

Community Planning Toolkit

Overview Summary



1. Introduction

The Council places great importance on the role of community led action in contributing to and being part of a strong community. The aim is that towns and villages in the Borough can deliver benefits in a more inclusive and sustainable way that helps meet the needs of everyone.

Gaining a real understanding of what matters most to all members of your local community is the first important step in community planning. This toolkit will help explain how best to identify what issues are being faced, what the effects are and what could be done to change the situation and help our communities to thrive.

As a result of carrying out a community led plan the parish council and residents can focus their efforts on identifying the necessary resources required to tackle the issues raised by the community or highlight matters to external stakeholders to see improvements to the infrastructure.

Experience has shown that joint working between authorities and communities on community led plans can deliver real benefits. What is necessary is understanding which the most appropriate tool is to use. This is where this toolkit can help.



2. What is the Community Planning Toolkit

Planning with your communities is at the heart of successfully using the tools in this toolkit. Choosing the most appropriate tool relies on building connections and collaboration between the Parish Council and their community to understand what is most important to them and begin to identify priorities to move forward with.

The toolkit provides a framework and practical guidance to use these approaches to help communities identify what is important to them, how they work together to gather evidence, develop shared goals and plan for their future which is the essence of community planning.

The toolkit is intended to support the process for communities who have identified an issue and who might want to make a plan and develop practical ways to improve their area, such as through a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), Village Design Statement (VDS) or Parish Plan. Local organisations like Parish and Town Councils or collaborative community groups like a Community Land Trust are at the core of this process.



3. Background to the Toolkit

The first community planning toolkit was published in June 2019. It brought together the Test Valley Association of Parish and Town Councils (TVAPC) and the Council to support the development and use of community planning tools such as Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) or Parish Plans.

The success of the first community planning toolkit has helped a number of Parishes to undertake extensive engagement with their communities and delivered a number of NDPs and other community plans. Since 2019, twenty-two out of the total of fifty-two parishes (42%) have either made a NDP, are in the process of making one or have had their parish designated for the purposes of doing a NDP in the future. Ten NDPs have been made and undertaken by local communities. Five Parishes are actively working in developing NDPs and a further seven Parishes have successfully had Neighbourhood Plan areas designated, demonstrating their desire to make an NDP¹.

Some Parishes, through engagement with their communities, have taken a different path towards a community plan such as undertaking or reviewing their Village Design Statement. Additionally, other communities have identified many community projects which have resulted in investment into our communities, for example new play equipment and fitness equipment in several villages, improvements to community halls and sports pavilions and traffic calming schemes.

Updated Community Planning Toolkit

It is important to keep the toolkit up to date so that communities have access to all the latest guidance and information. In 2024 a series of events were organised to understand how the original toolkit was being used by our communities and where additional or more detailed guidance would be helpful. This feedback has informed the menu-style approach set out in this revised toolkit that helps communities select which type of community planning tool is best suited to

their needs; and to address their local issues and key priorities. The toolkit update takes account of the most recent TVBC Corporate Plan (2023 – 2027) and other new policies and guidance introduced since the previous version was adopted.

The Local Plan

The council is updating the Local Plan to deliver the number of homes set by the government for all Local Planning Authorities including Test Valley. The emerging Local Plan contains policies that enable affordable housing in rural areas to come forward and deliver the type of housing that meets the needs of the local population. Encouraging more homes to be built of the right type in the right location will help meet local affordable need as well as helping to sustain the existing facilities and services in our rural communities. The emerging plan also has a policy on community led development which aims to facilitate the delivery of affordable housing and other uses on sites in the countryside that are community led.

¹ Figures accurate as of January 2025

4. Importance of community engagement

Effective community engagement is the cornerstone of effective community planning. This toolkit will give you an overview of the principles and some of the techniques of effective community engagement. More importantly, if you pursue a community led plan in your area, you will also be able to access dedicated community engagement support and advice from the council. Your first point of contact for this will be one of the councils Community Engagement Officers for your area (insert link to CEO map)

Community engagement is a broad term that covers a whole range of activities that encourage and enable individuals and communities to be involved, at the level they want, in what is going on in their area. This ranges from simply giving the community information, to working in partnership with the community in developing services in their local area. Community engagement should be a positive experience for those carrying out the engagement and those being engaged with. Community engagement should not be undertaken to inform the public of a decision that has already been made.

At the early stages of understanding community priorities, the parish council will usually take the lead role, allowing a discussion with the whole community so they are engaged and involved from the outset. Further guidance on how to undertake community engagement to inform the community planning process can be found as part of the toolkit in Annex A. This can be done with support from officers of the council who can help bring some of these engagement techniques to life.

