

The New Forest Community Facility Toolkit



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- Debbie Grace, Community First New Forest
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- Des Hobson, Hampshire Rural Pathfinder
- Eunice Hollist, DEFRA
- Lindsey Osman, Hampshire Early Education & Childcare Unit

And

- Michelle Badcock, The Toolkit researcher
- Penny Velandar, Community Planning Officer, New Forest District Council.
Also Toolkit project manager

An aerial photograph of a town, likely New Forest, showing a dense residential area with many houses and buildings. A river is visible on the right side of the image. The image is in black and white and serves as a background for the top half of the page.

The New Forest Community Facility Toolkit

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Toolkit Training registration form



The New Forest Community Facility Toolkit

Summary

The need for the New Forest Community Facility Toolkit was first identified by groups going through the community planning process to produce either a parish plan or market town healthcheck.

The majority of parishes in the New Forest either have done or are doing a community plan. As part of this process the community is consulted and asked to comment on issues of concern in their locality. One issue came up again and again in both villages and market towns: the use and viability of community buildings.

A number of these facilities were built a long time ago, and in the intervening years the use and purpose of the facility may have changed. Modern living has brought about more choice and higher expectations of all aspects of community living as well as fewer volunteers and resources to run these facilities.

Changing priorities and the possible deterioration in the conditions of these facilities mean that it may be the right time to:

- take stock of current use of one or more community facility
- question whether the existing facilities will match future use
- produce an action plan to inform future direction
- Identify funding to support the action plan

The information gathered through using the Toolkit approach will provide essential evidence of community need and support if applying for grant aid.

The Toolkit aims to support and guide people who want to assess the usage, gaps and potential of their community facilities. It can be used as a step by step guide or, for those having completed a community plan, it allows a pick and mix approach. It thereby enables the group of people doing the Toolkit to begin at the stage that will be most helpful.

Step by step guide to using the Toolkit

Step One

Set up a working group and identify facilities
Toolkit Guides One and Two



Step Two

Where are we now, community profile and facility profile
Toolkit Guides Three, Four and Five



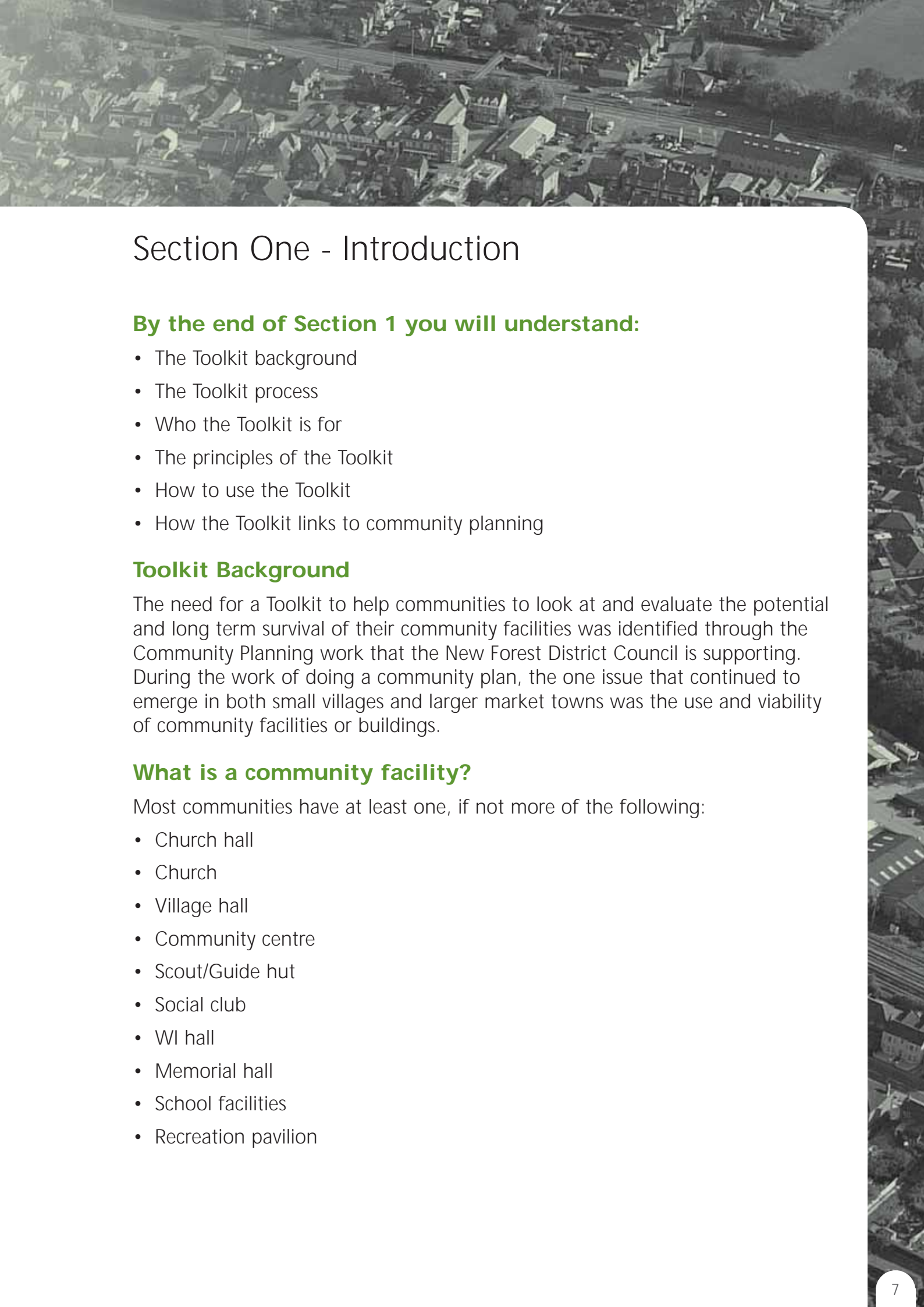
Step Three

Where do we want to be in the future, analysis of information
Toolkit Guides Six and Seven



Step Four

Developing an action plan for the future
Toolkit Guide Eight and Nine



Section One - Introduction

By the end of Section 1 you will understand:

- The Toolkit background
- The Toolkit process
- Who the Toolkit is for
- The principles of the Toolkit
- How to use the Toolkit
- How the Toolkit links to community planning

Toolkit Background

The need for a Toolkit to help communities to look at and evaluate the potential and long term survival of their community facilities was identified through the Community Planning work that the New Forest District Council is supporting. During the work of doing a community plan, the one issue that continued to emerge in both small villages and larger market towns was the use and viability of community facilities or buildings.

