



Making the most of Community Led Planning: a best practice guide for local authorities

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Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)

www.acre.org.uk

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) is the national umbrella body of the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN), which operates at national, regional and local level in support of rural communities across the country. ACRE works strategically with government and with a range of national third sector organisations to reflect a rural perspective in policy and practice, ensuring that community-led solutions are central to public policy debate.

RCAN members are charitable local development agencies, generally based at county level, which support and enable initiatives, in rural communities. They have supported Community Led Planning (CLP) in many rural parishes since the late 1970s when they were first piloted as *Village Appraisals* and then later as *Parish Plans*.

Independent local facilitators employed by RCAN members use a national toolkit developed by ACRE which outlines 9 steps that communities are advised to undertake when developing their plan.

Action for Market Towns (AMT)

www.towns.org.uk

Action for Market Towns (AMT) is a national membership group that provides small towns, local authorities and others with:

- information and advice
- examples of best practice
- national representation.

AMT has 14 years' experience of working with towns, local authorities and other organisations. The charity believes that effective community action requires both independence and strategic support from local authorities and the public sector. AMT supports the idea of Localism putting greater decision making powers and more funding decisions in the hands of local people.

AMT also maintains a network of independent local facilitators based around the country who can work with communities to put together Community Led Plans, predominantly in market town settings.

Details of CLP facilitators affiliated to ACRE and AMT are shown on the reverse of this guide





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Foreword

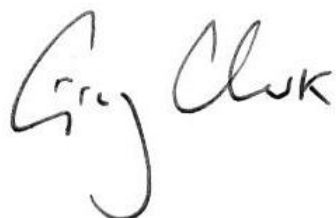
The Coalition Government took office with a promise to effect an historic shift in power. We want to transfer influence from central government to local government, and from both of these to local communities. We want to make it easier for people to exercise real influence over issues that make a difference to their lives. This is the essence of the Big Society.

Few issues make a bigger difference to local life than planning. Everyone has a strong opinion about the place where they live, and everyone wants to have their say about its future. All the evidence, both from this country and abroad, suggests that involving people at an early stage, and helping them to wield genuine power in the planning process, is the best way of delivering the sustainable development our country needs.

With the Localism Bill currently before parliament, we are seeking to strengthen local and democratic control in the planning system. The Bill introduces a revolutionary concept: neighbourhood planning. In the future, communities everywhere will have the right to come together and make decisions about the future of the place where they live: where new homes should go; where the shops and offices should be; and which are the green spaces the community most wishes to see protected. This is an unprecedented opportunity to shape the look and feel of the neighbourhood.

Formally, local people will only be able to assert their right to draw up a neighbourhood plan after the Localism Bill has been passed into law and put into effect. But some places already want to lead the way, showing how putting real power in local people's hands can work, and the benefits it can bring. And of course, some local authorities have been working hard to achieve similar ends for many years, through their support for Community Led Planning.

I'm delighted that this guide explores and explains some of the ways that local authorities, developers and planners have opened the door, created opportunities to get involved, and genuinely handed over big decisions in order to put communities where they belong: at the heart of the planning system.



Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Minister for Decentralisation at Communities and Local Government

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Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and Action for Market Towns (AMT) are very grateful to the organisations and individuals that have been involved in the production of this guidance. In particular we would like to thank:

Project participants - for sharing with us their experience of Community Led Planning (CLP), offering examples of best practice and commenting on drafts of the guide:

- Action with Communities in Cumbria
- Broadland District Council
- Caterham Community Partnership
- Community Action Hampshire
- Community Council for Berkshire
- Community First (in Herefordshire and Worcestershire)
- Community Lincs
- East Hampshire District Council
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- Herefordshire Council
- Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council
- Lake District National Park Authority
- Rural Community Council (Leicestershire and Rutland)
- Leicestershire County Council
- Norfolk Rural Community Council
- Oxfordshire County Council
- Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
- Community Council of Devon
- Suffolk ACRE
- Suffolk Coastal Local Strategic Partnership
- Teignbridge District Council
- West Berkshire District Council
- West Lindsey District Council

Supporting organisations - for useful comments, suggestions and final endorsement of the guide:

- Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)
- Commission for Rural Communities (CRC)
- Communities and Local Government (CLG)
- Community Development Foundation (CDF)
- Community Matters
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
- English Heritage
- Local Government Group (LG Group)
- National Association of Local Councils (NALC)
- Planning Advisory Service (PAS)
- Urban Forum

We would also like to thank Sue Oppenheimer for her help developing and facilitating workshops with project participants.

Lastly, we are indebted to the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) who part sponsored this project through the Empowerment Fund.



Executive Summary

The desire for communities to determine their own future and do more for themselves is a fundamental aspiration of the Coalition Government. The Localism Bill announced in December 2010 proposed a range of measures to this end. New rights will be given to citizens to allow them to shape the future of their neighbourhoods; where they want to take over local services and assets, or where they want to stipulate what new development takes place. There is, therefore, an expectation that communities are both willing and able to take action locally, and that local authorities will have a role to play in facilitating this transition of power away from 'big state' to 'big society'.

Statutory policy can only go so far in putting an onus on communities to empower themselves and requiring local authorities to be supportive of this change. Experience shows that this is much more likely to occur where citizens are guided through a structured process that enables them to meet with others locally and collectively research, discuss and then agree priority actions for improving their neighbourhood, taking into consideration a wide range of social, economic, environmental and cultural factors.

One such process that results in genuinely more empowered communities is Community Led Planning (CLP). Developed and refined in rural communities since the 1970s, 4,000 Community Led Plans have been produced to date, supported by facilitators from ACRE's Rural Community Action Network and AMT. Generating high rates of participation and resulting in actions that are based on a sound understanding of local needs and aspirations, Community Led Plans offer an unparalleled insight into how communities can be prepared to use the new rights that will become available to them through the Localism Bill.

Many local authorities are already making the most of CLP; using this to empower the communities they work with, improving service delivery and generating more positive attitudes towards local development and growth. Working alongside independent local facilitators affiliated to ACRE and AMT, local authorities can play a vital role in making sure that communities are equipped with the information, resources and confidence that they need to produce high quality plans that result in sustained action and development locally.

This best practice guide has been produced as a result of exploring CLP from a local authority perspective. It highlights where best value can be obtained in the relationship between communities, local facilitators and local authority officers during the development of any plan. The guide complements existing resources and toolkits already developed by ACRE and AMT to help communities take on the challenge of effective CLP.

Introduction

What is the guidance about?

This guide is about the practical ways that local authorities can make the most of Community Led Planning (CLP). Examining best practice from across England, it shows how local authorities can support communities to take action locally by enabling them to research and then implement a plan of action that contributes to the wellbeing and sustainability of their neighbourhood. In turn, it illustrates how this process can also support the work and aims of the local authority itself.

Who is the guidance for?

The guide will be of particular interest to local authority officers looking to make use of a tried and tested approach to community empowerment that brings people together and builds their capacity to explore solutions to local issues. It will also be of interest to elected members and other community leaders who want to get behind their community's plan and maximise the contribution that the local authority can make to the process.

What is the relevance of the guidance?

The guide has been written against the backdrop of emerging government policies of localism and the Big Society. In the coming years, local authorities will need to play an active role in shifting power to communities; helping them to do more for themselves. The Localism Bill currently before parliament proposes a number of new rights that will allow communities to do this including changes to the planning system. However, for this to happen, communities need support to be able to confidently research, discuss and agree priority actions for improving their neighbourhood. This guide examines the tried and tested process of CLP for achieving this.

What does the guidance contain?

Building on existing resources and support, this best practice guide is split into two sections. **Section A** sets the context, providing a brief introduction to CLP and its relevance to the Localism agenda. It outlines the process involved in developing any Community Led Plan, how local authorities can engage with it and how their support can lead to better served communities that are more able to meet their own needs. **Section B** goes on to provide some best practice examples showing how local authorities are already making the most of CLP. It explains what typically happens at each stage of a plan, detailing the practical things that local authorities can do to add value to the work of communities, usually in partnership with independent local facilitators.

How was the guidance produced?

The guide has been produced following extensive research with local authorities known to use CLP as a method of working with communities to improve neighbourhoods. Participants from these local authorities and the independent local facilitators they work alongside were invited to two day long workshops in October 2010 with a view to find out how they already make the most of CLP and the support they provide to community groups throughout the process. The varied examples of best practice identified are illustrated throughout the guide. Feedback and comment was also sought from national stakeholder organisations with an interest in community empowerment, localism and the big society. A full list of project participants can be found in the acknowledgements section.

