



Neighbourhood Plan - Policy Development

The role of Theme Groups

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan involves a number of stages as the community is engaged; a broad vision for the area is agreed; issues identified and planning solutions sought to address the various concerns raised.
- 1.2. Central to this process is the identification of broad themes to help theme the discussion about issues of local importance. These can include topics such as housing; environment; design; community facilities; economy; transport and highways.
- 1.3. This paper seeks to set out a process through which these broad themes can be explored and broken down into greater detail to help provide a framework for the development of planning policies and projects that will ultimately form the basis of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.4. It is proposed that the Theme Groups are recruited from members of the Advisory Committee; community representatives and local stakeholders where appropriate.
- 1.5. Each Theme Group will meet generally over a period of 3-4 months to brainstorm the issues involved; to agree a set of community objectives/obstacles to meeting the objectives; to consider the policies needed to address the issues raised and to seek the evidence needed to support the emerging policies.
- 1.6. The need to identify issues to be tackled and to develop solutions through planning policies is at the heart of all Neighbourhood Plans.

2. Establishing the Theme Group

- 2.1. Individuals will be identified through consultation events and through general publicity relating to the developing Neighbourhood Plan. Opportunities should be

taken to engage with the broader community and to encourage people to come forward to contribute in line with their specific area of interest.

2.2. Each Theme Group will be supported wherever possible by Associates from Yourlocale.

3. The role of the Theme Group

3.1. The purpose of each Theme Group is to prepare the evidence and develop policies to build the detail to be contained within the Neighbourhood Plan.

3.2. Each Theme Group will tackle a specific Theme and its issues generally over a period of 4/6 meetings:

3.2.1. 'brainstorming' the issues involved in the specific theme;

3.2.2. defining the desired community objectives for the area of work/barriers to achieving them;

3.2.3. considering options and producing planning policies which will ensure the community objectives for the theme are achieved;

3.2.4. Identifying (and filling) any gaps in the evidence needed to support the policies.

3.3. Evidence can include:

3.3.1. Key findings from resident consultation to date

3.3.2. Key findings from any socio-economic and other data

3.3.3. Key evidence from stakeholder consultation

3.3.4. Planning and other policy context

3.4. Members of the community and stakeholders will be invited to attend Theme Group meetings alongside Advisory Committee/Parish Council Members according to their area of interest.

3.5. A member of the Theme Group shall be required to take notes of the meeting and a leader from the group shall be appointed to drive the process forward. It is recommended that at least one member of the Advisory Committee is on each Theme Group to enable feedback to the Advisory Committee meetings.

4. Subject Areas

The suggested Theme Group topics can include the following:

a. Housing and the built environment Theme Group

- Tenures and type of housing;
- Affordable housing requirements;
- Number, type and density of houses;
- Design;
- Location of housing;
- Limits of Development.

b. Environment (natural and historic) Theme Group

- Protection of specific sites through designations such as 'Local Green Space';
- Areas of separation;
- Wildlife corridors;
- Biodiversity;
- Important views;
- Trees and hedges;
- Conservation area/heritage assets;
- Protection of cycle ways/paths;
- Energy Efficiency/renewable energy.

c. Sustainability Group (Economic growth/Community facilities/transport):

Economic growth

- Current retail and employment infrastructure;
- Opportunities for growth;
- Relationship between availability of employment and population, commuting;
- Location, number and types of jobs, apprenticeships, manufacturing, retail;
- Potential links with neighbouring communities;
- Relationship between local skill base and available employment;

Community facilities

- Community infrastructure;
- Schools;
- Open spaces;
- Community centre;
- Analysis of what is needed and what is being provided in relation to new buildings;
- Activities for all the population including growing elderly population;

Transport

- Car parking;
- Road infrastructure;
- Speeding;
- Disabled access;
- Congestion;
- Public transport.

5. Work outputs

- 5.1. The work of the Theme Groups will conclude with the preparation of a draft chapter containing narrative that describes the current situation and the problems to be addressed/aspirations to be met.
- 5.2. In the preparation of this work, the Associates from YourLocale will assist with structured information including local Census data; demographic information; existing strategic policies and examples from other Neighbourhood Plan. Through this process, templates will be used as necessary to progress work involving the assessment of, for example, sites to be considered for Local Green Space designation or as potential sites for housing development.
- 5.3. Local communities can contribute their knowledge of the Parish and the issues under consideration and bring local studies such as transport assessments; knowledge of community facilities etc.
- 5.4. The Advisory Committee will be required to identify and address any conflicts between the outputs of the Theme Groups.

6. Timescales

- 6.1. It is expected that the Theme Groups will undertake their work over 4-6 months and that reports will be available after that.
- 6.2. At this stage, prior to the first meeting of the Theme Groups, it is impossible to state with any certainty how long the process will take. This will be determined by the complexity and scale of the issue to be considered and the capacity of the group to move the issues forward.
- 6.3. Regular reports to the Advisory Committee will help to manage the process and ensure that the groups remain on course within the overall timescales for the delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Gary Kirk
Yourlocale