

Introduction to Parish Plans

What is a Parish or Community Plan?

A Parish or Community Plan should harness everything that is different and unique about the community in which you live and your vision for its future. Parish Plans should provide an opportunity for the community to state its views and provide information regarding how people feel about where they live. The end result should be a document that reflects these views and provides a plan of action. It should also note areas where the Plan may influence, or be influenced by, external factors, e.g. local service delivery.

As well as involving local communities in influencing the services and policies which affect them, Parish Plans also ensure that the District's Community Strategies and the County's Community Strategy reflect the needs of individual communities across Worcestershire.

Context

In 2000, the Government's Rural White Paper, "Our Countryside – The Future", suggested that all rural communities should develop 'town, village and Parish Plans' to identify both problems and opportunities for rural services and to provide community input into the new planning system. In Worcestershire, so far, approximately half of the parished areas of the county are involved in Parish or Community Planning initiatives.

Since the launch of the Parish Plan initiative, a lot of progress has been made in the development of these plans and this Guidance aims to reflect the changes and refinements to this process. It will ensure that Parish and Community groups undertaking a Plan have a clear understanding of what they can achieve through the Parish Planning process and offers a step-by-step guide as to how to go about it.



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Who writes the plan?

A Parish Plan is written by the community and for the community. It is essential to get support from the Parish Council. The process involves setting up a Steering Group which should consist of members of the community and the Parish Council. A wide community membership is useful to ensure the views of the whole community are expressed through the plan.

What does writing a Parish Plan involve?

(1) Consulting your community

This can often be the most interesting part of Parish Planning. The issues that are important to you, your parish council or steering group, may not be shared by the rest of your community. This is an opportunity to find out what other people think and to hear the views of a wide variety of the population. It is an opportunity to identify the key issues to include in your plan. See Principles of Involving Communities and Techniques for Consulting and Involving your Community, for more information on a range of consultation techniques.

(2) Engaging with Local Service Providers

The consultation should have highlighted key issues of concern or areas for improvement in your Parish. At this stage, discuss your findings with Service Providers to ensure that actions identified from this information are appropriate and realistic and to find out areas in which you can get assistance. Service providers can be statutory, voluntary or private sector agencies.

(3) Writing an Action Plan

The next stage is to prepare an Action Plan based on the key issues from your consultation and from the discussions with Service Providers. Those that are most important to your community should form the basis of your Action Plan. The Action Plan is a vital part of the process as it sets out what needs to be done to achieve the vision set out in the plan. See Action Planning for more details.

(4) Implementing the plan

Now the Parish Plan is completed, it is time to implement the actions identified by the local community. The Parish Council and/or the Parish Plan Steering group can monitor and evaluate these actions.



How can a Parish or Community Plan be used?

Parish Plans can be used for a number of benefits. Key ways in which they can be used may include:

- To take action to improve the quality of life in an area through practical projects, such as running a community transport scheme, or setting up a youth club.
- To manage change, and address local needs through the planning process, such as supporting the protection of community facilities or building affordable housing.
- To bid for funding for local initiatives and to encourage effective partnership working.
- To help influence and inform plans, policies and services of a range of organisations and service providers.
- To enhance a Parish Council's community leadership role, in line with quality Parish ethos.

Funding and Resources for Parish Plans

Significant levels of community consultation will be required in creating your Plan. The more views that shape your Plan, the wider the levels of impact. The information sheets in this Guidance have been developed to help you through the process of understanding consultation techniques and deciding on those you wish to use.

There are two grants available to contribute to the costs of developing your Plan:

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Parish Plan Grants

Funding of up to £1,000 or up to 75% of the cost of producing a Parish or Town Plan (whichever is the lesser) is available from DEFRA to support the development of a Parish or Town Plan. This fund is administered by Community First and will be available until March 2008. For details, contact Karen Humphries on 01684 580708.

Awards for All

This is a National Lottery grant scheme aimed at local communities. Grants are available from between £500 and £10,000. Contact: www.awardsforall.org.uk

Resources for printing – Community Resource Centres

These are located around the county and can provide photocopying and scanprinting facilities, plus I.T. resources. There is a small charge for using equipment in CRCs. For more information on your nearest CRCs, contact Community First on 01684 580707.

Contacts

Local organisations involved in Parish Plans are working to ensure that all the communities developing Plans are given the support and advice they need to produce an effective Plan. In addition to written advice, a number of local sources of advice and support are available to you. We suggest you speak to one of the contacts listed here before starting your Plan and throughout its development. They will be able to advise on Best Practice, the process of developing your Plan, and how to get the most out of your Plan. Please contact Community First to get their details.

Community First:

Director of Capacity Building and Service Development
Community Planning Co-ordinator
Development Officer, Community Planning

Worcestershire Association of Local Councils (CALC)

Worcestershire Partnership

West Midlands Planning Aid

Wychavon District Council

Bromsgrove District Council

Redditch District Council, Wyre Forest District Council

Malvern Hills District Council

Worcester City Council

Evesham Volunteer Bureau

For further information contact Community First on 01684 573334.