

NDP Steering Group Meeting via Zoom

Time: Sep 8, 2021 05:30 PM London

Guests

Richard Smith, Chair Kingsbridge Steering Group (Reg 14 Consultation)
Richard Allen, Chair MACK (Milton Abbot) Steering Group (Reg 16 Consultation)
Liz Hitchens, Chair Brixton Steering Group (Completed Plan)

Steering Group Members

Ursula Mann, Chair and Cllr
James Ellis, Cllr
Andy Hutton, Cllr
Karen Nolan
Janna Sanders
Sue Spackman
Harry Smith, Cllr

Introductions

Richard Smith, Kingsbridge:

Kingsbridge Plan was inspired by a development proposal for the Quayside area which was opposed by residents. As a result, 6 people from the community approached Kingsbridge TC who asked if they would like to complete an NDP. SHDC suggested they invite local small parishes to join, like Churchstow.

They have worked with Peter Sandover, Consultant and Champion for NDPs (ex Salcombe, South Huish) who has been very helpful and without whom the plan would not have progressed. They broke into small themed groups with each group being led by one member. Members seemed to have different interests within the plan, naturally leading to the subject area they have focused on.

Their initial questionnaire was delivered partly by the post office service, which wasn't entirely successful and therefore many questionnaires were hand delivered. From 6500 questionnaires they received 750 responses and apparently this ratio is good for a town the size of Kingsbridge.

They found that SHDC was responsible for slowing the plan down due to slow response on consultation but they also found that other statutory bodies are slow to respond (Environment Agency, Railway Commission) So a 6 week public consultation drags on longer due to these other parties.

Richard Allen, Milton Abbot (MACK Plan)

1. How did you select individuals with the right skills to join or work with the steering group? Not really applicable for rural NPs but we did strive to have a diverse committee to reflect the views of all residents. We also tried successfully to have equal representation from each geographic part of the NP area.
2. How did you ensure you got good consultation responses? We hand delivered whenever we could and while delivering we tried to talk to each household about what the plan was and why it was important to our community. I also wrote a personal covering letter whenever we had to distribute documents whether by hand or online.
3. How did you decide on the content for your initial questionnaire to the community? You need to do the best that you can on the basis of your experience as councillors and, I suggest, through talking to as many different elements of the community as you can to identify those issues that different sections of the community think are important or need dealing with (parking, speeding, litter, traffic congestion, heritage protection, climate change/embracing green technology, bio-diversity etc). It will not be perfect and you will need to gather more responses later in the process as the true issues and concerns begin to emerge.

General.

- It will take much longer than you think - do not underestimate the scale of effort required.
- Get Duncan Smith (WDBC) to talk you through the process from the outset - on Zoom/Teams and keep him engaged and part of the process.
- Locality - Read all the guidance and come up with a plan for the project but recognise that it will evolve and change direction as evidence is gathered.
- Know all the technical support that is available to you and use it at every opportunity.
- I think you can now get funding for someone to run your NP - ask Duncan
- Apply for your budget early - it is a long and detailed process and unspent funding must be returned each year and new applied for. A good plan will aid this process.
- Commission as much work as you can (commercial and technical support) - credibility, independence, expertise and work load.
- Do not reinvent the wheel. Use existing work whenever you can. Duncan Smith can always recommend good examples to copy or amend.
- Council loses control when evidence takes over. Recognise from the outset that you have to go where the evidence and democracy takes you even if it is not your preferred option.
- The NP is iterative and will change its focus from what you expected as aspiration and reality collide e.g. small developments vs affordable housing in the MACK Plan.

- Know the NPPF and JLP from the outset - have a champion to lead on this. You have to remain coherent with these policies and it is easier to do so from the outset rather than to have to change things that the public have been encouraged to support.
- Recognise and take into account changes that will happen in the life of the plan e.g. climate change (increased flooding and heatwaves), changes to building regs (no gas or oil boilers from 2025), electric car charging (public and domestic infrastructure), demographics e.g. an ageing population.
- Basic Conditions Statement and Consultation Statement - Start early to keep you on track.