Section A

The role of Community Led Planning in promoting and sustaining localism

What is Community Led Planning (CLP)?

Why should local authorities and other service providers make the most of CLP?

What can local authorities do to make the most of CLP?

What is Community Led Planning (CLP)?

Community Led Planning (CLP) is a step-by-step process, that enables every citizen to participate in, and contribute to, improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of their local area. It relies on people coming together locally, researching local needs and priorities and agreeing a range of different actions which help to improve their neighbourhood.

Approximately 4,000 communities across England have already been involved in developing Community Led Plans since the late 1970s. These have allowed communities to take responsibility for making things happen locally, rather than waiting on others to do it for them. Their success has relied on volunteers who work closely with parish and town councils and are the driving force behind the work that takes place.

Experience has shown that CLP is most effective in those areas where the community has developed a strong working relationship with its local authority. In many cases, an independent local facilitator can be brought in to broker this relationship. Providing impartial advice, resources and examples of best practice, they are able to guide communities through the process and ensure that any actions developed complement and add value to the work of the local authority. Members of the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) and AMT's Town Action Planning facilitators fulfil this role. For more information and contacts see the back page of this guide.

LEAD – a framework for CLP

CLP is not a one off, quick fix for any community. It requires people from different walks of life to learn to work together over a sustained period of time¹. In doing so, they will discover the skills, knowledge and confidence to take action for themselves, tapping into available resources wherever possible.

Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) and Action for Market Towns (AMT) have been working with communities for many years and have developed their own toolkits to streamline the process. ACRE's 9-step process (based on Parish Planning) and AMT's Town Action Planning Framework (formerly the Market Town Healthcheck) both offer practical step-by-step advice and resources that help to make CLP a manageable endeavour for communities.

The main difference between the two toolkits is that ACRE's 9-step process has tended to focus on more rural, parished areas, while AMT's Town Action Planning Framework has focused on market towns and larger settlements. Research is also taking place into the application of CLP in larger urban neighbourhoods².

¹ On average, it takes communities two years to get their plan to the stage of delivery.

² Blume T (2011) *Pilot Programme to test how community governance can be strengthened through establishing neighbourhood councils: draft summary and conclusions*, CDF, London.

Whichever toolkit a community opts to use, they will need to progress through four key stages. ACRE and AMT have defined these as 'LEAD'. LEAD summarises the steps specified in the ACRE and AMT toolkits, as illustrated below.

Figure 1: LEAD – the four key stages of any CLP

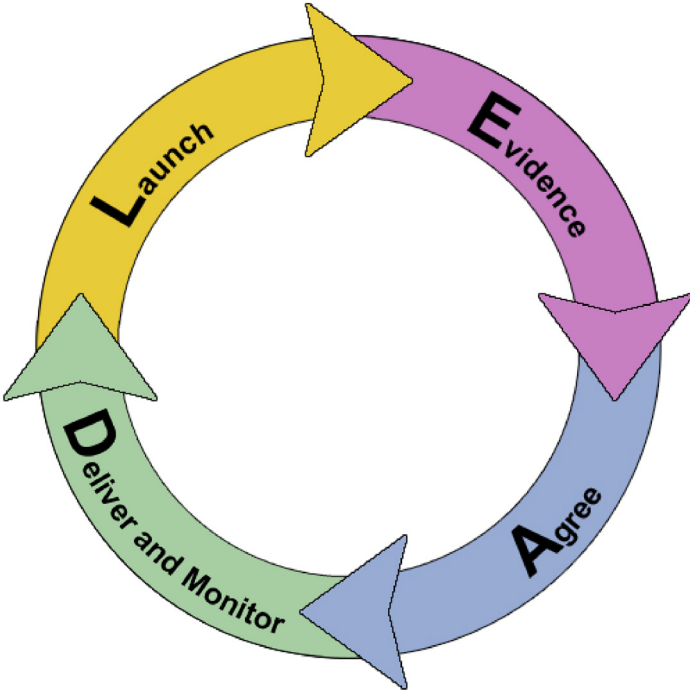


Table 1: LEAD and how it fits with the ACRE and AMT toolkits for CLP

LEAD Stage	ACRE 9-step process	AMT Town Action Planning
L aunch the plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting started Establishing the steering group Taking stock and planning ahead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting up a market town partnership Gaining community commitment
E vidence local needs and aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding your community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completing a facts and feedback process
A gree and prioritise actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreeing and developing actions Drafting the plan Finalising the plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating a vision Preparing an action plan
D eliver and monitor actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing actions Monitoring and reviewing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Putting the plan into action Sustaining the partnership Monitoring and reviewing

Quality Community Led Plans

LEAD helps communities produce high quality plans which demonstrate the following characteristics:

Owned and led by the community

It is important that plans are developed by communities and not done for them. Where communities are supported to lead on the process from the outset, a sense of collective ownership for the plan and its outcomes is likely to result. This encourages people to take responsibility for getting stuff done themselves, attracting higher rates of participation and reducing the need for external intervention.

Involves everyone locally

In any community there will be many different interests. A good Community Led Plan will allow everyone to get involved and put forward their views and opinions as to how the neighbourhood should develop.

Deliberative decision making

Critical to the success of any Community Led Plan is extensive deliberation between individuals and community groups, with input from external organisations and service providers where appropriate. This provides everyone with the chance to share their views and listen to the needs and concerns of others before reaching collective solutions that benefit the community as a whole.

Evidence based actions

Communities are expected to gather information about their community that will enable them to identify local needs and aspirations. Only once this has been done can they propose actions that will derive local benefit and be accepted by all.

Considers a range of different local issues

Communities are advised to develop a range of different actions, considering the impacts these might have on the social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects of their neighbourhood. Where this happens, people are more likely to identify with at least some parts of the plan leading to greater levels of participation and inclusion. It also encourages communities to think about the broader impact of any actions they wish pursue, e.g. the building of new homes may help to sustain local services and business in a rural setting but may also increase road traffic.

Aware of the bigger picture

Throughout the process communities are expected to work with local authorities and other service providers in order to understand the 'bigger picture'. This is particularly important for actions that require external support or where they may need to consider the broader priorities for the area.

Why should local authorities and other service providers make the most of CLP?

The move towards Localism requires local authorities to seek out new ways of working *in support of*, rather than *for* the communities they serve. Community Led Planning (CLP) offers a ready-made framework for achieving this, resulting in empowered communities that are more resilient and capable of meeting their own needs.

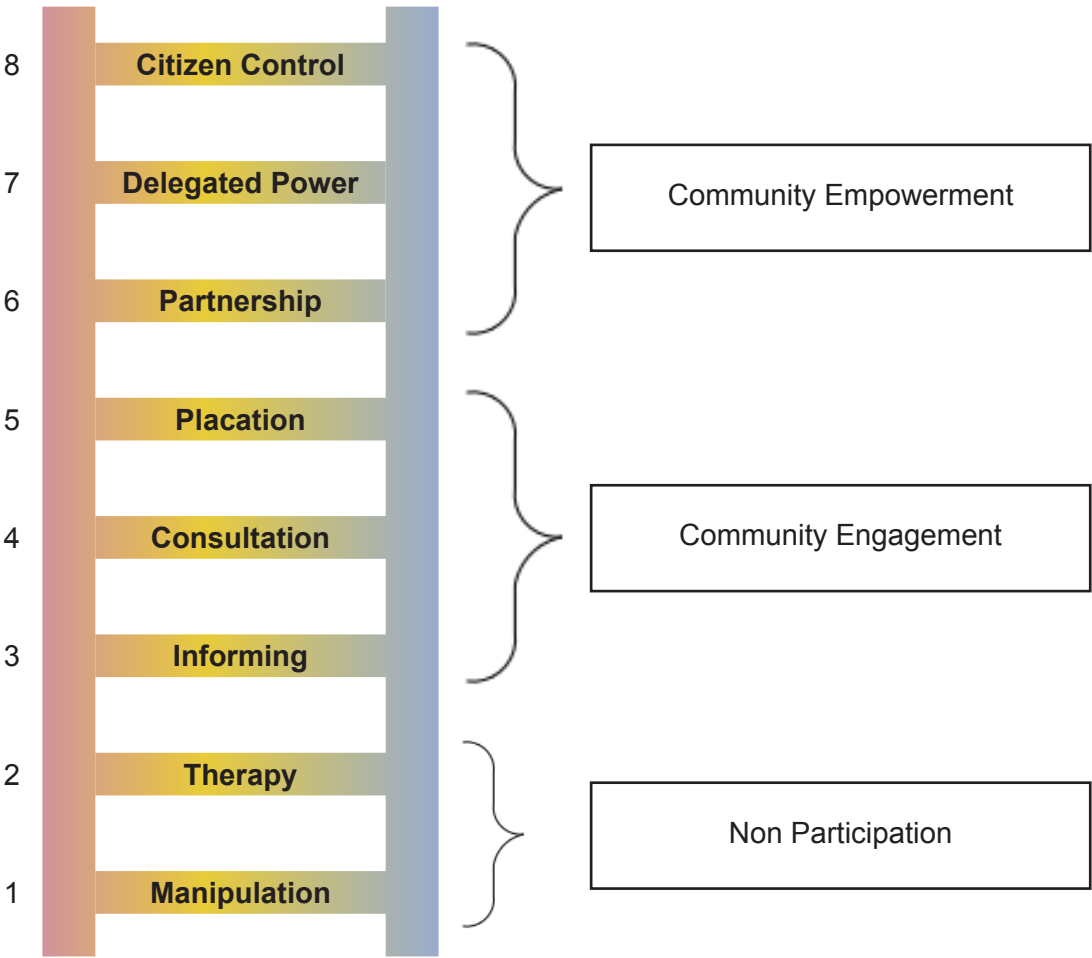
This chapter examines the shift from *community engagement to community empowerment* which characterises the government's commitment to localism and looks specifically at why some local authorities have chosen to mainstream CLP to make this happen.

