

**Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs)**

**Advice for Public Consultation during Covid-19**

**1.0 Planning Practice Guidance (Government advice)**

 [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2#covid-19](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2%23covid-19)

**What changes have been introduced to neighbourhood planning in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?**

The government has been clear that all members of society are required to adhere to guidance to help combat the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). The guidance has implications for neighbourhood planning including: the referendum process; decision-making; oral representations for examinations; and public consultation. This planning guidance supersedes any relevant aspects of current guidance on neighbourhood planning, including in paragraphs 007, 056, 057, 061 and 081 until further notice.

* **Referendums:** All neighbourhood planning referendums that have been recently cancelled, or are scheduled to take place, between 16 March 2020 and 5 May 2021 are postponed in line with the [Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner (Coronavirus) (Postponement of Elections and Referendums) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/395/contents/made) until 6 May 2021.
* **Decision making:** The government has been clear that all members of society are required to adhere to guidance to help combat the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). The guidance has implications for neighbourhood planning including: the referendum process; decision-making; oral representations for examinations; and public consultation. This planning guidance supersedes any relevant aspects of current guidance on neighbourhood planning, including in paragraphs 007, 056, 057, 061 and 081 until further notice.
* **Examinations:** The general rule remains that examinations should be conducted by written representations. If an examiner considers that oral representations are necessary, these should not take place in person. Wherever possible, oral representations may still take place using video conferencing or other suitable technologies.
* **Public consultation:** The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 require neighbourhood planning groups and local planning authorities to undertake publicity in a manner that is likely to bring it to the attention of people who live, work or carry on business in the neighbourhood area at particular stages of the process. It is not mandatory that engagement is undertaken using face-to-face methods. However, to demonstrate that all groups in the community have been sufficiently engaged, such as with those without internet access, more targeted methods may be needed including by telephone or in writing. Local planning authorities may be able to advise neighbourhood planning groups on suitable methods and how to reach certain groups in the community.

There are also requirements in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 that require at some stages of the process for neighbourhood planning groups and local planning authorities to publicise the neighbourhood planning proposal and publish details of where and when documents can be inspected. It is not mandatory for copies of documents to be made available at a physical location. They may be held available online. Local planning authorities may be able to advise neighbourhood planning groups on suitable methods that will provide communities with access to physical copies of documents.

Paragraph: 107 Reference ID: 41-107-20200513

Revision date: 13 05 2020

**2.0 Kirkwells advice for public consultation**

2.1 Develop a flexible approach to allow for sudden changes in Government guidance. For example, prepare a range of consultation methods and then make decisions in reasonable time beforehand for any last minute changes.

2.2 Such an approach could for example include the following a mix of the options:

**Face to Face / Drop in events**

* If Government restrictions allow, book village hall or other venue, preferably with outside space where you could use an outside space / gazebos etc.
* Publicise the date, time and venue, but be prepared to cancel at last minute.
* Add to promotional material wording such as "Subject to Government Restrictions" and provide contact details eg a phone number / email address / website on all publicity so people can check for last minute changes.
* Advise that if a physical event is cancelled there will be an online event instead.
* Provide hand sanitisers at the entrance and ask people to wear face coverings.
* Do not provide refreshments.
* Minimise spending on display material - preferably avoid altogether.
* Concentrate on PowerPoint or other digital information displayed on a screen as this can then be transferred easily to a website.
* Do not pay for printing of large scale maps, but use, say A3 copies for settlement boundaries, housing sites, conservation area boundary, local green spaces, views etc. Put these in plastic wallets or laminate so that they can be cleaned easily after touching using anti- bacterial spray and wipes. Retain them for people to borrow on request.
* Print a few complete copies of the NDP (eg up to 5) - these can also be provided to people on request if the public events are cancelled.

 **Questionnaires**

* Consider the use of questionnaires to consult on key issues at each stage. Try to keep to the key questions on which you need to understand public views and require feedback to guide decision making.
* Signpost to the full version of the NDP on the website and where people can access hard copies.
* Consider use of short summary documents of the NDP at all stages.
* Questionnaires should be provided online by:

- Survey Monkey or similar

- Providing a Word version to complete and return to an email address or to print out and complete by hand.

* Also provide hard copies of questionnaires to all households and offer more hard copies on request.
* Provide accessible places for completed questionnaires to be returned to eg boxes in local shop, church porch etc, addresses of steering group members (at least 1 in each village) and post using Freepost or SAE.
* Provide contact information (phone numbers and email) on the Questionnaire for people who may need assistance.
* Consider timescales carefully for responses. Allow time for people to fill them in and return them but not too long so they forget about it. We suggest 3-4 weeks for informal consultation. Reg 14 should be at least 6 weeks and longer if possible and where public holidays fall within the 6 week period.

 **Website**

* Ensure all consultation documents are on the website and easily accessible.
* Ensure website is up to date ie provide pdf of latest copy of NDP and summary, background / technical documents (eg AECOM reports), summaries, questionnaires, contact details of members of the steering group, links to online consultation meetings.
* Offer printed, hard copies of documents on request.

 **Online Fora / Meetings**

* Consider use of Zoom or other online meeting arrangement for set dates / times when Steering Group members will be available to answer questions.
* This could be, for instance the same day / time as a Drop In event if this cannot go ahead.

 **Telephone / Email**

* Provide telephone numbers of Steering Group members and advise dates / times when they will be available to answer questions or provide help with filling in questionnaires.
* Provide an NDP email address which is checked regularly for questions / requests for assistance.

 **Young people / key groups**

* Talk to schools, local youth groups eg scouts and guides and ask if they want to take part in consultation at an early stage.
* Explain household consultation process and ask teachers / youth workers for advice on engaging local young people.
* Consider a questionnaire for young people, asking them to explain what they want to see in the Parish eg over the next 15 years.
* Contact local care homes / Age concern etc and explain NDP consultation and ask if they want to be involved.
* Send copies of questionnaires to any local community groups eg local history societies, environmental groups, residents associations, sports clubs etc and invite them to complete questionnaires or return written comments.

 **Publicity**

* Publicise all consultation processes as widely as possible.
* Use posters on PC notice boards, shop windows, house windows etc
* Deliver flyers or postcards to all households.
* Publicise in local newsletters, parish magazines etc.
* Promote on PC website and other online Fora eg local Facebook pages.
* Direct email to all on consultation database(at all stages of consultations ask for email / postal addresses and permission to contact in future consultations).

 **Consultation Report**

* Prepare a full report of each consultation process.
* Explain methodology - how process was undertaken (dates, all publicity, copy of questionnaire, how people could access hard copies and online, how many responses as a proportion of adult population and in numbers etc).
* Use bar charts / pie charts to clearly explain results for each question.
* Summarise main points in a conclusion.
* Once steering group are happy with report, it should go to the Parish Council for information and be put on the website.
* Publicise the consultation report and key findings eg use posters, local newsletters etc.

**3.0 Further Information**

3.1 Please contact your Kirkwells consultant for further advice / information.

3.2 We would also advise discussing your planned approach with your NDP contact at the local council.

3.3 Check the Locality website for up to date advice and guidance.

 <https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/advice/>