



Neighbourhood planning communications pack

This guide is for local groups creating a neighbourhood plan with help from the [Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning programme](#).

It aims to give you information on how to communicate this support through social media and publicity material as well as advice and ideas on promoting your neighbourhood plan via the media.

Promoting the plan through the local press and social media plays a key role in raising public awareness, and increasing engagement and participation. The more people who are informed about the plan, the more successful it will be.

You may also find that your local authority press office is able to help you promote the plan to local media.

Credit line

If your story is related to the financial support or advice you've received from the Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning Programme, please select the relevant credit line from the list below to include on your website and publicity material where the support and/or grant is referenced:

- Support provided by the Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning Programme led by Locality in association with RTPI/Planning Aid England and partners, available through the My Community Rights website.
- Grant awarded by the Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning Programme led by Locality in association with RTPI/Planning Aid England, CDF and partners, available through the My Community Rights website.
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What makes a good story?

Neighbourhood planning - deciding how the area should develop, what should be built where, and what should be protected - is a matter of great importance to many people.

Explaining your work, telling people about key stages the plan has reached, and major decisions which have been made, will all be of interest to the local media.

Milestones in the project make the best news stories. Here's a list of the major milestones which you should be publicising (this promotion can be done in a variety of ways - local media, social media, posters, flyers, emails etc):

- the outset - as many people as possible should know that work is starting on a neighbourhood plan
- submission of the neighbourhood area - there is a statutory six week publicity period
- community engagement events should be publicised at all stages of the plan, including targeting 'hard-to-reach' groups
- pre-submission consultation - the draft plan proposal should be publicised widely
- if the plan is modified, you should publicise the changes in order to reduce the risk of legal challenge
- submission - the local planning authority has a duty to publicise the plan (six weeks statutory period)
- successful examination - publicise this so people know the next step is the referendum
- the referendum will need to be publicised, subject to statutory restrictions.

Here are just a few examples of the many neighbourhood planning stories which have made the local news:

[Villagers call for a long-term plan](#)

[Portland islanders have a say in their future](#)

[Double awards success for Thame's neighbourhood plan](#)

[Government minister welcomes Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Plan](#)

[Raise your hand if you want to build in Cheddar](#)

[Council pledges support to Malton and Norton Neighbourhood Plan](#)

How do I let the media know about my project?

The best way to let your local newspaper, newsletter, community website, radio station or TV know about your story is to send them a short press release.

The press release is a chance to sell your story - make it sound lively and interesting.

When your press release is ready you can email it to the local paper, TV and radio. You can usually find their contact details pretty easily on the web - media outlets generally have a 'contact us' link on their website.

Timing is important. You should send your press release before a key date, not after it. So if you've got a big community meeting coming up, for example - send the press release well before it happens, not the day after. Once it's been and gone, it is old news.

If your local paper is weekly, or monthly, make sure you check their deadlines and send information to them in good time. For online media, sending one week before you'd like the story to appear is usually adequate.

Media Trust offer a [free distribution service](#), if you think your story may strike a chord nationally, they can circulate your press release to their contacts.

Also if you think your story might be of interest to the national media or trade press, you can contact Locality's communications team jo.shardlow@locality.org.uk or clare.roebuck@locality.org.uk and we'll help you to publicise.

Using social media

If you're on twitter or you've got a facebook account, post when you have useful and interesting news to share. You can also use social media to post extra content, such as pictures, short films or audio.

If and when you write a press release, upload it to your website or blog and post a link to it. This will help spread your message among your community and may also gain you extra media coverage, as many journalists and bloggers use social media.

You can use the hashtag #neighbourhoodplanning in your tweets so other groups can easily find your news and updates.

If you don't have accounts on Twitter and Facebook and would like some tips on getting started, read Locality's short [social media toolkit](#).

How do I write a press release?

A press release should be short - no more than one side of A4. It should be snappy and contain all the key facts about your story. Imagine that you're writing the story as an article for a newspaper.

Try to get the most important points into the first paragraph to grab the journalists' attention.

Quotes will help bring the story to life. You could include a quote from yourself, or from someone else involved in the process (just make sure you check with them first of course).

Be sure to include your contact details at the bottom of the press release. If the journalist is interested in following up your press release, they will sometimes get in touch for further information. Being available to talk can be a big factor in getting your story published.

Please use/amend the template press releases at the end of this document.

Speaking to the media

If a journalist decides to follow up your press release, they may want to interview somebody. Before you send off your press release, make sure you have someone available who is happy and confident about speaking to a reporter if required.