Localism and the shift from community engagement to community empowerment

There is no doubting the fact that local government is undergoing a rapid and significant transformation. The coalition government's commitment to localism, combined with deep spending cuts, signals an end to top-down service delivery and the determination of land use development. In stark contrast to the previous government's agenda of community engagement whereby local authorities were expected to 'inform', 'consult' and 'involve' communities in local decision making¹, the emphasis is now firmly on that of community empowerment. Community empowerment is significantly different in at least two respects. Firstly, it implies that local people should be given far greater powers to shape their own lives and environments. Secondly, the role of local authorities is changed from provider and carer, to that of an enabler; responding to, and supporting local action. This is illustrated in Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, see **Figure 2**.

¹ These requirements for community engagement were outlined in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007

Figure 2: Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (adapted)¹



So what is necessitating these changes? It is possible to suggest that local government spending cuts will make it much harder for local authorities to sustain much of what they currently do. Many may look to contract out services and functions, as well as reduce expenditure on the maintenance and upkeep of assets. Indeed, the proposed *Community Right to Challenge* and *Community Right to Buy (Assets of Community Value)* promise to make it much easier for communities to play a part in this transition, providing them with increased opportunities to safeguard services and assets locally.

Community Right to Buy (Assets of Community Value)
 The Assets of Community Value element of the Bill includes provisions designed to make it easier for community groups to take over buildings and land considered to provide a valued local service or public facility. These ‘assets’ can be placed on a list held by the local authority. Should a listed asset come up for sale, communities will be given time to put together a bid for its purchase.

¹ Arnstein S (1969) ‘A Ladder of Citizen Participation’ in, *Journal of American Planning Association*, 35 (4), pp. 216-224

Community Right to Challenge

The Community Right to Challenge will allow community and voluntary bodies, parish councils and local authority employees to submit an expression of interest in taking over the delivery of local services. The public service provider must then undertake a full commissioning exercise.

However, there is perhaps another more important change taking place – the decentralisation of the planning system. In addition to the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies, there will be a new bottom-up pressure at work. The Localism Bill proposes a new tool called Neighbourhood Plans that can be used by communities to influence planning decisions and propose new land use developments for their local area.

Neighbourhood Plans


The Localism Bill proposes new powers for communities to influence planning decisions in their neighbourhood. By producing Neighbourhood Plans, they will be able to propose new land use development, such as the building of new shops, offices or homes and what green spaces should be protected. They can be created by parish and town councils, or neighbourhood forums in non-parished areas. All Neighbourhood Plans must be subjected to an independent check to ensure they meet minimum criteria, such as general conformity with the strategic policies of the local plan. If Neighbourhood Plans pass this check, they must then be put to a public referendum in the relevant neighbourhood area. If it receives approval via a simple majority of the vote, the new plan will form part of the statutory development plan and any planning applications in that neighbourhood will be determined using those policies. Neighbourhood Plans may result in Neighbourhood Development Orders which can be used to grant outline or full planning permission for certain types of development in the neighbourhood area.

Local authorities have a duty to provide ‘technical advice and support’ to communities preparing Neighbourhood Plans. This could include providing evidence, help with facilitation and advice on consultation. Engaging communities in this way will be important for ensuring that any developments proposed have regard for the strategic policies specified in the local plan, are based on solid evidence and are genuinely representative of broader community interests.

Community Led Planning: a framework for effective community empowerment

There are reasons however why local authorities should welcome Localism and the shift from community engagement to community empowerment that this entails.

The experience of CLP in rural areas over the past three decades has been very positive. A structured step-by-step process of community empowerment, it has derived many benefits for the 4,000 plus communities that have put together plans for their area. Research into its significance and impact has shown that it can result in many tangible actions that improve the



characteristics of the places concerned, often undertaken by the communities themselves without external support¹. It also has softer, more enduring benefits such as increasing people's interest and pride in their neighbourhood and strengthening community cohesion where consultation has been inclusive. In a time of fiscal austerity, continuing to support this legacy of activism and self help will be of paramount importance, particularly in rural areas where public service provision is already diminished.

Of significance for this best practice guide, however, are the **benefits of CLP for local authorities**. The participants involved in the production of this best practice guide identified the following:

Meeting statutory requirements

At its most basic level, CLP can help local authorities meet statutory requirements placed on them by central government, such as the Duty to Involve and other targets associated with place shaping and community engagement. By supporting and responding to CLP groups, local authorities have been able to tick all the right boxes, without having to design and implement other, more expensive consultation projects and programmes. However, to see the benefits of CLP purely in this light is perhaps missing the point.

Improved relationships with local communities

CLP has also helped local authorities to develop much better relationships with the communities that they serve. Where local authorities have shown an interest in plans that are being produced by communities, and where people have had a chance to share their concerns or ideas for local action with relevant officers and elected members, a relationship of mutual trust can be developed leading to better outcomes for all those concerned.

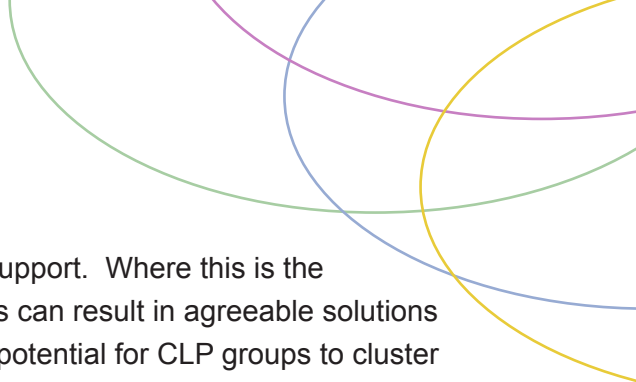
Better understanding of communities' needs

It holds true that the people who know an area best are those that experience it on a day-to-day basis. Whereas top-down consultations may ask for views on pre-defined and limiting topics, the premise of CLP is that it allows people with a connection to a particular place to articulate their views and aspirations for it without constraint. This can generate issues, concerns and priorities that may have failed to register in pre-existing data about that area. As demonstrated in **Section B** of this guide, there are already a number of examples where local authorities have made good use of this data for strategic purposes.

Innovation in service delivery

Where communities have collectively explored local needs and priorities, they are also likely to come up with much more innovative ideas and suggestions for service delivery. In some instances, communities are well-placed to take over the delivery of a service completely. For instance, many rural communities across England manage their own village halls or have set up their own community transport schemes in the absence of state subsidy or support.

¹ Parker G & Luck R (2006) *Evaluation of Parish Planning in West Berkshire*, West Berkshire Council, Newbury
Cole J (2008) *Parish Plans completed in Braintree, Essex*, Braintree District Council, Braintree



Other actions desired by communities may need external support. Where this is the case, a dialogue between local authorities and communities can result in agreeable solutions that make better use of available resources. There is also potential for CLP groups to cluster together to address common issues of concern. This can help a local authority to address strategic priorities that overlay an area, albeit with significant contributions of time and effort from the communities concerned.