What is a community facility?

Most communities have at least one, if not more of the following:

- Church hall
- Church
- Village hall
- Community centre
- Scout/Guide hut
- Social club
- WI hall
- Memorial hall
- School facilities
- Recreation pavilion



You might want to consider facilities with other types of functions too, such as:

- Social
- Religious
- Educational
- Medical
- Private
- Sport

Community Planning

Community planning is the overarching term used to cover the process for the production of a community plan; i.e a parish plan or a market town healthcheck. Both provide a structure by which the community thinks about how they want their village/town to be in the future; identify what the obstacles are to getting there and develop an action plan to achieve that vision. A community plan needs to look at all aspects of local life through consultation with all sections of the community to gain wide representation of views and involvement.

The New Forest Community Planning Guide gives an overview of the process, explains strategic links and provides a step-by step guide. Attached to the Guide is a resource pack which contains 15 individual support reference sheets.

The New Forest Community Planning Guide can be viewed and downloaded from the New Forest District Council website. Further information can be obtained from Penny Velandar, Community Planning Officer (see Section Three)

What is the Toolkit about

This Toolkit has been produced to help you in the local community to assess the usage, gaps and potential of facilities in your locality in order to make better use of them. The purpose is to review one or more facilities in the community to understand how they work as individual places but also as part of the community's collective resources. This may be as part of the community planning process, as part of a parish/town council review, or a hall management committee future planning.

Working through the Toolkit will provide you with information and possibly new understandings which can help you to; make plans to use the facilities more effectively and in turn attract new resources such as funding or new volunteers to make it more viable.



Principles

The basis for the Toolkit process is the belief that all of you in the community, who are involved with your facilities, are the best people to undertake an evaluation of what you have and what you want to do with it. This may require you to think about new ways of working with other groups in the community. There may be changes that you and/or others will have to make for the long-term survival of your resources. The Toolkit process and any actions you may want to take will need the support, advice and guidance of local agencies such as your local council (parish/district/county), your church, your local council of voluntary services or the rural community council.

This process is based on some fundamental values which begin with an agreement over how you approach the process

- Openness
- Confidentiality
- Communication
- Partnership
- Participation and accountability
- Support and optimism

Who is this Toolkit for?

This Toolkit can be used by a group of interested people who want to make changes to their current situation. A small working group needs to take responsibility for and run the process. This group of interested people could be a management group, a community partnership, or an interested party who will work through the process with the local group. Getting a wide representation of interested people on to this group is vital for its success and ownership by the community. This Toolkit is designed to be used whether the community is in an urban or rural setting.



How do we use the Toolkit?

The Toolkit can be used as part of a whole community planning process or as a standalone activity by a group involved with just one facility. It is a process of linked steps designed to move the process from start to finish. For communities having completed a community plan it allows a pick and mix approach, beginning at the point in the process that is most important to your situation. Each step can be carried out as a single activity in itself, or it can be used in its entirety. The starting point for using the Toolkit is your choice, depending on what work has been done so far.

It is probably a good idea to set a time limit to avoid the process drifting on and people losing interest. As a suggestion each step could be carried out within a month or two, depending on the number of people involved, and the amount of information already available. At the beginning of each stage there is a check list of what that step sets out to achieve. There are also a set of Toolkit Guides that provide additional information and activities to help with each step. These are found at the end of the pack.

What support is available to help with the process?

Help is available at any step of the process from:

- Community Development Officer, Community First New Forest
- Community Planning Officer, New Forest District Council
- Any of the Toolkit partners listed in Section Three



Section Two - The Toolkit

This section covers the Toolkit itself and is divided into Steps 1- 4. At the beginning of each stage will be a summary of what will be covered

Step 1 - preparation and exploration

By the end of Step 1 you will have

- Set up a working group to undertake the Toolkit process
- Used Toolkit Guide One to explore and understand the principles on which the Toolkit is based
- Agreed to carry out the Toolkit process
- Established the reasons for undergoing the Toolkit process
- Drawn up a list of all community facilities
- Chosen the community facilities to begin the Toolkit process

The first step of the Toolkit is important as it sets the scene for the next three steps by:


- Bringing together the right people for the working group
- Confirming the principles of the project
- Agreeing the facility (s) to be included

Activity 1

Set up a working group to consider the Toolkit process

Initial activity

- Arrange an open meeting to discuss the Toolkit process, inviting all community groups and community leaders. Approach Community First New Forest or New Forest District Council to support you
- At the meeting, explain the Toolkit, consider the principles of the Toolkit and the process
- Identify the working group who will take overall responsibility for the Toolkit process, this should include representatives from the community facilities and other interested parties eg user groups

- 
- This working group should meet to familiarise themselves with the Toolkit process and decide on the starting point
 - Do we all understand the how/why we are doing this process, the benefits/cost and decide whether to proceed
 - Discuss and agree the end result the group is looking for

Activity 2

Exploring the principles

Working group activity

You may want to talk about the desirability of openness, good communication, encouraging everyone to participate and what support is available, as it can assist you to reach a common understanding about these values.

Support

Toolkit Guide One: Ways and Means of using the Toolkit

Activity 3

Why carry out the feasibility study?

