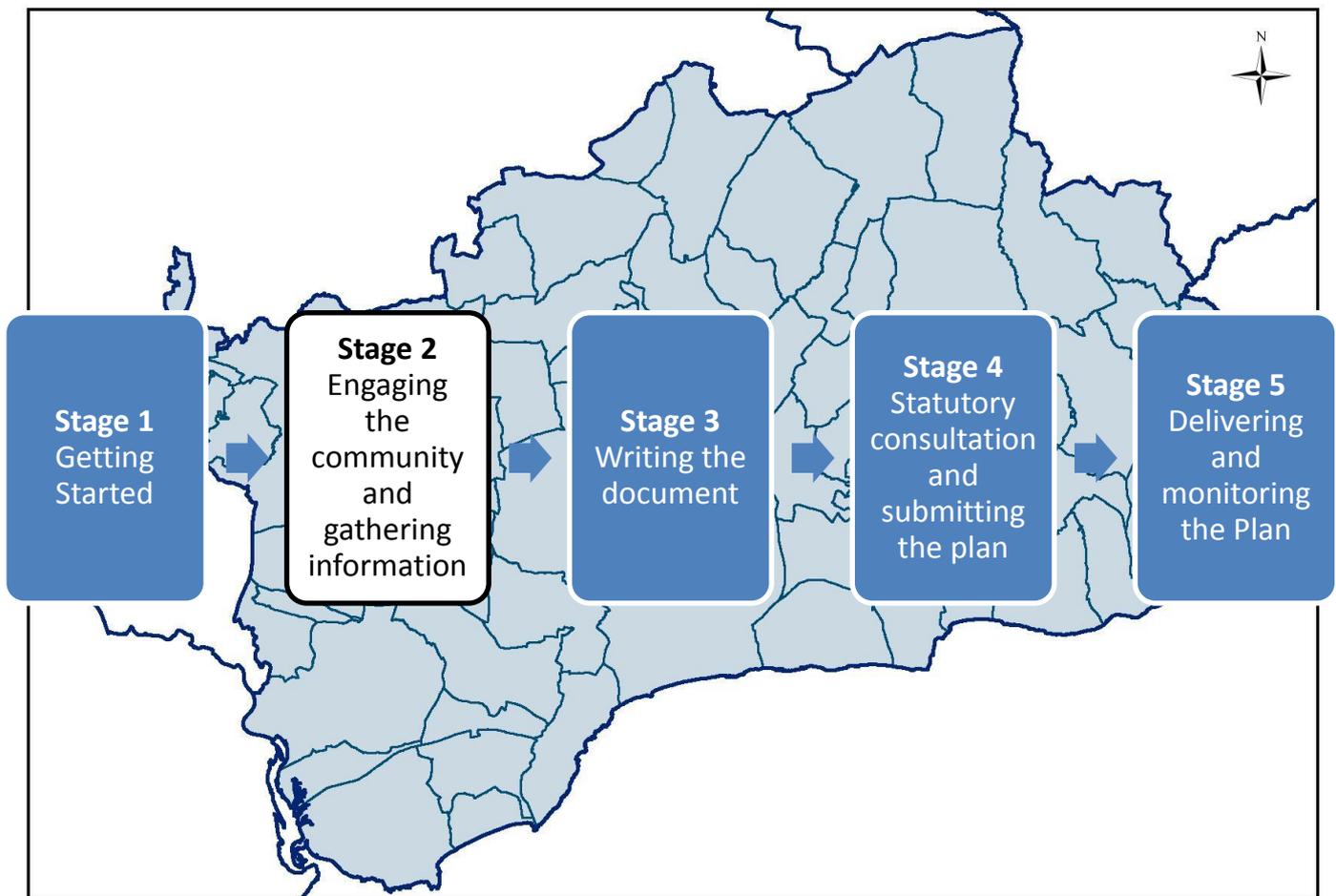


## Neighbourhood Planning Guidance

# *Guide to Consultation*

September 2019



# ***Guide to Consultation***

## **Contents**

Guide to Consultation .....	3
Quick Summary Guide .....	5
Preparing Your Consultation .....	6
When should we consult? .....	6
Who should we consult? .....	7
How should we consult? .....	8
How do we decide which method to use? .....	9
Where should we consult? .....	10
Potential consultation methods and their effectiveness .....	11
Focus on Surveys .....	15
Focus on Events .....	24

Produced by the Planning Policy Team  
East Devon District Council

01395 571533

[planningpolicy@eastdevon.co.uk](mailto:planningpolicy@eastdevon.co.uk)

## Guide to Consultation

Town and Parish Councils producing neighbourhood plans need to involve and listen to their communities to find out what they think about local issues. People are more likely to participate if their views are sought at an early stage and they are kept informed. This is especially important in the case of a neighbourhood plan as the support of the community at referendum stage is crucial to adoption. This guidance is intended to support you in this process. It contains practical guidance on the process, including holding an event and analysing results.

There are a large number of ways you can involve the community and other organisations in the development of your plan. Your choice of method will depend on who you want to engage with, the type and quantity of information you require as well as the money and time available to you. Our Officers will be pleased to discuss appropriate methods of consultation with you.

You may find it useful to create an informal and brief '**communication strategy**', setting out how and when you will communicate with the community and other groups and organisations. This will be useful to refer to as the process progresses.

The neighbourhood development plan regulations require you to undertake at least one consultation, but you can do as many consultations as you like. In many cases it is useful to consult at least twice. The first consultation could focus on the needs and aspirations of the community. This will help you set your vision and objectives. Whilst the second consultation could be upon the draft plan so the community can see how their earlier comments have been interpreted into actions and policies. Good constructive consultation will help to achieve a positive result at the referendum stage.

