reinforced by the evidence of local opinion in a Parish Plan, to take the lead.

The Public Examination will normally take the form of a “round table” and/or informal sessions and will be very different from the formal adversarial approach of the former public local inquiries for local and unitary plans under the old system. This has two implications for parish councils. If they can demonstrate that they are speaking from authority on the basis of an up-to-date Parish Plan, it is much more likely they will receive an invitation to participate in appropriate sessions and articulate the views of the wider community for the inspector’s benefit. They will, in these circumstances, be a more legitimate choice than, say, a residents’ action group or single interest body, such as a green belt protection society.

Secondly, Parish Councils will find the atmosphere of a Public Examination using round table and/or informal sessions, much less intimidating. They will therefore, be in a better position to articulate the views of their community with confidence and clarity.

In some cases, it may be appropriate for a Parish Plan to become part of the Local Development Framework. This can happen if the appropriate local planning authority agrees from the outset to “adopt” the parish plan as its own and give it the status of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This cannot be done retrospectively – i.e., after the Parish Plan has been prepared and approved by the parish council.

The SPD preparation requirements are substantial and include four important stages:

- Inclusion in the local authority’s Local Development Scheme (the “work programme” of plans to be prepared agreed with Government Office). The inclusion will have to be fully justified in terms of necessity and appropriateness to Government Office’s satisfaction.
- Preparation in accordance with the Development Plans Regulations, including full community involvement.
- In conformity with the Development Plan for the area (both regional and local parts).
- Subjected to formal sustainability scoping and appraisal.

These are clearly onerous requirements and not something that a local planning authority and a parish council should undertake lightly. Indeed, Government Office (in agreeing the content of the IPA’s Local Development Scheme) will want to be assured that, given other plan-making commitments, the councils’ have the resources to deliver such a Supplementary Planning Document to the stated timetable.

Supplementary Planning Documents are not development plans and are not subject to public examination. They must not, therefore, contain land-use allocation proposals nor other proposals with strategic policy implications. Such allocations and proposals should be in Local Development Documents, precisely because they may need to be debated at public examination.

In most cases, following the SPD route will not be appropriate because it will take the ownership of a truly local document away from the sole control of the parish council. By needing to conform in content with the development plan, it will restrict the parish council's ability to express the full range of local priorities and to act as an advocate for local interests as a development plan consultee.

Village Design Statements

The above Guidance on Parish Plans will also apply to Village Design Statements.

Planning Applications

Parish Councils are also statutory consultees for planning applications submitted to their Local Planning Authority. LPAs have a duty to determine planning applications in accordance with development plan policies unless there are very good reasons not to do so. Applicants in their turn, are now expected to undertake pre-submission consultations with the local community and to show, in their subsequent application, how they have taken account of the issues raised. An up-to-date Parish Plan will provide a good basis for responding to those consultations on issues of local concern, both within and outside matters relating to the development plan.

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Produced by Community First on behalf of Worcestershire Partnership,

supported by



DEFRA Rural and Social Community Programme