

community
enterprise

Community Action Plans : An Approach to Place Based Strategic Planning

Scottish Community Alliance

**scottish
community
alliance**

local people leading

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Background to Community Action Planning

Community led action planning is a tried and tested way of setting out a vision for a community with an accompanying set of actions to be delivered over time.

It is a participatory tool aimed at not only developing that plan, but, in the process, building the capacity of the residents of a community so that there is the skills, confidence, resources and resilience to implement that plan with minimal external support.

It is not meant to articulate what a community is like, but to stimulate change and action. The action plan will be set out in response to the needs, challenges and gaps in a community and the implementation plan will be rooted in the assets of a community.

Under an aspirational statement about what people want the community to be like in an achievable future, there is detail about what will be done, who will do it, how it will be resourced and how it will be undertaken.

It is often led by one group, (often an over-arching community anchor organisation, development trust or community council) but delivery is the responsibility of the whole community and not that one organisation. As a result, a good plan will see existing organisations stepping up to the plate, and new organisations forming.

There has been a range of iterations of the process including community led action planning, consultant led community research, development frameworks and master planning, landscape appraisals, townscape appraisals and co-design charrettes

The most recent re-articulation of community plans are Local Place Plans. In 2017 The Scottish Government introduced the Planning (Scotland) Bill. The Bill introduces a new right for communities to produce Local Place Plans.

The objective of a Local Place Plan is to “significantly enhance engagement in development planning, effectively empowering

communities to play a proactive role in defining the future of their place”.

Spatial or ‘development planning’ includes things like housing, public facilities, business growth, use of land or buildings, roads, flooding, energy, recreation, paths and other infrastructure which impact on people. A good plan should ideally merge these approaches, containing both community consultation and project development, but also a vision for the physical place using design techniques.

Whatever the current strategic drivers, it is vital to develop effective, efficient ways to enable local people to drive change in their own communities.

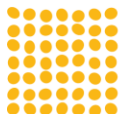
The Making Places initiative was a (now closed) Scottish Government fund to resource communities to undertake Local Place Plans. Though they are community controlled there is an acknowledgement that communities often need sensitive support and facilitation to undertake this work.

A blend of local knowledge gained through lived experience, combined with objective specialist technical support, can build both consensus and clear evidence to achieve robust community action plans that will make a difference over time.

The Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document, having reflected on the history of community action planning, is to set out an ideal process that is effective and will achieve impact, but is also affordable and accessible to local people.

There are no right and wrong answers. Others will have different views about an ideal process and the process will be different in relation to the scale and nature of each community and the people who live there.

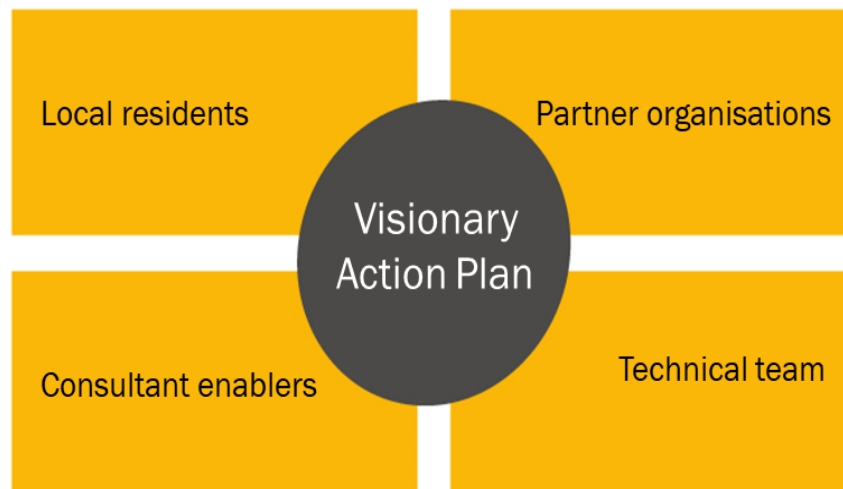


Parameters

All communities are unique and each community action plan will be different but fundamentally they should all fit within the following six parameters

1. Place based
2. Community led throughout
3. Spatial as well as having actions
4. Diverse and inclusive
5. Robust and evidenced
6. Accessible to all

The Team



The Process

Phase 1 : Preparation

1. Initiating the Idea

A community will come together to agree that it needs an action plan. This discussion can be stimulated by a community activist, external supporter or community anchor organisation. It is often driven by the need to distribute funds wisely and fairly, particularly wind farm funding.

Before starting the process, clarity is needed about exactly what is meant by “community” in relation to specific geographical boundaries.