### **Important!**

To fulfil the minimum requirements for your plan the consultation must:

1) Publicise in a manner which is likely to bring it to the attention of people who live, work or carry on business in the neighbourhood area details of:

The proposals for a neighbourhood plan

Details of where and when the proposals for the plan may be inspected

Details of how to make representations; and

The date by which those representations must be received, being not less than 6 weeks from the date on which the draft proposal is first publicised;

2) Consult any consultation body referred to in paragraph 1 of schedule 1 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 whose interests you consider may be affected by the proposals for the plan; and

3) Send a copy of the proposals for a neighbourhood plan to East Devon District Council

After you have consulted your local community about your plan proposals you must report on what you have done. This is the '**consultation statement**' required by the Neighbourhood Planning regulations. Your consultation statement should include:

- details of the people and bodies you consulted, including number of people consulted and number of attendees to consultation events
- a description of how you consulted them
- a summary of the main issues raised
- information about how these issues have been considered and addressed, where relevant, in the neighbourhood plan

**Important!**

Writing the consultation statement will be much easier if you record each activity as you go along. Make sure you also retain all consultation materials, responses and other information, for instance press articles and adverts- you may be asked about them at examination!

## Quick Summary Guide

1. Think about your community and residents. Do they have regular meeting places? Are they mobile? Do they have access to computers and the internet? Are there any literacy issues within the community? Plan your consultation so that everyone has the opportunity to participate.
2. Ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate by overcoming barriers that some individuals or groups may face. Recognise any special needs of your community and select any venues and communication methods with care. Acknowledge diversity and actively ensure your consultation is as inclusive as possible.
3. Make sure the aims of the consultation are clear, and decision makers are all agreed – be clear on what you are trying to achieve. It helps when explaining it to others and ensures consistency.
4. Plan your questions carefully. What information are you looking for – what do you need to know? Who is responsible for acting on any outcomes and are you able to use the results to make decisions? Ensure you have the capacity to evaluate and analyse results effectively.
5. Make your consultation easy to understand. Be empathetic when drafting questions, writing in a way that people are comfortable with and that they will understand. Group relevant questions into short sections and keep the flow in a logical sequence.
6. Ensure you have set aside enough time to draft, conduct and analyse your consultation. You may need to adapt as the consultation progresses too, e.g. if your schedule changes, let people know about it.
7. Ensure that you comply with the Data Protection Act when handling personal details. Personal questions will help your analysis so ensure you include household size, housing type and geographic location (postcode/village/street name) as well as the usual age, gender etc. The responses to these questions should not identify who the respondents are, unless of course you wish to invite them to further consultations.
8. Ensure you observe and display any copyright for maps or pictures, including Ordnance survey-based maps.
9. Thank people for their contributions. Don't forget to let them know what you learnt and what you will do as a result.
10. Analyse your consultation process. Have you achieved what you set out to do? If not, why not and how could you have done things differently?

# Preparing Your Consultation

## When should we consult?

You will probably want to carry out several consultations. Most groups undertake an initial exercise to establish the needs and aspirations of their community and a further consultation once the Plan has been produced to determine whether the Plan has addressed them. Communities are often engaged in a variety of further ways throughout the process.

The length of time needed will vary depending on:

- the type of consultation and method/s you choose
- the time of year, and
- the level of response that is being sought.

Best practice suggests you should plan for 6 to 12 weeks for each consultation.

### Important!

Remember that some organisations and groups will only meet monthly, so you may need to allow at least 5 weeks for responses.

### Do not consult:

- If the decision has already been made
- If the results are not going to be used
- If you cannot deliver what you are asking/promising
- If there are previous similar up to date engagement results
- If the appropriate resources, including financial resources, are not available
- If the urgency of the issue is such that the public interest lies in addressing the issue straight away
- In some regulatory matters where statutory processes must be followed

## Checklist

1. Think about the time of year. What else is happening?

Try to avoid major holiday times such as Christmas or key school holidays. If you must consult during these times, allow extra time for responses and issue reminders, ie through posters or a parish magazine article, to focus attention on the consultation.

2. Check if other local events or occasions are planned that you might either clash with, reducing the level of interest and responses, or use to communicate effectively with an already established audience.

#### Top Tip!

Combining your consultation with a popular local event, for instance taking a stall at the farmer's market, village fete or Christmas fair, can pay dividends, especially if a broad range of residents are likely to attend. Many neighbourhood planning groups in East Devon have reported much better response rates and a wider diversity of respondents from this approach, than they have had from stand alone events.

Dunkeswell timed their consultation to coincide with the very popular farmers market, whilst Clyst Honiton resurrected the historic 'revelry' fair for theirs!

3. Be clear about when decisions will be taken - and plan back from that.
4. Offer a range of dates and time of day/evening for events as some elderly residents may not wish to be out at night or commuters not able to get to a day time event. Using a combination of both will ensure that you are attempting to reach everyone.

#### Top Tip!

If you are only planning one or two consultation events you could still make the consultation material available at other times. In East Devon the following approaches have worked well:

    'Unmanned' exhibition boards with response forms, displayed in village hall foyers for several weeks, for visitors to view when attending routine clubs and meetings

    NP group attending local clubs to talk to those who find attending evening meetings difficult eg the Good Companions group, mother and toddler group, nursing home residents

    Copies of material on CD or available by e.mail to be viewed in residents own homes

5. Use a project planner to develop a realistic timetable.  
<http://new.eastdevon.gov.uk/planning/neighbourhood-and-community-plans/neighbourhood-plans/stage-1-getting-started/project-plan/>
6. Make sure you build in sufficient time for analysing what you learnt, identifying any key themes emerging. Analysis can be started as soon as responses start coming in. Don't waste time by waiting for the final deadline!
7. Allow time for feedback and evaluation.

## Who should we consult?

Recognising the mix of people that makes up your community will help to ensure everyone has the opportunity to 'engage'. Whether they do or not can reflect on how 'inclusive' your consultation plans are (though some people are just not interested, no matter how much the outcome may affect them in the future).

The more imaginative and creative your plans are, the more interested and involved people will be, making your consultation more robust.

Naturally, the people who live in your parish are those whose views are most important. Generally speaking, it is relatively easy to get mature adults to participate in consultation. Grouping residents and businesses into 'stakeholder' groups, helps to identify who else you need to think more carefully about what methods you should select to ensure their views are obtained. Some methods are better than others at including the majority of these groups.