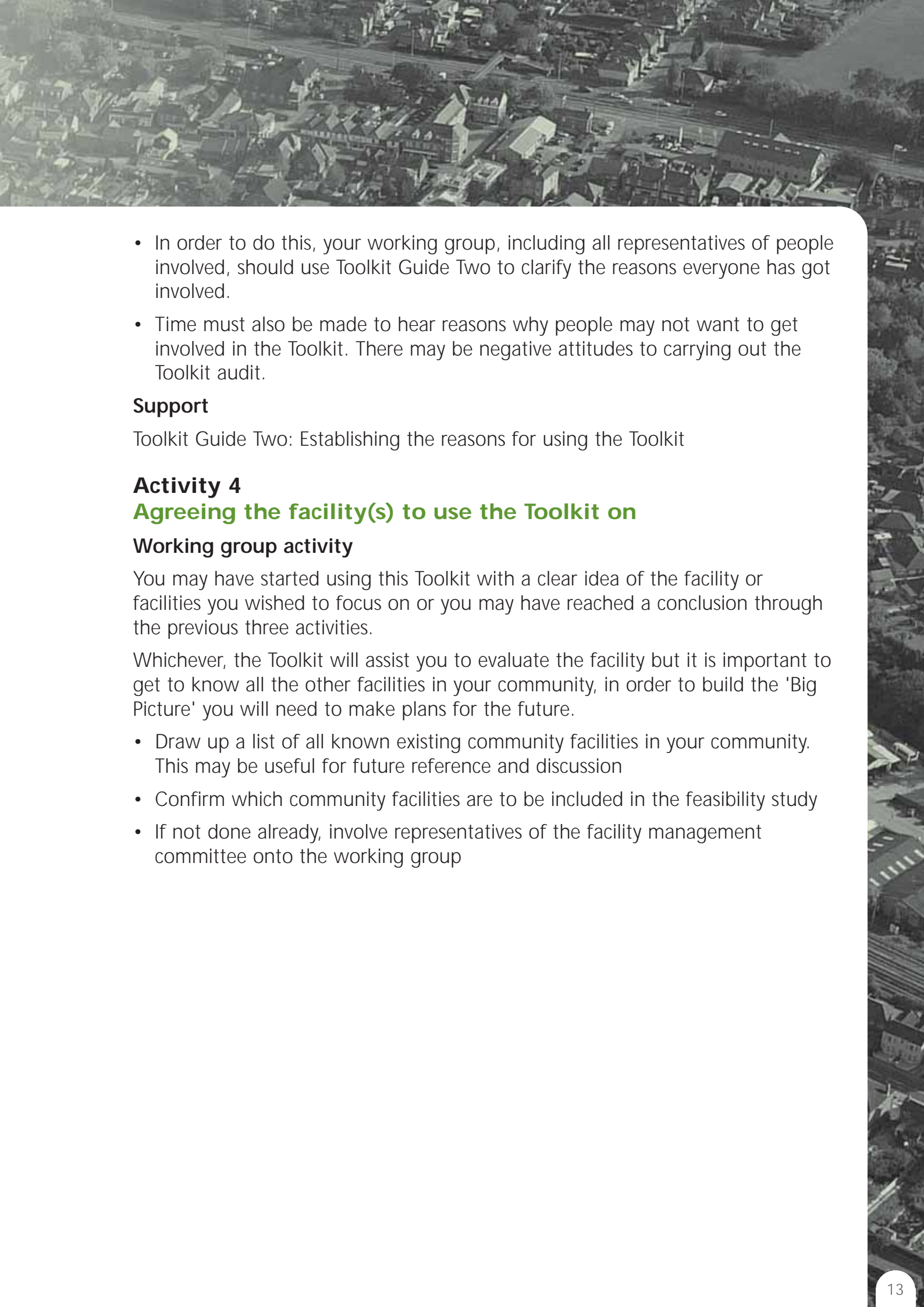
It is important to establish the reasons for choosing to use the Toolkit and understand what has brought you to this point.

This step could be vital to the process of looking at the usage, gaps and potential of your community facility(s) in order to make better use of them being a success.

- Are there problems you want to address through the process
- What benefits do you see coming out of the Toolkit process
- Who will get the most out of it (users/clients)
- What is most important to all of the participants
- What will you win by using the Toolkit
- What do you have to lose by using the Toolkit

Working group activity

Within your community, there could be many different reasons for using this Toolkit. Consequently you need to be open and clear about those reasons.

- 
- In order to do this, your working group, including all representatives of people involved, should use Toolkit Guide Two to clarify the reasons everyone has got involved.
 - Time must also be made to hear reasons why people may not want to get involved in the Toolkit. There may be negative attitudes to carrying out the Toolkit audit.

Support

Toolkit Guide Two: Establishing the reasons for using the Toolkit

Activity 4

Agreeing the facility(s) to use the Toolkit on

Working group activity

You may have started using this Toolkit with a clear idea of the facility or facilities you wished to focus on or you may have reached a conclusion through the previous three activities.

Whichever, the Toolkit will assist you to evaluate the facility but it is important to get to know all the other facilities in your community, in order to build the 'Big Picture' you will need to make plans for the future.

