

Introduction

Villages across Kent are facing a range of challenges including housing development, an aging population and traffic growth while at the same time trying to prevent the loss of key services such as shops, schools and pubs. There are two important tools available to them to address these challenges:

- Neighbourhood Plans also called Neighbourhood Development Plans
- Community Led Plans also called Parish Plans

The former is a land-use plan with a set of policies that mainly considers future transport needs, housing, public open spaces, buildings and commercial development while the latter is an action plan that tends to focus more (but not exclusively) on activities and services. The table below shows some of the common ground between the two processes but also the key differences:

Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)	Parish Plan ¹ (PP)
A profile of the village based on a community consultation exercise and other sources of information	
A clear vision and set of objectives	
A formal call for sites for development (optional) The formulation of a limited number of Ash specific land-use policies (required).	Identifying actions/projects to meet the objectives.
Consultation with statutory and other local agencies.	Consultation/ seek support from statutory and other local agencies.
An examination and referendum prior to becoming part of the Development Plan for Dover District.	Seeking funding or other resources to deliver the projects.

A key difference is that if 'made' through a referendum, the NDP becomes part of the statutory development plan for the district. A PP, although it can be 'adopted' by the parish council, only has voluntary status.

Both are medium term projects that could take between 12-18 (PP) and 18-24 months (NDP) minimum estimate. They also require commitment from the community, co-operation of the Dover Council Planning (NDP more) and the use of consultant/s (NDP more). There is government funding and support available for the NDP up to £9,000² and Action for Communities in Rural Kent will support the PP with some staff time and possibly funding. General funding is available for both (but especially for PP) from your district and county councillors and Awards for All. Both, or the two combined, will need a small but hard working group of volunteers to take them forward.

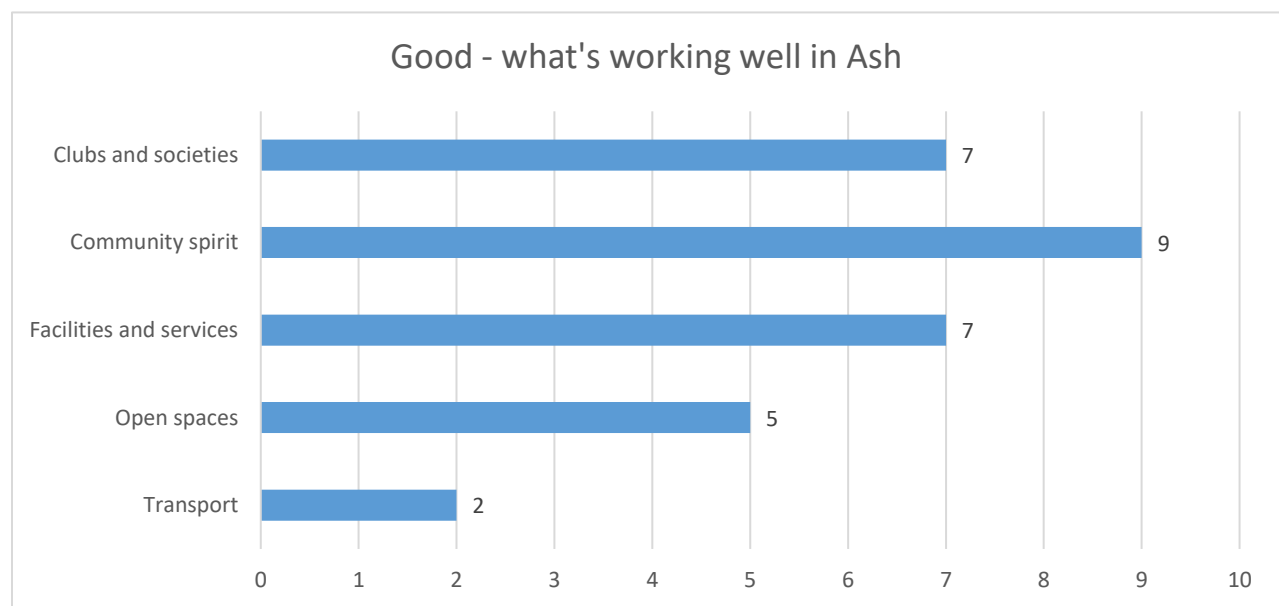
¹ Previously called village appraisal and sometimes referred to as community led plan.