Typical stakeholder groups include:

Schoolchildren (aged 5-16)	Young people (aged 16-30)	Older people
Commuters (people living in the community but working outside)	Community groups and societies	Black and minority ethnic groups
People with physical needs	People with learning needs	Faith groups (from a range of different faiths)
People employed in the community	Local businesses	Single parent families
Travellers and gypsies	Families	Migrant workers

**Important!**

To meet the Basic Conditions you must demonstrate that you have complied with equalities legislation- this can be achieved by showing that you have engaged with all stakeholder groups in your community.

Obviously many people will fall into several groups and consultation does not need to be specifically targeted to every possible stakeholder type. Good consultation will provide information in a format which is accessible and understandable by all, so that everyone is aware that the process is happening and has the opportunity to be involved.

One way that you can show that everyone knows that a neighbourhood plan is being produced is to directly notify every household. This could be through a questionnaire, or you could advertise in a magazine or local newspaper which everyone receives. If this isn't possible then make sure that you advertise prominently throughout the Parish- on posters, your website, in the shop etc.

Remember- you can't make people be involved but you must give them the opportunity!

**How should we consult?**

This will depend on your community and the skills and resources available to your group. The range of consultation methods that are particularly suited to neighbourhood planning includes:

- Self-completion questionnaires
- Public meetings
- Focus groups
- Stakeholder seminars

- Parish website
- Exhibitions

The best response rates tend to be generated by using methods which your target audience are used to- depending on your local community, this could include social media such as Twitter and Facebook. You may need to use several methods to get the whole community involved. If you can, provide several ways to respond eg by completing a paper questionnaire or an online form.

**Important!**

However you decide to consult, you should follow these guidelines:

- Explain fully why you are engaging with people, what on, what the results will be used for and what feedback will be expected.
- Make sure the information is well balanced, open and accurate.
- Always use clear plain English or language suitable for your target group without jargon and acronyms
- Ensure it is branded appropriately with the Council logo and other partners logos if appropriate
- Make sure it is accessible to your target audience. This may include large print versions, translations or visual options.

**How do we decide which method to use?**

Ask yourself the following key questions below to guide you to the right method:

**1. What am I trying to find out?**

This will determine whether you need to use quantitative or qualitative methods, or a combination of the two.

**Quantitative methods** – are usually based on a representative sample of people who will give you an accurate picture of the population. If you want to know 'how many people think', the quantitative method should be used.

Quantitative data is generally collected through offering a 'multiple choice' of responses which make it easier to carry out statistical analysis. Analysing quantitative data involves 'number crunching' – results are usually expressed as percentages and frequencies.

Most frequently used quantitative methods include:

Questionnaire	Referendum / poll	Survey
---------------	-------------------	--------

**Qualitative methods** – have more to do with attitudes, views and opinions and the reasons why people feel the way they do. If you want to know 'why', then a qualitative method is required.

Qualitative research typically involves group discussions or in-depth interviews to gain information, but is less about the number of people involved and more about the type of information you are trying to get. Analysing qualitative data takes longer as it involves grouping those strands of opinion that are related to one another.

The most frequently used qualitative methods are:

Focus groups	In-depth interviews /face to face	Exhibition or open day event
Questionnaire - 'open' questions	Stakeholder meetings	Forums - area, local, web
Community meeting	Workshop or group discussion	Photo survey

Consultation methods are discussed in the table overleaf, or visit

<https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/toolkits-and-guidance/how-to-consult-with-your-community/>

Other questions to help you determine which consultation method/s will best suit you are:

**2. From whom do I need this information?**

**3. How would they like/are they able to respond?**

**4. What information do they need before they can respond?**

**5. Do we need something besides a simple exchange of information?**

**6. How will I record this information?**

**7. What resources do I need and have?**

**8. How much time do I need and have?**

## **Where should we consult?**

If you are holding an event, consider different consultation venues to help you reach the whole of your community. Using different locations may give more people the opportunity to join in, and you will get better information as a result.

Checklist of possible venues

Community centre / village hall	Schools	Pubs/Cafes
Places of worship	Shops / Post office	On-the-street
Community days / Village fetes / Summer festivals	Playing Field	Existing clubs/societies

## Potential consultation methods and their effectiveness

Method	Commentary	Potential costs	Useful for	Not useful for
Documents available in public buildings e.g. parish council office	This is a useful way of raising awareness and providing easy access to documents (especially for those without internet)	Costs of document preparation, printing and distribution	Ensuring interested people have easy access to 'hard copies' of documents	Reaching 'hard to reach' groups who may not go to libraries, council offices etc. Difficult to judge how many copies are needed
Focus groups or citizens panels	Useful for area based discussions and presentation of options. Can help to gain more understanding of community concerns. Provides and opportunity to explore some issues in depth.	Low cost if handled internally. Consultants costs could be £500+ per session.	Gaining views from a cross section of the community, but these may be self-selecting and unrepresentative	Ensuring representative views from across the community
Formal written consultation/community surveys/questionnaires etc	Good introduction to the main issues and ability to obtain really detailed information. Responses can help identify key interests and groups.	Fairly low costs of publishing and printing (if black and white) but postage will add significantly, as will enclosing pre-paid reply envelopes. Telephone surveys can be expensive.	Providing users with detailed, comprehensive information. Useful for targeted consultation, full coverage of an area or random sampling to ensure unbiased responses.	Obtaining a large sample of views, particularly if respondents are responsible for returning them (rather than responses being collected by volunteers). Responses may be low and it may exclude those who can't read or don't speak English.
Hotline	Information for people without internet access. Needs to be staffed rather than a recorded message. Unlikely to be cost-effective or highly used, so better operated	Time and telecom set up. Dedicated staff may be a high cost, if volunteers then they are not undertaking other work	Giving information and allowing first point of contact. Useful to answer telephone queries from a 'general'	Wide ranging contact. A standalone phone service is very resource intensive.