- Draw up a list of all known existing community facilities in your community. This may be useful for future reference and discussion
- Confirm which community facilities are to be included in the feasibility study
- If not done already, involve representatives of the facility management committee onto the working group



Step 2 - Gathering information

By the end of Step 2 you will have:

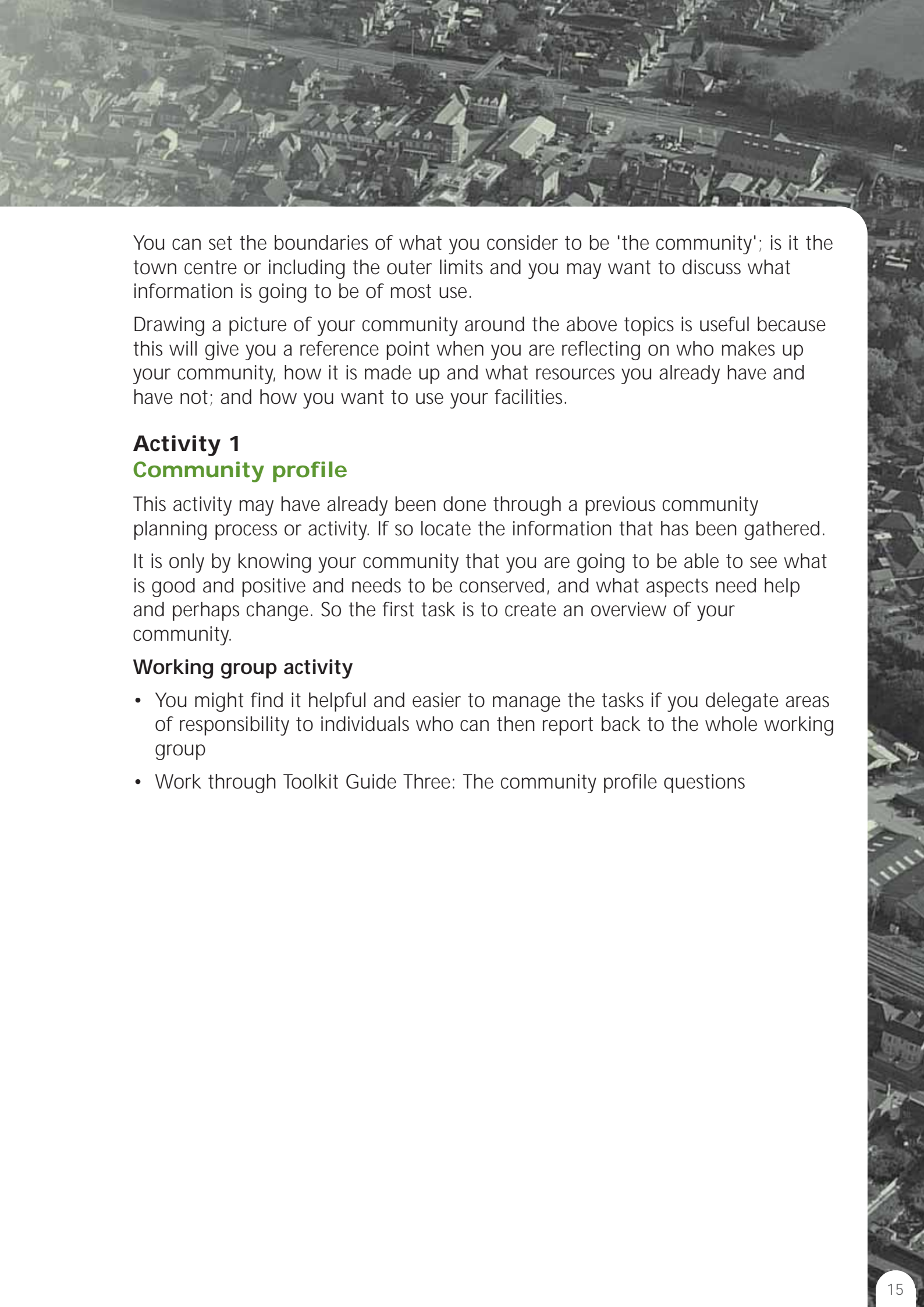
- Brought together information about your community by doing a community profile using Toolkit Guide Three
- Established contact and a working relationship with the group of people responsible for the community facility(s) and, if not already done so, included a representative(s) on the working group
- Gathered together all the information about the community facility(s) using Toolkit Guide Four
- Consulted with user groups of the facility using the Love it / Hate it form, Toolkit Guide Five

What is the current profile of your community?

In this section you will need to gather information to create a thorough description of 'how your community is now'. This is essential as it provides the background for your community facility audit and provides a picture of your community that will be useful to outsiders eg grant making trusts, local authorities etc. If you have already done a parish plan or healthcheck, you may have all the information you need and you can simply bring this from your previous work. Check out or revisit the community profile, if you have already done one, to see whether the information is up to date or whether there are any aspects that may need updating.

The sorts of information you will want to consider are:

- Local history
- Census information -population, age breakdown, pockets of deprivation
- Landscape and setting of the parish
- What community resources are there? eg schools, shop, post office, pubs, play areas
- Transport links
- Business economy
- Health care opportunities
- Tourism
- Social issues



You can set the boundaries of what you consider to be 'the community'; is it the town centre or including the outer limits and you may want to discuss what information is going to be of most use.

Drawing a picture of your community around the above topics is useful because this will give you a reference point when you are reflecting on who makes up your community, how it is made up and what resources you already have and have not; and how you want to use your facilities.

Activity 1

Community profile

This activity may have already been done through a previous community planning process or activity. If so locate the information that has been gathered.

It is only by knowing your community that you are going to be able to see what is good and positive and needs to be conserved, and what aspects need help and perhaps change. So the first task is to create an overview of your community.

Working group activity

- You might find it helpful and easier to manage the tasks if you delegate areas of responsibility to individuals who can then report back to the whole working group
- Work through Toolkit Guide Three: The community profile questions



Activity 2

Social Issues

Social issues arise from past present or future developments within the community and can be either positive or negative. This may be planning applications for new housing, the closure of a facility, or a flare up of crime. One person's perception of a social issue may not be the same as another, because it can be so subjective so there may be a wide scope of responses.