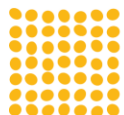
The community should establish why they are doing this and specifically what the outcome needs to be so that they are clear as the work progresses whether it is meeting their needs. Motivation can include some or all of the following;

- To address a specific problem or challenge
- To improve services and facilities, either for everyone or for a specific group of people
- To influence how public money is spent
- To empower the community to lobby for change

2. Forming a Steering Group

Often after a public meeting, a steering group is formed to take the project forward. This is normally a time limited steering group, but in some occasions, it evolves into a development trust or other constituted group to manage the implementation of the plan.

The group should be largely, if not exclusively, local residents with good diversity of age, gender, culture etc so that it represents the nature of that particular community.



To enable it to manage consultants and steer the process forward, some training, support and learning visits to other communities can be undertaken to ensure it has the capacity and confidence to take control of the process.

During the research, the steering group becomes;

- A sounding board and reference point
- Ambassadors for the project
- Communicators
- Information providers
- Brokers of meetings – conduit of trusted relationships
- The eyes and ears of a community

3. Scoping out What Is Needed

The detail of what is required, and what the aspiration is, will be developed into a brief. This will be directly related to each local community, building on what has been done before and the assets that already exist. It should learn from, but not be identical to, other scoping documents from other places.

This will be articulated as an invitation to tender for a team of specialists with experience in research but also with a capacity building and empowering approach. This will identify how much it will cost.

4. Finding the Resource

Whatever methodology is used, undertaking a community action plan has a cost. A very technical study with an area that has lower capacity and confidence (or a larger area) may be more expensive but even communities that will take control themselves will need to cover administrative expenses, childcare, room hire and catering, print costs etc.

Funding can be challenging to source. With no current national specific fund, organisations tend to secure funding from a range of sources

including local windfarms and renewables companies (such as CARES), local authorities, regeneration agencies and NDPBs (such as the national parks) and funding such as Awards for All.

5. Procuring Support

The brief can be advertised nationally, in sector bulletins, on social media and sent direct to a range of appropriate consultants. Intermediaries such as the Development Trust Association Scotland can suggest potential consultants and other communities who have been through the process, can give a level of quality control about the service provided by the team they commissioned.

Tenders received will be judged on the scoring criteria contained within the brief, largely balancing experience, skills, community approach, cost and an understanding of the local community.

Interviews are recommended so that the ways of working can be discussed and a rapport will emerge.

With support, contracts should be drawn up to protect the community.

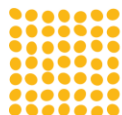
Phase 2 : Delivery

6. Inception Meeting

The consultants will attend a kick off meeting that will give the team an opportunity to discuss the boundary of the community, the vision and purpose of the work and a summary of the key issues that are emerging locally.

It will consider the methodology in some detail (so that it can be amended to specific circumstances) and will give an opportunity to discuss technical issues such as gathering contacts, data protection, dates of review meetings, lead contacts etc.

Following this, the consultants will produce a detailed work plan.



7. Training Local Community Researchers

Ideally, if the budget allows and communities want this, a small team of local people should be selected, recruited and trained to become local researchers.

This needs to be a carefully managed process so that it attracts a genuine breadth of local people and not just those with research skills.

On-going training and mentoring will be offered throughout. The consultants will then work closely with the community researchers to implement the plan. This co-design and research is summarised in the graphic below.



In some instances, these are volunteers and in others they are paid living wage. Whether people are paid or not changes the dynamic of the group and whatever is the best route for the community should be respected.

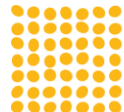
A clear job description and specification will be produced with information for local people to respond to. A sensitive selection process will lead to a small team of local researchers (say 5).

Induction training will be provided in relation to the purpose of the research, research and information gathering techniques and skills, risk assessment, compliance and data protection, pitfalls and problems, data collection and analysis and the production of fair results.

8. Awareness Raising

It is vital the community knows this is coming and is prepared to engage as fully as possible when the direct engagement period starts. The process should have a brand that is launched here and repeated throughout in posters, press releases and social media (e.g. “Our Community : Our Vision”).

Awareness raising will use the best communication routes in a community, specific to that community. This can range from local newsletters, posters in public spaces, use of Facebook (including setting up a new Facebook account for the duration of the research)



- Gathering of memories (e.g. on Facebook)
- Digital or physical graffiti wall
- Creative competitions including drawing, writing and photography to allow people to engage visually
- Small gatherings and focus groups which can be done virtually
- Drop in events
- Large public meetings, ideally around a fun activity such as a community meal, family fun day, quiz night or event. During covid-19 lockdown, innovative virtual events can be created.
- Sometimes it can be better to attend already existing events, seasonable community parties, taking a market stall etc.



Accessibility

Consideration needs to be given in all of this about engaging with as many people as possible, particularly those who are hard to reach. This will differ per community but can include isolated older people, people with disabilities, young people and those from different cultures.

