

How to resource your neighbourhood plan

Putting the pieces together



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1 Introduction

This resource will explain:

- how to identify the resources and skills available within your community
- external sources of advice and guidance
- indicative costs of producing a neighbourhood plan
- ways to budget and to finance your plan

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 Resources and skills within your community

Before making the decision to buy in skills and support to assist you with the production of your neighbourhood plan, you need to look within your group to see what skills are already available. Having done this you can then look to fill any gaps from the wider community, before considering paid for services. This will enable you to involve the wider community in plan production and help to keep costs down.

It is important to remember that people will be volunteering their time to help with the development of your neighbourhood plan. The Community Matters website has information and advice on working with [volunteers and volunteering](#).

2.1 Understanding what is needed

Understanding the skills that are required can be difficult if you are new to the process. There are a variety of skills needed to produce a neighbourhood plan and we have produced a [skills mapping resource](#) which will help you relate the skills you have in your group to those needed to produce a neighbourhood plan.

Remember to think beyond 'planning' skills, for instance having someone who can set up and maintain a website is really useful. Most neighbourhood planning groups have found having an informative and up to date website helped them spread their message and increase participation in developing the neighbourhood plan. Also be aware that some tasks (for example distributing leaflets) may not require technical or specialist skills, so you should also try to identify those who are willing to help with general tasks.

2.2 Identifying skills within your group

Our [skills mapping resource](#) can be used as a starting point for identifying skills within your group (a skills audit).

Here are some top tips for carrying out a skills audit:



- **Retain an open mind** as it is likely that people will have additional useful skills to those identified as needed so make the most of any assistance offered. It is also important to remember that people may have skills which can be transferred to the neighbourhood plan process. Some people may want to use the neighbourhood plan process to work with others to develop a new skill.
- **Link to your project plan** so you can discuss with people when you expect to require assistance on particular tasks and what the potential time commitment may be. The more information you can provide the more likely people will be willing to step forward and offer to assist.
- **Keep a record** of the available skills and areas of interest of your members. You can use this information as a basis to ask for their assistance at the relevant time. This can also be used to help identify skills gaps.
- **Ask people to be specific about the help they can provide.** Wherever possible you should ask people to sign up to specific tasks you know you need help with. This will make it easier to call on them for help when needed, and to involve them in something they actually want to do. This will also avoid a situation where you have a large pool of “volunteers” who have expressed a vague interest in helping out, and whom you are unsure how to use.

2.3 Identifying skills within the wider community

Not all groups will have all the skills required to deliver their neighbourhood plan. If through undertaking your skills audit you identify skills or knowledge gaps, then the next stage is to try and fill them from within the wider community. Here is some advice on how to do this:

- **Tap into existing networks.** This can be an effective way of raising awareness of the neighbourhood plan and encouraging people to help. For example, you could talk to community groups, local sports teams, or tenants and residents associations. The East Shoreditch Neighbourhood Forum explains, in this [video](#), the importance of working with existing organisations.
- **Word of mouth** is one of the best ways of getting people to come forward. Members of your group should also be champions of your plan. They should take every opportunity to raise the plan’s profile whether at work, at the school gates or down the pub. People will only offer to help if they know you are producing a neighbourhood plan. By raising the profile of the neighbourhood plan at an early stage you should get ‘buy in’ from the local community. As a sense of ownership develops more people are likely to volunteer.
- **Ask for help at every opportunity.** For example a sign-up sheet could be made available at the end of each public meeting, at every consultation event and on-line. These details should be kept secure. They can be used to keep people informed of your plan’s progress and to let them know how they can get involved.
- **Ask for help from organisations and groups within the area.** Local traders may be able to provide meeting space for free or at a discounted rate or residents may be willing to host smaller meetings.
- **Keep records of those who have offered to help and remember to use these records.** This information will need to be stored securely and you will need to explain to



people how their personal details are to be used. Some groups use cloud storage such as Google documents or Dropbox which enable named individuals (for example members of the steering group) to access the records remotely. Cheshire West and Cheshire Council include guidance on [data protection](#) as part of their Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit.