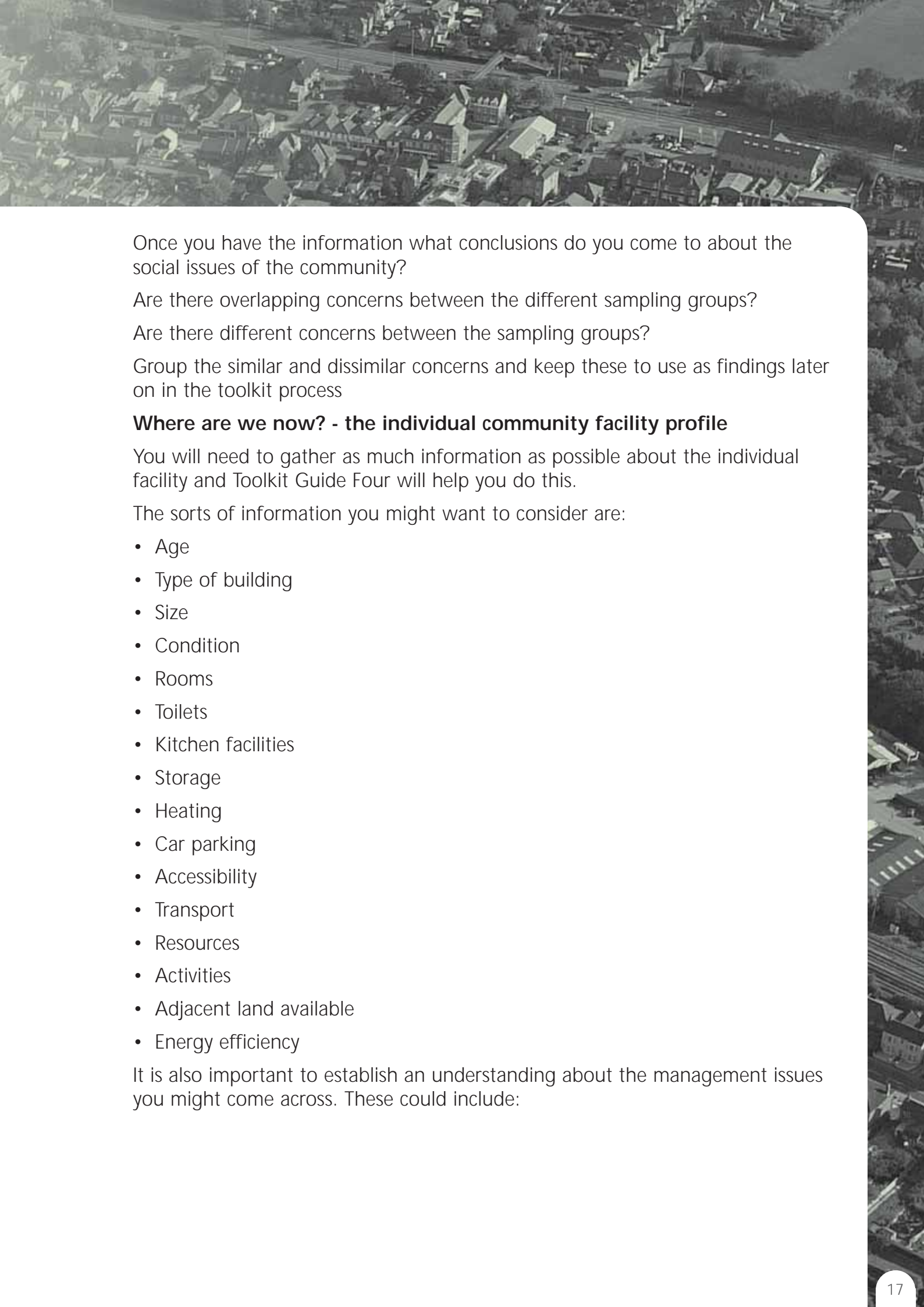
The purpose of this exercise is to take stock of people's perceptions of the local situation and gather a clearer view of what people perceive exists in their local community.

Your steering group can gain a lot by brainstorming the following questions:

- What is the overriding positive aspect of your community
- What do you not like about it
- What are the issues you would like to do something about
- What are the issues you feel you cannot do anything about
- What are the main social challenges of living in the community
- What would you most like to change
- What would you like to remain the same
- Where do you go from here?

It is important to get the views of different perspectives. You may want to delegate this task to someone who can do a sampling survey of the following:

- Children
- Teenagers
- Retired people
- Young parents
- Lone parents
- People with a disability
- Ethnic groups



Once you have the information what conclusions do you come to about the social issues of the community?

Are there overlapping concerns between the different sampling groups?

Are there different concerns between the sampling groups?

Group the similar and dissimilar concerns and keep these to use as findings later on in the toolkit process


Where are we now? - the individual community facility profile

You will need to gather as much information as possible about the individual facility and Toolkit Guide Four will help you do this.

The sorts of information you might want to consider are:

- Age
- Type of building
- Size
- Condition
- Rooms
- Toilets
- Kitchen facilities
- Storage
- Heating
- Car parking
- Accessibility
- Transport
- Resources
- Activities
- Adjacent land available
- Energy efficiency

It is also important to establish an understanding about the management issues you might come across. These could include:

- 
- Trustees/charitable status
 - Type of facility (e.g. faith/private/council/community)
 - Caretaker
 - Level of activity
 - Insurance
 - Maintenance
 - Financial viability
 - Legal issues (e.g. licensing)
 - Volunteers
 - Communication

Finally the usage of the facility, which could include topics such as:

- Management of activities
- User groups
- Providers of services
- Types of activities (faith/sport/support)
- Survey of age of users
- Attendance numbers per activity
- Funding issues
- Overlaps and clashes
- Gaps

Activity 3

The community facility profile

Working group activity

- It may be useful to delegate areas of responsibility to small 'teams' who can report back to the working group. This will be especially important if dealing with more than one facility
- Gather information to create a detailed picture of the community building (s) - facilities and uses
 - Work through Toolkit Guide Four: The community facility questions



What do the facility users think?

