

Talking about nature

Resources for creating Local Nature Plans

Introduction

Essex County Council has adopted the 2021 recommendations of the Essex Climate Action Commission to establish a Climate Focus Area (CFA) and enable local parishes and towns to create Nature Plans by 2030. The CFA is based on the catchments of the rivers Blackwater and Colne and Essex County Council and Involve were determined that these Nature Plans were shaped by local people's views and knowledge. The innovative work was designed to be replicable for the other parishes and town to be able to create their own Nature Plans.

The 'Talking About Nature' pilot consisted of three community workshops that ran as part of the national Local Climate Engagement (LCE) programme, with Involve and Essex County Council (ECC), Wivenhoe, Tiptree and Stisted councils, and local residents. The results are directly informing their local nature plans. This resource gives some guidance on how other parish and town councils could run a short community workshop with residents to help inform their own local nature plan.

It sets out some guidance for creating a two-hour community workshop, so that your local town and parish councils can involve residents more fully and develop your own local nature plans. This is not exhaustive but will help consider what is involved and how a workshop could do this in your local area.

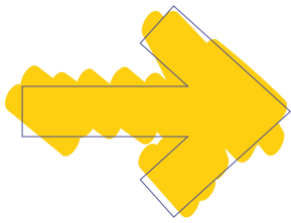
If a community workshop does not sound like the idea you need – then look here for a few other ideas: <https://involve.org.uk/resources/methods>

Running a short community workshop in your area

These resources can help you to plan and deliver a community workshop or consider other types of engagement.

The guide explains why participation matters and then gives some guidance on:

1. Preparing your community workshop
2. Participants
3. Running the event
4. Follow up
5. Useful resources



1. Why does local participation matter?

The national LCE programme provided expert training for leaders, officers and elected members across the country to explore why public participation in climate policy and decision making is so important¹. Here is a snapshot about why it matters.

Good public engagement – at local level can help get a greater impact on local decision making about climate issues, and can:

- Give local politicians the mandate and scope to act
- Help improve policy-making and implementation
- Include marginalised voices often missed out – but this takes time
- Build legitimacy, trust, and support for policies
- Encourage others to act and get involved

There are challenges and risks – so no ‘one size fits all’ – and you must follow through on promises....

What can be influenced?

If you are thinking about doing some local engagement with residents to inform your local nature or climate planning – here is a key question to ask:

What level of engagement and influence do you want to enable?

What can be influenced, and what can happen as a result?

- Are you simply gaining views and insights or are you asking people to think more deeply and help set priorities for example.
- Here is a simple way to help you think about the ‘level’ of engagement that is best locally: <https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars>



ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO ACT

- Building awareness and making people think
- Developing a sense of shared ownership of the problem and solution
- Developing a sense of agency
- Developing internal efficacy (confidence, skills etc)
- Producing and implementing policies and initiatives that reflect

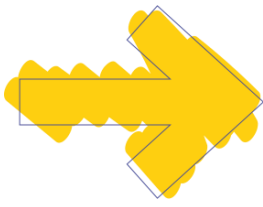


BUILDING LEGITIMACY, TRUST AND SUPPORT FOR POLICIES

- Policies recognise the reality of people's lives, where they are coming from and what they need
- Policies reflect an understanding of what people see as the benefits/reasons for changing their lifestyles and habits and taking action
- Policies meet public expectations of fairness
- People develop a sense of shared ownership of the problem and its solutions



¹ This training was provided as part of the LCE funded programme and was made available in 2023. Further training may require funding.



2. Preparing your community workshop

Set the goals and purpose

- Ask yourself 'Why do you want to get more residents helping set the priorities for a local nature plan'?
- Be really clear about what you want to see happen and what it is possible for the group discussion to influence.
- Can they make decisions, make recommendations, or just have some thoughts?
- Set a time and date you think most popular with your target audience – for example two hours one evening or on a weekend?

Overarching question

After agreement with your key stakeholders, agree your overarching statement. This will be important to know in advance so you can add it to the invitation – it helps you be really clear what impact the event will have.

Here is the example used in the three pilot areas of Essex:

What should your parish or town council prioritise in its Local Nature Plan in order to improve and protect nature, wildlife and green spaces in your area.

- You can divide the workshop into groups looking at different aspects - keep in mind:
 - What can the parish or town council directly control?
 - What can the parish or town council influence?
 - Where can the parish or town council enable, support and partner?