² At the recent DCLG Neighbourhood Planning road-show in East Grinstead, the cost of NDPs was between £4k and £27k with the average cited as £14k.

To enable Ash to plan the best way forward, a village workshop was held on Saturday 5th March facilitated by Jim Boot, Freelance Community Planner (recent roles include advising on Wye's Neighbourhood Development Plan) and Kathy Bugden, Rural Development Officer, ACRK. The following report sets out the work that was carried out by the participants, their findings and recommendations for moving forward including the start of a timeline or project plan.

Good, bad, dreams community planning activity

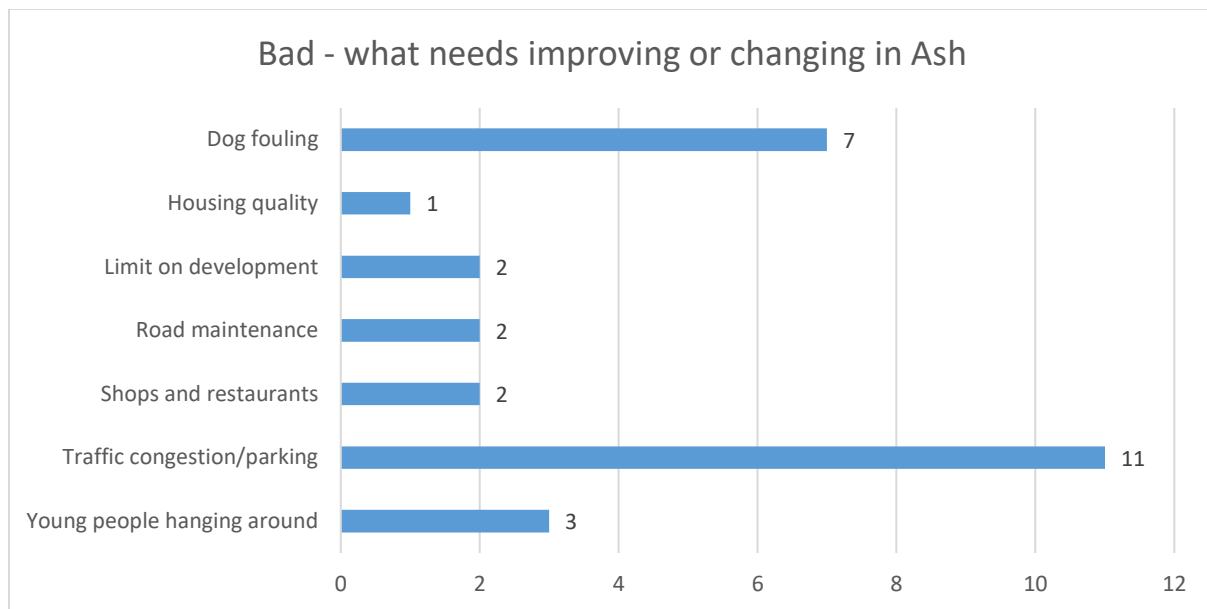
As a warm up activity – to get residents thinking about their community now and in the future participants were asked to identify what is 'good' or working well in Ash, what is 'bad' or needs improving and their 'dreams' or 'visions' for the future. This activity which will be replicated at the Village Open Day on 30th April revealed the following:



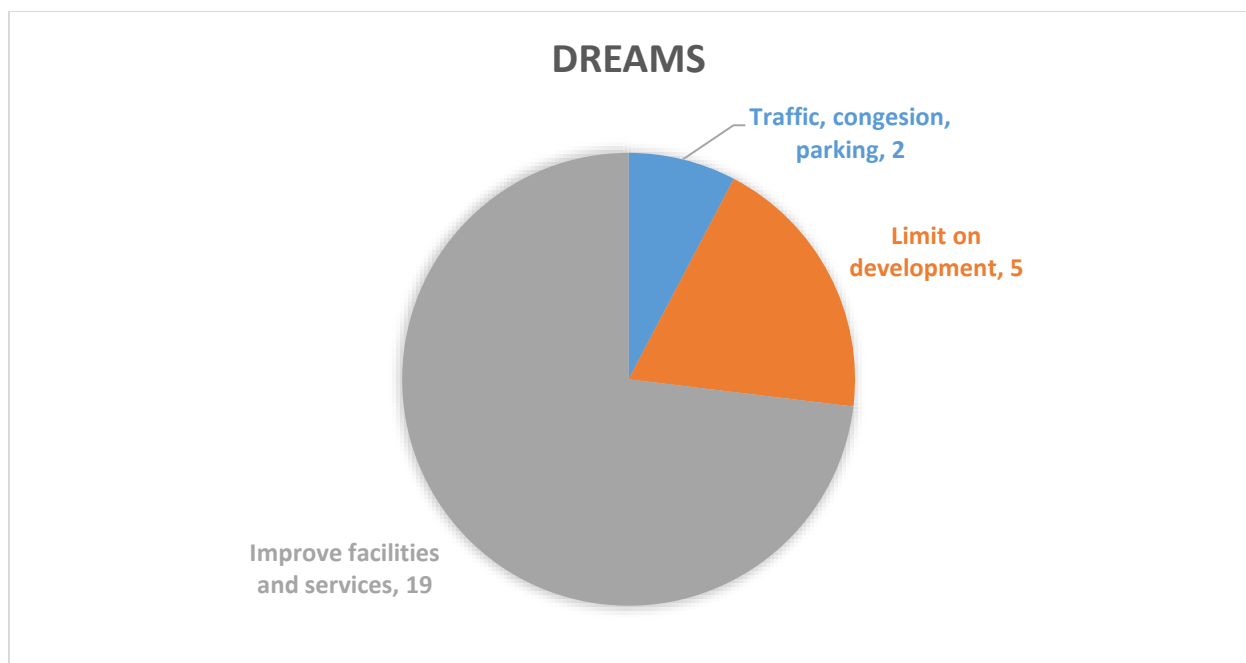
It's important at this stage, not to get too focussed on the results, rather to evaluate the process and start to think about how you might categorise the results. One thing that occurred on the day was that people gave more than one response. Ash needs to decide whether it records each response separately thereby allowing some people to have more than one 'go' or else simply take the first issue/idea stated as 'the most important'.

To get the chart above, all the comments were recorded on a spreadsheet (attached) and categorised and in the case of the dreams broken into sub-categories as well. Separate 'tabs' were set up for 'good' 'bad' and 'dreams'.

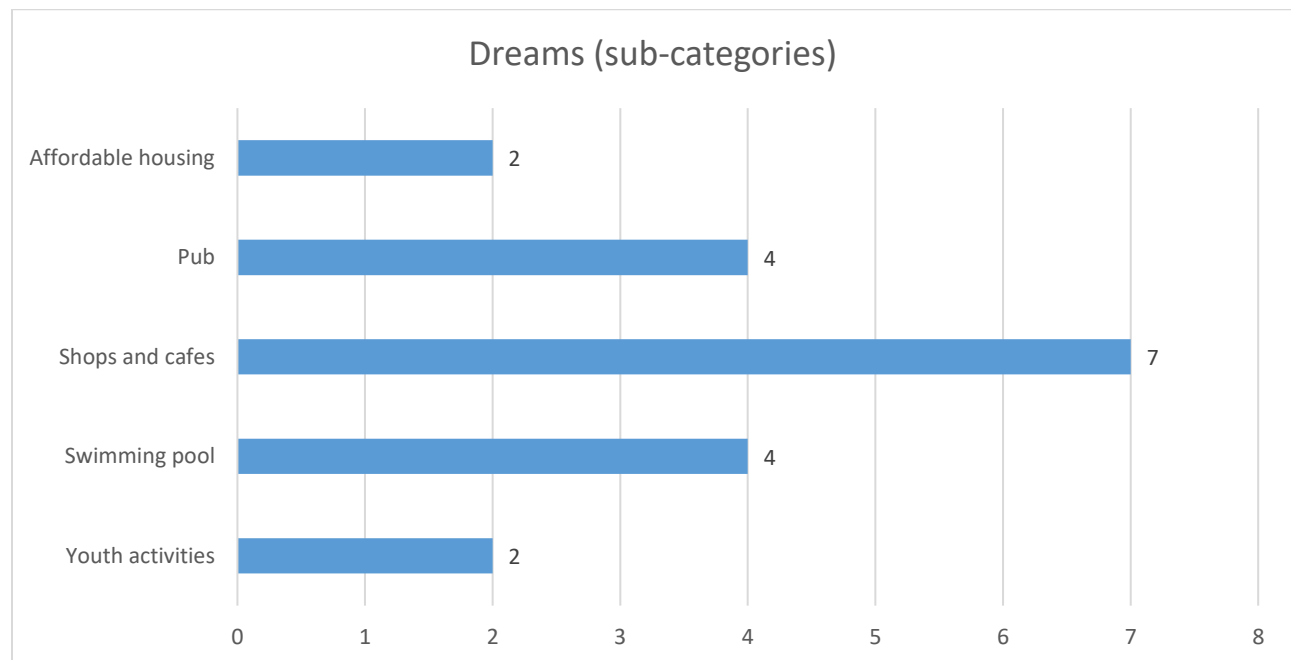
This question – when you compare to the next two arguably provides 'nice to know' information but has value in making people appreciate what they have – the positives – that can be built on, rather than simply focussing on negatives.