The information you have gathered in activities 1 and 3 has been entirely factual. Now it is time to consult with the users of the facility (s) to identify what works and doesn't work for them. First you will need to decide if you are going to target all users individually or the leaders of the main user groups eg pre-school, over 50's, yoga, WI, youth club. In a smaller facility you may wish to consult all users however in a larger community centre you may decide to consult with the group leaders and ask them to represent their group's ideas.

A very simple way of gathering this information is through a Love it / Hate it survey. This technique is simple to complete and works well for young children as well as elderly or disabled. Users are asked to list:

- 3 things I like about using this facility
- 3 things I don't like about using this facility
- 3 things I would like to see improved for the future

When the forms are returned the working group will need to cluster the comments from each of the three sections into common headings. This will give you three lists of the main likes, dislikes and changes that are important to the facility users.

Activity 4

- Working group decides whether to target all users or group leaders, this will form your consultation group
- Personalise Toolkit Guide Five: the Love it / Hate it forms to your community, stating where forms need to be returned to and by when
- Distribute Love it / Hate it forms to all in the consultation group
- Collect forms and cluster comments into main headings or issues

Step 3 - Where do we want to be in the future - analysis

By the end of Step 3 you will have:

- Used Toolkit Guide Six to produce a SWOT analysis from the community profile, facility profile and Love It / Hate It
- Compared results from the three SWOTs to identify possible options that would improve the usage, lessen the gaps and utilise the potential of the community facilities
- Consulted with the management team and facility users to consider the pros and cons of each option agreeing those that have the best chance of success. Toolkit Guide Seven

Where do we want to be?

Analysing the information you have gathered

In step 2 you will have gathered a great deal of information. Step 3 involves looking at each set of facts or issues to complete a SWOT analysis. You will be able to draw some conclusions by comparing what is available with what you want to achieve. This step also involves looking at the potential and untapped resources in the community and its facilities and developing a plan for using it by choosing realistic goals and objectives, and with the awareness of the issues that limit success.

You may need support in this activity from Community First New Forest or New Forest District Council to develop ideas into strategies and to bring out some imaginative and creative thinking

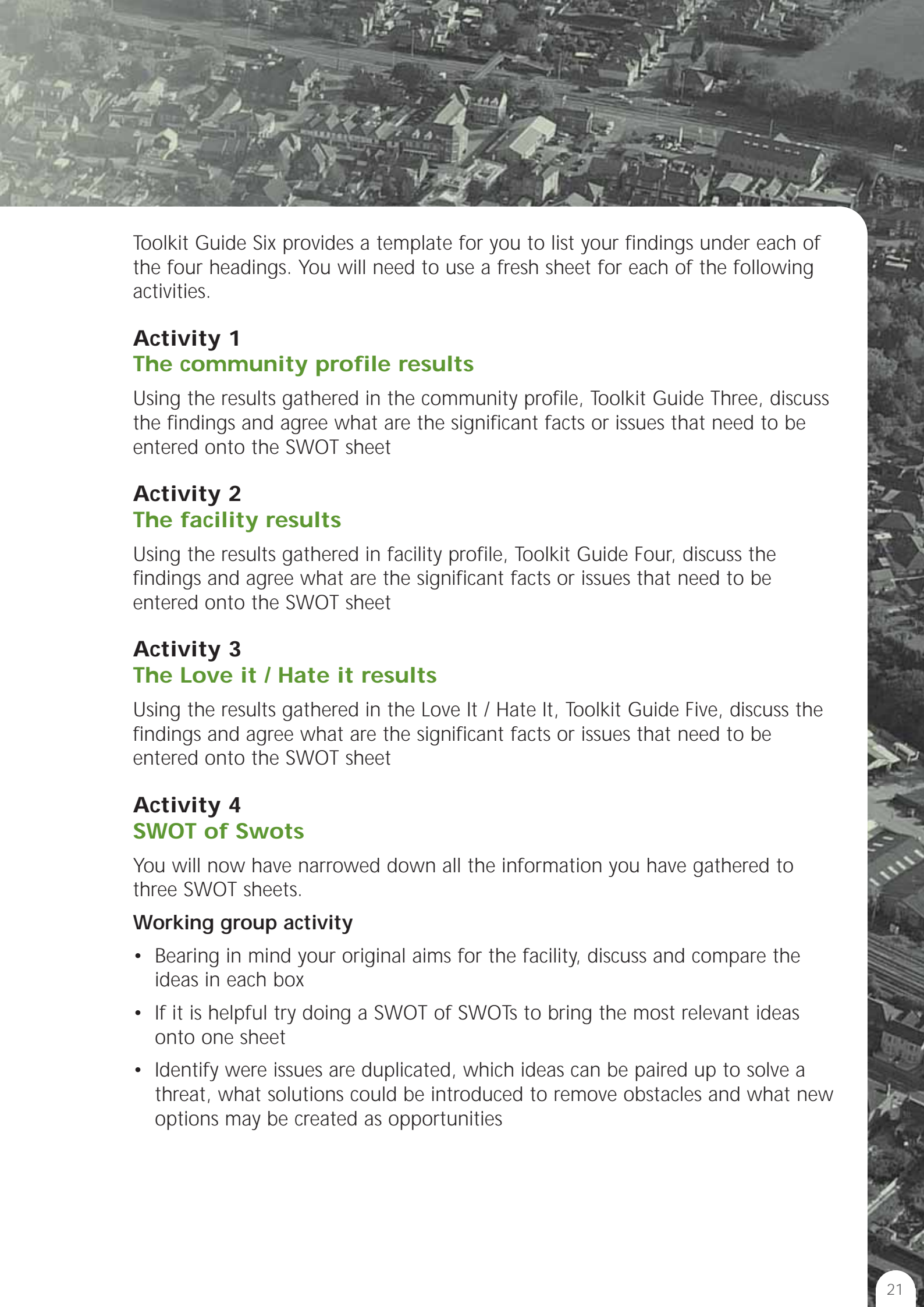
During each of the activities you may need to refer back to step 1 and remind yourselves of your aims and principles

What is a SWOT analysis?

SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Strengths and weaknesses refer to issues that are present now. Opportunities and Threats refer to issues that are likely or could happen in the future.

For example: you may identify that due to an increase in the number of primary school children the school has turned the indoor sports facilities into class rooms = Threat

However, you may identify that the school could explore using the village hall or sports pavilion for sports activities = Opportunity



Toolkit Guide Six provides a template for you to list your findings under each of the four headings. You will need to use a fresh sheet for each of the following activities.

Activity 1

The community profile results

Using the results gathered in the community profile, Toolkit Guide Three, discuss the findings and agree what are the significant facts or issues that need to be entered onto the SWOT sheet

Activity 2

The facility results

Using the results gathered in facility profile, Toolkit Guide Four, discuss the findings and agree what are the significant facts or issues that need to be entered onto the SWOT sheet

Activity 3

The Love it / Hate it results

Using the results gathered in the Love It / Hate It, Toolkit Guide Five, discuss the findings and agree what are the significant facts or issues that need to be entered onto the SWOT sheet

Activity 4

SWOT of Swots

You will now have narrowed down all the information you have gathered to three SWOT sheets.

Working group activity

- Bearing in mind your original aims for the facility, discuss and compare the ideas in each box
- If it is helpful try doing a SWOT of SWOTs to bring the most relevant ideas onto one sheet
- Identify where issues are duplicated, which ideas can be paired up to solve a threat, what solutions could be introduced to remove obstacles and what new options may be created as opportunities

Activity 5

Pros and Cons

Each idea that has emerged from the above activity should be analysed in terms of the pros and cons. This should be done systematically, so that you do not become overwhelmed by what may seem stacked against the idea, or by negative attitudes.

For example:

Using Toolkit Guide Seven draw up a list of all the ideas that emerged from the information that you have gathered in activity 4.

When your list is complete discuss the cons to see if or how they can be overcome. Consider:

- Do you need the help of other agencies or experts
- Do you need to attract funding
- Do you need further information
- Is the option legal eg charity law
- Would the option meet with your original aims
- Would the option have the support of the community

Activity 6

Whole community audit

When the Toolkit process is used to audit all the community facilities, perhaps as part of the community planning process, further collation of results will be needed.

The community plan steering group and representatives from facility working groups will:

- Meet to draw out findings from their analysis of the community and their community facilities
- Consider social issues that impact on all community facilities
- Consider the impact of Toolkit evidence alongside the community planning evidence
- Include recommendations for the facilities in the draft community plan action plan



Step 4 - action planning

At the end of Step Four you will have:

- Drawn up a draft action plan using Toolkit Guides Eight and Nine
- Circulated the draft action plan to all working group(s) and representatives
- Canvassed views in the community
- Sought involvement from supporters in the community
- Done a reality check ie
- Identified partners to help you develop your projects
- Started researching sources of funding
- Prioritised projects
- Produced and launched your final plan

How are we going to get there? Planning the action


The working group and the appropriate representative(s) from the community facility(s) need to come together to plan the way forward. Having considered all the information gathered and analysed, you will need to agree which projects should be taken forward to your draft action plan.

There will be many projects on your draft action plan, some the community can put into action, some will fall under the remit of the parish council and others will need the input of other agencies such as the district council, county council or funding bodies. Once you have got your plan to the draft stage it is essential that you identify who needs to be involved in each project and start that dialogue.

Representatives from other agencies should be involved as soon as possible so they can give you more detailed or specialist advice. Also if your projects will require funding there certainly will be an application procedure and timescale that needs to be considered.

This phase is called the Reality Check as it allow you to test out that your identified projects are realistic and set out a time-frame that the projects are likely to happen in.

If you are involving external agencies in your reality check ensure that enough time is allowed for your plan to reach the right officer, for them to understand



what you are aiming to achieve, consider your project and then feedback. Also grant making committees may only meet a couple of times a year so you will need to build such decision making points into your time-plan.

What happens after the Reality Check?

Once you have completed your consultation you will have the information you need to be able to update your draft to produce your final action plan. Through the Reality check you will ensure that key community members and groups agree with your proposals and you have 'buy-in' from agencies whose involvement is necessary.

The future of the plan now needs to be considered. The role of the working group was to produce the finished plan but it is also going to need to be put into action and monitored. If the Toolkit has been used as part of a community planning exercise this will not be a problem as the projects will be absorbed into the larger action plan. However if it was a separate or stand-alone activity the working group will need to make sure it is being taken forward.

This could be through:

- A new working group specially formed for the purpose
- The facility management team
- The parish / town council