Positive attitudes towards development and growth

In considering the overall wellbeing and sustainability of their neighbourhoods, communities are more likely to understand the need for securing future development and growth. For example, in many rural areas communities have proposed new housing on the basis that this will help to sustain the local economy and services such as schools and public transport. As with innovation in service delivery, CLP groups that work together as a cluster are better positioned to see the bigger picture; for example, the need to promote tourism across an area.

More active and resilient communities, better able to meet their own needs

Finally, support for CLP is likely to result in more active and resilient communities that are better able to meet their own needs. For example, during seven years in the East of England region, a database listed 231 communities that had produced plans, between them containing over 9,000 individual projects that could improve their local area. 47% of these projects were able to be taken on by the community themselves without external support. Of the remainder, 34% required negotiation with public service providers to bring them to fruition¹.

In the next chapter, we examine how a local authority can add value to CLP to make the most of these opportunities.

¹ Rural Action East (RAE) PlanIT Database [accessed Dec 2009]

What can local authorities do to make the most of CLP?

The benefits of engaging in and supporting Community Led Planning (CLP) are clear, particularly in the context of a move towards greater Localism. But how can local authorities actively engage with CLP groups and add value to the process?

This chapter explores some of the literature already published on how local authorities might better engage with their communities, in terms of promoting empowerment and more specifically how they can support CLP.

It then examines the roles of the key players involved in CLP – the local community, town and parish councils and facilitators - outlining their key motivations and how they complement one another, before setting out how local authorities can actively participate in the process.

This will provide a useful background to the next chapter, which details specific practical measures that a local authority can undertake to support their community in the preparation and delivery of a Community Led Plan.

The story so far

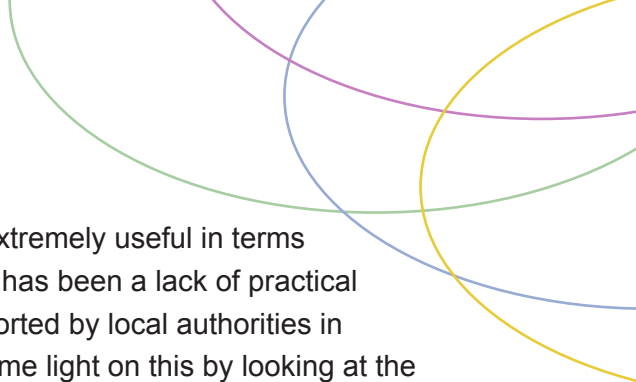
In the previous chapter, we detailed the move towards Localism and the change of emphasis from *community engagement* to *community empowerment*. This is a subtle difference that often goes unnoticed. Whereas the former implies the involvement of communities in the running and delivery of services managed by the local authority, the latter is about taking this one step further and building the capacity of communities to help themselves.

Much of the literature that exists was written in the context of the previous government's agenda of community empowerment. As such there tended to be a focus on how local authorities could capture information and respond to the needs of their communities; in particular how this could be used in strategic decision making. This lent itself to top-down consultations where local authorities sought the opinions of communities on pre-determined topics. Critics have claimed that this practice resulted in bureaucratic and costly interventions which failed to attract high rates of participation¹.

Responding to these criticisms, some commentators proposed broad-brushed principles for a more a genuine form of handing power to communities. For example, a Community Development Foundation (CDF) guide to the Duty to Involve proposed a number of factors that would lead to successful involvement of communities in decision making². This included the need to make sure communities' views and opinions are actually used to influence decisions, the need to engage people on their own terms, the need to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to take part and the need for councillors to champion those that they represent.

¹ See for example: Foot J (2009) *Citizen involvement in local governance*, JRF, York; Prendergast J (2008) *Disconnected citizens: is community empowerment the solution?*, SMF, London

² Pritchford et al (2009) *The Duty to Involve: making it work*, CDF, London



Whilst the principles in the CDF guidance and others are extremely useful in terms of thinking about how to pass power to communities, there has been a lack of practical examples of how community empowerment might be supported by local authorities in practice. In the remainder of this guide, we aim to shed some light on this by looking at the roles of and responsibilities of the different actors in the CLP process; in particular the value that local authorities can add.

The key players in CLP

To better understand the role of local authorities in the CLP process, there is a need to understand how this fits in with the work typically undertaken by communities, parish and town councils and independent facilitators. Here we explain the roles of the different actors.

Communities working in partnership with parish and town councils

For a community to take ownership of its plan, it is vital that it takes the lead and drives the process. Without the time and effort of volunteers, the plan would simply not happen. Working in partnership with their parish or town council from the beginning, they are able to use the national toolkits to work through each of the stages of LEAD. There are, however, key moments when communities require additional support from independent local facilitators and their local authority.

Independent local facilitators

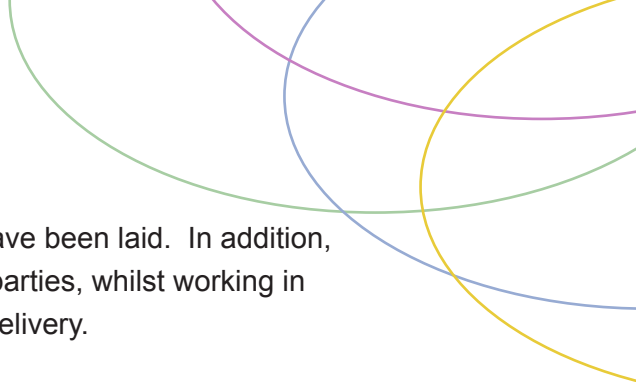
Facilitators employed by organisations affiliated to ACRE and AMT are able to provide practical advice and support to communities throughout their plan. Working independently from the local authorities they are well positioned to bridge the gap between communities and local authorities in an impartial manner. With considerable expertise in consultation techniques and their experience of working across a range of communities, they are effective at catalysing local activity and securing the support of other key stakeholders along the way. The back page of this guide provides contact details for independent local facilitators at a county level.

Local authorities

Local authorities, working in partnership with independent local facilitators, can provide communities with the confidence to produce high quality plans in the knowledge that they will receive the support that they need, both at the stages of development and implementation.

A community starting out on the development of a Community Led Plan is far more likely to succeed if it has the backing and support of its local authority right from the beginning. In turn a local authority engaged with its community is better placed to deliver on the wishes of that community, and enhance its relationship with its voters.

A key role that all authorities can play is helping communities to navigate the statutory system, so that they understand which tier is responsible for which services and plans. In this way it will assist them in understanding how their Community Led Plans can fit into the



statutory landscape that more often than not will already have been laid. In addition, sharing place based information can be beneficial to both parties, whilst working in partnership on action planning can lead to more effective delivery.

Local authorities who actively monitor the CLP activity in their areas have a wealth of information at their fingertips which is not only useful for forward planning, but can also negate the need for expensive consultations.

At each stage of the LEAD process, we have identified ways in which local authorities – officers and elected members – can most usefully engage in the CLP process, to benefit both themselves and their communities. **Table 2** illustrates, at a glance, the complementary roles that independent local facilitators and local authorities can play at each stage of LEAD.

In **Section B**, we demonstrate how local authorities can set themselves up to engage with CLP groups and then support them at each stage of LEAD looking at best practice from across England.