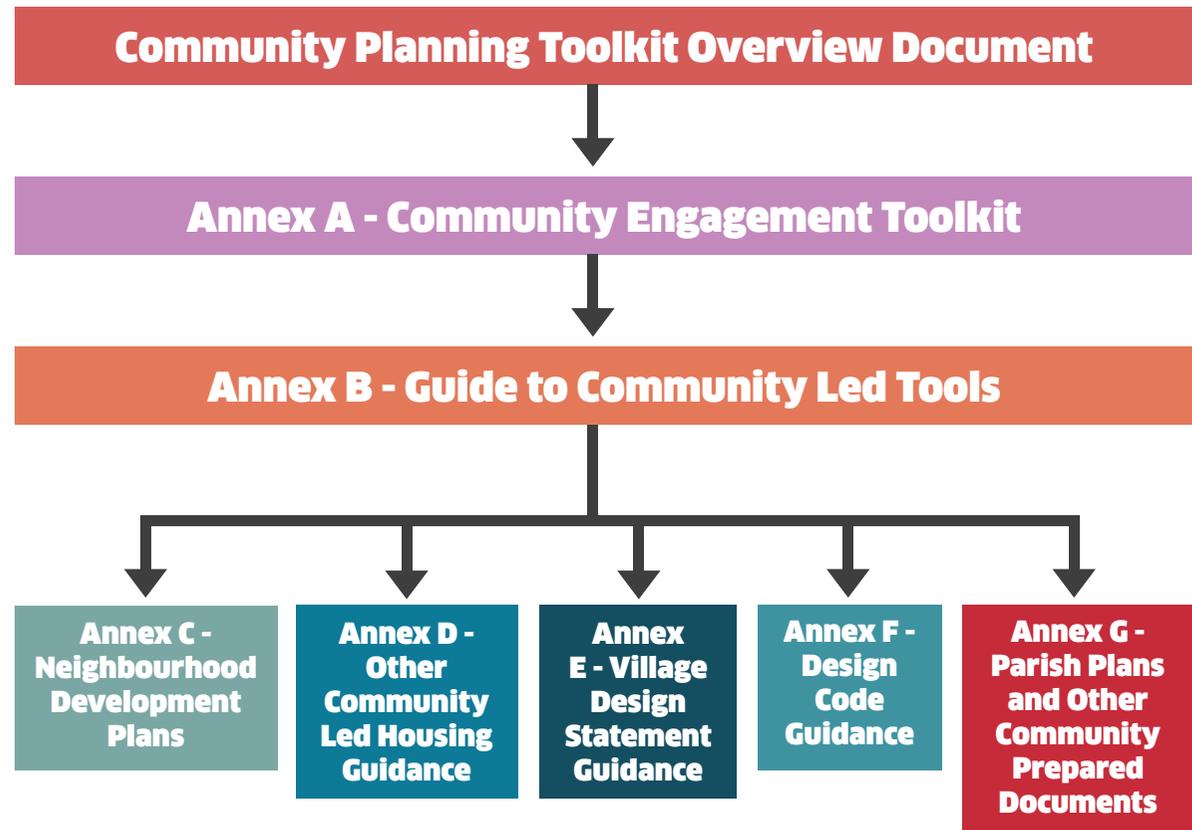
- Engaging with communities is not just about meeting legal duties. Genuine and effective community engagement has benefits for organisations such as parish councils and local people with:
- Enhanced wellbeing and increased levels of satisfaction through local people being genuinely involved in decisions
- Increased local ownership and enhanced local pride. If people feel valued and included, they are more likely to participate
- Increased dialogue and communication between local people and organisations. Working in partnership will allow better relationships and trust to develop between policy makers and local people.
- Increased openness and accessibility
- Promotion of social inclusion and bring in new information and ideas with a local perspective
- Increased sustainability – Sustainable change can only happen if communities are involved from the start through generating jointly agreed aims and objectives
- Responsive services that meet local need enabling plans to be delivered effectively
- Save time by dealing with any areas of conflict in a timely way and before local decisions are made
- A more detailed explanation of community engagement techniques is provided in Annex A

5. Structure of the Toolkit

The focus of the toolkit is to get to the heart of local issues through community engagement and setting shared objectives as a means of identifying which community planning tool is the most appropriate to help deliver your communities' priorities.

The toolkit is structured into a series of annexes, which each set out the specific tools that are designed to address issues that have been identified by communities, such as the need for more family housing. The Annexes C to G should be read in tandem with Annex A which provides a reference point for the engagement that needs to take place throughout a community planning exercise and how that engagement should be carried out.