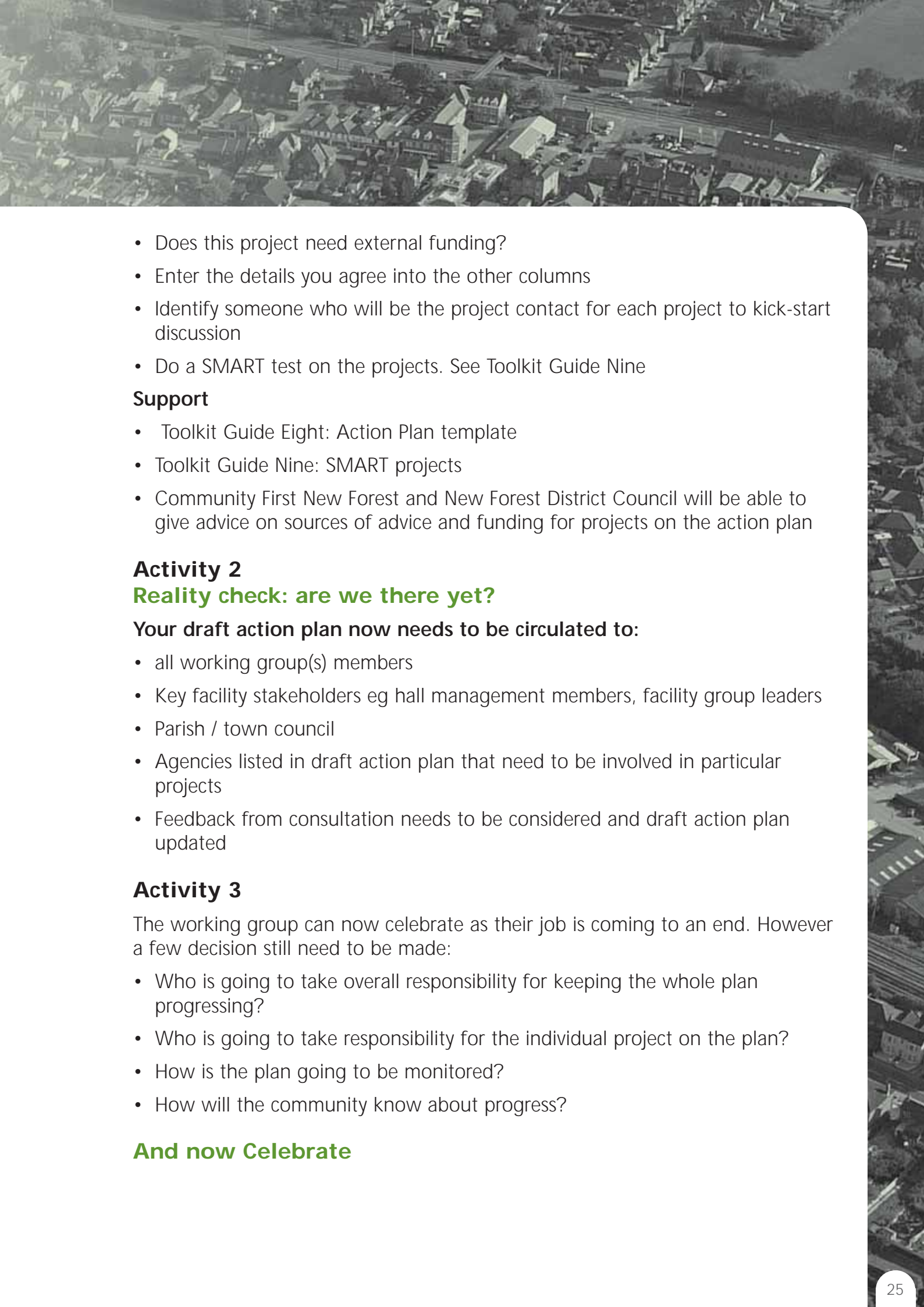
Once this is agreed it will be time to circulate and celebrate your community facility (s) plan.

Activity 1

Identifying goals

Working group activity

- Using the information produced in step 3 activity 5, agree which projects are going to be taken forward to your draft action plan
- Using Toolkit Guide Eight list the projects you have agreed into column one
- For each project consider:
 - Is this a project that we, the community, can make happen?
 - Does this project need to include the parish council?
 - Does this project need to involve someone from another agency? If so which one?

- 
- Does this project need external funding?
 - Enter the details you agree into the other columns
 - Identify someone who will be the project contact for each project to kick-start discussion
 - Do a SMART test on the projects. See Toolkit Guide Nine

Support

- Toolkit Guide Eight: Action Plan template
- Toolkit Guide Nine: SMART projects
- Community First New Forest and New Forest District Council will be able to give advice on sources of advice and funding for projects on the action plan

Activity 2

Reality check: are we there yet?

Your draft action plan now needs to be circulated to:

- all working group(s) members
- Key facility stakeholders eg hall management members, facility group leaders
- Parish / town council
- Agencies listed in draft action plan that need to be involved in particular projects
- Feedback from consultation needs to be considered and draft action plan updated

Activity 3

The working group can now celebrate as their job is coming to an end. However a few decision still need to be made:

- Who is going to take overall responsibility for keeping the whole plan progressing?
- Who is going to take responsibility for the individual project on the plan?
- How is the plan going to be monitored?
- How will the community know about progress?

And now Celebrate

Section Three - Local links and your information

Team members for the Community Facility Toolkit are:

Jo Dixon	Community Action Hampshire joanne.dixon@action.hants.org.uk 01962 845971
Nick Evans	New Forest National Park Authority nick.evans@newforestnpa.gov.uk 01590 646679
Jane Fisher	The Diocese of Winchester Jane.fisher@winchester.anglican.org 01962 624771
Debbie Grace	Community First New Forest debbie.grace@cfnf.org.uk 01425 482773
Anne Harrison	Hampshire County Council Anne.harrison@hants.gov.uk 01962 846558
Des Hobson	Hampshire Rural Pathfinder Des.hobson@hants.gov.uk 01962 847379
Eunice Hollist	DEFRA eunice.hollist@DEFRA.GSI.GOV.UK 07958 085887
Lindsey Osman	Hampshire Early Education & Childcare Unit Lindsey.osman@hants.gov.uk 02380 667360
Penny Velandar	New Forest District Council Penny.velander@nfdc.gov.uk 02380 285342

Other useful links:

- Martin Devine** Assistant Director of Leisure Services, NFDC
Martin.devine@nfdc.gov.uk
02380 285474
- Peter Thompson** Village Halls Adviser,
Community Action Hampshire
Peter.thompson@action.hants.gov.uk
01962 845971
- Stephen Lugg** Hampshire Association of Parish and Town Councils
Steven.Lugg@hants.gov.uk
01962 841699
- Specialist Village
Hall advice** Action for Communities in Rural England (Acre)
www.Acre.org.uk
01285653477
- Community Halls
for Rural People** Defra
www.defra.gov.uk/rural/communities/halls
0845 933 5577

You may wish to use the remainder of this section to compile the information you gather on your community or list specific contacts you have made or wish to follow up.