Table 2: Suggested roles and responsibilities at each stage of a Community Led Plan

Stage	Activities required by communities	Local facilitator support	Local authority support
L aunch the plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract community interest in the plan • Establish a leadership structure • Plan the work ahead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about CLP and the support available • Introduce toolkits and resources which provide a step-by-step guide to producing a plan • Signpost to other successful CLPs • Facilitate launch events • Support new leadership structures, helping them plan the next steps and access funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about CLP and the support available • Attend plan launch events • Offer a named contact who can respond to enquiries and signpost to colleagues where needed
E vidence local needs and aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research existing facts and information about the local area • Consult everyone locally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the use of existing facts and information • Explain the application of different consultation techniques • Suggest ways of making sure that consultation is inclusive • Assist with the analysis of consultation data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make existing facts and information available to communities to help them research their local area • Add value to the work of local facilitators, providing resources and support to aid community consultation • Encourage the involvement of councillors in consultation activities
A gree and prioritise actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sense of evidence gathered • Draft actions to improve the community • Agree and prioritise actions • Produce a final document explaining the plan, research undertaken and the actions that will be pursued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with data analysis • Signpost to other communities addressing similar issues • Facilitate events set up to agree and prioritise actions • Make sure actions are developed in consultation with key partners • Provide examples of other plan documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with data analysis • Advise on the development of actions where appropriate • Respond to draft plans • Clarify the support available for the delivery of actions
D eliver and monitor actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with others where needed to implement and monitor the actions specified in the plan • Review the plan when it needs updating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing support and advice for the delivery of actions • Mediate between the community and other partners where issues with delivery arise • Support community groups that have chosen to work together to deliver actions • Monitor progress made towards delivery of actions • Remind communities to review their plan and provide guidance about how to do this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep a record of CLP actions • Make use of CLP data for strategic purposes • Provide ongoing officer support for the delivery of actions • Outline expectations for communities to review plans

Section B

Best practice examples

Getting Started

Launching the Plan

Evidencing local needs and aspirations

Agreeing and prioritising actions

Delivering and monitoring actions

Getting started

In **Section A**, we considered the value of Community Led Planning (CLP) to local authorities as a means of empowering local citizens to improve the wellbeing and sustainability of their neighbourhood. This will become increasingly important in light of proposals contained within the Localism Bill such as Neighbourhood Panning.

In this section, we introduce examples of best practice which demonstrate how local authorities can set themselves up to engage with CLP groups and then support them at each stage of any plan, which we define as LEAD (see **page 10**).

Setting the scene

For local authorities to effectively engage with CLP, a number of things can be done to prepare for this. These are outlined below, with actual examples to show how this can work in practice.

Cross-departmental understanding of CLP including elected members

It is important that all local authority officers and elected members understand what CLP is, how it works, its value and how communities can be supported. For some authorities this will mean a real move away from top-down working where communities are consulted on work, as opposed to being instrumental in its inception and development. By shifting the culture of the authority to be focussed on a more Localism approach, local authorities have the opportunity to reap the benefits outlined on **pages 15-16**. Previous guidance explains this in more detail¹.

“We have been offering training for both staff and councillors, with the support of RCC officers, for a number of years. This has included larger scale conferences with partners as well as smaller authority-only interactive information sessions. We’ve also held special events for councillors.”

Oxfordshire County Council

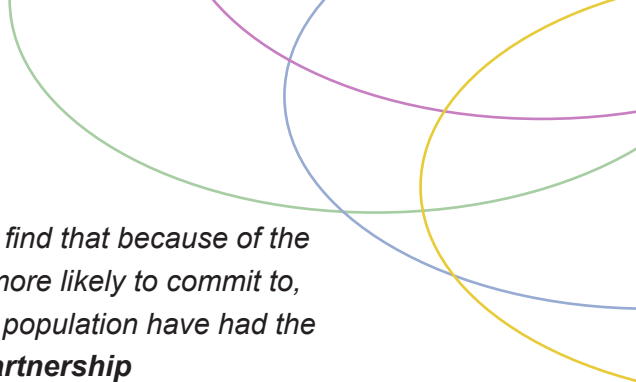
Setting a clear structure for funding and resourcing CLP

Whilst a key benefit of CLP is the time and effort that volunteers put into developing and implementing their plan, this does need resourcing. This may include:

Small grants to communities allowing them to produce their plan, for example, to cover costs associated with the hire of meeting spaces, resources needed for consultation activities and the printing of their final plan document.

“The local authority in Herefordshire offers grants of up to £1500 per Community Led Plan, although the local Parish or Town Council is expected to provide a significant proportion of this. This has really helped communities to

¹ Pritchford et al (2009) The Duty to Involve: making it work, CDF, London



*get the buy-in from their local councils and we often find that because of the funding input at the start, the local council is much more likely to commit to, and often adopt, the final plan. 90% of the county's population have had the opportunity to participate in CLP." **Herefordshire Partnership***

Independent local facilitation to provide communities with hands on support and guidance as and when they need it at the various stages of their plan, for example help with consultation techniques.

*"We created a new post; Community Planning Co-ordinator, within East Hampshire, dedicated to supporting community groups undertaking CLP. We also offer a grant to groups producing plans. Within 18 months of creating the new post there was an increase from 50% of communities involved in CLP to 70%!" **East Hampshire District Council***

Support for the implementation of specific actions agreed in Community Led Plans where external assistance is required.

Adopting CLP as a strategy for place-based community empowerment

It can be helpful for local authorities to adopt CLP as a strategy for community empowerment across departments. This can result in a more cost effective and coordinated approach to working with communities, and can help to ensure that it is linked into existing strategies. Some of the local authorities involved in the production of this guidance have done this with very positive results.

*"Community Led Planning plays a crucial role in helping West Berkshire Council engage and work effectively with local communities. It also informs elected members, officers and partners about the needs and aspirations of people across the county. Working with the Community Council for Berkshire (CCB) we advise and support communities during the Community Planning process and beyond." **West Berkshire Council***

L – Launching the plan

Activities required by communities	Local facilitator support	Local authority support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract community interest in the plan • Establish a leadership structure • Plan the work ahead 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about CLP and the support available • Introduce toolkits and resources which provide a step-by-step guide to producing a plan • Signpost to other successful CLP groups • Facilitate launch events • Support new leadership structures, helping them plan the next steps and access funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about CLP and the support available • Attend plan launch events • Offer a named contact who can respond to enquiries and signpost to colleagues where needed

What happens at this stage?

Community Led Plans are usually initiated by active individuals from within communities or elected members from parish or town councils. Their enthusiasm and commitment for improving the local area is important and can help to ensure that plans get off to a good start and are sustained throughout their lifecycle. It is important, however, that the efforts of these individuals are tempered by the broader involvement of everyone else locally. The first stage of any Community Led Plan therefore involves a launch event designed to attract wider community interest in the plan and the establishment of a more representative leadership structure, responsible for planning and overseeing the work ahead.

In most instances, a public event is held to raise an awareness of the prospect of producing a Community Led Plan. This is an opportunity for interested individuals and elected members to make a case for pursuing a plan and the benefits it could bring to their community. These launch events are best supported by independent local facilitators employed by community organisations affiliated to ACRE and AMT. These facilitators are able to explain what's involved in producing a high quality plan and the contributions that the wider community would need to make in order to guarantee its success. It is also a good opportunity for them to provide communities with copies of the national toolkits for Community Led Planning (CLP) that outline the next steps and leave communities feeling

like they can start to take things forward themselves without needing to rely on external support.

Where communities have shown their support for going ahead with a Community Led Plan, a leadership structure (sometimes known as a steering group or community partnership) should be set up. This is important for ensuring that there is a dedicated group of people who are able and willing to guarantee that the plan develops in earnest and stays on track. Whilst it is assumed that the founding individuals and elected members will want to be part of this leadership structure, it is better for them to be joined by other volunteers from the community to broaden representation and add additional skills and experience to the mix. It is also recommended that leadership structures should be constituted, as this makes them more accountable and able to handle money in the future.

Finally, communities are expected to chart out the work ahead using the national toolkits for CLP. Although it is not essential, many groups choose to draw up loose project plans to aid this process.


Role of local authorities

Local authorities should ideally engage with CLP groups from the start of the process. Where procedures have been developed for responding to new plans, communities are much more likely to approach their plan with confidence knowing exactly what is expected of them and where to go for support if needed. This early contact is likely to prevent problems from developing later on, particularly where this concerns the development of actions.

Provide information about CLP and the support available

It is important that when communities are considering whether to undertake a Community Led Plan they know what support is available and how to begin the process. Many local authorities already provide this kind of information on their websites. Others, however, have been even more proactive, working with local facilitators to actively encourage groups to produce Community Led Plans and developing literature that can be sent out to local councils and existing community groups. Some have even run events or approached communities in person to get them fired up about what they can achieve.