Method	Commentary	Potential costs	Useful for	Not useful for
	from a 'general' phone number.	whilst answering the phone	office number as part of admin activities	
Leaflets and brochures	You can publicise an outline or summary of the proposed document and inform the public of further opportunities to get involved	Fairly low cost depending upon length and quality, but can be in the order of £100-£150 per 100. A 2 side A4, leaflet would cost around £10 per 100.	Raising awareness in the community. A short summary leaflet could be sent to every house/included in free newspapers	Reaching those who aren't English speaking, don't read or aren't interested
Letters to organisations listed in the regulations	This is a minimum legal requirement so must be done	Small cost of producing letters, printing and postage	Making contact with organisations, raising awareness, useful feedback and compliance with regulations	Reaching people outside organisations Feedback is not always specific to the group
Local press, radio and TV	You can place formal adverts or ask them to carry local stories Some free newspapers are delivered to all houses	Adverts can cost £00s but articles/local stories are usually free. Radio and TV adverts cost £000s	Reaching groups and organisations where resources are limited but wide coverage is needed Newspaper adverts achieve wide coverage in a familiar format	Reaching groups who don't read/receive newspaper or listen to local radio/TV Coverage of local interest stories depend on space- may not appear if busy
One-to-one meetings with selected stakeholders	A useful way of identifying key issues and getting key people involved and achieving alignment with other strategies and initiatives.	Resource intensive	Getting to grips with specific issues relevant to stakeholders.	Assessing broad views as this method is restricted to specific people/bodies. Sample may be too small to be statistically reliable
Public exhibitions/ displays/ stalls/ roadshows	A useful medium for disseminating information and allowing communities to air their views. Fairly resource	Materials and time in preparing documents for exhibition.	Raising awareness and obtaining views on specific issues. Ideal for displaying large maps or models. They	Obtaining a large sample of the community's views. Feedback may be limited to what is on display.

Method	Commentary	Potential costs	Useful for	Not useful for
	intensive and attendees are usually self-selecting	Time for attendance and room/venue hire	will normally only provide feedback from a small number of people and may have to be used in conjunction with other methodologies	Can exclude those with mobility problems or those who find it hard to reach the venue due to time or location issues
Public meetings or Town/Parish Council meeting	An open and inclusive way for people to debate the issues although attendees are self-selecting. Meetings must be carefully prepared and effectively chaired. Can be resource intensive.	Time and venue hire. Preparation of any display materials.	Informing and consulting the public Reaching groups already interested in the future of their community Controversial issues may encourage attendance but can generate bad feeling	May not achieve consensus. Hard to reach groups and less confident persons are unlikely to have their say
Use of internet and social media	Good low cost method of involving people which can be easily updated. Could use existing parish website. Social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are also useful methods of informing people.	Minimal additional costs but will need expertise in controlling website and/or social media content	Good access at all times and can be easily updated at little cost. Questionnaires can be completed and leaflets downloaded, increasing accessibility and response rates.	Reaching people without internet success. In rural areas, lack of Broadband provision makes this a particular problem.
Workshops/Planning for real	Chance to engage local communities and develop 'ownership' of their proposals. Need to involve the right people and significant preparation time. Useful for identifying and focussing discussion around difficult	Facilitators and venue hire. Can be expensive, £000's, if externally facilitated	Environmental issues such as planning, open space, housing and development. Good for complex issues, getting fresh ideas and expressing views in a non-confrontational way.	Not appropriate for non-physical issues, or for engaging with young people, children or some hard to reach groups. Will not provide a large sample of views if a statistically

<b>Method</b>	<b>Commentary</b>	<b>Potential costs</b>	<b>Useful for</b>	<b>Not useful for</b>
	issues and key themes. Resource intensive in terms of staffing and may need professional assistance.			representative sample is needed.

## Focus on Surveys

Surveys are a mainstay of consultation work. They are relatively straightforward to set up and run and give reassuringly solid looking statistics. However, surveys are not always the best method of carrying out a consultation and often work best when done with other methods, such as public meetings or focus groups. Great care should be taken when designing the survey and with interpreting the results, especially when there is a very small sample size, for instance because return rates are low.

### ***When would I use a survey?***

Use a survey when you need to collect reliable figures and statistics- most Neighbourhood Plans rely on a questionnaire to provide a basic understanding of residents aspirations. You can gather more abstract information by including free text responses in the survey but these are imprecise, hard to analyse and should be used sparingly (see *Common Mistakes*). Although surveys are a relatively quick and easy consultation method they work best in conjunction with other methods, such as meetings or focus groups, which supply more qualitative data. Please don't assume that knocking off a quick survey constitutes a thorough piece of community engagement!

### ***What will a survey give me?***

A good survey will give you hard evidence of people's views in the form of robust statistics. It is extremely important to understand that achieving this is dependent on getting a good sample size (see How Big Should My Sample be?) and analysing the data correctly (see Analysing the Data). A well designed survey will also allow the data to be cross-analysed in some depth.

### ***Survey design***

Before designing a survey or questionnaire, think about your objectives and consider the key points you want answered and whose views you want to hear.

Questionnaires may be used to support an exhibition or open day, or used on their own. However you use them, you must give people some background so they know 'why' you are asking them for their views.

You could back it up with a leaflet explaining the background, exhibitions and displays, web links and further contact information.

#### Top tip!

Postal Questionnaires can generate very low returns. Improve response rates by hand delivering/collecting them (using volunteers to cover a few postcodes each) or including prepaid envelopes.

In the Blackdown Hills and Axminster response rates were improved by offering a prize draw to all respondents!

### **Checklist**

1. Keep the subject matter relatively simple, remembering that other forms of research may be better suited to the kind of questions that you want to ask or the target audience you wish to contact.

