

# How to share the workload

Putting the pieces together



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# 1 Introduction

This resource will focus on how to share the workload when developing your neighbourhood plan. It will explain:

- why it is important
- how you can share the workload
- how to establish effective working groups

If you are new to neighbourhood planning you are strongly encouraged to read the [Locality Roadmap](#) which explains the process of preparing a neighbourhood plan.

Your [project plan](#) should enable you and your group to identify the tasks that need to be completed to produce your neighbourhood plan and indicative time-scales for each.

This resource complements the project plan and provides guidance on how to share the workload and assign roles to members of your group.

## 2 Why is it important to share the workload?

Sharing the workload will:

- ensure responsibility for researching, writing and finalising the plan doesn't fall to a small number of people
- help to ensure your plan is community-led and reflects the views of the wider community
- make best use of the particular skills, knowledge and expertise of your group. For further information on the skills that may be required to produce a neighbourhood plan see [How to resource your neighbourhood plan](#)
- ensure you have the means to work around potential conflicts of interest
- help you to deliver your plan in a timely manner in line with your [project plan](#) and so keep people motivated
- enable multiple tasks to be carried out at the same time.

## 3 How can you share the workload?

This is where your [project plan](#) and your [skills audit](#) come into their own. Use them as a basis to decide how best to assign tasks between members of your community.

Your project plan will assist you to identify where it would be helpful to divide the work into distinct tasks. Your skills audit will enable you to identify whether you have the capacity within your community to deliver those tasks.



In order to combine available skills in the most effective way and to deliver multiple elements of the neighbourhood plan simultaneously to save time, most groups set up working groups. These working groups generally fall into two broad types: they can focus on particular issues the neighbourhood plan may be seeking to address (e.g. housing, community facilities or transport) and/ or focus on particular aspects of plan development (e.g. community engagement, policy writing or project management).

As identified in [How to resource your neighbourhood plan](#) members of the wider community are likely to have expertise, knowledge and skills that can be drawn on by using working groups.

It is important to appoint one person (or a small group of people) to oversee the process and to ensure the plan is progressing in line with the project plan. This 'programme manager' can also be made aware of any emerging issues and ensure a consistent approach is being adopted. The Chair of the neighbourhood forum or town / parish council may be the most appropriate person to take on this responsibility.

### 3.1 How can effective working groups be established?

Here are some pointers to establishing effective working groups:

- **Encourage people to volunteer as early as possible** as this will help to avoid delays in plan production. You should canvas for members from the outset when publicising your intentions to produce a neighbourhood plan. Keep a record of those that have expressed an interest. You can then approach them as it becomes clearer what types of working groups you wish to establish.
- **Advertise available positions.** Some groups have advertised specifically for members. They have asked those interested to submit a statement explaining why they would like to sit on a particular working group and how they can contribute and assist with the required tasks. Appointments to these positions have then been agreed at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) or first formal meeting of the neighbourhood plan.
- **Include a cross-section of local residents and those working in your neighbourhood.** This will allow you to draw on a diverse range of skills, knowledge and experience. It can also help to ensure that your plan reflects the views of the wider community. You may wish to map where members of your groups live and / or work to assess coverage across the neighbourhood area. If you identify a lack of members from a particular area, you may wish to advertise for members from there.
- **Ask people to sit on the working group based on their skills, knowledge, interest and expertise,** for example, a youth worker may be able to assist with engaging with young people and a local architect with formulating design and heritage policies. For further information on how to identify skills required to produce a plan and the skills, knowledge and expertise available within your community see [How to resource your neighbourhood plan](#)
- **Formalise the working arrangements.** When setting up working groups consider: their function and remit; timetabling of meetings; who they will report to; and when and how decisions will be made (for example voting structures). This is considered further in [How to make effective decisions](#).
- **Ensure consistency between groups.** It is a good idea for each topic based working group to have similar tools such as a map of the area and a template structure for



documents. This will ensure that there is consistency in approach and enable materials to be easily shared.

- **Ensure members of each group are clear about their role.** Members of a working group should understand their role in the group, as well as the group's purpose in the production of the plan. Some groups have suffered where working group members have used their involvement as an opportunity to advance their own agendas and interests. Clear terms of reference can assist in preventing this and prior to joining a working group people should declare any conflict of interest. A conflict of interest is a set of circumstances that creates a risk that an individual's judgement or actions regarding a primary interest (neighbourhood plan) may be unduly influenced by a secondary interest (for example, land ownership).
- **Ensure members are clear on likely time commitments.** It may be helpful to provide a guide for potential working group members on the level of involvement you expect to avoid people dropping out. For example the number of meetings they should attend and contribution required.
- **Ensure the groups are a manageable size.** The number of members in each group may vary depending on the topic or task that the group is responsible for. However, it is important to try and ensure the number is manageable and proportionate to the task at hand.
- **Ensure working groups talk to each other.** Your project plan should provide a steer on who is responsible for delivering specific aspects of your plan and help to ensure everyone keeps to the timetable. It is also important to ensure that there is regular feedback from the working groups to the steering group and to the wider forum or town or parish council. This will allow everyone to understand the bigger picture and provide an opportunity to discuss matters of fact, emerging issues, ideas and approach. This should help avoid working groups producing policies in isolation that may conflict and also help to prevent groups duplicating tasks. This is considered further in [How to make effective decisions](#).
- **Produce outputs.** In order to maintain momentum it is good practice for working groups to agree actions at each meeting that need to be completed by the next meeting. Each topic based working group should aim to produce material and content that can form specific sections of the emerging neighbourhood plan. In order to ensure your groups are working towards a consistent draft plan using a draft contents page, standard template and skeleton structure of the plan can help.
- **Feedback on progress to the wider community.** Your neighbourhood plan needs to be produced in an open and transparent way so everyone understands what has been discussed and the progress that has been made. Many groups have found that a website or [social media](#) can be an effective way of keeping everyone informed as information can be posted on, for example, upcoming meetings, agendas for meetings and minutes of meetings.



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