



Quick Guide to Neighbourhood Planning



Visual Minutes by James Munro & Claire Stringer



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Since April 2012, local communities are able to lead in the future planning of their area through the preparation of neighbourhood development plans. Whereas local authorities have led plan-making in the past, community development plans will be adopted if they receive a 50% 'yes' vote in a public referendum.

This guide gives a concise summary of the process of neighbourhood planning together with suggestions for best practice.

The elements of neighbourhood planning are:

Neighbourhood Development Plans

These are new types of plan, setting out a vision, aims, policies and proposals for the future development of a neighbourhood. If adopted, the neighbourhood plan will be part of the statutory development plan for the area in question.

This means that the local authority and planning inspectors will have to take the plan into account when making planning decisions. This gives the plans more weight than some types of plan, such as parish plans or community plans.

Neighbourhood Development Orders

These allow certain kinds of development to take place as 'permitted development', without the need to apply for planning permission. This can include actual built development, such as new housing (the community right to build).

For both neighbourhood development plans and neighbourhood development orders it is necessary to gain a more than 50% 'yes' vote in a public referendum.

This guide focuses on neighbourhood development plans.

neighbourhood plan and area

Where there is a town or Parish Council, that is the qualifying body for leading a neighbourhood plan. Where there is no parish or town council, a neighbourhood forum of at least 21 people must be formed. This must reflect the “inclusivity, diversity and character of the area” and should include people living in the area, people working in the area and at least one councillor.

A neighbourhood area must be identified. This can be large or small. For example, it could contain a village, town centre, housing estate, employment area or combination of these things. Or it could be based on an administrative boundary such as a local ward. For town or parish councils, the boundary will already be defined.

It is up to the neighbourhood forum, town or parish council how it chooses to undertake the work and whether it commissions other organisations to work on its behalf. The neighbourhood area and neighbourhood forum require the approval of the local planning authority. To gain approval, the following must be submitted to the local authority:

Neighbourhood Area:

- map identifying the area;
- statement explaining the area;
- statement explaining that the body making the area application is a qualifying body under the Localism Act 2011.

Neighbourhood Forum:

- name of the proposed neighbourhood forum;
- written constitution for the neighbourhood forum;
- name of the neighbourhood area and map;
- contact details of at least one member of the neighbourhood forum (to be made public);
- statement, which explains how the proposed neighbourhood forum meets the requirements of the legislation.



scope of neighbourhood development plans

Neighbourhood development plans can include anything that other development plan documents deal with. Essentially, they are about the use and development of land and can deal with a range of social, economic and environmental issues.

Plans may be comprehensive, dealing with a wide range of issues, or they may be focused on a limited range of issues.

Neighbourhood development plans must conform to:

- European directives/legislation
- National legislation (planning & other)
- National planning policy
- The Local Plan

Project Plan

It is advisable to draw up a plan for preparing a neighbourhood development plan (rather like a project plan). This can identify key stages, actions and an indicative timetable. It can also identify available resources and likely costs. Things like developing the evidence base and undertaking community engagement will have to be designed around the available budget.

A diagram illustrating the neighbourhood planning process is included later in this guide (see the section on Process).

the evidence base

A review of existing evidence should be undertaken.
This may include things like:

- The Local Development Framework
- Other local authority plans and strategies
- Socio-economic data for district/ward (census etc.)
- Technical reports
- Transport studies
- Public transport data
- Conservation area appraisals
- Statutory list (listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments)
- Plans from other public bodies or statutory undertakers
- Existing plans for an area, such as a community plan or parish plan
- Details of other environmental protection designations, such as tree preservation orders and sites of special scientific interest..

It may be necessary to develop new evidence at neighbourhood level.
This could include:

Economic: business surveys, vacancy/floorspace survey, available sites survey, land values, etc.

Social/Community: housing condition survey, audit of community facilities, 'Building for Life' assessment of housing, etc.