2. Using multiple-choice or ranking options is easier for both respondents to answer and data entry.
3. Make sure the survey is logically planned, formed in sections that flow naturally from one to another.
4. Use a simple explanation to provide context to complex questions or different subjects covered by the survey.
5. Keep your questions and the overall survey as short as possible, if you keep the subject matter to the neighbourhood plan, this shouldn't be a problem.
6. Pilot the survey. Ask someone not involved in its design to test how long it takes to complete – if it's over 15 minutes it maybe off-putting to some.

A single questionnaire on its own may not be able to answer all you need to know, but provide good data to base further 'qualitative' consultation upon.

7. Add in a confidentiality statement, to reassure participants of your security / data protection.
8. The survey should always end with a thank you and the closing date for replies.

### **Survey tools**

There are a number of software packages that can be purchased to produce and analyse your questionnaire. There is also a piece of free software available through 'Google', known as Google Forms. Unlike most free packages, Google Forms is easily accessible (you just need to set up a Microsoft Account- which is free) so that you can enter your questions in a format that can be responded to electronically online or by mail or printed as a paper copy, will put electronic responses into an Excel spreadsheet format (that you can manually add paper responses to) and will analyse responses and produce a simple report containing graphs and charts. If you would like advice on how to use Google Forms, please contact the Neighbourhood Planning Officer in the Planning Policy section of the District Council.

EDDC aim to be as supportive as possible to assist you in your consultation and will advise on any stage of the consultation process.

### **How do I organise a survey?**

Before you start the design process you should draw up a schedule for the survey. There are four main elements:

- design,
- fieldwork (when the survey is 'live')
- data entry & analysis and
- reporting

as well as important events such as proof reading/testing, stuffing the envelopes, Committee dates etc. Be realistic.

For example:

Design and testing	1 week
Survey 'live'	5-6 weeks

Data entry	1-2 weeks
Analysis and report writing	1-2 weeks
Total	8-11 weeks

Once you have designed and set up your survey you need to send it out. If you are posting the survey, you will get a better response if you include a pre-paid reply envelope. You might also want to consider offering an incentive (free tickets to a festival event or a cash prize, for example) as this may help to boost the return rate. You must also consider publicising the survey as this will raise awareness and increase the likelihood that recipients will recognise it when it arrives on their doormat/inbox. Don't assume that everyone receiving the survey will be instantly enthused! At the District Council we have access to the Post Office Address File which contains all of the addresses in the East Devon postal area. This can be used for randomised mail-outs or for targeting specific areas. Please contact us for more information.

### **Common survey design mistakes**

Surveys are very easy to assemble, but very hard to get right. Here are some of the common design mistakes that people make:

#### ***Not having a clear idea of what you are asking and what you need to know.***

This is fundamental. Spend some time discussing what the survey needs to deliver and design your questions accordingly. Work through several drafts, and consider how the questions might relate to each other, particularly if you want to cross-analyse the data. Don't ask any questions simply for the sake of it.

#### ***Incorporating two questions in one.***

"Where do you live and work? Exeter \_ Exmouth \_ Sidmouth \_ Crediton \_"  
Not everyone works in the same town where they live...

#### ***Forgetting to ask a key question***

"We want to break the results down by age"  
"Did you ask people for their age?"  
"Er, no..."

#### ***Ambiguous questions***

"Do you use the leisure facilities in the village? Yes\_ No \_"  
There is a wide range of leisure facilities. Without knowing which one/s the respondent is referring to this question gives very little useful information. One possibility would be to ask a follow up question "Which facilities do you use?" followed by a list of possible options. A better alternative would be to simply ask "Do you use any of the following facilities?" followed by a list.

#### ***Leading questions***

Leading questions make people think and answer in a certain way and lead to false or skewed results. They either include the answer, point the consultee in the 'right' direction or include some form of carrot or stick to send them to the 'right' answer.

These can be quite overt:

- People love living in East Devon. Do you love living in East Devon?

- How good was the excellent service provided by the Parish Council?

Or more subtle:

- Would you like to see the play area improved? Yes/ No

**Leaving the respondent with no suitable option or creating options that overlap**

"Tick one box which describes your current status:

Student \_ Employed \_ Parent \_ Retired \_"

Your children have grown up and left home, you retired from your career in local government last year but you currently do occasional part time work at a garden centre in between studying for your Open University Social Research degree. Which box are *you* going to tick?

**Be careful with the question type**

In 'open ended' questions respondents write in their own answers, whereas in 'closed' questions respondents choose from a list of possible answers.

**Closed answer** questions – typically choosing from a list of options is easier and less expensive to analyse than open answer questions. Aim to make as many as of your questions 'closed' answer as you can. Rating scales can be used in 'closed' questions, so you can get a mean score, as well as count the percentage, Be careful though with ranked questions, where the respondent is asked to rank a number of options in order of importance. These are frequently completed incorrectly and the more options there are to rank, the more mistakes you will find.

E.g. Rank the following from 1-6

	Correct	Wrong
Play Area	6	1
Shop	4	1
School	2	2
Doctors	5	5
Bus Service	1	2
Church	3	1

A better approach is to rate the options and ask, for each one, how important it is, as per the example below. This way you can order the options yourself according to how many people said the category was important.

	Very Important	Important	Neither	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Play Area					
Shop					
School					

Doctors

Bus Service

Church

Note: When designing questions, it is essential to provide an equal number of negative and positive options on the list.

**Classification questions** - These questions are used to help with analysis and identify what groups of interviewees feel about different issues. Remembering that any classification questions asked give personal information of the responder, so only ask those categories that you will use the replies in analysis.

In community led consultation, the classification questions you should ask are:

- Age
- No. in household
- Housing type
- Occupation
- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Postcode, and
- Street/village.

Using these demonstrates that you have been inclusive in your consultation and therefore that your results are robust.

***Too many open text boxes...or not enough.***

Open answer text boxes are an invitation for your respondents to tell you things that the questions alone don't cover. You want to give your respondents a chance to really air their views and share their ideas but you don't want to wade through vast amounts of text at the analysis stage so only use open answer questions where they add value to your overall survey. Ideally, they should only be used to probe specific closed answer questions, e.g. 'And what makes you say you are satisfied/dissatisfied with affordable housing in Happyplace?' (Please write in) .....

