

A councillor's guide to understanding the role and impact of Community Led Planning

Community led planning: all members of a community coming together to say what's good and distinctive about where they live; how they will work to protect and improve where they live; and how they wish public bodies to help them.



People creating their vision for their community

Community led planning (CLP) takes several forms, including Parish Plans (rural), Neighbourhood Plans (urban), Market Town Healthchecks and Planning for Real. These lead to a vision and action plan for the future, embracing social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of the community and all those who live and work there.

Another form of CLP is a Town or Village Design Statement (VDS), which relates to the physical appearance and character of the local built environment and links to the planning system.

Village Design Statement, West Hanningfield, Essex

The Parish Council adopted the VDS and uses it to assess the suitability of planning applications, providing feedback to the developer and using it in its responses to planning application enquiries. The Parish Council also advises local residents on how to use the recommendations in the VDS when making planning applications. The VDS has been accepted by the borough council as a planning guidance document. Since 2007, over 57 planning applications have been made for the area and on at least 21 occasions, the VDS was referred to by Local Authority planning officers, playing a meaningful role in the decision making process.

"A Village Design Statement will not prevent future development but will help manage change."
Parish Councillor & Member of the Steering Group

Parish Plan, Witchford, Cambridgeshire

A high proportion of the actions identified as a result of the Parish Plan are now complete, including the installation of more bins for rubbish and dog-waste and switching off the church lights at midnight, saving lighting costs and reducing light pollution. Prompted by the Action Plan, the Parish Council has commissioned an audit of the facilities available to the community in Witchford. This will help the Council to budget expenditure against community priorities and improve provision of local facilities. This audit has been funded entirely by grants, secured because of the Parish Plan.

"People are more involved in what goes on when they feel that their voice has been heard - community led planning was vital in achieving this and has made the village more vibrant."

Witchford Parish Council

Community led planning promotes democracy and active citizenship and can help councils to meet their Duty to Involve, Consult and Inform.

The results can inform the development of Sustainable Community Strategies by Local Strategic Partnership, the priorities and targets of Local Area Agreement business plans and the selection of National Indicators and targets. The process and consideration of the results by public bodies provides evidence for Comprehensive Area Assessments. Village Design Statements can inform the Local Delivery Framework.

COUNCILLOR PARTICIPATION and ROLE:

Early and on-going active involvement, support and advice by a councillor brings significant benefits to community led planning process and its results. For a councillor, it gives an opportunity to work more closely with their community and gain better understanding of its concerns and aspirations.

Leadership

- Provides leadership role to represent concerns to authorities
- Champions engagement of community by public bodies
- Facilitates connection to council to support process and adopt agreed actions
- Brokers relationships between community group and public bodies
- Supports and encourages local events, including use of locality grants
- Advocate for community's views, concerns and priorities to the Local Strategic Partnership members.

Democratic Process

- Helps build an understanding of and increases support for democratic process
- Strengthens the democratic process; representative and participative democracy working in partnership
- Validates and enhances the councillor's position and understanding of their role
- Increases accountability to and credibility with their communities
- Stimulates interest in active citizenship
- Connects citizens, councils and public bodies.

Understanding

- Informs communities about policy development and how to engage with it
- Identifies and develops priorities as input to participatory budgeting process
- Provides route for feedback regarding decisions and progress on agreed actions
- Facilitates and advises on contacts in departments in public bodies.

Quality

- Helps to mobilise community involvement
- Supports informed decision making by the community
- Uses results to identify potential improvements to service provision
- Encourages more realistic action plans through a knowledge of mainstream policy and priorities.

References:

- Guide to Community Led Planning (www.communityledplanning.com)
- Comprehensive Area Assessment (www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/index.asp)
- Guide to Duty to Involve (www.cdf.gov.uk/web/guest/publication?id=20497)
- IDeA support for local government (www.idea.gov.uk)
- Overview of Parish Plans and links to local Rural Community Council (www.ruralactioneast.org.uk)
- Communities and Local Government policy (www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment)
- Comprehensive Community Engagement Strategy (www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/9639939)
- Neighbourhood Initiative Foundation Planning for Real (www.nif.co.uk/planningforreal)

If you would like further information about the Partnership, contact:

Inspire East, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford, Norfolk IP24 1BT

Tel: 01223 484644, Email: enquiries@inspire-east.org.uk, Website: www.inspire-east.org.uk/communityempowerment.aspx

If you require this document in larger print, contact Inspire East.

This paper has been produced by Rural Action East for the Regional Empowerment Partnership for the East of England.