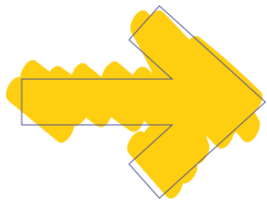
Get support

- Get your parish or town council to support the idea of greater input from residents, and be clear on the range of influence that the event can have – so everyone is clear and supportive.
- Secure any budget or help in kind you need – things like refreshments, specialist help or facilitators, venue or even an 'honorarium or gift of thanks' for participants all have an impact on the cost and resources needed.
- Consider applying for a small grant to help with the delivery of the event.

Key point – if possible, work with local voluntary groups or organisations that can help steer the event or help deliver it – who needs to be a partner from the beginning?

Getting started

- Use a good local venue that is accessible, easy and comfortable to use for everyone.
- Choose a fixed time and date that works best for your participants.
- Be generous with refreshments, or lunch for example, it all helps people engage and feel welcome.



3. Participants

Who needs to be there?

- Think about which members of the public do you want to reach and how might you reach them?
- How many people do you think you need in the room – six or seven can be a small group – 20 people will need to use a ‘breakout approach’.
 - Think about who you want to hear from, and how to get them to come to your workshop.

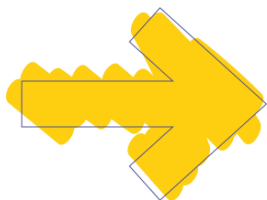
Key point: Whose voice is missing? Who is marginalised in the discussion and may need encouragement to come?

Why will people attend?

- Be clear in the proposal/invitation to take part – what will it achieve and why they are needed- What’s in it for them?
- Will it make a difference? Are they highly motivated by the agenda already and you need to hear from others not so engaged already? Are they representative of the wider community – or is this not necessary?
 - Consider using an ‘honorarium’ payment or gift to attract people to attend – but be clear on your numbers – this could be vouchers for local shopping, local entertainments, or days out for example.

Get the message out

- There may be a range of methods you need to use, including promoting the event well in advance and using an online registration form – you can collect demographic data which may help later on. (Remember to meet your council’s GDPR requirements for privacy too so ask for advice.)
- Have a communications plan ready – as it will affect who turns up
 - Create a short description of what you want to achieve and why – and why people should sign up.
 - Remove barriers to taking part – think about what help to give people to attend your workshop such as travel, carers support, accessibility etc
 - Give yourself plenty of time for invitations and social to cascade out – if you are using that method – put flyers through doors
- Here is a useful campaign guide:
<https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/guidance/marketing/delivering-government-campaigns/guide-to-campaign-planning-oasis>



4. Running the event

Stakeholders and community experts

Who needs to be informed and supporting the plan even if they are not taking part?

- Which external groups and organisations do you want/need to reach and what roles do you want them to play, alongside your residents?
- Who are your community experts – use them in a steering group – or on the day to provide input
- Who has inspiration and support to help you run the event – they can share stories of what's possible and what is happening locally if you have time.
 - Involve your local partners and other local organisations to publicise the event.

The event plan or 'running order'

- Keep it simple and keep things interesting – have one 'overarching question' that can focus the time
- You can divide the workshop into groups looking at different aspects – keep in mind:
 - What can the parish or town council directly control?
 - What can the parish or town council influence?
 - Where can the parish or town council enable, support and partner?

Design the process so people can develop priorities at the end – such as a vote, or order of priority for them – you can be creative here!

Here is a sample running order:

Session	Timing – 7pm – 9.15pm
Set-up	6pm
Arrive and welcome	6:45/7pm Getting to know you – share what nature means to you locally – use a local map
Session 1: Presentations 7:15pm	Overview of the plans and issues for the nature plan – what works well and what does not What's happening locally
7:45pm Capture on post-its	Breakout Groups x 3: Ideas to prioritise in a local nature plan <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What can the parish or town council directly control• What can the parish or town council influence• Where can the parish or town council enable, support and partner Group ideas together in each one
8:30pm	Rotate the groups so they can add to each other's ideas.
9.00	Sticky dot voting on the most important
9:15pm:	Finish

In the three pilot areas of Essex – we used up to four groups depending on how many participants we had, although it ran from 10-2pm.