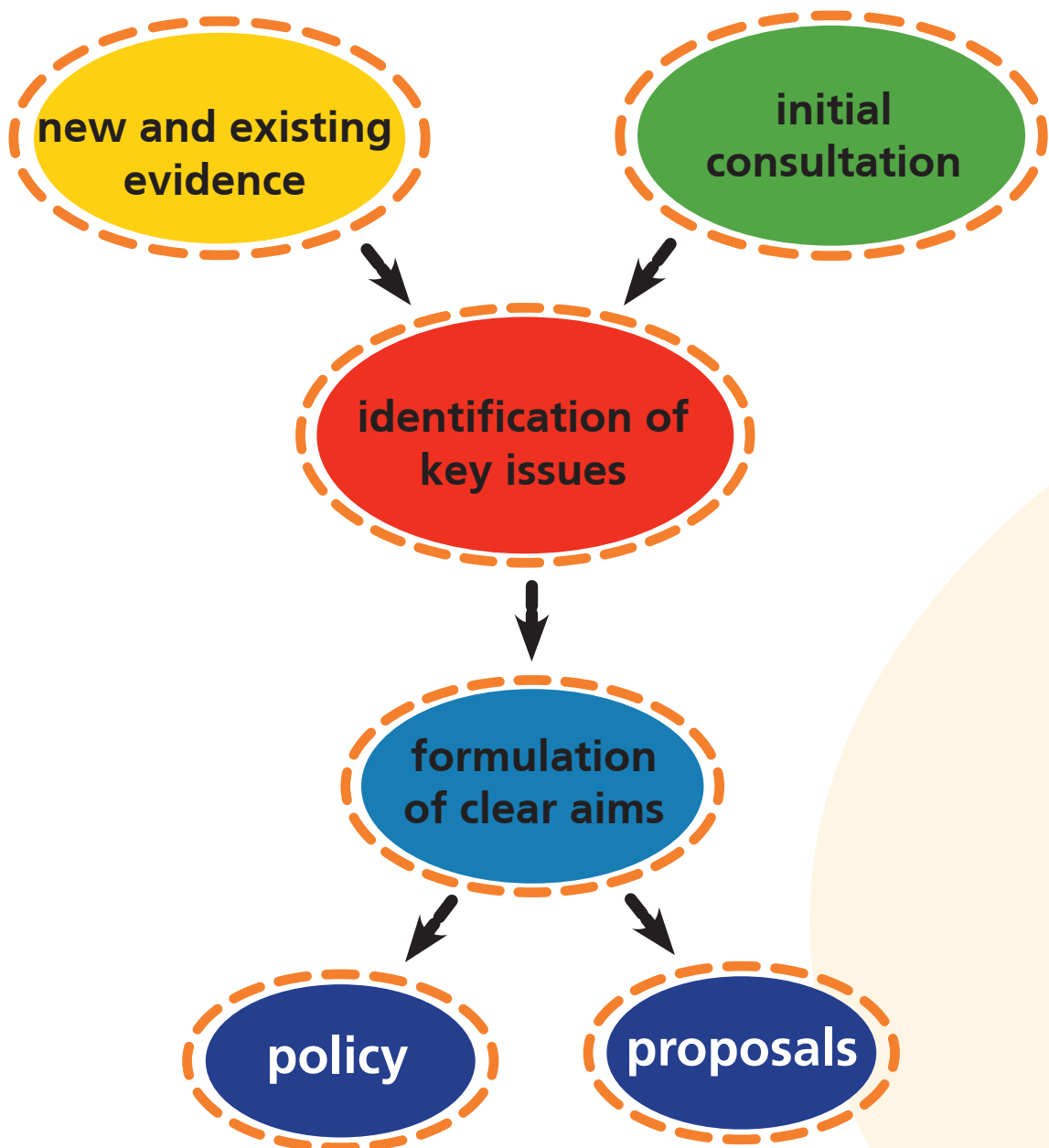
Environmental: heritage audit, conservation area appraisals, review of local lists, urban design analysis, open space survey & analysis, etc.

Infrastructure: transport linkages, schools capacity, transport capacity analysis,

policy making

Policy should be based on information/data about the area (the evidence base). From consideration of evidence and early community engagement, key issues and aims for the plan should emerge. Policy and proposals can then be developed to achieve the plan's aims.

The following diagram illustrates this:





Community engagement is necessary and important for several reasons:

- It is a statutory requirement (including in Localism Act)
- Early engagement is essential for developing political consensus and avoiding misconceptions
- It is part of developing the evidence base (front loading)
- It helps achieve better informed outcomes (community know their own place best)
- It leads to more realistic and deliverable plans/policies
- Public confidence and support need to be maintained
- It helps to avoid conflict, delay and cost at later stages
- It reduces the possibility of a 'no' vote in the local referendum if people are aware of the plan and have had the opportunity to participate in its production
- There is a democratic deficit (there is a need to involve people at a more detailed level than elections every four years).

Where intensive community engagement has recently been undertaken, such as in respect of the community plan, the material obtained will be useful in informing the neighbourhood plan.

best practice

Publicity and Awareness: It is important to publicise the proposed neighbourhood development plan as widely as possible using different media right at the beginning of the process.

Local Partnerships: Key partners and stakeholders should be identified. These can provide easier access and support in involving minority groups, different communities, residents, the business community, hard-to-engage communities, etc.