In addition to support with undertaking community engagement, the council can also help guide you on the use of each tool. Each of the tools are set out in their own annex and are underpinned by community engagement to ensure that each plan has the best opportunity for success. An outline of each of the tools and their process is shown in the flow diagram below. An overview of each of the tools is set out in Annex B and provides examples of the issues that may arise within your community and the best tool to address them.



Summary of the tools available

Tool	Purpose
Annex C Neighbourhood Development Plans	Allows communities to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and include planning policies to deliver the vision. The policies can include providing housing to meet local needs, protecting green spaces, identifying and protecting important community facilities and design policies. Once the plan is made or adopted, it will be used to decide planning applications in the area.
Annex D Other Community Led Housing	This can identify the local housing need through a survey and bring forward sites to deliver the housing. For example through Rural exception sites, Community land trusts or Neighbourhood development orders.
Annex E Village Design Statement	This can set out clear design guidelines that future development will need to take into consideration, so that new development fits into the town or village character.
Annex F Design Code	This provides a design framework for creating healthy, safe, beautiful, green, environmentally responsive, sustainable and distinctive places, with a high standard of design.
Annex G Parish / Town Plan	These plans identify community actions and aspirations to achieve the vision for the area. They will also set out, who will implement them and the timeframe for achieving them.
Annex G Neighbourhood Priority Statement	A simple and accessible way for communities to set out their key priorities and preferences for their local area.
Annex G Community Resilience Plan	This plan allows communities to identify potential hazards and threats (e.g. flooding), setting out the roles and responsibilities should the plan need to be implemented.

It is important that your choice of approach is informed by the issues or concerns raised by the community. To help you to get started, we have listed some common issues in the Symptom Checker below and which community tool may be the best fit. This is not an exhaustive list of issues but provides some useful examples, if you wish to discuss any other matters which have arisen during engagement with your community please get in touch with us at neighbourhoodplanning@testvalley.gov.uk.

Community Planning Tool Symptom Checker

Issue	Village or Town Design Statement (Annex E)	Neighbourhood Plan (Annex C)	Community Led Housing (Annex D)	Parish or Town Plan (Annex G)
Selecting sites for new development (housing, employment etc.)		✓	✓	
Protecting valued 'Local Green Spaces'		✓		
Provide locally distinctive design standards for new buildings	✓	✓	✓	
Strengthening controls in Conservation Areas	✓	✓		
More/better paths and cycleways		✓		✓
Renewable energy provision		✓	✓	✓
Improving public spaces	✓	✓		✓
Affordable housing for local people		✓	✓	
Controlling housing extensions	✓	✓		
Controlling housing density		✓	✓	
Parking		✓	✓	✓
Better road and path signage				✓
Retaining/enhancing biodiversity	✓	✓		
Retaining historic features/landmarks	✓	✓		
Better broadband coverage				✓
Flood mitigation		✓		

Issue	Village or Town Design Statement (Annex E)	Neighbourhood Plan (Annex C)	Community Led Housing (Annex D)	Parish or Town Plan (Annex G)
Traffic speed and safety				✓
Downsizing housing		✓	✓	
Retaining local facilities/services		✓		✓
Providing new/additional facilities			✓	✓
Encouraging home working and reducing out-commuting				✓
Improving public transport				✓
Community safety/security				✓
Street Lighting		✓		✓
Community events				✓
Provision of play and recreation facilities		✓	✓	✓
Sport and leisure pursuits				✓
Social isolation				✓
Litter				✓
Communications				✓

6. What support is available?

The council can support you at key stages of the process including how to get your community involved and choosing and using the tools within the toolkit.

In particular, we can provide the following support:

- Advice throughout the Community Plan process by phone and email.
- Visit your parish council or group to answer questions.
- Ongoing help with the specific actions where agreed, particularly where the community needs the support of external organisations or has chosen to work with other Community Led Plan groups to get things done.
- Help with revisiting and refreshing existing Community Led Plans.
- Helping with progress and providing advice on the process.
- Reminders for when and advice about how to review your Plan.

When you are gathering evidence and agreeing your approach with your communities we can:

- **Help in finding evidence for the work you will be undertaking**
- **Undertake a Housing Needs Survey**
- **Comment on your consultation process and draft questionnaire and discuss the outcomes of the consultations.**
- **Comment on any draft versions of any documents you produce.**

7. Delivering a community led plan

For your plan to be a success and to achieve the things you want, you will need to secure the 'buy in' of the whole community. In the case of a Neighbourhood Development Plan, for example, it will have to pass a local referendum. Some issues addressed in your plan may be controversial or split opinion. Even the less controversial subjects may generate some objections if you haven't secured broad community support along the way. Establishing trust between community members will help tackle difficult issues and support difficult conversations.