- **Use social media e.g. Facebook and Twitter.** This can be an [effective method](#) of keeping people up to date with your plan's progress and as a method of asking for help and assistance. It can be particularly useful when assistance is required from a large number of people for a one-off task, such as distributing leaflets.
- **Clearly explain the assistance you require** as people are more likely to volunteer if they are clear on what they are being asked to do (including the level of responsibility) and their likely time involvement.
- **Adapt your approach and pace** in light of the skills and funds available and willingness to engage in shared working activities. You should focus on delivering what you can with the resources available so identify the key issues rather than trying to deal with everything. The more complicated your plan is the more resource intensive it will be to produce.
- **Be creative.** Some neighbourhood planning groups have worked with school children to design the logo for their neighbourhood plan. Uckfield Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group held a [logo competition](#) with the Community Technical College and Winsford Town Council invited all primary school children to [produce a logo](#) with the winning and shortlisted entries used to illustrate the [neighbourhood plan](#).

3 External sources of advice and guidance

Your skills audit alongside your [project plan](#) should enable you to identify knowledge gaps or areas where further assistance and advice is required. There are a number of sources of help, advice and guidance you could draw upon to help fill these gaps including: other neighbourhood planning groups; neighbourhood planning champions; and students.

3.1 Neighbourhood planning groups

The number of groups who have a 'made' neighbourhood plan is ever increasing. This means that there is a body of experience, knowledge, expertise and best practice which you can tap into and build on during the development of your plan.

It is important to remember that each neighbourhood plan is different. It will be seeking to address issues in a specific area and within a particular planning context. However, you may want to try and identify neighbourhood plans that have faced similar issues or are similar in nature to yours. For example neighbourhood areas and plans with similar:

- geography (e.g. rural village, town or city centre, or suburb)



- development pressures (e.g. limited development potential because of protected landscapes; seeking to provide homes for local people; or areas under high development pressure)
- issues to address (e.g. housing, retail, employment, open space)
- population size
- planning policy context e.g. the group is producing the neighbourhood plan in advance of an up-to-date Local Plan

You should exercise caution when looking at emerging neighbourhood plans that have not yet been tested at an independent examination and therefore may not meet the [basic conditions](#).

Identifying other relevant neighbourhood planning groups, as well as learning from the experience of others, need not be difficult. Below are some suggestions on how to do this:

- **Local planning authorities** must publicise details of designated neighbourhood areas in their authority. These are often listed on their website along with relevant contact details.
 - **Join the debate:** There are a number of neighbourhood planning discussion forums where you can post questions and receive responses to queries. These include [LinkedIn](#) and the [Forum for Neighbourhood Planning](#).
 - **Sign up for newsletters such as** Planning Aid England's monthly newsletter [Up Front](#) which includes details of upcoming events, top tips and news. The Department for Communities and Local Government's [notes on neighbourhood planning](#) provides an update on neighbourhood planning progress to date as well as emerging issues.
 - **Get online.** There are a number of websites dedicated to neighbourhood planning including the [Community Knowledge Hub](#). This has information on neighbourhood planning including resources published by neighbourhood planning groups and details of upcoming events. [The Forum for Neighbourhood Planning](#) has a wealth of information and resources including; latest news; case studies; resources; forum posts; and links to 'made' plans. #neighbourhoodplanning is an active twitter feed and can be used as a source of information on the progress of other neighbourhood planning groups throughout England.
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- **Neighbourhood Planning Champions**

The Department for Communities and Local Government has put together a network of ['Neighbourhood Planning Champions'](#) whose role is to provide peer-to-peer advice.

The Champions network includes representatives from communities, business forums and local planning authorities (including elected members and senior officers). They are all engaged in neighbourhood planning in some way, including several from communities and local planning authorities that have been all the way through the process and have ['made'](#) neighbourhood plans (those brought into legal force).

