STEP 1

RUNNING PUBLIC MEETINGS

STARTING UP

This guide explains why community public meetings are useful and provides some points to consider when planning the meeting.

COMMUNITY PUBLIC MEETINGS CAN BE USED FOR A NUMBER OF PURPOSES FOR COMMUNITY ASSET ACQUISITION:

- **AS A FIRST STEP IN ESTABLISHING A MANDATE FOR SETTING UP A GROUP TO EXPLORE COMMUNITY ASSET ACQUISITION.**
- **HAVING OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMMUNITY FROM THE OUTSET WILL DEVELOP TRUST AND BUY IN FOR THE ASSET PROJECT UNDER CONSIDERATION.**
- **TO SHARE INFORMATION WITH A LARGE AND VARIED GROUP OF PEOPLE DURING THE ACQUISITION PROCESS.**

This is particularly important to acquisitions that will affect whole communities. Public meetings are just one way of sharing information and gaining ideas and should be seen as part of a suite of community consultation tools.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING?

Be clear and concise as to the purpose of the meeting at the outset. This can include information sharing, consultation, collecting ideas, engaging people and getting them involved. You might want to make a specific request such as obtaining a mandate for starting or continuing a particular piece of work, or recruiting more steering group/board members.

WHO IS THE MEETING AIMED AT?

It may be a whole large community or a particular small community. Remember that anyone can attend a public meeting, whether they are part of the community or not. If a vote has to take place it is important to make sure that only community members are voting. try to make sure the audience is broadly representative of your community. Consider the age and gender of those present for example.

WHERE WILL THE MEETING BE ADVERTISED?

Use local media (newspapers, newsletters and radio), social media and put posters/notices up in places where people meet in your community – local shops, notice boards, village halls. Think about the audience you are trying to attract and adapt adverts accordingly. Remember that different people use different media. consider appealing to “hard to reach” groups such as young people.

WHEN AND WHERE IS THE MEETING TO BE HELD AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

Try to choose times that don’t clash with other community events. If you are covering a large area, it might be helpful to hold more than one meeting across several different locations. Meetings that have a focus and still allow time for discussion should usually last no more than 2 hours. Think about access - if someone cannot drive, will they still be able to attend?

HOW WILL YOU ORGANISE THE PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS OF THE MEETING?

Make sure people are clear about who is setting up the meeting room and what equipment is required such as projector, screen, microphone. Allow plenty of time to make sure everything is ready and working before the meeting begins. Also check the venue yourself, even if you are leaving it to a third party to organise the practicalities.

WHAT ARE THE KEY MESSAGES AND AGENDA OF THE MEETING?

Having a structure to the meeting ensures it stays focused and everyone knows what the meeting is about. Hold a discussion of steering group members before the meeting to understand and agree any key messages that you wish to impart to the audience.

WHO WILL CHAIR THE MEETING?

The meeting will need a chairperson to introduce the meeting agenda, field questions, conclude the meeting and keep the meeting in order. In some instances an independent chair may be useful.

WILL THERE BE A PRESENTATION?

A short presentation about the potential acquisition project, either by an outside expert or from someone on the steering group helps to impart information and provide a context for the meeting.

DO YOU NEED AN ‘EXPERT’ PANEL?

Expert panels can provide information to the meeting, whether through a presentation or being available to answer questions. Depending on the project you could invite representatives from the local council, the Scottish Government Community Land Team, HIE or other agencies. These people should sit at the front of the room and be introduced to the audience. The experts and an independent chair will need to see the agenda, ideally before the meeting, so they are clear of the meeting plan.

HOW WILL YOU MAKE SURE THAT ALL VIEWS CAN BE EXPRESSED?

Some people attending may be unsure about, or even object to, the proposal. Others may simply find public meetings intimidating. The chair will need to manage these issues carefully and calmly during the meeting. Opposition to an idea needs to be considered in any community acquisition process so discussing concerns openly helps to resolve issues. To help people who are nervous about speaking in front of a large group you could break into small group discussions during the meeting. You could also have post-it notes available for people to write down their questions or suggestions, which can be addressed either on the evening or afterwards. You could consider having a specific group for young people to be part of to share their views.

HOW WILL THE MEETING ITEMS AND ISSUES BE RECORDED?

Arrange for someone to take notes from the meeting to capture the discussion. It is better for this to be done by someone who isn't part of the panel or the chair as they can focus on note taking. Decide what you want to take notes on; some important examples are points of clarification, unanswered questions and action points. This should be made clear from the beginning of the meeting. Taking notes in a visible manner on flipchart paper shows openness to the audience.

HOW WILL YOU CAPTURE THE NUMBER OF ATTENDEES, AND THEIR NAMES AND CONTACT DETAILS?

This is useful as evidence of community consultation for the future, particularly the numbers of attendees. Collecting contact details can also be the start of an e-mail distribution list to keep people up to date with progress. A simple way to do this is to have one of the meeting organisers greet people on arrival and ask them to complete a signing in sheet. Do be aware of data protection issues –your group may wish to provide information on what the details will be used for and/or a disclaimer that the contact details will not be passed on to third parties without the person's consent.

You could consider having a specific group for young people to be part of to share their views.

HOW WILL YOU END THE MEETING?

With a clear agenda and in a focussed meeting, an end will naturally come. A show of hands on whether to proceed, or securing volunteers to join a steering group, may be the appropriate conclusion depending on the purpose of the meeting. The chair would usually allow a chance for any final questions and provide clear information regarding the next steps.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Following up issues and actions that arise from the meeting in a timely and consistent manner will demonstrate that you are listening to the community. It is important to reflect and record the public meeting and any issues that arise in the minutes of the next meeting of the steering group. Remember to circulate the minutes of the meeting in a manner which is accessible to all.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE SEE
www.hie.co.uk/ten-steps
or contact us on community.assets@hient.co.uk