Consideration may need to be given to arranging additional input from translators to deaf signers. Methods of engagement need to be appropriately done in the right places to secure the input from marginalised groups. Using local researchers can help. Choose appropriate methods for the different groups of people who will engage.

The National Standards for Community Engagement are a good reference point¹.

¹ <https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/national-standards>

12. Spatial Planning

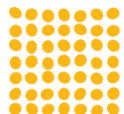


This phase of the plan is run by a technical consultant who has access to tools that will rarely be available in the community. This will be a landscape architect, architect, town planner or urban realm designer.

This team will take the issues and ideas emerging from the community research and will consider how this will look graphically within the community.

This can include creating or moving buildings, establishing pathways and cycle paths, enhancing green space, connectivity between places, safety issues such as lighting and road layout.

It is an engaging and interactive process, giving the community physical and digital tools to design their own place. It can include large



mapping exercises, 3D modelling and use of computer aided designs to envisage digitally what a community could look like.

It gives a visual representation of the physical change to the community that are envisaged and usually a Quantity Surveyor will give ball park costs to help prioritise resources.

13. Data Analysis

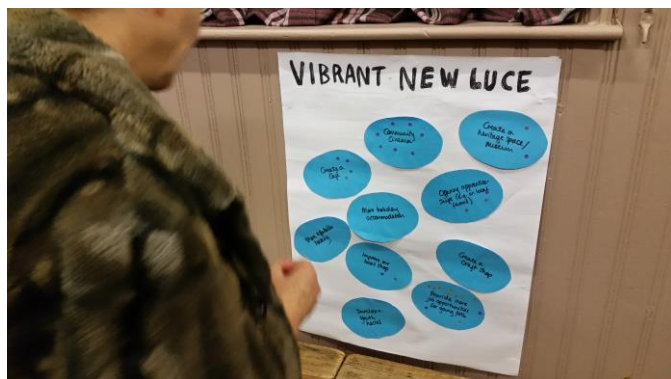
A co-inquiry event will be held with the consultants, community researchers and representatives of groups to analyse data and start to agree general trends, themes and commonly supported project ideas.

14. Research Report

Very often in community action planning, a very significant volume of data is gathered but the consultant consolidates this into a very short document.

Ideally a full and detailed research report should be created with the data included from survey results, interview notes, full lists of ideas etc. This can be made available to the wider community but is often kept on file as a record and to use in future funding applications.

15. Prioritisation



A final public consultation will be held to see if the emerging vision resonates and to take the long list of ideas and prioritise them into the achievable goals over time

that the whole community supports.

16. The Action Plan

Writing of the action plan itself which will include;

- a. A summary of research methodology
- b. The nature of the community and key issues
- c. Values and principles
- d. A review and monitoring method
- e. An overarching vision
- f. Thematic areas
- g. Projects under each area split into short, medium and long term priorities
- h. Contact details about how to get involved

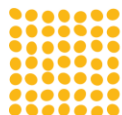
17. Dissemination

The plan will be presented graphically by professional graphic designers (to ensure maximum impact), in a document that can be available digitally but also a summary printed and delivered to each home. It should use images by the community gathered during the creative element of the consultation work.

If resources allow, communities may choose to use animation, video and audio to articulate the priorities.

Throughout – review and check in

Regular meetings will be held with the community researchers, steering group and consultant team to review progress, discuss barriers and plan forward



An Approximate Cost

There are significant variables depending on approach, nature of community, size of the site and purpose for the plan so this is just a guide. More extensive and more affordable studies are possible.

Item	Approximate Amount
Fees for community planning consultants 15 days x £400 + VAT	£7200
Urban Realm/architect fees 8 days x £400 +VAT	£3840
Graphic designers to produce the designed plan 4 days x £400 + VAT	£1920
Community Researchers 5 people x 20 hours x £10/hr	£1000
Room hire and catering	£750
Incentives for competitions and survey	£200
Childcare and dependent care	£500
Access requirements (translators, deaf signers etc)	£1000
Printing costs	£500
Total	£16,910

Implementation Phase

It is absolutely crucial that the Community Action plan does not just gather dust, but is a catalyst for change. As noted, it is the responsibility of everyone in the community to take responsibility for a range of project ideas that dovetail with their own ethos and vision.

However, there is often a need for a lead body to ensure things are progressing and to review progress against targets at regular intervals. As a result there is usually a lead organisation for this role. This can be an existing community controlled anchor organisation, or the steering group sometimes evolves into a Development Trust to start to implement these projects.

Review processes and impact assessment should be built into the plan itself.

On-going communication is also vital using the routes agreed under section 8 to continue to keep in touch with the local community during the 5 year plan, passing on information, listening to views and encouraging involvement.

