

How to make a Community Charter

The Community Chartering Network started as an association of four individuals in different parts of the UK. We came together in the spring of 2013 to assist the communities around Falkirk in Scotland to take responsibility for their environment. The immediate need was to present a strong argument and a united front against commercial-scale Coal Bed Methane extraction. The document that we co-created, with the words of the community in it, became our first Charter. You can find it here: <http://www.faug.org.uk/campaign/community-charter>

Now the network is growing to include the communities that have Charters, or are planning to make Charters. The organisers of the Community Chartering Network can advise you but communities are also advising each other. Each Charter is different because the assets and values of each community are different. This document is a guide to how to make a Charter. Making a Charter is not difficult or time-consuming, the challenges lie in engaging your community and bringing as many people from as broad a background as possible into the process. It is all about participation, in particular about participatory planning and participatory democracy. You could say that together we are reinventing the concept of local governance, with the rights and responsibilities that go alongside that.

Step One

Identify the need that your community has for a Charter. You may be opposing fracking, the cutting down of ancient woodlands, inappropriate or over-extensive building works, pollution..... some action that will have a long-term negative impact on your local economy or ecology. In England you may be creating a Neighbourhood Plan (NP) and see the Charter as a way to hold all the aspirations that don't fit the NP format. In either case, you will probably have come to realise that it is exhausting and time-consuming to be in opposition to planning applications and want to create a case for what you are for. The aim is to make a document that can be shown to any landowner, local authority, planner or developer, with an invitation to engage in dialogue with the community around its long-term vision.

Step Two

A community group steps forward to hold the process of making the Charter, and hold the finished Charter on behalf of the Community. This could be an activist group, a Community Land Trust, a Parish Council or an NP task group. It doesn't matter what kind of group, they just need to take responsibility. It is also possible that the group that ends up holding the Charter is not the group that holds the process.

Step Three

The Charter-making group (CMG) reaches out to as many organisations and individual citizens in the community as possible. Reach is really important. The CMG explains what a Charter could do for the community and organises a talk or other awareness-raising event. You could invite someone from the Community Chartering Network to come along and give a presentation. The event is an opportunity for more individuals to get involved in the process.

Step Four

The CMG calls a meeting to devise the five to six questions for the community conversation at which the words from which the Charter will be made can be gathered. Examples of the questions that have been drawn up by St Ives in Cornwall

can be found in the Appendix at the end of this guide. You will be alive to the key issues that concern the community and aim to come up with open questions that will stimulate lively discussions. The questions will be angled to prompt citizens to name assets and values. Set a date and find a venue for the community conversation.

Step Five

Get the questions out to as many people as you can if you are concerned about groups that are unlikely to make it to the community conversation. You will see in the examples of questions below that there are headline questions and then prompt questions underneath. The headline questions can be taken into groups such as old people's homes, or schools, or outlying parts of the area.

Step Six

Get ready for the community conversation. The process we have been using so far and that works well is World Café: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/method.html> If you feel you need a facilitator for the overall event, now is the time to find one and the Community Chartering Network may be able to help here. Or you may know someone locally.

Book a space that can hold around 40-60 people at 6 different tables. Ideally you want around 8 people at a table, and plan for one main question at each table with a "host" to lead the conversation. Think of how to make the space attractive, and looking like a café with refreshments, flowers and maybe bunting.

Brief the table "hosts" on their role. They will be leading and encouraging the conversations, using the sub-questions as prompts, and aiming to hear from all the voices around their table. Each table will have flip-chart or wallpaper lining paper on it and around 5 pens so people can write down what is being said. Capturing the words is really important!

Step Seven

Hold the community conversation. Make sure that everyone knows what they are there for: the issues, what is at stake, the capacity of citizens to bring about change. You are collectively naming what you value and want to protect, and looking into the future of your local economy and ecology. At the end, give the people who took part a rapid overview of what has emerged. Tell them about the next steps, and that there will be another event shortly at which they can see the draft Charter.

Step Eight

Collect up all the paper "tablecloths" and distil the words on them into assets and values. Refer to the original Falkirk Charter for inspiration. Remember that "intangible" assets are as important as "tangible" assets. The parts of the original Charter that you will be adapting are the Declaration and Our Assets sections. The Definitions, Basic Rights and Responsibilities and Framework and Context Sections largely stay the same.

Note that the Community Charter document has a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-Commercial, Share Alike License. That means you need to attribute it to its origins in the Community Chartering Network, not charge any money to use it, and let us know how you use it by emailing us at: info@communitychartering.org. Once you have a Charter you become part of the Community Chartering Network.

Hold another public meeting to review the draft Charter and finalise it.

Step Nine

Now you have a final Charter, gather signatures for the Charter from as many people from as broad a range of backgrounds as possible. This could be at a launch party where the Charter is read aloud, and/or it could be done on line. You can take the Charter to your local parish or community council, to your district council and your MP. Ask if they are prepared to sign. Remember, the more people and organisations who support the Charter the more powerful it will be.

Step Ten

Devise the ways in which you are going to keep the Charter alive. It will need to flex and change if it is to stay relevant. You could read it aloud four times a year (as was done with Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest). Or you could integrate revisiting it into an existing event that happens every year. You will certainly want to take stock of how successful it has been, and how it could be more effective.

You will also want to come up with ways to invite landowners, developers and planners to round-table dialogue based on the Charter. Again you might want to consider hiring a facilitator. The Community Chartering Network can help you too.

Possible sources of funding for help with making a Charter:

Heritage Lottery Fund is definitely worth an application. St Ives was successful in obtaining funding from Awards for All for their Charter.

<https://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/funding/awards-for-all>

You can also try the Co-Op: <http://www.co-operative.coop/join-the-revolution/our-plan/keeping-communities-thriving/funds-and-foundations/>

And this Community Development Foundation fund: <http://cdf.org.uk/neighbourhoodmatchedfund>

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Appendix: Sample questions

St Ives Area Community Charter: the Questions

Q1. How did St Ives area come to be your home?

- Is it your family home?
- Do/did you see yourself living here long term? Why? What makes it a place to live in?
- How important is the natural environment? Why?

Q2. How would you like your children and grandchildren to enjoy St Ives area in 20 years time?

- What kind of job opportunities would you like to see?
- What types of open spaces would you like to see?
- What kind of leisure activities would you like to see?

Q3. How can sense of community be maintained in St Ives area?

- Events/public spaces
- Tourism into the future
- Housing use and development

Q4. Is the history of St Ives area important to you? Why?

- What do you know/love about the history of the area?
- Which places do you enjoy alone and/or share with friends and family?
- How do your favourite places make you feel?

Q5. Why do you enjoy living here?

- Home/family life
- Leisure/sport
- Arts
- Heritage
- Neighbours/community
- Festivals and events
- Local traditions
- Services
- Local employment

Q6. What is the identity of St Ives area, what does it mean to you?

- A holiday destination
- A fishing community
- A cultural centre
- An arts centre
- A place to enjoy nature
- A collection of diverse communities
- Dominated by outside interests