There is a recognised process to follow for each of the tools and this is set out in the relevant Annexes. The process is underpinned by some key principles and, if these are embedded into the process throughout, it will give the best chance of being supported by the community and adopted by the parish and borough council. The key principles are:

- Broad representation and the widespread involvement of local people throughout
- A sound evidence base to underpin your proposals
- A series of proposals that are realistic and deliverable

These principles apply equally to all forms of community planning, so this should be followed irrespective of the option that you have chosen to follow.

The Annexes for each of the community planning tools include lots of good practice, templates and examples of what have been successful, based on the experience of communities in the borough and across the country.

8. Funding

You are likely to need funding both to produce your community plan and also to undertake any actions or projects that are identified in your finished plan. These should be treated separately and your priority in the first instance should be to secure funding to help you produce your plan.

The community planning tool you have chosen will determine the level of funding you require and what is available. It can vary from a few hundred pounds to undertake a parish plan or Village Design Statement in a small village, to £10,000 for a more complex neighbourhood plan in a larger settlement.

You might be able to reduce the cost of your projects by utilising local skills or tradespeople. Maybe you have a local architect that is willing to do some plans free of charge or a builder who is willing to do some work at a subsidised rate to help their community. Some larger employers allow teams of employees to do voluntary work to help the local community, which could be worth considering.

Funding a Plan

There are grants available locally to support the production of most community plans. These are the most likely sources of funding for producing a community plan, but other sources are also available.

Community Planning Grant Scheme - Test Valley Borough Council

This grant scheme exists specifically to support communities with the of cost of creating a new, or updating an existing, community plan. Grant awards range from between £500 up to £2,000, depending on the type of community plan you are doing and the population of the parish.

For further details and online application form visit:
www.testvalley.gov.uk/cpgs

At Parish level

Your parish or town council can raise a precept each year to provide services locally. Some include within their budget a sum to support small-scale local projects and initiatives such as a community plan. A special case could be put to the Parish or Town Council to ask for funding for an important local project such as a community led plan.

Locality

Once you have designated your plan area all parish and town councils undertaking a neighbourhood plan or neighbourhood development order are eligible to apply for up to £10,000 in a Basic Grant.

Further details and how to apply: **www.neighbourhoodplanning.org/about/grant-funding/**

Funding the projects

Funding for the actions or projects that are identified in your finished plan is far more widespread. Again, there are some good sources of grants available locally to support the delivery of community plan projects. These are as follows:

Councillor Community Grant Scheme - Test Valley Borough Council

This grant scheme exists to support local, not for profit groups and organisations to undertake community led projects which improve and enhance their communities. Each ward has an annual budget, calculated on the population, which borough councillors can allocate within their wards. Applicants can apply for two thirds of the project cost, up to a maximum of £1,000. You must contact the borough councillor(s) for your ward, to discuss your project and interest in this grant before applying.

For further details and online application form visit: **www.testvalley.gov.uk/ccg**

Community Asset Fund - Test Valley Borough Council

Not for profit community organisations can apply to the Community Asset Fund for a grant of 50% of the project cost, up to a maximum of £25,000. Only projects costing more than £4,000 are eligible as the minimum award is £2,000. You must contact your Community Engagement Officer for your ward, to discuss your project and interest in this grant before applying.

For further information and online application form visit: **www.testvalley.gov.uk/CAF**

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

CIL allows planning authorities to raise funding for new infrastructure by levying a charge on new development within their area. Any Parish Council where a development starts (and to which CIL applies) will receive 15% of the CIL monies. The money is for the Parish Council to spend on local projects as it sees fit. If a parish has a Neighbourhood Plan in place, it will receive 25% of the CIL monies.

For more information about CIL, please visit **www.testvalley.gov.uk/cil**

Funding from other organisations

There are numerous sources of funding available locally and nationally to support with the implementation of projects and actions identified within plans. Funds are available through statutory organisations, charitable trusts, and businesses. Substantial sums can be secured from sources such as the National Lottery and Landfill Tax Grants. Below are two key resources to help you search for and secure funding for your projects:

Test Valley 4 Community

Test Valley 4 Community is a FREE online Grants Directory full of up-to-date information about hundreds of funding opportunities. It has a user-friendly website that allows you to quickly and easily filter through a huge variety of different grant schemes from local and national funders. You can save key searches, which enables you to receive instant updates when new grant meeting your criteria become available.

For further information visit:

**[www.idoxopen4community.co.uk/
testvalley](http://www.idoxopen4community.co.uk/testvalley)**

Unity

TVCS is the umbrella organisation for all voluntary and community organisations in Test Valley. It offers a range of support for local groups, including grants and funding advice. It can assist with funding searches and also offer advice on the preparation of funding applications.

Further information visit:

www.unityonline.org.uk