Leaving them out entirely can leave your respondents feeling frustrated that they haven't been properly heard. The trick is to include just one or two open text questions and to limit the physical amount of space on the page. With an online survey you can set the character limit for a question. You should also bear in mind that you will have to conduct some analysis on the resulting comments, however rudimentary, and this can take some time. It is both time consuming and costly to analyse open ended questions so don't ask them unless this is the only or best way to get the information you need.

**Not proof reading and testing the survey.**

If you have spent lots of time preparing and setting up your survey it is very easy to miss flaws and mistakes, especially if you have been through several drafts. Always test your survey on some colleagues, preferably people who have no direct connection with the content. This is especially important for online surveys as you also need to be sure that you have set the survey up correctly as well as testing the content.

**How big should my sample be and how many surveys do I need to send out?**

There is no definitive answer to this. Survey return rates can vary enormously and you will have to make a decision about how many surveys to send out in order to achieve the required sample size. Most rural Neighbourhood Plan groups in East Devon will post/deliver questionnaires to every household. This is useful in demonstrating that every resident has had an opportunity to be involved in consultation, however, it is not always possible to do, particularly in a larger urban area where resources may not stretch to addressing every household and a sample may be needed. Do be aware that a questionnaire sent to every household is likely to result in answers which are more representative than a questionnaire distributed at an event or in a local shop where attendees are more likely to be demographically similar.

The size of your sample will dictate whether or not your survey is statistically reliable. Ideally all surveys should be statistically reliable but this is not always possible. If a survey is not statistically reliable then the results should be treated with caution.

The table below provides a simple sample size reckoner. Population size is the number of people who your survey applies to.

Population size	Number of returned surveys required for a statistically reliable sample (+/- 5% margin of error)
100,000	270
10,000	264
5,000	257
1,250	223
156	100

As an example, if you have a population size of 600 you will need a sample size of around 185. This equates to a return rate of around 31%, assuming that you contact all 600 in the population. You will have to make an informed judgement as to whether this return rate is likely for your population and do everything that you can to boost it, using publicity and incentives.

You can still use figures from a non-statistically reliable survey but it should be made clear that these figures are indicative and not categorical. Anyway, a major piece of consultation work should include more elements than just a survey.

### **Collecting demographic data and personal information**

Best practice is to always collect demographic data with a survey. Please don't be tempted to leave these questions out as there can be significant differences between people in different groups and without asking things like age, gender etc you won't know.

Do not ask for too much personal information. Things like names and addresses should not be collected unless there is a specific reason, such as asking if people are interested in taking part in further consultation work (and you should give them a yes/no opt-in for this). If you want to plot your survey results on a map make sure you ask for a postcode. If you are surveying a group of people for whom you already hold demographic data avoid having to ask for it again by assigning an ID number to each person's record and mail merging these ID numbers onto the survey forms. Make sure you include the ID field in the form design and the data entry.

Personal information from surveys should *never* be passed on to a third party. You should always have a standard disclaimer on any survey stating that " xxxxx ~Parish Council fully complies with the 1998 Data Protection Act and will not pass your data on to third parties". Survey forms with personal information should be stored for a limited time and disposed of appropriately in confidential shredding.

#### **Don't panic!**

If any of this is unclear or you have any questions about designing a survey, contact the Neighbourhood Planning Officer who will be happy to help.

#### Checklist

1. Avoid using jargon and use everyday language wherever possible.
2. Write in short sentences of no more than 15 words.
3. Use multiple choice questions wherever you can – it's easier for respondents to tick a box than think how to phrase their comments - and its easier to analyse.
4. Keep the questions short.
5. Do not ask questions that might be hard to answer, e.g. participants will have difficulty imagining where they might be living in ten years time.
6. Route respondents to different parts of the survey if answers are not applicable.
7. Avoid leading questions, such as 'Do you agree.....'.
8. Avoid vague phrases such as 'Do you use the bus service regularly' – 'regularly' is subjective. Instead, list a variety of time scales, such as daily, weekly, twice monthly and so on, in closed answer format.

#### **Increasing response rates**

Making it easier for people to get involved results in a better response rate.

If promoted well, distributed and collected by hand, response rates for self completion questionnaires will usually be very high. Typically the effect of this 'personal touch' increases returns to around 75-85%.

Door to door collection, supplemented by collection boxes in local outlets such as shops, pubs and places of worship will help the response rate as it reminds people to complete it if they haven't already.

Creating awareness in the weeks running up to your questionnaire launch ensures that the community know about your plans. Village and parish newsletters are an ideal way to pique local interest, e.g. a small feature titled 'Look out for next months issue for your local neighbourhood planning survey'.

#### Checklist for collecting questionnaires

1. Use existing delivery networks eg village/parish magazine distributors, or use word of mouth or advertising to recruit a team of people to distribute and collect. Asking lots of people to cover their small area will reduce the chance of volunteer fatigue!
2. Encourage volunteers to speak to every householder, not just to push the envelope through the door. You may wish to produce a crib sheet answering the most common questions- not all volunteers will be neighbourhood planning experts!
3. Indicate clearly when the questionnaires will be collected (usually within three weeks for households; longer for stakeholder groups), or provide a (prepaid) envelope for return.
4. In large communities it may be worth buying a licence for a Freepost address to return questionnaires. Be aware that return rates will be lower than household collection.
5. Think about how you will gather information from people with poor literacy and numeracy skills or with conditions that make participation difficult e.g. blindness. Consider arranging for someone who can help explain and fill in the forms.
6. Keep a clear record of where questionnaires have been delivered and collected to ensure you have covered the area.

#### **Analysing your responses**

Using any survey software to create your questionnaire will make the 'number crunching' much easier for you, and it helps analyse results. Using survey software should make composing and analysing questionnaires much less time consuming and less expensive to conduct. If you have used software such as Google Forms to produce your survey, it makes sense to also use it to analyse the responses. If you use an online survey tool, don't forget to factor in time to input paper responses and to interpret the findings once they have been analysed.

