

How to project plan

Putting the pieces together



Contents

1	Introduction.....	3
2	Why should you prepare a project plan?	3
2.1	How long will it take to prepare a neighbourhood plan?	4
3	What goes in a project plan?	4
4	How do you fill in your project plan and manage the process? ...	4
5	Conclusion	6



1 Introduction

This resource will explain:

- why you need to prepare a project plan
- what goes in a project plan
- how to fill in your project plan and manage the process

If you are new to neighbourhood planning you are encouraged to read the [Locality Roadmap](#) which explains the process of preparing a neighbourhood plan. It will provide useful context to this resource which focuses on the 'how.'

2 Why should you prepare a project plan?

There are a number of tasks and stages involved in producing a neighbourhood plan and it can at first appear to be a complex process. A project plan is critical to making the process as manageable, efficient and effective as possible.

Project planning is a method of identifying and mapping out the specific tasks, resource requirements and time needed in order to deliver a project. In this case the project is your neighbourhood plan.

A project plan can help your group:

- **visualise the process** and identify what needs to be done, when and by whom
- identify how much **input is required** whether that be from volunteers in your group, consultants you have appointed or from third parties such as your [local planning authority](#).
- **allocate roles and tasks** to people and identify whether you need to ask for help from others (see [How to resource your neighbourhood plan](#))
- identify the **likely time required** to produce the plan and the resources you may need (see [How to resource your neighbourhood plan](#))
- identify the **likely costs** of producing your plan and potential sources of funding (see [How to resource your neighbourhood plan](#))
- build **understanding and agreement** on what you are trying to achieve
- **remain focused** on the tasks at hand
- help **maintain momentum** as once one task is completed you know exactly what needs to be done next and by whom
- save time by **mapping out tasks** that can be undertaken at the same time, as well as identifying those tasks that depend on the completion of other actions in the project plan
- **assess risks** by thinking through where issues may arise and identifying actions that could reduce the likelihood of this happening. For example, if there is a risk that no-one



from the wider community will turn up to a consultation workshop you may decide to have a communications strategy to publicise your neighbourhood plan and related consultations

2.1 How long will it take to prepare a neighbourhood plan?

The time required to produce your neighbourhood plan will depend on many factors including:

- the number of issues you wish to tackle and the likely complexity of the plan. For example, if your group intends to [allocate sites for development](#) it may take longer as you will need to identify and assess potential sites
- the availability of evidence (facts, information and supporting information) to help you write the policies in the plan.
- the skills and resources available in your neighbourhood. (See [What skills might you need](#))
- whether there is an [up-to-date Local Plan](#) in place to guide you
- how long your local planning authority may take to make its decisions. (See [How to engage and work constructively with your local planning authority](#))

The number of groups that have a 'made' neighbourhood plan is ever increasing. This means that there is a body of experience, knowledge and best practice which you can tap into and build on during the development of your plan. Learning from others should help to reduce the time involved. Further information on external sources of advice and guidance is available in [How to resource your neighbourhood plan](#).

3 What goes in a project plan?

The following information should be included in your project plan:

- **Milestones:** key stages in the process such as submitting an application to define the neighbourhood area, or, later in the process, agreeing the independent examiner. Wherever possible a target date should be set
- **Tasks:** actions that need to be carried out such as writing the application to the local planning authority to define your neighbourhood area
- **Activities:** such as community consultation workshops at different points in the process to get feedback on what the plan says.

4 How do you fill in your project plan and manage the process?

We have produced a [template](#) to assist you fill in your project plan. This should be read in conjunction with this section.

- **Identify the tasks, activities and milestones:** this will help you understand each stage of the neighbourhood planning process.



There are a number of statutory timescales associated with key stages of the neighbourhood planning process such as set publicity and consultation periods. These timescales can be added as a starting point. The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) has produced a simple [project management tool](#) that includes indicative dates and likely time requirements for a number of stages to assist you with this.

Discussing timescales with other neighbourhood planning groups and your local planning authority can also be useful in understanding how long tasks will take.

- **Be realistic:** it is important to set ambitious but achievable targets and timescales as this can help maintain momentum and keep you on track. Timescales need to be realistic and you need to consider both internal and external factors. For example, if your neighbourhood area contains 10,000 people, how long will it take to carry out meaningful community engagement? Will your community engagement work take place at a time when fewer people are around, e.g. during the summer holidays? Could timetabling some community engagement in the summer months be a good idea because there are other community events you can attend? Internal factors could include holiday arrangements for the main people involved in delivering the plan.
- **Order the tasks** as some may be dependent on others being completed. For example pre-submission publicity and consultation will come after the designation of your neighbourhood area. Other tasks may be carried out at the same time, such as preparing your neighbourhood area and neighbourhood forum applications.
- **Work backwards from the final target date** to see if the timings you have identified fit in with the date you have set. This will be particularly important if you are using time-limited funds.
- **Work closely with the local planning authority and other relevant third parties** to understand its timescales.

Your local planning authority may be able to assist you to identify tasks and milestones that you were unaware of. They may also be able to provide information on the timescales they will be working to, such as how long they expect it will take them to feed-back comments on draft policies. There may be internal processes they need to follow that may influence the time required to appoint an independent examiner or to arrange the referendum. The key is to ask, to enable your project plan to be as accurate as possible and reduce the risk of any slippage.

- **Break the project plan into smaller sub-tasks:** this should make the process more manageable and can help retain focus on what you are trying to achieve. It will also allow you to best manage volunteer time as well as giving volunteers a reasonable expectation of what is expected of them and how much of their time will be required.
- **Review the timetable regularly** to keep you on track. There are four steps that you should follow:
 - **Plan:** put a project timetable in place



- **Do:** carry out the actions agreed in it
- **Monitor:** check that the actions have been carried out in the manner in which and when they were supposed to happen
- **Review:** identify whether you need to make changes to the timetable, for example, by revising milestones or adding in additional tasks

The timetable may slip due to unexpected issues such as holidays or illness, so keep the plan under review and amend it accordingly. Even though one aspect has slipped this does not mean the entire timetable has to. For instance, you may be able to bring forward some other tasks, some activities may be able carried out at the same time or you may be able to redistribute roles. Having a project plan can help you make these decisions.

- **Build in extra time and contingency** as you cannot plan for every eventuality. Having some “spare” time set aside within the project plan that you can use if you need to will help to manage this without setting the entire timetable back.
- **Build on the experience of others:** to help start your thinking the Woodcote Neighbourhood Planning Team has [explained how](#) robust project planning and management can help deliver a neighbourhood plan. The Duston Parish Council [discuss](#) how they got started with their neighbourhood plan. We also have a [video about project planning](#) and its importance.

Further information on the project planning process and examples of timetables prepared by neighbourhood planning groups can be accessed [here](#).

5 Conclusion

Producing a neighbourhood plan involves undertaking a wide variety of tasks and involving a wide range of people to deliver them. Having a project plan in place will help you to: deliver these tasks to a realistic timetable; make best use of the roles, skills and experience of people involved; and make the whole process more manageable and hopefully quicker.

To assist you put together your project plan we have produced a [template](#). The [template](#) includes an annotated project plan with hints and tips, and there is also a [blank spreadsheet](#) that you and your group may wish to populate.



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