Road or traffic related issues came out on top amongst the 'bad' or needs improving. Again Ash might want to decide if it has separate sub-categories for parking, traffic or congestion or if at this stage you do as I have done and combine, then separating the sub-categories at the questionnaire stage ie Which of the following do you consider most important to tackle: Traffic, congestion or parking. This could have a graded response ie Very important, important, neither important or unimportant, unimportant or very unimportant to get clear feedback from residents on their priorities. Dog fouling is more clear cut although it would be difficult to see how this would be addressed through a Neighbourhood Plan. It would be more appropriate for a Parish Plan or could simply be a matter for the parish council to lobby the district for more dog bins, warden patrols/fixed penalties or educating dog owners – or a combination of all three.



With regard to the dreams, the majority of people wanted to improved facilities and services in the village, followed by those wishing to limit development and then to tackle traffic, congestion and parking issues.



However, when this was broken down in to sub-categories the largest group wanted to improve or retain existing shops and cafes, save the pub or else have a swimming pool. A smaller number addressed the question of affordable housing with one wanting housing for over 60s and the other stating 'no affordable housing'. Using sub-categories allows you still to identify residents' priorities but care needs to be taken not to mix positives and negatives in one category/sub-category which could be misleading. Good practice would suggest making available all the comments to be seen (possibly on-line), even those which might be seen as controversial so that it is seen that there is 'nothing to hide'.

Presentation on Parish Plans past and present

Kathy Bugden from Action for Communities in Rural Kent gave a presentation on parish plans. The full presentation can be found in the appendix. However, the main points from the presentation were as follows:

- The role of Action for Communities in Rural Kent
- Background to parish plans – formerly village appraisals
- Their benefits
- An overview of the process

Neighbourhood Development Plans

Jim Boot, Freelance Community Planner followed this up with a presentation on Neighbourhood Plans. Again the full presentation can be found in the appendix. However, the main points from the presentation were:

- Description from the government's National Planning Policy Framework

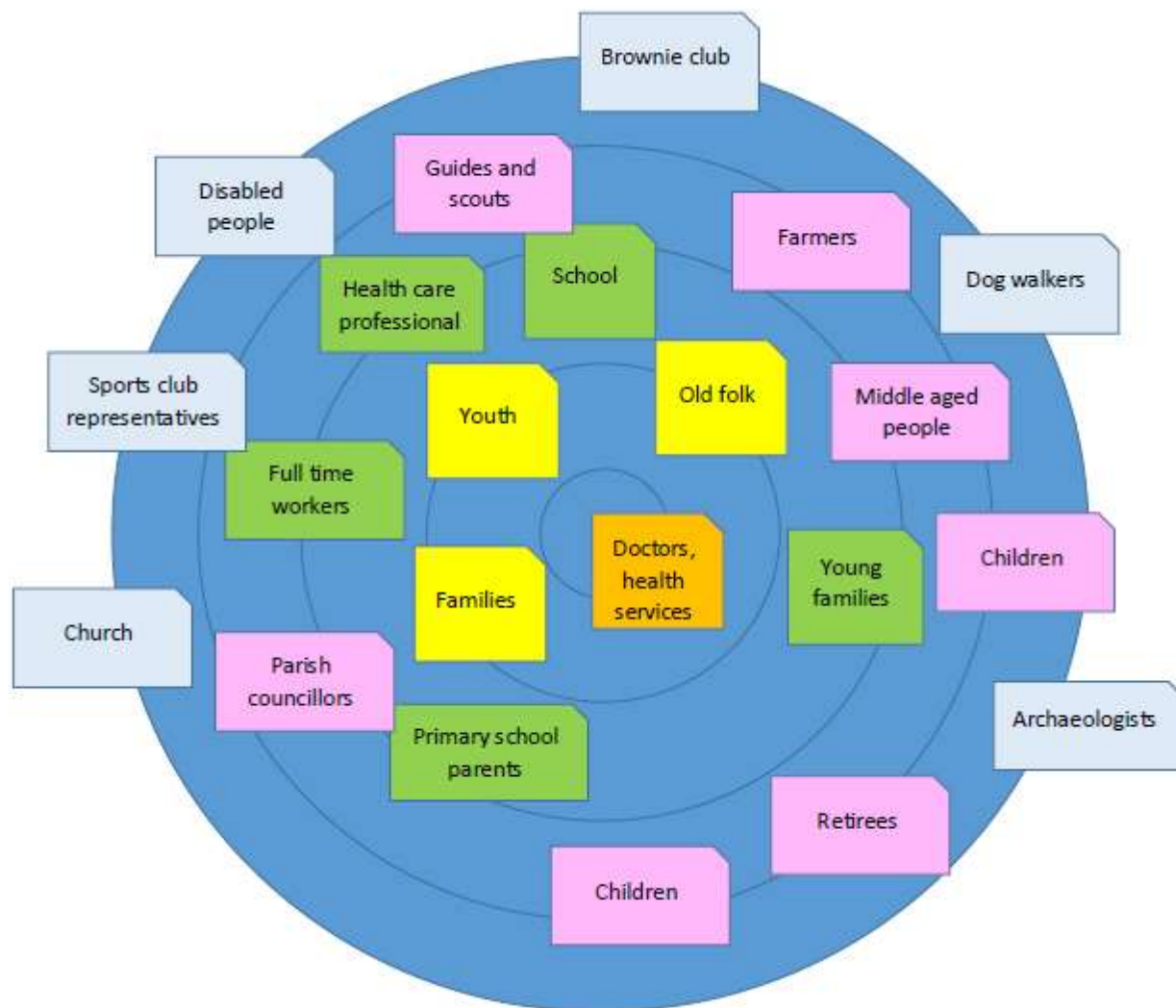
- Table comparing the two processes in the front of this report with approximate timescales 12-14 months for a Parish Plan and 18-24 months for a Neighbourhood Plan.
- Five reasons for having a Neighbourhood Plan based on CPRE and NALC guidance:
 - feel that the Local Plan does not address what you would like to happen in Ash (this is not the same as disagreeing with the adopted plan).
 - You would like more things to happen that aren't in the Local Plan or you would like things to happen more quickly.
 - You are worried a parish plan will have less weight than a formally adopted Neighbourhood Plan.
 - You want the same amount of development or more development (you can't have less) than is in the Local Plan – but perhaps in different places or phased over a different period.
 - You would like the Parish Council to have 25% of any Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) by right, rather than the 10% the parish council will be due.
- Also what a NP cannot do:
 - Conflict with the strategic policies in the Local Plan prepared by the local authority.
 - Be used to prevent development that is included in the Local Plan.
 - Or developments that come forward before you have made significant progress ie to the Examination.
- Some example of housing policies from adopted 'made' Neighbourhood Plans.
- What Wye feel they have achieved through their NP.

Dover District Local Plan

Originally it was intended to have a speaker from Dover's planning department to explain the current status of the Dover District Local Plan. Unfortunately, this wasn't possible but instead a paper was circulated in advance of the workshop (see appendix).

Circles of engagement – who to involve in your community led plan

Having set the context, there followed another exercise called 'Circles of Engagement'. This asks participants to identify key stakeholders that need to be involved in the community led plan and to what degree. The results are over-leaf. The stakeholders that need to be nearest to the heart of the process are moved towards the middle. Unusually, parish councillors were left towards the edge and the doctors' surgery put at the middle. The former may be because parish councillors don't want to dominate the process and the latter may reflect concerns over the impact of new housing on local health services. Families were seen very much at the heart as were young people and 'old folk'. Overall there is a strong steer that the project group needs reflect the make-up of the community.