#### Checklist

1. Merge the responses from any paper and online questionnaires, by inputting any paper replies into your chosen software programme. Whilst doing this you can check the returns for accuracy (eg have people put in two ages?).

2. It doesn't really matter if all questions aren't answered. Some people may feel uncomfortable answering some questions – a good reason why you should include a 'Don't know/not sure/can't remember' option to prevent this putting people off completing it.
3. Using survey software makes analysis easier; how you interpret the findings requires more skill.
4. Start by looking at the basic statistics and percentages around which you will develop your findings, eg 25% are aged under 30, and so on.
5. The next stage is to 'cross tab', looking for trends in your data by analysing two questions together. For example, knowing that just under half of parishioners agree that it would be more convenient if local shops were open later, you can say how important this is for certain age groups.

(Note: A quick 'word of mouth' search in the early planning stage of your consultation may identify if there is anyone in your parish with experience in producing questionnaires, undertaking market research or with experience of data collation, input and analysis that may be able to help).

### **Feedback and reporting**

You don't need to use all of the feedback in your report. Only use statistics to support and evidence the conclusions you have come to, ie those that have informed your findings and any decisions moving forward.

Select those most relevant and important and organise into summary tables and graphs. (You can provide the full data set as an appendix rather than in the main report body if you wish).

#### **Checklist**

1. Make sure that what you have concluded is supported by the data.
2. Ensure you feed back the results to residents in a timely manner.
3. Let people know what you found out, as well as what you are going to do with this information. This will make sure that people do not think that their contributions 'disappeared into a filing drawer' and help continue raising the profile of your task.
4. If using other consultation methods in addition, don't be tempted to merge the results, they are not comparable, but complementary. However you can present them side by side.

## Focus on Events

Public events are best used when you need to consult in a very specific geographic area or on a topic with a specific target audience. They are best used as a way of raising awareness of an issue and offering people a chance to discuss issues in a depth to which they are comfortable. Public events are time consuming, need detailed planning and most importantly they must be well publicised.

### What will a public event or meeting give me?

This will depend on what kind of event you hold.

- Public meeting. This will normally yield meeting notes, recording the issues and questions raised. These can be incorporated into reports and other documents.
- Display. A display of plans or proposals is more difficult to record. You should aim to record the number of people attending and consider using a survey or other means to record people's views. You should also try to record people's comments. It can also be useful to observe people's behaviour.
- Interactive event. This is an event where people can come and take part in activities rather than passively receiving information.

You should bear in mind that it is very unlikely a public event will give you a fully representative cross-section of the community. Although they are a very useful way of bringing an issue to people's attention a public event should be used in conjunction with other consultation methods.

### Where should we hold the event?

Where you decide to hold your event is important. Community buildings are the obvious choices although not always the only option and not all communities have one. Most communities choose the venue where they hold Parish Council meetings, as this is already known and used by the public for 'community business'. If you don't have a community building, is there a local school, scout/guide hut, sports pavilion, or does the local pub have a spare room that could be used instead?

Hire a venue with good access and capacity that caters for those with disabilities, and preferably with public transport and parking nearby. Remember that your choice of venue should be inclusive- try to avoid pubs and places of worship if other venues are available (as some residents may not feel comfortable in them)

There are a number of ways in which an open event can be used in the neighbourhood plan process:

- Generate general community awareness
- Inform people of the benefits and the processes involved
- Attract volunteers to sign up for working groups
- Identify issues that the community feels are important to its collective future
- Use the event as part of the overall consultation process

- Identifying people's views on the draft action plan
- Launch the Neighbourhood Plan
- Report progress on various actions as they develop

Don't forget that attendance and interest can be greatly increased by combining the neighbourhood plan event with an existing community activity such as setting up an exhibition stall at a farmers market, Christmas fair or summer fete, or by holding a public meeting after a parish council meeting.

### **Formal events**

Formal events, such as public meetings or seminars, are more structured, and often include presentations. Introduced and managed by someone acting as chairman, they usually involve speakers and experts. .

Public meetings are usually more successful in attracting a range of people at the weekend. Whilst weekday evening meetings may be convenient for commuters, others such as elderly members of the community or single parents may not wish to attend at night.

#### Checklist

1. Choose speakers who are comfortable speaking in front of an audience. Can the 'chair' handle hecklers and keep their cool under pressure?
2. Do you need audio/visual aids, microphones and a roaming microphone to take questions from the floor in a public meeting? Have the correct equipment, and ensure you set up and test it in advance.
3. Plan in any breaks and discussion between community members
4. Bring a note taker or get the event filmed or recorded to ensure you don't miss any comments and body language used by those who contribute. You should advise people that you intend to tape the event for data collection purposes only.

### **Informal events**

Informal events such as open days and exhibitions have a more relaxed environment that encourage people to have their say in a less conspicuous way. These typically can run from morning to night, making it easy for people to 'drop in' at a time that suits them, therefore people with time constraints are more likely to attend.

Less formal events give people the opportunity to look around, find out what's going on, meet attendants and ask questions in relative privacy. You get more time to network with stakeholders as well as engaging with people on the issues.

#### Checklist

1. If you are planning to stage an exhibition, select the best location for it to be seen by everyone.
2. Consider using case studies, they can help to illustrate what could happen.
3. Think about who will erect, dismantle and man your event?

4. Prepare an information leaflet highlighting the key points for people to take away.
5. Draft a short questionnaire to pick up the key issues you want to know, otherwise it can be difficult to capture what people think.
6. Draft a rota of attendants throughout the day with more people planned to cover the evening.
7. Be aware that the time and choice of day you decide to hold your open event on may affect who will be able to attend. Perhaps you could hold your event over two half days?
8. Offer refreshments- these act a focus for discussion and 'capture' attendees whilst you ask for feedback.

**Top tip!**

Increase the chance of younger people and families attending by offering activities for children (and advertising this fact through fliers given out at School). This gives parents the chance to participate and read the information without being distracted. Why not ask children to draw their favourite things about the community? This will give you instant artwork for your Plan as well as capturing their feedback!

