

FACT SHEET

Parish Plans and Community-led Planning

A previous briefing note looked at how community groups and champions can fund their way around the UK planning system and engage with Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Development Frameworks. This briefing looks at a more local level at Parish plans and other community planning work.

Why have a Parish (or Community) Plan?

In 2000 the Government's 'Rural White Paper' called for the development of Parish Plans. These plans are meant to set out a shared vision for a community over the next 10 - 15 years along with an action plan for achieving this vision. It is envisaged that these would be delivered at a very local – 'parish' – level.

The great majority have been done in rural areas and many are linked to Parish councils. But there is no reason why a Community Plan with an identical structure and purpose cannot be done in an urban area (and more and more are).

A community plan needs to be developed through a structured process with well-planned involvement of local people and organisations. People can work together to identify the issues and problems that face the community, consider and develop solutions, work out whose responsibility it is to tackle these issues and provide the solutions and set out the role of the community itself in delivering the changes that are needed.

This could therefore be a long-term project for a community group (supported by a Champion) that has tackled some immediate issues and want to get involved in longer-term change. A plan may take between 12 and 18 months to complete.

How does a group start a community plan?

The good news is that there is a lot of support and experience to learn from. Around 4000 community plans have been developed across the UK. ACRE, Action for Communities in Rural England, have developed two important resources that are an essential first stop for anyone wanting to develop a plan.

The first is the Parish Plans Tool-kit: (www.acre.org.uk/communityengagement_parishplans_toolkit.html) which is exactly what it says – a detailed guide to doing a Plan.

The second is more general: the Community-led Planning website: (www.acre.org.uk/communityledplanning_index.html) this covers a wider range of activities and may be of more help to those in urban areas (although the Parish Plans site is also very useful).

It will also be important to talk to people who've been through the process. If you live in a rural area your Rural Community Council is the place to start. Some local councils do have a Parish Plan Officer, who will be able to provide long-term support throughout the process. In an urban area contact your local Council for Voluntary Service and find out what they know about community planning and if they can help or point to those who can.

This research will give you enough to have a detailed discussion within your group. If you can invite someone who's been involved in doing a plan, so much the better. It will be important that any group thinking about developing a local plan carefully considers:

- a) the time and effort that will be needed to develop such a plan
- b) the extent to which they may be able to help tackle some of the problems themselves
- c) the ways in which they can develop their links and cooperation with the local council to make sure that their planning work is taken seriously.

If the group decides to go ahead, then the next steps are:

- Make an outline plan and start talking to other groups in the area, and
- Start working within the '9 Step' guide set out in the Community Led Planning website.

The 9 Steps are fairly clear. Each includes actions for the community and work to link with the local council:

1. Getting started
2. Setting up a Steering Group
3. Developing a Project Plan

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4. Community Consultation
5. Prioritising and planning actions
6. Drafting the plan
7. Finalising the plan
8. Implementing the plan
9. Monitoring and review

What's in a Plan?

The answer is broadly simple: whatever the community wants to talk about in terms of creating a better quality of life! The ACRE websites include plenty of examples of completed plans that will give you ideas. The key output of the process is the action plan, which should set out:

- Actions the community can do itself
- Actions that need external support
- Actions where the community will need to influence other plans.

It's important that the group also agrees that those first actions aren't just things the group 'can' do, but things that people in the group 'will' actually do. If not there's a risk that the implementation phase may fail and the work go to waste. It's worth including some 'quick wins' – things that can be done easily and will make a visible difference.

The Plan should also celebrate the community: it may be worth including an introduction that talks about the nature of the community, what else is happening and why and how the plan has been produced.

It may also be useful to see it as a document for local people to use: it may be helpful to include useful phone numbers / emails etc. for key local organisations and other useful contacts (e.g. council phone numbers on issues such as waste and recycling, energy advice or fly-tipping, along with local bus / train information).

Will it make a difference?

A Parish or Community Plan can set out how community action can meet local needs and can help to prioritise resources. It can also be used to influence the policies, decisions and actions of others, especially those involved in the council-wide planning process. Getting this right will be important. A report for Defra in 2007 assessed the linking of parish plans into wider local government systems and suggests that there has often been a failure to develop proper integration. Making contact with the council right at the start: speak to local councillors and to relevant staff. One role for a Champion may be to do some research to find out who the most useful and interested staff are.

Resources

The obvious advice sites are mentioned above. There's plenty of other useful information:

www.pariahplanning.co.uk/background.html is an independent site that has useful information and excellent links

An Introduction to Village Design Statements ([VDS \(Village Design Statement\)](#)): a VDS differs from a parish plan in that it is concerned with the evaluation and planning of the setting and shape of a village within its local environment, and the buildings within it.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) has a wealth of relevant information: start at www.communities.gov.uk/communities/ and look for the sections on sustainable communities, the third sector and anything else that seems relevant.

Much of this work is rooted in rural action. The original Rural White Paper of October 2000 is at [Our Countryside: The Future - A Fair Deal for Rural England](#)

A useful presentation on local planning is available to download from the Royal Town Planning Institute: www.rtpi.org.uk/download/1817/Democratising-Planning-hand-out-.pdf