Tips for speaking to the press:

- Put together three key messages that you want to get across in your interview - what are the most important things you want readers/listeners to remember? If you listen to a politician being interviewed, you'll hear them repeat the same points many times
- Think of a short phrase that sums up your work and explains why it's needed by the community
- Test your key messages and phrases on colleagues or friends - get someone to do a mock interview so you can practice
- If you don't know the answer to a question you don't have to answer it, stick to your area of expertise and go back to your key messages
- Think about the potential criticisms - are some people opposed to your project? How would you respond?

Preparation is the key to a good interview. Decide on your key messages, do a practice run and if you do get any critical questions, answer them as best you can, then go back to your main messages.

How to talk about the Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning programme

Key info about the programme:

Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning is a £9.5m programme of expert support and funding to help communities across the country create neighbourhood plans.

The programme is run by Locality, in association with partners RTPI/Planning Aid England, Community Development Foundation, Urban Vision Enterprise, Eden Project and URS, and funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Photos

Sending photos with your press release can increase the chances of getting coverage - particularly in the local paper or on a website.

You can also use photos to post on twitter and facebook.

A photo which illustrates your story is obviously best.

It's good to have people in your picture; a few people close up is better, rather than a big crowd of people quite far away. Ensure you have their permission, plus their names, in case the journalist asks for this info.

It's a good idea to take both portrait and landscape photos and to have copies in both high and low resolution. Only send one or two low res photos with your press release so you don't risk your email not being delivered.

Media monitoring

Once your story is sent, you can search the local media for it by simply carrying out a Google search. You can also set up a '[Google alert](#)', where Google will send you an email every time it finds a reference to your search term, eg "Newton neighbourhood plan".

You can also search twitter for useful information regarding neighbourhood planning using #neighbourhoodplanning, as mentioned above.

Template press release - permission to plan

Press release

16/9/13

Local people to plan future of Newton

The council has given a group of local people the go-ahead to start work on a neighbourhood plan for the village of Newton.

Newton's neighbourhood plan will set out how the village will develop, including how to preserve the character of the area, where new homes could be built, and how to protect local green spaces like the village green.

It's an opportunity for everyone in Newton to have their say on how the village develops.

Sarah Smith is part of Newton Neighbourhood Forum, the group which will lead on the creation of the plan.

Sarah said: "This is great news for Newton. We want to ensure that the village is a vibrant place to live, but at the same time we're keen to make sure it doesn't lose its character. The neighbourhood plan will give the people of the village a chance to have a real input into how Newton develops in the long-term."

Last night Newton District Council approved Newton as a designated neighbourhood plan area, meaning work on the plan can now begin.

The first stage of the plan will be a full consultation with local residents. The plan will then be drafted and finally voted on by the community.

Ends

Notes to editors

Contact details: Add your email address and phone number

Credit line

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Template press release - invite to a community event

Press release

1/10/13

Residents meet to plan future of Newton

Newton residents are all invited to an event about the Newton Neighbourhood Plan, at 7pm on 10 October in the Village Hall.

The Newton Neighbourhood Plan will give the village a major say on how the area develops, including where new housing is built, how to preserve the character of Newton and how to protect our local green space.

All local residents are invited to the community workshop, where leaders of the Newton Neighbourhood Forum will talk through the plan's progress and explain the consultation process. It's a chance to ask questions, give us your views, and talk about how we see the future of our village.

Sarah Smith is leader of the Newton Neighbourhood Forum. Sarah said:

"The Newton Neighbourhood Plan is making excellent progress so far, thanks to the hard work and engagement of local people. This event is a chance for the village to talk about the plan and to find out more about the consultation process - I hope to see all of Newton there next Thursday night!"

For more info about the Newton Neighbourhood Plan visit www.newton-np.org.uk, or follow @newtonnp for regular updates.

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Template press release - people vote yes

Press release

15/7/15

Newton votes to adopt neighbourhood plan

Yesterday local people voted overwhelmingly in favour of adopting the Newton Neighbourhood Plan.

More than 80% of voters were in favour of Newton District Council adopting the plan to inform future planning decisions about the village.

Sarah Smith is head of Newton Neighbourhood Forum, the group in charge of producing the plan.

Sarah said: “This is a fantastic result for the village! Newton residents have spent almost two years working on this plan and it’s great that our opinions have been heard and will now inform how the village develops. I’m pleased so many people turned out to vote and that it was such a positive result.”

The plan identifies where new housing and shops will be built in the village, what community facilities will be required, and protects the village centre and village green from any new development.

The district council will now bring the neighbourhood plan into action and as of August, it will carry legal weight in deciding planning applications for the town.

For more info about the Newton Neighbourhood Plan visit www.newton-np.org.uk, or follow @newtonnp for regular updates.

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