- Group 1: **Public spaces** - What the parish or town council controls and managing their green spaces (Direct control)
- Group 2: **Making more local green spaces** for nature and residents. (The parish or town council influence)
- Group 3: **Protecting special green places for nature** – enjoy the benefits of nature without unwittingly compromising it (The parish or town council in partnership and wider support)
- Group 4: **Challenges and opportunities of development** and urban influence (Where the parish or town council can influence and enable)

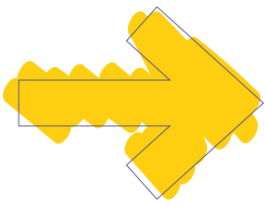
Make sure people are safe

- Obviously consider health and safety for your event – but also how to care for people when having discussions and disagreements – have ‘conversation guidelines’ so everyone agrees to care about how they speak, listen and be mindful of others.
- Make sure you know any accessibility needs people have to take part – mindful so the atmosphere is inclusive and welcoming.
- Support different accessibility and learning styles in how you communicate.
- Have someone experienced facilitate your workshop – if your budget allows you can engage specialist help such as from Involve or other experienced local specialists to help you.



TIP- Use maps to help people focus on their local area.





5. Follow-up

What happens next?

- Let people know what happens next
- Follow up and let people know the results and what happened
- Is there anything you want to achieve beyond input to your decision-making? E.g. sign up to volunteering, starting a reference group or joining an ongoing panel

Evaluation

Ask participants how they felt about taking part and what might make it better – something for your learning and provides evidence that could be used in the future.

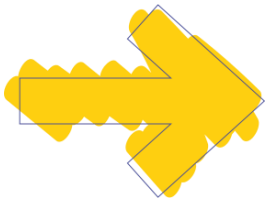
Below is a sample from the feedback form used at the Essex workshops.

Feedback form – Community workshop

1. Overall, how would you rate today's event? Please circle one number
(Poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (Excellent)
2. Overall, how helpful did you find the table facilitators today? Please circle one number
(Poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (Excellent)
3. Please tell us the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements about the workshop today:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not sure
I felt my time was valued by the organisers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think that what we have done today will make a positive difference to the parish or town council's local nature plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am now more willing to take part in community consultation like this in future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have increased my understanding of local nature plans	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. How could we have made this event more accessible for you or for anyone else? What would have made it even easier to attend? Or advice for future events?



6. Other methods and Ideas

What is the best 'method' to engage local residents effectively?

Think about the best way to engage your local residents – there are many creative and fun ways to engage the public to help shape your local nature plan. In this guide we give some tips on running a short community workshop.

There are however, many other things to consider.

- From a 'pop-up' stand at a community event to a local community workshop one evening in the local pub. Here are a few other ideas:
<https://involve.org.uk/resources/methods>
- Participation events could happen as part of existing community events, such as a local 'green' festival or open days for example, or a stand outside a supermarket. It can be a 'one off' event or using social media for an ongoing conversation, online survey or polling. Explore local funding opportunities for such events.
- There are many ways of involving the community ongoing, and whilst meaningful engagement would need resourcing, planning and funding, events could be part of ongoing engagement and support for a nature plan over time. It can also help start a local community group or help get support for specific projects, as well as provide scrutiny on what impact has been made and what the barriers are.
- Get connected with the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC), your local organisations, businesses and voluntary sector as they may be able to help with practical support or funding.



Useful web sites and resources

Other examples of community engagement on climate and nature from Involve:

<https://www.ourzeroselby.org.uk/>

Pop-ups – are a great way to do something simple

<https://involve.org.uk/resources/methods/pop-democracy>

Essex Association of Local Councils - See the tools and support

<https://ealc.gov.uk/climate-in-essex/>

See the vision for all parishes and town councils to have local nature plans

<https://www.essexclimate.org.uk/talking-about-nature>

Background on the Essex Local Nature Partnership and why partnership matters

<https://www.essexclimate.org.uk/essex-local-nature-partnership>

A sample web text and online form – from ECC is below

Sample - web text

As used by the LCE project with Essex County Council

<https://www.essexclimate.org.uk/talking-about-nature>

Talking about Nature - Your chance to make a difference!

You could be one of the residents selected to take part in a workshop to help your local community of Stisted, Tiptree or Wivenhoe improve and protect nature, wildlife and green spaces in your area.

What's happening?

Essex County Council has teamed up with Stisted and Tiptree parish councils and Wivenhoe Town Council for an exciting project to improve nature in your area. Working with [Involve](#), a leading public participation charity, the councils are offering the opportunity for residents to get involved and have a direct say on nature plans in their local environment.

Your local council will use your recommendations to help create a Local Nature Plan which will determine how the natural environment in your area is looked after in the future.

If you live in Stisted, Tiptree or Wivenhoe you have the chance to get involved and have your voice heard!

Why is this important?

We all rely on nature such as forests, rivers, land and sea to give us food, water and support our health and wellbeing. Nature also supports a wide economy, places for sports, our gardens and places to visit.

Nature is most important to the community that surrounds it, so it is vital that the community has a say in how it is looked after!