### **Utilising existing community events**

Think about taking your consultation to the public, rather than the public coming to you. Think carefully about where people already meet and try to make best use of these opportunities.

If the timing of your consultation coincides with that of a popular local event such as a village fete, local society event or community club, it maybe possible to 'piggy back' that event and you'll be instantly guaranteed an audience.

Be creative and make your stand or activity as interesting and eye catching as possible to ensure people notice it. And remember to have a team of people to answer questions and look after your display.

### **Publicising an event**

Publicity is crucial in getting people to take part. Never assume that publicity is just a quick and easy add-on, consider what you are going to do as part of the planning process. Inviting local organisations and authorities gets them involved from the start, creating good working relationships and benefiting you in the long term when addressing future actions. There are lots of different ways to publicise an event, but timing is key to its success.

#### **Checklist**

1. Find out the print deadlines for local newsletters/newspapers and advertise in them. If you've missed the print deadline, you may still be able to insert an A5 flyer within its distribution.
2. Find out what other events are being held in advance that you can use to hand out invitations for your event.
3. Ask local shops and pubs to display a small poster, or a postcard if they don't have much space. Also promote the event with posters on local public notice boards, community centres and in sports pavilions.

4. Ask the local schools to hand out a flyer with pupils.
5. Make sure your community website has large feature on your event on the homepage.
6. Don't forget to ask a local radio station if they'd like to come and do an interview at your event. They are always looking for local news stories - you may get some free publicity in advance too.
7. Plan the event well in advance to maximise peoples' availability, and try to avoid clashing with local events, sports matches and popular television programmes.

## **Equipment**

Make a list of all the equipment you are likely to need. This will depend on what you have planned and may include:

- Large-scale map and aerial photographs of the area (EDDC are able to provide these)
- Exhibition boards (EDDC may be able to help with these)
- Leaflets and questionnaires
- Flip charts and coloured pens
- Display boards
- Laptop computer, projector and screen
- Tables and chairs
- Extension cables
- Name badges
- Paper, pens
- Blu-Tack, stickers & sticky note pads
- A camera (take pics to include in your final plan)
- Attendance sheets and forms granting permission to use any photographs taken at the event with 'identifiable' people in them
- Box for completed questionnaires

You may also find it useful to bring along large scale 'garden' games or colouring equipment to occupy children whilst adults participate.

## **Insurance**

Investigate if you need to get public liability insurance, which protects your council from claims by members of the public for death, illness, loss and injury caused by negligence. This may already be covered by the venues' existing public liability insurance or it may be possible to arrange one-off cover.

In most cases if you are hiring or borrowing equipment it will be covered against loss or damage by the owner, but check this is the case. If needs be you may have to get separate insurance.

## **Attendance lists and contact sheets**

Attendance lists and contact sheets are useful - at an initial meeting you may be looking to attract volunteers or, if you are nearing the completion of your plan, looking for 'Champions'. Remember to include a statement of intent at the top explaining that people's details will only be used for the purpose of the exercise.

Records of the type and number of attendees may be used as evidence to justify a Neighbourhood Plan and should be recorded in your consultation statement.

**Maps** will be used in a variety of ways. The most obvious way is to show people what is proposed in their community and to invite them to comment or highlight areas for improvement (by inserting cocktail sticks or using a sticker on a large scale map).

It is also useful for attendees to indicate where they live/work so that you can identify the localities that have not been well represented at the event and may require additional consultation.

Historic maps and maps showing constraints to development (such as flooding, historic features, areas of nature conservation, planning policy boundaries) are available from EDDC. These provide talking points and allow people to see how and why settlements have developed as they have. They also inform people so that some suggestions (such as building in a floodplain) can be discounted.

It is important all maps are referenced and include copyright protection.

**Flip charts/Question boards:** Flip charts can be used as discussion boards, with people posting comments (using sticky note pads) that can be discussed more widely within focus groups or at a public meeting or seminar. Alternatively, three boards can make an instant 'Mad, Sad, Glad' board at an open day event. People post comments using sticky note pads under the heading that describes best what they feel or what features they like/dislike about the area. Using sticky note pads means people can write their comments in relative privacy and you can lift them and group into 'themes' easily.

## **Facilitators**

You will need at least one facilitator to lead focus groups or seminars, on the day, as well as several others for group work. Ideally you would have one facilitator per table as well as a 'roaming' person.

Facilitators will need to be objective and make certain that the event works towards its objectives, ensuring that the most articulate or the loudest people do not dominate the event and everyone has an opportunity to participate.

Facilitators are also useful for question boards, linking comments being made and encouraging people to write down their opinions that may have otherwise gone unwritten.

## Photographs

Take a camera along, but if you intend to use the photographs for publicity purposes you should explain what the photographs will be used for and ask for written consent from people who attend. Alternatively, invite the local newspapers for publicity photographs.

In addition, you can use photography as a form of consultation on it's own. Aerial photographs are available from EDDC, and local people or groups may be able to provide other material (for instance historic photographs, local artwork, photos of buildings etc) to generate and aid discussion about local issues (highway pinchpoints, flooding, layout of public spaces).

Some groups also ask residents to photograph features of particular importance or which detract from the area in a 'photo survey', individually or in teams. After sorting they can be used as part of a wider discussion, just like written comments can, and to illustrate the Plan. This is also an interesting way to get young people to get involved. By using their own digital camera/mobile phones and sending the results in electronically keeps costs down too.

## After the event

Keep people informed and let people know how the event went. Produce a summary and send it to those that provided contact details along with details of any further consultation.

Send a summary of the day (with photographs) to the local community newsletter / newspaper and on the community website.

### Contact us:

Planning Policy Team  
East Devon District Council  
Blackdown House  
Border Road  
Heathpark Industrial Estate  
Honiton  
EX14 1EJ

01395 571533

[planningpolicy@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:planningpolicy@eastdevon.gov.uk)