Front Loading: Community engagement should be undertaken before work commences on the plan (this is called front-loading). The purpose of the first stages of community engagement is to help define issues and aims for the plan, and to inform an overall vision. Early and later stages of community engagement/involvement will also inform policies and proposals in the plan.

Capacity Building: It will often be necessary to include capacity building (education/training) so that those participating in community engagement events are well informed about the plan and the issues it is dealing with.

Avoid Tokenism: The purpose of undertaking community engagement is to inform the content of the plan. If the outcomes have already been determined, then community engagement is tokenistic (marketing).

Specialist advice and enabling: It may be necessary for those leading and participating in the planning process to bring in specialist advice and support.

Be Creative: Community engagement needs to engage people. It should be stimulating and enjoyable. Too often it is dull and inaccessible.

Manage Expectations: Too often, community engagement exercises raise unrealistic expectations, leading to disappointment and cynicism. It is necessary to explain the scope and limitations of the planning system and of neighbourhood development plans, in particular that they are a means to an end, not the end itself.

Targeting: Whilst some people will naturally want to get involved in neighbourhood planning, with other people targeting will be necessary. This could include the elderly, young people, ethnic groups and other minority or hard-to-engage groups.

Accessibility: Careful thought needs to be given to make events accessible, including location, timing, media, format, etc. Events should be informal and unintimidating – for example those running events should dress informally.



Common Mistakes – What to avoid!

- The 'stand in the library with a thick document' approach
- The 'talking at people at a public meeting' approach
- The 'consultant producing options before consulting anyone' approach
- The 'publish and defend' approach
- The 'boring people to a point of unconsciousness' approach
- The 'people are too stupid' approach
- The 'we need strong leadership not consultation' approach
- The 'outcomes predetermined' approach



independent examination and referendum

The independent examination will be undertaken by an independent examiner appointed by the local authority to ensure the plan meets the necessary standard and is in conformity with legislation and general conformity with national and local policy.

The independent examiner may suggest changes to the plan.

If the plan is found to be satisfactory, then the local authority will arrange for the referendum to take place. If more than 50% of those voting in the referendum vote 'yes', then the Council will adopt the plan.

summary of process

The process of producing a neighbourhood plan begins with establishing the neighbourhood forum and area.

The foundations of a good plan are a robust evidence base and effective community involvement/engagement from the beginning to end of the process.

Early community engagement and consideration of the evidence base should identify key issues and aims for the plan to address. More detailed policies and proposals may be developed to address key issues and achieve the plan's aims and vision.

Community engagement and involvement should continue throughout the plan-making process and should be flexible to address emerging issues and concerns. Once a plan is finalised, it needs to be submitted for independent examination, followed by the referendum.

The diagram below illustrates this process.





some key points

Neighbourhood planning presents many opportunities.

A good neighbourhood development plan will be based on effective community involvement and engagement and a robust evidence base.

Careful consideration needs to be given to available resources, skills, capacity and the need for external support.

A neighbourhood plan is a means, not an end.

About Urban Vision Enterprise CIC

Urban Vision Enterprise is a community interest company, specialising in town planning, regeneration, urban design, heritage, neighbourhood planning, community engagement, leadership and management, third sector organisational development, project development and management, training and education.

It also draws on a pool of external experts in a range of disciplines, including leading professionals in many fields. Urban Vision Enterprise is part of a wider partnership with Urban Vision North Staffordshire.

About Locality

Locality is the leading nationwide network of settlements, development trusts, social action centres and community enterprises. It helps people to set up locally owned and led organisations. It supports existing organisations to work effectively through peer-to-peer exchange of knowledge and best practice on community asset ownership, community enterprise, collaboration, commissioning support, social action, community voice, community rights and regeneration.

Locality also works to influence government and others at national and local level to build support and investment for the movement. Locality was formed in April 2011 by the merger of Bassac and the Development Trusts Association, two leading networks of community owned and led organisations.

Locality is the lead partner of the Building Community Consortium, one of the four programmes funded through the Department for Communities and Local Government Supporting Communities and Neighbourhoods in Planning' scheme.

Contact Details

Urban Vision Enterprise CIC
Burslem School of Art, Queen Street
Stoke-on-Trent
ST6 3EJ

Locality
33 Corsham Street
London
N1 6DR

www.uvns.org

www.locality.org.uk

Contact:	Dave Chetwyn	Tel:	0845 458 8336
Tel:	01782 790595	Email:	info@locality.org.uk
Email:	dave.chetwyn@uvns.org		



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Urban Vision Enterprise CIC. Company No. 7690116.
Burslem School of Art, Queen Street, Stoke-on-Trent, ST6 3EJ