The Champions are volunteers and this means that different Champions are able to offer different levels and types of assistance. Groups have already benefitted from Champions supporting neighbourhood planning in various ways including:



- organising neighbourhood planning events to bring together communities in their area and nearby areas to learn more about neighbourhood planning and to discuss common issues
- attending neighbourhood planning events around the country and offering advice based on their first-hand experience
- providing advice and assistance including going along to local parish council meetings to give a first-hand account of the process and to answer any questions, or offering advice over the phone or via email
- organising '[twinning](#)' trips for neighbourhood planning groups, visiting each other's areas and sharing knowledge.

You can find out where Champions are located [here](#). For further information on the Champions [email](#) the neighbourhood planning team at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

3.2 University students

University students, including those training to be town planners, have been helping some neighbourhood planning groups. There may be students in your area that can offer support and assistance. [Further information](#) on this has been published by the Royal Town Planning Institute.

4 Financial resources

There will always be costs involved in producing a neighbourhood plan. However, by identifying and making use of the skills available within your community, you will be in a better position to identify the specific items you may need to spend money on.

4.1 How much does a neighbourhood plan cost?

Locality has published a series of case studies on how much neighbourhood planning groups have spent on producing their neighbourhood plan. The case studies focus on [Strumpshaw](#), [Exeter St James](#), [Broughton Astley](#) and [Heathfield Park](#) with the average cost of producing a neighbourhood plan being around £13,000.

The cost will very much depend on the complexity of your plan and the resources and skills available within your community.

Issues that can affect the costs include:

- the complexity and scope of your plan
- the geographic area (for example a rural area may have a dispersed population which may make engagement more challenging)
- the population of the neighbourhood plan area (e.g. the higher the population the more publicity may be required and where your community is more diverse you may require differently targeted publicity e.g. leaflets translated into different languages)



When estimating the likely costs of producing your neighbourhood plan it is important to remember that you are not responsible for paying for all the stages in the process. Your local planning authority is responsible for organising and meeting the costs of the independent examination and the referendum is paid for by the [responsible authority](#).

You can add to your [project plan](#) indicative costs for the various stages of the neighbourhood plan process. You may need to obtain estimates from others for some items.

4.2 Sources of funding, including grants

Once you have identified the indicative costs of producing your neighbourhood plan you can then begin to identify funding sources, including grants. Possible funding opportunities include:

- **Government funding.** The Department for Communities and Local Government has funded a support programme worth £22.5 million from 2015 to 2018. Further information, including details on how to apply, will be published on [My Community Rights](#).
- **Parish precept** is an option for parish and town councils and has been used to fund neighbourhood plan development.
- **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).** Speak to your local planning authority and ask whether it has introduced or is likely to introduce CIL. Recent changes to the CIL regulations mean that neighbourhood planning groups can, in certain instances, use some of the 'neighbourhood pot' to develop a neighbourhood plan. Further information on CIL can be accessed [here](#).
- **Non financial support.** A number of groups have successfully received support from businesses and organisations within their area. This has ranged from the free use of meeting rooms to pro-bono technical advice (professional work undertaken voluntarily and without payment or at a reduced fee) and support to assist with the development of the plan.
- **Big Lottery Funding.** Lawrence Weston and Friends of Fishwick and St Matthews neighbourhood plan groups both received funding through the Big Lottery Fund's (BIG) [Big Local Programme](#).
- **Other sources of funding and grants.** This [article](#) and [table](#) look at the various ways groups have funded their neighbourhood plan. In addition, [Community Matters](#) has a wealth of information and helpful guidance on finance and funding.
- **Sponsorship.** A local business or developer may be willing to fund specific elements. For example, a local shop paid for the photocopying of materials for East Shoreditch neighbourhood plan and this was acknowledged on the printed materials.

4.3 How should you keep track of your budget?

Make sure you have someone whose role it is to look after the budget and the money.

The arrangements for the financial management of your neighbourhood forum should be explained in your written constitution (parish and town councils will already have these procedures in place).

