

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Planning for Real

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What is 'Planning for Real®'?

Planning for Real® is a nationally recognised process of community consultation. It begins with contacting the local community networks and reaches a conclusion with the formation of an action plan for taking forward the decisions made during the process. It can be revisited at any point; models are often kept and used many times.

First stages

An initial scoping meeting is held to explore requirements and the objectives for the programme. Once agreed, Planning for Real® will start by letting everyone know how Planning for Real® works and taking their advice on matters such as which venues would work - often what seems like an ideal venue to an "outsider" turns out to be one that local people know always gets a poor turnout.

Option cards are central to the Planning for Real® process and allow local people to have their say about what's happening in their neighbourhood. At this stage option cards are looked at - are there issues specific to the neighbourhood that need to be covered? Of course, there are always blank cards on the consultation days for people to write themselves.

Model-making

Next is the model-making. Starting from a large scale map (usually around 1:300), a three-dimensional model is built. It helps the local 'ownership' of the project if this is done locally, either by adults, or more commonly, in the local school. This begins the process of looking at the area as a whole - finding where your house is, tracing your regular journeys and considering what needs to be done to improve community wellbeing.

Planning for Real® events

The Planning for Real® events are held in venues and locations convenient for local people, as many as required. Sometimes an event is arranged for a specific group, perhaps young people, or Asian women. At the events, the model is laid out with cards placed around it. These show options, around 300, which people put on the model to show what they want and where they want it. There are also blank cards for people to write their own suggestions.

Action Plan

Following on from this, all the options placed on the model are prioritised into HIGH, MEDIUM, or LOW, again using visual hands-on techniques. This is then developed into an action plan looking at stakeholder involvement, actions and opportunities for progression. For neighbourhood planning projects, this is the stage when the neighbourhood development plan would be created.

Park Wood Neighbourhood action planning (Planning for Real)

A pilot Neighbourhood Action Plan, utilising Planning for Real (registered trademark) has been developed in Park Wood by the Borough Council with local residents and the support of Kent County Council, Golding Homes (formerly Maidstone Housing Trust), Kent Police and other local partners. The plan was adopted by Maidstone Borough Council's Cabinet at its meeting on 10th November 2010 and is now available: Park Wood Neighbourhood Action Plan 2010-15 (see attachment).

Since its agreement in November 2010 the action plan has resulted in improved estate cleaning, streamlined measures to tackle noisy neighbours and a job shop and training programme for young people. Additional activities have been organised for children and young people such as Be Free at the park. Further work has also been carried out to explore some of the underlying issues in the area with workshops on health, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, education and skills and new actions developed.

£50,000 was secured by the Borough Council to make some environmental improvements on council owned property within Park Wood and residents are helping to choose how the money is to be spent. The favoured projects are: new CCTV at the parade of shops, improving areas adjacent to the parade, a mini-ball park (cage) to the rear of the shops, a dog free picnic area at the community centre Heather House and motorcycle barriers to the park. There is a shortfall in the funding so residents are being asked to list their top priorities.. All the projects will provide training and volunteering opportunities for local residents and young people.