“We publish information on dedicated web-pages (www.broadland.gov.uk/parishplans), providing FAQs on Parish Plans, details of the grant scheme, PDFs of completed plans in the District and a copy of our ‘Parish Plan Guidance’. This guidance sets out how we can support groups that are undertaking CLP, including officer and funding support, practical support (e.g. loan of equipment), and how the plan might feed into wider service delivery, such as the Local Development Framework and the Local Strategic Partnership. Regular information on CLPs is also published in our ‘Parish Pages’ magazine, which goes to parish and town councils and Broadland News magazine, which goes to all households. We have also undertaken



two ‘rounds’ of Parish Plan Workshops across the district, in partnership with the Norfolk Rural Community Council, which were open to parish and town councils, other local groups and the public, and which explained the process and benefits of developing a Parish/Town Plan, as well as the support available from both bodies. It provides communities undertaking CLP in the District with some reassurance that they can count on the support of the District Council, both in terms of the plan’s delivery and its implementation.” **Broadland District Council**


“We have a special section about CLP on our website: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/communityplanning. This makes it really easy to refer communities to this for information (self-help). We also have information on our council intranet, including a page for elected members. We find that the download section containing published plans across the county is particularly useful for internal communications.” **Oxfordshire County Council**

Attend plan launch events

Some local authorities also send officers or councillors to launch events. Their presence is an opportunity for community members to speak to someone at the local authority and ask questions about how their plan will be supported and received. It is also a chance for local authorities and other service providers to get an early impression of the types of issues that are likely to arise in a plan, which they can feed back to colleagues.

“Our Community Development and Liaison Officer is often invited to attend launch events and will sometimes give a brief presentation on the benefits of developing a Community Led Plan and the kind of support the Council can offer. Members also attend the events from time to time. Having a council presence at the events is useful as it provides the community with some reassurance that we do support these initiatives and that they can also receive any necessary guidance and assistance in the process.” **Broadland District Council**

“We have a dedicated Community Planning Co-ordinator who gives presentations at launch events along with a representative from another parish plan group who has already been through the process. We find that having a presentation from someone who has already succeeded in developing a plan increases the success rate for parish plan start-ups rather than just a Rural Community Action (RCAN) member or local authority presentation because the community is inspired by the real life example.” **East Hampshire District Council**





Offer a named contact who can respond to enquiries and signpost to colleagues where needed

A common problem faced by CLP groups in the past has been a lack of clarity about who to contact for help from local authorities. To counter this, an officer can be appointed as a first point of contact who can signpost to other colleagues where needed. Alternatively, some local authorities have made a list of useful contacts available to CLP groups.

“We have a named officer in each of our districts and at the county who can help open the door for communities and offer a signposting role. They also run helpful information sessions for colleagues in the local authority. Communication is important and in our county, the district and county officers and the local facilitator keep each other updated with new developments in the communities.” **Oxfordshire County Council**

“Our Community Development and Liaison Officer is the named contact for Parish/Town Plan queries, support, advice and guidance. This officer is located within the Policy Unit and has the advantage of being closely allied to the Planning Policy Team, which helps in terms of drawing out spatial planning links between Community Led Plans and the wider planning system. We are particularly fortunate as our officer has the benefit of several years experience in supporting CLP, having been previously employed as a Field Officer for a Rural Community Action (RCAN) member.” **Broadland District Council**

E – Evidencing local needs and aspirations

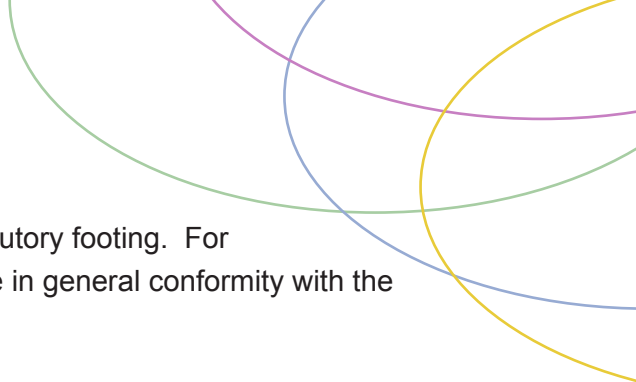
Activities required by communities	Local facilitator support	Local authority support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research existing facts and information about the local area • Consult everyone locally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the use of existing facts and information • Explain the application of different consultation techniques • Suggest ways of making sure that consultation is inclusive • Assist with the analysis of consultation data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make existing facts and information available to communities to help them research their local area • Add value to the work of local facilitators, providing resources and support to aid community consultation • Encourage the involvement of councillors in consultation activities

What happens at this stage?

Once a plan has been launched and a leadership structure set up to oversee its progress, communities are expected to undertake some initial investigative work to better understand local needs and aspirations. This stage of a Community Led Plan is likely to take time, as it involves the analysis of existing information about the area and the use of varied consultation methods to make sure that everyone has a chance to input into the plan and have their say.

National toolkits developed by ACRE and AMT stress the need for those leading on plans to research their community's wellbeing and sustainability in its broadest sense. This should include social, economic, cultural and environmental considerations. Starting out with this broad focus helps groups to adopt a pragmatic approach to developing their plan, using the evidence they have gathered to identify priority issues that they want to address. This is quite different to single issue campaigns which tend to be based on the opinions of a few passionate individuals rather than being a true representation of wider community interests.

As with any significant local development project, there is a need to research any existing facts and information about the place in question. Community Led Planning (CLP) is no different. Often communities are able to develop a much more informed sense of their local area once they have accessed a range of secondary data such as census statistics, historical records, results from previous consultations and plans or strategies currently being used by the local authority. This is likely to become even more important for groups should they wish



to satisfy requirements for putting specific actions on a statutory footing. For example, Neighbourhood Plans will require proposals to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the local plan.

The most important requirement at this stage however is the need for those leading on the development of their community's plan to speak to everyone else locally to find out how they view the local area and what they would like to see happen in the future. A range of different consultation techniques can be deployed for this purpose. Facilitators employed by organisations affiliated to ACRE and AMT are best placed to explain these, including their ability to reach certain groups within the community.

Role of local authorities

Local authority involvement at this stage is important for making sure that communities go about researching their local area and take into consideration all available information and the views of different stakeholders.


Make existing facts and information available to communities to help them research their local area

Officers can work with communities to help them access data and information, explain its relevance and how it can be used to help agree and prioritise actions. This is crucial when addressing issues such as housing, as communities need to understand the wider strategic needs for the area and the role that they can have in responding to this.

"We provide large scale A0 maps to CLP groups to assist them in their consultation process. These can be used to help tease out the key spatial issues that can be then addressed more fully through questionnaires. We are also developing 'ward profiles' for each of the wards within the District. These will contain a range of quantitative data such as demographic, economic, housing and environmental statistics. They will be available to CLP groups to assist them in building up a portrait of their neighbourhood. The ward profiles have been really useful in helping groups to focus on the priority issues. It means that they can compare qualitative data received, for example, through household questionnaires, with quantitative data held in the profiles." **Broadland District Council**

Add value to the work of local facilitators, providing resources and support to aid community consultation

In most cases it is the independent local facilitator who provides hands on support for the consultation that communities undertake. This is really important because it ensures that communities are using the most appropriate techniques to engage with different people, and are covering the whole range of issues. Local authorities have found it useful to work closely with these facilitators to ensure that the data being collected is useful for their own purposes and to have confidence that the consultation has been conducted in an inclusive manner.



“In partnership with the local authority Research Team, we have developed a CLP ‘questionnaire menu’ which gives advice on how to frame questions and offers a range of examples based on previous Community Led Plans. The local group then adapts and adds their own questions based on preliminary consultations (e.g. Planning for Real, focus groups etc) and the draft is then critiqued by the local authority research professionals. The toll has proved really useful because it means that the whole community can have confidence in the validity of the questions.” **Herefordshire Partnership**

“Rural Community Council (Leicestershire and Rutland) has been very proactive in using more interactive consultation tools with communities and to support this we offer them access to our council voting handsets. This is particularly useful for engaging with young people consultations.” **Leicestershire County Council**

Encourage the involvement of councillors in consultation activities

Elected members have an important part to play in the research and development of CLP actions. They have the potential to get behind the community as champions for the CLP process and can encourage greater involvement and interest in the consultation.

“We encourage our councillors in their role as community champions such as coming to community events.” **West Lindsey District Council**

“Our councillors have attended consultation events and in one case actually helped to deliver household questionnaires!” **East Hampshire District Council**

A – Agreeing and prioritising actions


Activities required by communities	Local facilitator support	Local authority support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sense of evidence gathered • Draft actions to improve the community • Agree and prioritise actions • Produce a final document explaining the plan, research undertaken and the actions that will be pursued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with data analysis • Signpost to other communities addressing similar issues • Facilitate events set up to agree and prioritise actions • Make sure actions are developed in consultation with key partners • Provide examples of other plan documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with data analysis • Advise on the development of actions where appropriate • Respond to draft plans • Clarify the support available for the delivery of actions

What happens at this stage?