Public Engagement

- Public Engagement and information is a vital and large part of the project.
- NP is for the people by the people - trying to impose your views will fail - Lamerton/Lifton insurgency - learn from these. Have a committee that represents the community - young/old, male/female, white collar/blue collar etc. The views of a dozen greying men will not be representative or progressive and if you do not take the community with you on this journey, all your endeavours may fail at referendum.
- You must keep the residents informed and justify your recommendations with evidence. Take every opportunity e.g. use your minutes of meetings to inform a public audience, drafting them accordingly and posting on the NP website.
- We decided not to publicise options for development until the true feasibility of each site had been independently assessed so that site without hope of ever gaining planning consent were identified before being made public. We thereby avoided unnecessary heartache to those living next to these unsuitable sites.
- Issue regular newsletters.
- Have a really good and current website that truly engages the public and through which they can contribute and comment (moderated input). Beware unmoderated nature of facebook. We chose not to have our own FB page for this reason but we publicised on community pages.
- Residents Survey in house vs independent analysis.
- Obsessives - be very careful about giving out individual email addresses.

Liz Hitchins, Brixton

In small parish of 1400 it took Liz and five committee members 5 years to get their NDP from start to finish. The plan was originally inspired by a planning application for the use of an old quarry located on a small single lane road for use storing inert material.

Liz stressed that this was a huge job, that SHDC was not always easy or forthcoming to work with and that she felt Duncan Smith was crucial to use and speak with. They used Devon Communities Together to help with their consultation and they are particularly good at engaging harder to reach communities, including children.

Advice to those beginning the process now:

1. Those who are councillors on the committee should think about whether they can really serve as volunteers and councillors as the NDP is a volunteer and community-based project.
2. This is a long journey, be flexible in your approach, plan but plan for contingency
3. Be kind to your steering group members, this is a big commitment, at times you will need a break.
4. Listen to all ideas, even the strange ideas and don't contradict people, just take the ideas back to the steering group to discuss. Sometimes strange ideas can lead to good policies.
5. Look at and use existing policies, crib from other NDPs – think about other market towns like Tiverton, Ivybridge.
6. Start your Statement of Consultation now, describing your process and documenting it along the way so you don't have to go back and write from memory
7. Try to look forward, you'll be planning until at least 2034, so you need to think of climate change, flooding changes, water quality.
8. Talk to nearby parishes, make sure that your plans don't clash.

Questions at the end:

1. Cllr Smith: Budget, how did you keep to it?
 - a. R.Allen – you write it up with locality each year, you price what you think you need, Grantworks is flexible if you need more or you have to change it.
 - b. R Smith – Consultants are the most expensive item, be careful.
 - c. L.Hitchins – Give it to one committee member to be in charge of and keep track of.
2. Cllr Hutton: Is Tavistock too big to do an NDP?
 - a. L. Hitchins, it's a big job, break it down into your themed groups and work separately then bring that back together.
 - b. R Smith, It's a big job. Get help from consultants
3. Cllr Ellis: We've been told £60k would be enough for our NDP, is this realistic?
 - a. R. Allen, yes, we've spent about £9k, didn't need a consultant, relied on D. Smith and ourselves. Most expensive thing was printing hard copies of the entire plan for each household.
 - b. R. Smith, Watch costs of communications and consultant expense, we've spent about £15k.
 - c. L. Hitchins – I can't remember how much we spent, but use Devon Communities Together to help keep consultation costs down.
4. Cllr Mann: To L. Hitchins, are you happy with your plan?
 - a. L. Hitchins: Yes, generally we are, although we have an application for a home outside the development boundary that we are watching.
5. Cllr Hutton: If someone said to you now, would you do this NDP committee again would you?
 - a. R. Allen- Ursula has already said I can't tell you my answer.
 - b. L. Hitchins – Yes definitely. And these will say the same once they have passed their plans. However, I haven't been able to think about reviewing the plan.

- c. R. Smith – uncommitted, let's see how it goes.
- 6. L. Hitchins – Are you a committee or a steering group?
 - a. Cllr Mann, We're a steering group and we aim to double our number of community volunteers in the near future to be a group of 14.
- 7. R. Smith – Does your Town Council have a budget to help with the NDP? Kingsbridge has a small budget to help?
 - a. Cllr Mann, Yes, the Town Council has committed a budget to help fund the NDP, although it sounds like we need to get started on our locality application after listening to you tonight.

The chair expressed the thanks of the whole committee for the guests joining us for yet another meeting about NDPs. This was extremely useful information from people who have been through the process and has given the group a lot to think about.

It was agreed that the next meeting of the NDP Steering Group would be decided via email, circulated by the chair with the notes of this meeting and the minutes from the previous meeting.

The meeting closed at 18:35.