How can you make a difference?

Essex County Council, Involve and the local town and parish councils are inviting up to 30 residents in Stisted, Tiptree and Wivenhoe to attend an event in May 2023 where you will have the opportunity to have your voice heard. At the event you will work with other members of your local community to put forward your recommendations to your town or parish council on how nature in your area should be looked after.

Apply now to attend a one-day workshop (10am – 2pm) in each location. As one of up to 30 local residents selected to take part, you will explore a whole range of topics regarding the value that nature brings to our lives, challenges that nature and green spaces are facing and how we can fight these challenges.

Please note that on the day you will need to arrive at 9:30am for registration.

During the day you will be provided with free refreshments including lunch, and any costs to attend the event can potentially be reimbursed.

Where and when are these events happening?

William Loveless Hall, Wivenhoe 13th May

Stisted Village Hall 14th May

Tiptree Community Centre 20th May

Do I need to be knowledgeable about nature?

No! We want to hear from a wide variety of individuals in these areas. We understand the value of everyone's opinion. On the day participants will be provided all the information they need to make valuable contributions.

We want to listen to your opinions on how nature should be looked after in your local area

How do I get involved?

Everyone from across the town or parish is welcome to apply. To get involved we ask that you fill out a short application providing us with information about you.

We are asking these questions as there is only capacity for roughly thirty individuals to attend each workshop. We will select a group based on survey answers which reflects the local community. It is important the event is as representative of the town/parish as possible using characteristics such as gender, age, location etc. Selection is anonymised and random, we want to hear from a diverse group of people.

You are not eligible to apply if you:

Are an elected representative from any level of government.

Are an employee of a political party.

Do not live within the town/parishes of Stisted, Tiptree and Wivenhoe.

Apply now by following the link relevant to you below:

[I live in Stisted](#)

[I live in Tiptree](#)

[I live in Wivenhoe](#)

FAQs

What will happen on the day?

You will explore what is happening to your local environment and some of the problems it currently faces. This will be done through a range of activities which includes hearing from nature experts and working with other local residents to overcome problems facing your local area.

Once you have explored some of the issues you will then work and collaborate with other participants to decide how these challenges can be best overcome in your area.

As a group you will share what is important to you and what the parish can do to improve local nature. The group will come up with priorities on how nature can and should be improved in your local area. These recommendations will then be presented to members of your local town or parish council.

What happens once I have registered my interest?

Applications for the Wivenhoe workshop have now closed, but applications for residents in Stisted and Tiptree are open until 2 May 2023. Once applications for all three workshops have closed, Essex County Council will select approximately 30 people from each town/parish to participate in the workshops.

This selection will ensure a fair representation of people from all walks of life and different backgrounds in each group.

If selected, you will be informed by telephone or email. We will then contact you with further information and discuss any requirements you may have to make it possible for you to attend and explain what happens next.

What will participation in the workshops involve?

Participants will meet with other residents living in the local area and hear from expert speakers before participating in facilitated group discussions. Group facilitators will ensure that everybody's voice is heard.

There is no need to have prior knowledge of the topics or issues discussed, as all relevant information will be provided on the day of the workshop.

What happens after the workshops?

The discussions at the workshops will help your local town or parish council develop a deeper understanding of issues and barriers facing residents and help identify opportunities for the future.

A full report of the process, along with recommendations of what the priorities might need to be, will be produced and presented to members of your local council.

A summary of the report can be shared with those workshop participants. The report will not contain any personal details but may include quotations and photography of those who give consent on the day.

Do I have to fill the application form out online?

No, if you have a reason for not being able to fill out the form online you can arrange to fill out your application on paper, to do so please email the relevant email address below:

xxxx

How do I travel to the event?

We ask you to make your own way to the venue, but please inform us if this is not possible and if you require assistance.

How will we ensure that the workshops are accessible?

All workshop venues are wheelchair accessible and suitable for those accompanied by a support dog.

If you require British Sign Language interpretation or translation, hearing loops, or any additional support, then every effort will be made to accommodate requests. You will be able to request additional support if your application is successful.

Will refreshments be provided?

Lunch and refreshments will be provided during the workshop sessions. If your application is successful we will ask for any dietary requirements.

Where can I find more information?

If you would like more information about the event before registering or have any questions, please email xxx

These resources were developed by LCE, [Local Climate Engagement \(LCE\) programme](#), with Involve and Essex County Council. LCE 2023. Further information on the LCE programme can be found here: <https://involve.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/embedding-good-practice/how-can-local-authorities-engage-public-climate-0>