Once the initial research has been undertaken into local needs and aspirations, communities go on to agree and prioritise a range of different actions that are expected to enhance the social, economic and environmental characteristics of their settlement. These actions should be backed up with evidence, demonstrate local support and detail how they will be delivered and resourced.

To begin with, communities need to make sense of the evidence they have gathered so far. This is largely about identifying the most pressing local issues, but it's also a time to reflect on any differences of opinions or tensions where they exist. Sometimes, this can be a time consuming and challenging task, particularly where the analysis of larger quantitative data sets is required.

Where efforts have been made to consider the available evidence and local issues identified, those leading on the development of plans usually find it fairly straightforward to come up with a list of draft actions. It is important that these actions are presented back to the community for discussion and agreement at the earliest opportunity otherwise there is a risk that they will be rejected at a later stage. This 'second stage' of consultation is usually held at a single public meeting or event.



Having decided on the actions they wish to pursue, it is likely that communities will need to undertake some further investigative work to establish how these will be delivered and resourced. This should involve any groups or organisations that are expected to support the actions, including local authorities where appropriate.

By the end of this stage, communities will have produced a final document that explains the purpose of their plan, describes the work they have done to understand local needs and aspirations, and details the particular actions that the community will seek to pursue and how they will be delivered.

Role of local authorities

The involvement and support of local authorities at this stage can help to make sure that communities develop actions that are well researched, inclusive and linked in with local service provision. It also offers an opportunity to identify any linkages with actions in existing statutory plans that might aid the community in achieving their own actions.


Help with data analysis

Some local authorities help communities to analyse the data they have collected about their area. This instils greater confidence in the evidence communities use to agree and prioritise actions. It can also help to ensure that there is more consistency in the way that information about local needs and aspirations is used and presented across individual plans, opening up opportunities for CLP data to be used for other strategic purposes. This support has been welcomed by some community groups who feel they lack the time and knowledge to be able to make sense of reams of information at their disposal.

“We provide questionnaire data input and analysis via SNAP software free of charge. We encourage communities to use survey monkey, an online service which allows you to have the questionnaire on the web, but also to input results from paper questionnaires yourself.” **East Hampshire District Council**

Advise on the development of actions where appropriate

Whilst many of the actions proposed in Community Led Plans can be undertaken by communities themselves, there are others that require the support of local authorities to bring them to fruition. Where this is the case, it is highly recommended that officers from relevant departments seek a conversation with the communities concerned to make sure they have information about the issue they seek to address, are aware of how their proposals might fit in with more strategic considerations and know what support they can realistically expect. This is very important, as otherwise there is a risk that communities could end up proposing poorly conceived actions that fail to happen, or worse still, conflict with the work the local authority is already doing.



“We provide a toolkit for all CLP groups which includes a section dedicated to advice and guidance from specific service providers. The information provided is based on issues that each service provider has dealt with regularly in the past from CLPs, and gives information on what support may be available, along with some guidance on issues such as relevant statutes and technical procedures. This makes it more viable for local authority officers to meet the needs of so many different CLP communities - there are currently 30 plans being produced and roughly another 30 actively being implemented.”

Herefordshire Partnership

“Help is available through regular surgery sessions, and “meet the expert” events, hosted by us and designed to enable the members of steering groups to come and discuss the issues and problems they face and to engage with key public sector providers to find possible solutions. The intention here is to provide support for steering groups at a difficult point in the process, and also to enable both parishes and providers to see what is emerging before it becomes too firmly set; informal discussion at this stage can help to shape the plan more realistically before expectations become unmanageable.”

West Berkshire District Council

“We have worked with four separate groups of parishes to produce a Community Action Plan for each ‘cluster’. After each completed a consultation we then held an “action planning” session, one was even on a Saturday. Officers from local authorities and other organisations were invited as well as residents and councillors from each of the parishes. Officers sat at tables representing their area of knowledge i.e. transport, economic development, housing etc. with the consultation results, and groups of residents visited each table in turn, discussed the consultation results and suggested possible actions to tackle problems. Because the officers were involved, the actions were discussed as they arose and any unachievable ones were unlikely to be included. At the end of the sessions the attendees voted for their preferred actions to prioritise them. An action plan was drafted and actions prioritised with agreement between officers and members of the community all within a day. It was relatively quick and provided lots of opportunities for networking.”

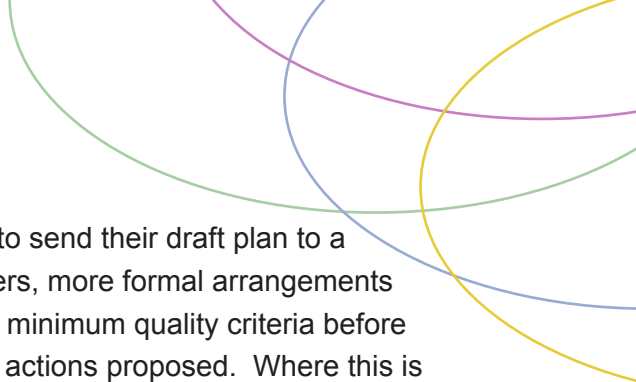
Lake District National Park Authority

“We produced a DVD covering how decisions are made and exploring service delivery so that groups understand how to use systems available to them.”

East Riding of Yorkshire Council

Respond to draft plans

Procedures can be developed for responding to draft plans. These are an opportunity for local authorities to make sure plans have been produced in an appropriate way and specify actions that are likely to have a positive impact. In some cases these procedures



have been kept informal, offering communities the chance to send their draft plan to a designated officer or elected member for comment. In others, more formal arrangements have been developed whereby plans are expected to meet minimum quality criteria before they can continue to receive support for the delivery of any actions proposed. Where this is a clear and transparent process for doing this, it can encourage stronger dialogue between communities and local authorities and result in better outcomes locally. With the introduction of Neighbourhood Planning, this more formal approach is likely to become increasingly necessary as aspects of the plan relating to spatial land use will be required to undergo an independent assessment fulfilling various criteria.

“Communities send their draft action plans in to each of our service managers, via a facilitator, so that we can comment constructively and offer suggestions on where we can help. When the plan is returned there is a name by each comment or action for further contact. This person will go out to the community, if asked, and help to further refine their plan. This ‘whole council response’ is good because it means that all services are involved and there is a wide knowledge and understanding of the CLP process. In addition to the response to draft action plans outlined above, CLP groups are invited to give a presentation to Full Council, which brings issues in front of all Members.” **West Lindsey District Council**

“Parish/Town Plans are adopted by a process known as “Individual Decision” (ID). This means that the elected Member of the council who holds the portfolio for Community Planning has the power to sign off the Plan for adoption on behalf of the rest of the Council. As part of the ID process, all Members of West Berkshire Council are consulted on the draft action plan and have an opportunity to comment. See: <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=16510&p=0> for more information.” **West Berkshire District Council**

Clarify the support available for the delivery of actions

Many local authorities and other service providers choose to acknowledge receipt of completed Community Led Plans, confirming the support and funding that they will provide towards the delivery of specific actions. Sometimes, it can be helpful to delegate responsibility for supporting particular actions to appropriate departments or officers.

“We have a pot of money available for parish planning with grants of up to £5000 available per community plan area. We also offer advice on where other funding opportunities might exist.” **West Berkshire District Council**

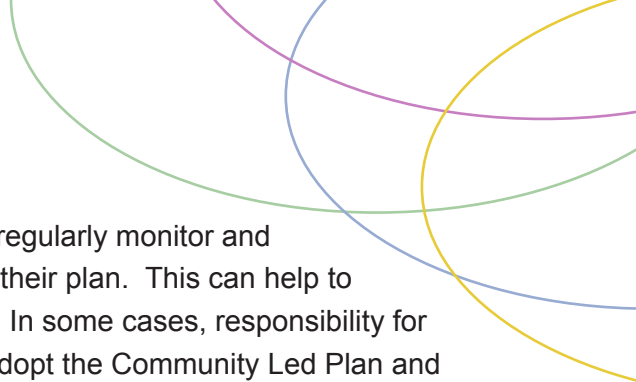
D – Delivering and monitoring actions

Activities required by communities	Local facilitator support	Local authority support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with others where needed to implement and monitor the actions specified in the plan • Review the plan when it needs updating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing support and advice for the delivery of actions • Mediate between the community and other partners where issues with delivery arise • Support community groups that have chosen to work together to deliver actions • Monitor progress made towards delivery of actions • Remind communities to review their plan and provide guidance about how to do this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep a record of CLP actions • Make use of CLP data for strategic purposes • Provide ongoing officer support for the delivery of actions • Outline expectations for communities to review plans

What happens at this stage?

