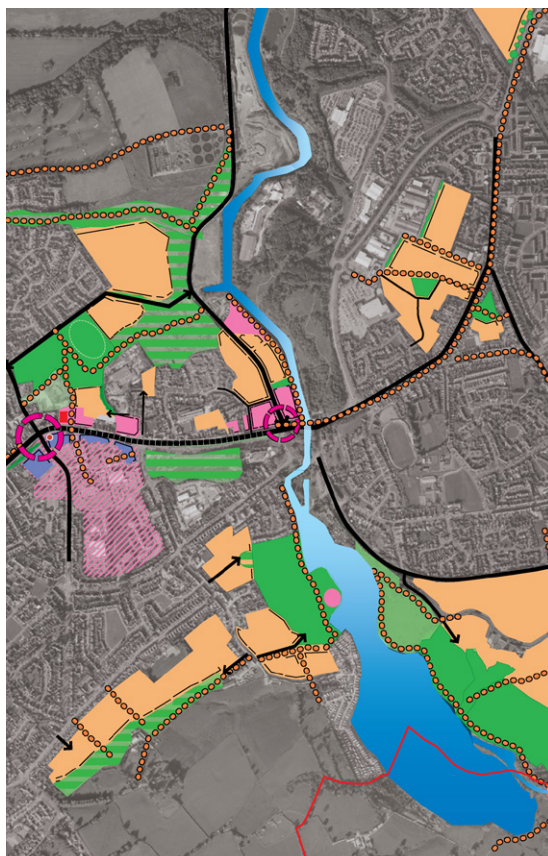


How to undertake successful community engagement within the Neighbourhood Plan process

Almost all projects now have a need for community engagement – the chance for local people and other stakeholders to feed in to and comment on proposals coming forward. The best consultation is undertaken early, involves a range of feedback mechanisms and helps shape emerging plans. But although it may feel time-consuming, expensive, and at times frustrating, planned effectively this need not be the case – and a meaningful dialogue is essential. With experience of hundreds of consultations so far, including for a number of Neighbourhood Plans, here are Tibbalds' tips for a successful programme.



Winsford Neighbourhood Plan

“Think about why you’re engaging with the local community. What do you need to achieve and what do you also want to happen as a result.”

1 Start with a clear plan

Think about why you’re engaging with the local community. What do you want to achieve and what do you also want to happen as a result of your engagement. Have an overall plan for consultation, considering: *who* to engage; *when* to engage; and *how* to engage.

Match the scope of your engagement to the people you are engaging with to shape your plans: everything needs to be user friendly. People need to know what you’re doing and why but also what you need from them and how their views will be taken forward; that they’re not merely taking part in a tick box exercise and their opinions matter.

Think about qualitative vs quantitative results – or a mixture of the both. Broad trends and detailed feedback are both valuable but different projects may need one more than the other.

2 Who to engage

You should be aiming to get a representative view – in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and other demographic factors from the community you are engaging with.

Don’t rely only on representatives of residents associations; their input is essential but not enough. Work hard to engage those people who don’t normally get involved. Get in touch with young people or busy parents through schools. If routes around town are the issue, track down the local ramblers’ association, cycling organisations and other clubs to get their opinions.

3 When to engage

Timing is everything. ‘Front loading’ consultation avoids wasting time and effort on things that aren’t important to local people. You may think “We already know what people want,” – the reality is, you probably don’t! Once you’ve got going, think about the timing of key decision-making points. Are there different options to test? Are there specific issues that need to be checked?

How to undertake successful community engagement within the Neighbourhood Plan process

4 How to engage

What do you want from the consultation? Is it information about what the place is like now? Endorsement of the work you've done? Or maybe simply raising awareness? Be very clear on what you need from people and give them time to do it. This project may be your main focus, but everyone else has jobs, families and schedules to juggle – for the best response you need to find a way of engaging that suits the people you need to reach.

- If possible 'piggy back' on existing events – you'll get far more people involved.
- Advertise – use Facebook and twitter as well as posters and leaflets. Go out to where people are – stand outside supermarkets, invite yourselves to meetings of local clubs and societies, and don't just stand in the library!
- Provide different ways for people to respond. Some find long questionnaires helpful for getting views across but others only have time to add a few sticky dots to a plan.
- Face painting – or other activities that keep children busy – is important when you're seeking views from parents and carers.

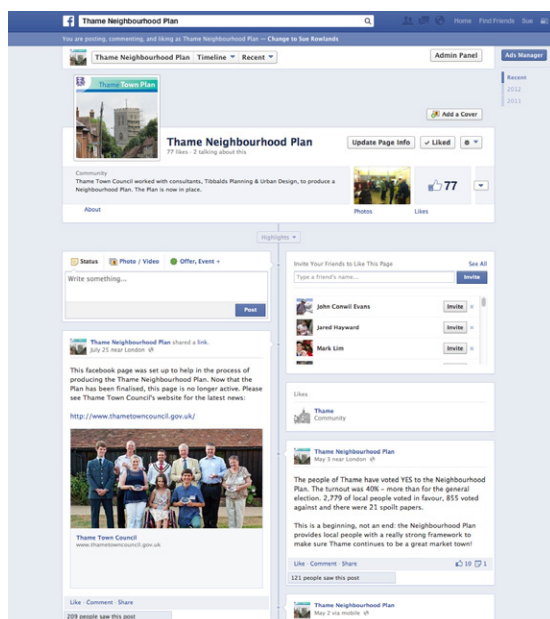
5 Tell people what happened

Provide easy-to-read reports, and make them available soon after the event before people have forgotten about it. Some projects take a long time: use social media to keep the consultation alive with regular updates.

"If possible 'piggy back' on existing events – you'll get far more people involved if you do this."



Thame Neighbourhood Plan



Thame Neighbourhood Plan - Facebook page

Further information

Click a link below to find out more:

- [Thame Neighbourhood Plan](#)
- [Winsford Neighbourhood Plan](#)

Contact

Sue Rowlands is Tibbalds' Neighbourhood Planning specialist. An architect and town planner by training, she has been instrumental in bringing forward three Neighbourhood Plans to a successful referendum decision. The Thame Neighbourhood Plan, in Oxfordshire was the first plan to allocate land for development while the Winsford Neighbourhood Plan – the largest plan so far – won the Neighbourhood Planning/public participation in planning award at the 2014 Planning Awards.



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