You will need to set up processes to manage the budget and keep track of the money that your group is receiving and what it is spending. Your forum will need a bank account to hold any



money you raise and in order that any payments can be made. Most high street banks offer accounts for community groups. You are likely to need at least two members of your group willing to act as signatories. Funders usually require (and it's a sensible precaution in any case) that you have a bank account where each cheque has to be signed by two people.

Community Matters is the national membership and support organisation for the community sector. Its website provides advice on book keeping including: guidance on setting up [cash flow forecasts](#); how to [simplify accounting](#); and a [specimen budget sheet](#) (there is a charge involved in accessing these resources).

Top tips on managing your finances:

- **Use your [project plan](#)** to assign indicative costs for the various stages of the neighbourhood plan process. It should also provide you with an indication of when money may be required so you can plan to apply for grants and funding within good time.
- **Don't forget about the little costs** as these can soon add up, for example photocopying, printing and postage. These costs are variable for example they may depend on the number of households in your area.
- **Shop around** to ensure value for money. Use the internet to get the best deals for promotional materials and use local contacts. For example local printers may offer to print for free or reduced cost if you acknowledge them in your publicity.
- **Reuse existing material wherever possible.** One neighbourhood planning group ensured that their banners and publicity material were as generic as possible so they could be re-used throughout the process. They did this by not putting dates on material and simply attached additional information as and when needed.
- **Newsletters** are an important and relatively low cost way of keeping people informed about your neighbourhood plan. A black and white two page newsletter can provide lots of information but is not too expensive to print and even cheaper to distribute via e-mail.
- **Use free publicity wherever appropriate.** [Social media](#) (such as Facebook and Twitter) can be an effective way of raising the profile of the neighbourhood plan without incurring costs. But you should also consider including articles and letters in local papers and press.
- **Use free online software.** Many groups use [Survey monkey](#) to design their surveys, others have used [Commonplace](#) to capture people's comments, for example on what they like and don't like about the area.
- **Consultants** can be a good way of making progress or to secure skills that are missing, but there will be a cost. Before you consider appointing a consultant you should identify whether the work is required and be clear about the scope of the work and the available budget. It is good practice to discuss this with your local planning authority as they may be able to offer advice and assistance. Costs will vary so shop around. Be very clear about the budget and expected outputs before appointing. This [article](#) provides top tips for instructing consultants. A recognised source for finding a Chartered planning consultant in your area is the [RTPI Online Directory of Planning Consultants](#).
- **Check conditions of grants and funding.** If you receive grants and funding for your neighbourhood plan you should check the terms and conditions. Some funding bodies may stipulate that the funds have to be spent by a particular deadline and if it is not the



money must be returned. It is also important that you ensure that you spend the money in accordance with what you applied for and do not use it for other tasks. Similarly, you need to ensure that you keep accurate records of what you have spent and copies of documentation. There may also be particular requirements you need to follow, such as seeking more than one quote on expenditure over a certain amount.

- **Build in a contingency** as you need to ensure that you have sufficient funds to cover any unexpected costs. A meeting venue may be more expensive at the weekends or you may have budgeted for food but not drinks. It is also important to build in a contingency in case there is a need to repeat tasks (you may decide to repeat a survey due to a low response rate) or a best estimate proves inaccurate.
- **Check whether there are any annual or recurring costs.** The majority of your costs will probably be one-off costs such as appointing a consultant to assist with a particular piece of work or to design a logo. There may, however, be some recurring charges you need to be aware of and budget for, for example, an annual charge for hosting a website.

5 Conclusions

There are a number of sources of help, advice and expertise that your group can draw on in order to produce your neighbourhood plan. It is recommended that you use the [What skills might you need?](#) template to identify capacity within your community and where additional help and assistance may be required.

It is also recommended that you use your [project plan](#) to link resource requirements and capacity with particular stages in the neighbourhood plan process and to identify indicative time-scales.



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