Comparing Neighbourhood, Parish Plans and 'Managing as we are'

After the break there followed a series of table top workshops or focus groups each considering the best way forward for Ash. One of the groups looked at the 'do nothing' or 'manage as we are' option, trying to influence developers and Dover District Council through existing planning policies in the National Planning Policy Framework and Dover District Local Plan. All the groups used so-called SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis to consider the merits and otherwise of the different approaches. See over for the results of the three focus groups.

Neighbourhood Plans

This group identified the following:

Strengths • Local voice • Strength in community • Increased awareness – whole community • Being proactive – better than not having a plan	Weaknesses • Lack of real decision making influence • Real benefits? • Will they listen? • 106 currently allocated by Dover District • Time delay
Opportunities • Affordable housing • Have an influence • Overcome lethargy/engage community. • Funding for the plan and for actions. • CIL funding in future. 106 now. • Influencing design of new developments.	Threats • Amount of work. • Unable to influence major decisions.

Afterwards they fed back to the other groups what they considered their most important findings:

- Give local community a voice
- Have an influence on future planning
- Opportunity to engage community
- Secure more development gain – funding from development
- Lack of real decision/influence
- Better to have one than not
- The large amount of work involved.

Parish plan

This group identified the following:

Strengths • Best interests of the parish /community at heart. • Provides a shopping list of what the community desires. • Brings community together. • Can be produced by the community • Helps create solutions to need.	Weaknesses • Lacks statutory/regulatory authority • Does not generate funding. • The consultation is less rigorous. • Time consuming, great local effort.
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Opportunities • Evidence of need can produce opportunities for funding. • To bring people together (all sections of the community) and parish. • Raise the profile of Ash. • For better communication and feedback to parishioners.	Threats • Could be overruled (need to engage difficult partners in difficult issues). • Communication blocks. • Conflict (local and how it is dealt with). • Apathy, commitment, lack of volunteers.
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Afterwards they fed back to the other groups what they considered their most important findings:

- Has best interests of parish at heart.
- Brings community together
- Time consuming – effort and energy
- Local conflicts
- Could help with fundraising

‘Manage as we are’

This group identified the following:

Strengths •	Weaknesses • No influence with Dover District Council • Lots of unwanted housing
Opportunities •	Threats • New housing in unwanted places • Split village • Parking problems/traffic worse

After they had fed back to the other groups, everyone present was able to vote on their first and second choice options for a way forward. The results were as follow:

Neighbourhood Plan	Fourteen first choices and two second choices.
Parish Plan	Two first choices and 11 second choices
Managing as we are	One first choice, four second choices

The recommendation of those present after the workshops/focus groups to the parish council is therefore that the parish council goes ahead with developing a Neighbourhood Development Plan with a working group made up of a small number of parish councillors (2-3 max) and a larger group of residents reflecting the make-up of the community.

As a final activity before going home, the participants were asked to identify some key milestones/events coming up in the next few months that might provide opportunities to engage residents in the Neighbourhood Plan process:

Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
	Ash NP open event 30 th	Art exhibition 1 st May Bank Holiday	C&K School Fair	Scout AGM						Panto
		Ash Bake Off 7 th								

A list of participants at the event was taken by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and will be added to this report.

Conclusion

This was a well-attended event with a diverse range of participants from babies and children with their mums and dads to retired people. Given the opportunity to find out about the two main options for developing a community led plan, the majority of those present opted for developing a Neighbourhood Development Plan. It is recommended that a steering or working group that reflects the community (as per the Circles of Engagement) is set up with terms of reference (model terms of reference are available from Rural Kent) to take forward this project. Guidance and funding up to £9,000 is available from Locality who act on behalf of the government to support Neighbourhood Plan groups nationally: <http://locality.org.uk/resources/neighbourhood-planning-roadmap-guide/>. Information on grant funding is available from: <http://mycommunity.org.uk/programme/neighbourhood-planning/?a=funding>. One of the first tasks of the steering or working group should be to put together a project plan or timetable based on the NDP roadmap setting out when and what will take place over the next few months. Early on a decision needs to be made on how to consult with the community ie through focus groups, modelling or a questionnaire. Guidance on the best approach is also available in the Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE)'s publication: Community Led Planning Toolkit available from Rural Kent.

Jim Boot, Freelance Community Planner and Kathy Bugden, Rural Development Officer, Action for Communities in Rural Kent 22nd March 2016