The final stage of any Community Led Plan involves communities delivering and monitoring the actions they have previously agreed, either by themselves or with external input and support. Given that it can take up to two years of preparatory work, it is essential that communities continue to have faith in their plan and know exactly how they will turn their aspirations into reality. This usually involves continued negotiation with local authorities and other service providers who can help to make sure this happens.

Depending on the scale of the work involved, some actions may take days or weeks to achieve whilst others can take years. To make sure these happen, communities are expected to be clear about what needs to be done when, by whom and with what resources. Quite often those actions which are the easiest to achieve are undertaken first, resulting in a few ‘quick wins’ that renew people’s interest and confidence in the plan. For other larger projects, communities may choose to set up working groups comprised of interested volunteers to oversee their implementation.



The LEAD framework also recommends that communities regularly monitor and report on progress made towards the delivery of actions in their plan. This can help to prevent efforts from stalling and keeps everyone informed. In some cases, responsibility for monitoring is assumed by the parish or town council who adopt the Community Led Plan and support it as part of their day-to-day work.

Finally, communities may choose to review their entire plan after five years. Indeed many communities across England are already at this stage. Reviewing a plan allows a community to consider what they have managed to achieve to date and if any new actions should be proposed. This might be because local circumstances have changed significantly, or national policy has been revised or introduced opening up new opportunities. It is likely that many communities will want to refresh their plans once the Localism Bill has been passed and the new policies are in effect offering them new rights and powers. Local authorities who understand the CLP process will be best placed to most actively support these groups.

Role of local authorities

Local authorities can continue to make use of Community Led Plans once they have been agreed. Where a record of actions has been kept, intelligence about local needs and priorities may be used for strategic purposes. Moreover, support can be provided for specific actions where appropriate, equipping communities with the resources and technical expertise needed to deliver innovative local projects that add value to public service provision, encourages new development or enables greater self-sufficiency. Lastly, local authorities may wish to encourage communities to review their plans as this helps to sustain and renew community activism.

Keeping a record of CLP actions

Many local authorities find it useful to keep a record of Community Led Plans and the actions they propose. Systemising this information, usually in a database, can provide a useful source of information that can be easily accessed by officers and elected members for different purposes. The following case studies look at how data has been captured, whilst the following two items of best practice describe how this information can be put to best use.

“In 2007 the Devon Strategic Partnership commissioned the development of a new and innovative database to provide easy access to the wealth of information contained in CLPs from across the county. The database, Communities in Action (CiA), was launched online in 2008 and is publicly available from www.communitiesinaction.org.uk. Communities themselves input the data. The database is useful both to communities producing plans and local authorities for strategic purposes. It shows what plans have been produced, what stage they’re at and can be searched to map out issues and actions that are being addressed across the county. The database is undoubtedly most effective in districts where district council and county council



staff have been proactive in supporting parishes to make full use of it. Local authorities across the county are now using the information from the database to help inform their policies. There is also interest from the Health Service and the local Police. In Teignbridge South Devon, database information has been particularly useful for the Local Development Framework process. The database can also provide strategic information about trends and can highlight areas of common concern.” **Teignbridge District Council**

“We have a CLP Action Plan database which is funded by the local authority and populated and maintained by the local branch of NALC, using LEADER funding. The database can be interrogated by any department for specific actions related to their area of work. It is also cross-referenced against each parish, the age of each plan, the 6 Community Strategy themes and 9 county localities.” **Herefordshire Partnership**

Make use of CLP data for strategic purposes

Where a record of Community Led Plans and their actions has been kept, it may be interrogated to report on community activism across an area and generate geographical intelligence about local needs and priorities. This is likely to provide a much deeper understanding about the distinctiveness of particular places and the issues that cut across them. Some local authorities already use this data to inform policy and future interventions in communities such as the delivery of local services and the approval of new land use development. Capturing this community-level data may also reduce the need for other, more expensive consultation activities.

“The planning department has made explicit reference to CLP in the LDF, stating that where a need for housing and available land has been identified in a Community Led Plan, they will grant permission for the development of two affordable houses for every house built at market prices.” **Suffolk Coastal Local Strategic Partnership**

“When a plan is completed, the Community Partnership is invited to give a presentation to a meeting of the full Council. This has proved really popular and gives the community a real sense that their work is being taken seriously. Elected members also enjoy the opportunity to hear from individual parishes and get an insight into both specific and common problems that the communities they represent face. At the moment, the plan is not formally adopted, but we are working to embed CLP issues into individual service plans.” **West Lindsey District Council**

“We have successfully developed links between Community Led Plans and the Sustainable Community Strategy. Local targets, taken from the Community Led Plans, were agreed within the Sustainable Community Strategy at both county level (over 3 years 2009-12) and in most districts. It’s been really valuable as we’ve been able to promote the idea of CLP to wider communities, and educate

other partners in what CLP is. When the new Local Transport Plan (LTP) for Oxfordshire was being developed in 2009/10, proposals from CLPs were included as part of the proposed long list of schemes that were consulted on. Local communities saw that their local proposals were being taken into account when developing the next county-wide LTP.” **Oxfordshire County Council**

“The Development Management team now include a section in their reports which allows for CLP evidence to be formally referenced in decisions, where appropriate. Evidence contained within Community Led Plans is given material consideration helping community groups to have a bigger voice in the planning system.” **Lake District National Park Authority**

Provide ongoing officer support for the delivery of actions

Whilst many of the actions proposed in Community Led Plans can be undertaken by communities themselves, there will be others that require the support of local authorities to bring them to fruition. This may involve the contribution of officer time and expertise, the provision of financial resources or even necessitate changes to strategic policies for the area. In instances where local authorities have agreed to provide support, there may be a need to delegate responsibility for this to relevant departments, officers or even elected members. Some local authorities have developed procedures to help delegate this work and monitor progress made.

“On receipt of completed Parish Plans, notification is given to an email group of internal staff across different council departments along with an electronic copy of the plan and a summary of the key information to be found within. The Community Development and Liaison Officer follows up with particular officers on those action points that relate to their area of work. In terms of spatial planning, a register is kept up-to-date which draws out those elements of Parish Plans that relate to this issue. We have just started to plot this information on maps too. This allows different council departments to work positively with communities across the District, and to address issues that are important to them, as identified within their plans. This helps to build a positive relationship between the council and its communities.” **Broadland District Council**

“Actions are categorised by those taking the lead, be it community, local authority or other partner. If it is a local authority responsibility then there is a named officer or department placed against that action and they are responsible for its delivery. Service heads can see all the actions, check they are being progressed and feed back to communities. Draft action plans therefore must have been shared with local authorities earlier in the LEAD process so that there are no surprises!” **West Berkshire District Council**

“We have a LEADER-funded Implementation Officer employed by the local branch of NALC, who liaises with the local working group, the local Parish Council and relevant service providers to implement their CLP.” **Herefordshire Partnership**



Outline expectations for communities to review plans

Many local authorities also see benefit in encouraging communities to review their Community Led Plans. This can help to ensure that community activism is sustained, that evidence of local needs and aspirations is kept up to date and that people have an opportunity to respond to changes that have occurred in their local area. Communities may also be supported to take advantage of new policy initiatives when reviewing their plan.

“We have developed a Review Process Document which is made available to all CLP groups at the “D” stage of the “LEAD” process. It’s also made available to parish councils and local groups who have old CLPs that they want to refresh. It takes the form of a self-assessment, in order for the local community to judge their best way forward.” **Herefordshire Partnership**

Our support for Community Led Planning

Independent local facilitators affiliated to networks maintained by ACRE and AMT are able to work directly with communities to guide and support them through the process of producing a Community Led Plan.

The best practice featured in this guide shows how local authorities can work with, and add value to the work of these independent local facilitators to make the most of CLP.

Experience has shown that many communities have found it useful to draw on independent support whilst producing Community Led Plans. Facilitators affiliated to ACRE and AMT have fulfilled this role for many years, making sure that communities are equipped with the very best techniques for producing high quality plans, whilst making sure that this activity is linked in with the work of the local authorities.

We strongly recommend that local authorities contact local ACRE and AMT facilitators in the first instance to maximise the potential of this guidance when developing processes and procedures for CLP.

Contact details:



<http://www.acre.org.uk/about-rcan>

<http://towns.org.uk/2011/06/30/clp-and-np/>