

Principle 5: Develop and implement an effective engagement strategy for the preparation of the plan

Guide Questions

- How will the engagement strategy be applied at each stage of plan preparation?
- How are the plan options to be tested through the engagement process?
- How will the skills and knowledge of members, council officers and local communities be best used?

- 5.1 Involvement of local people in planning for their areas is an essential component of successful plan-making. To make engagement worthwhile the approach has to be effective for you *and* for those involved. If you are clear about what you are doing, why and how, you are more likely to get buy-in from your communities. The better you engage communities in plan making, the less likely they are to feel their needs are not being met in local planning decisions on individual schemes.
- 5.2 Your engagement plan should be an integral part of the project plan. Building on any commitments set out in your statement of community involvement, it should define:
- the objectives of consultation;
 - the stakeholders and their needs;
 - methods and timings;
 - roles and responsibilities; and
 - how responses will be dealt with.
- 5.3 The most effective engagement begins when the work on the plan begins, and communities work towards 'telling the story' of the plan. Be clear about the length of time this will take, and about the time horizons you are asking for opinions about. Many people become frustrated that they are being asked questions now, and then perceive the lack of 'action on the ground' as either a failure of the council or ignoring of their comments.
- 5.4 Effective engagement needn't be costly. Think about the easiest and best ways of engaging the audience you are trying to reach. This might mean meeting people where they are, rather than booking venues, such as outside

public buildings or on train platforms. The use of social media is still largely untested, and those that are starting to use it are having varying success. However, there is a large proportion of your audience that is 'technology-literate' and this should be tapped in to. Speak to your ward councillors who should have an invaluable role in community engagement – it's what they do. Community leaders can also play an important role in disseminating information about the development of the local plan.

- 5.5 When resources are constrained, you need to think about how to make the most of what you already have. There are probably other engagement exercises going on so work with others in the authority using the skills and expertise of others. You may have a community development officer or team, and a corporate engagement plan; it will be important to link in to this when writing your engagement strategies.
- 5.6 It is not only the community – business and residential – that you need to talk to, but key stakeholders as well. Key stakeholders include:
- statutory consultees listed in the local planning Regulations and including the regulatory agencies (the Environment Agency, English Heritage, Natural England) and neighbouring local authorities
 - physical infrastructure delivery agencies: highways authority, Highways Agency, utilities companies, Network Rail, public transport providers, airport and port operators, energy providers, telecommunications providers etc
 - social infrastructure delivery agencies, education, social services, health providers, the emergency services, charities and voluntary sector
 - major landowners – including the local authority itself and government departments and agencies
 - housebuilders and other developers
 - minerals and waste management industries.
- 5.7 Your approach to engagement should ensure that both key stakeholders and the community have an active role in shaping the plan and can take more responsibility for finding their own solutions.
- 5.8 Engagement can have benefits in terms of both information gained (for example, evidence on local concerns and priorities) and the process of engagement (for example, building understanding, ownership and a sense of pride about the area in which you live). Your approach should seek to optimise the different benefits for your council and community. Engagement on the local plan is also one way to assess the appetite for neighbourhood plans. If neighbourhoods are interested in having a greater involvement in the planning for their area, find out what they hoping to achieve and work with them on whether a neighbourhood plan is the right tool.
- 5.9 Effective community engagement should:
- address statutory requirements for publication and consultation on documents

- provide meaningful engagement opportunities for everyone who can affect, or are likely to be affected by, the policies being developed
- enable people to understand the issues and broader context– this includes sharing evidence and information on national policy
- be clear about what the choices are and set out clearly what they can and can't influence
- encourage participants to explore the implications of their views rather than simply state a pre- determined view or preference and
- be appropriate and proportionate for the context and stage of the document and the scale of interest – issues which have already had a lot of coverage and debate need not be extensively reviewed. If there are small changes, be clear about what has changed and what you are now seeking views on.

5.10 It is important not to forget that the engagement process is a two way street – and not engagement for the sake of it or solely about consultees. The engagement process should be designed in a way that will help you understand peoples' views and preferences and develop more locally relevant and successful local plan.

Further Information

[PAS community engagement support](#)



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: If changes to the plan are made between publication and submission, what are the requirements for consultation? The regulations do not seem to define this. The default is for 6 weeks for the publication draft, but if further changes are likely to be minor, would a further 6 weeks be required?

A: There is no prescribed length of time for inviting representations on further changes. The main driver is likely to be your Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). How long does the Council prescribe for consultation? If your SCI does not cover this, then you need to ask if there is a minimum period below which anyone could reasonably argue they did not have enough time to respond. Factors affecting this minimum time may include common holiday periods or, in the case of statutory consultees, some other known 'busy periods' (such as their own key stages in plan work). If you feel that a lesser period than 6 weeks will provide adequate time for all interested parties and statutory consultees to respond, then you could use that period. You may have to be prepared to defend the decision, so understanding and setting out clearly why it is less than 6 weeks is going to be important.