

Neighbourhood Planning Guidance Note 28

Setting up a steering group

April 2013 - Revised June 2015



When thinking about preparing your Neighbourhood Development Plan it may be worth establishing a steering group to oversee, and help to keep the progress of the plan on track. This guidance note helps to explain how to set up your steering group and what benefits such a group could bring to the Neighbourhood Development Plan process.

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Introduction

Although, within Herefordshire, it is only a parish council that can instigate a Neighbourhood Development Plan, the parish council should enlist the help and assistance of volunteers from the local community via a steering group to undertake the day to day tasks.

It is important to remember, that the parish council still has responsibility for the plan and all the final decisions made.

Why you need a steering group?

Due to the work involved in producing your Neighbourhood Development Plan, you will require additional people to those who are on the existing parish council. The establishment of a steering group will allow you to delegate the day to day tasks of organising consultation events, information gathering, editing drafts and producing the final plan to others, whilst the parish council concentrates on other wide ranging existing parish matters.

A steering group may have various different names including; steering committee or management committee. Whatever name you choose to use, the group should be able to:

- Consider the overall aims of the Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- Set a project plan and monitor activities against the timetable outlined.
- Link the aims and objectives of your plan in a wider context.

A successful steering group meeting should question, provide ideas and have a useful distance and perspective to assist working on the details of your Neighbourhood Development Plan.

What is the main role of a steering group?

As the parish council remains the responsible body for the Neighbourhood Development Plan, the steering group must report to the parish council on a regular basis and receive ongoing endorsement, via parish council minutes, during production of the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

The steering group will need to develop a project plan and consultation plan for the production of the Neighbourhood Development Plan within the budget set by the parish council. The parish council are accountable for the expenditure and ensuring that the project budget remains on track. Therefore, the steering group needs to keep the parish council informed of any changes in timetable or budget requirements.

The steering group will be responsible for ensuring links between the parish council, the community and professionals involved are maintained and everyone has the opportunity to be engaged within the project.

In addition, the steering group is not just limited to the tasks already detailed; there are many other possible tasks that they could also undertake, such as:

- Acting as a focal point for people living or working in the Neighbourhood Area.
- Providing a forum for discussion and debate.
- Helping to see more effective ways of getting things done.
- Motivating the community to be involved throughout the plan.
- Troubleshooting any conflicts raised.
- Assisting the parish council to meet the terms of the service level agreement.
- Assisting the plan to achieve a high profile within the local area and wider community.
- Maintaining the energy and enthusiasm to ensure that whatever needs to be done, will be accomplished.
- Setting up sub-groups to focus on particular themes that arise through the consultation process.
- Identifying ways of involving the whole community and gather the views and opinions of as many individuals, groups and organisations in the community as possible.
- Determining the types of survey and information gathering to be used.

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- Co-ordinating the collation and analysis of the consultation feedback in accordance with the Data Protection Act.
- Obtaining advice and information about relevant matters and policies.
- Prioritising actions, using the findings from the consultation process and information from other sources.
- Establishing the necessary skills required to complete the Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- Undertaking and producing the additional material such as consultation reports and environmental assessments.
- Reporting back to and receiving endorsement from the parish council on progress, issues arising and outcomes throughout the process.

How to set up your steering group?

The steering groups should be representative of the neighbourhood area. For example, if your neighbourhood area covers more than one parish, then this should be reflected in the membership of the group.

The steering group should include both parish councillors and members of the community. There is no required size for a group but smaller groups can sometimes lack the breadth of experience or resources required whilst larger ones can lose focus.

Deciding on the skills and experience required within the group would be a good starting point. Remember that enthusiasm and drive is just as important as an identified skill such as planning experience or project management.

When forming the steering group for your Neighbourhood Development Plan try to get a diverse range of skills involved, therefore avoiding people with similar skills or backgrounds and try to incorporate members from all of your community.

It is a good idea for everyone on your steering group to have clearly defined roles, which will also enable the group to make the best use of resources, for example; a people person would

be good at getting community support and organising consultation events, yet a financial whizz would be good at keeping a control on the budget plan.

Try and develop a clear project plan early in the process, outline a working budget, set aims and objectives, and set guide timescales. It is important to keep up regular meetings throughout the development of your plan, this will not only keep everyone abreast on the progress of the plan but will also help to maintain enthusiasm at all times.

You may like to involve your Ward Member in helping you develop the steering group.

How does the steering group relate to the parish council

Activities undertaken by the steering group should be transparent and communications links with the full parish council strong as they will remain the responsible body.

The steering group should report to and receive endorsement from the parish council on a regular basis.

Below is a checklist of things it is important to remember about the relationship between your parish council and your steering group.

- Throughout the development and implementation period of the Neighbourhood Development Plan there needs to be a standing Neighbourhood Planning item on the parish council agenda.
- There should be minutes of parish council decisions in relation to the steering group and Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- The steering group may identify a need for funded expertise from other bodies and make recommendations to the parish council. The parish council will then seek a minimum of three quotes and commission the work.
- Budget responsibility lies with the parish council and not the steering group.
- It is recommended that the steering group gives a presentation to the parish via a parish meeting, at key stages of the Neighbourhood Development Plan process.

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- The steering group present the Neighbourhood Development Plan to the parish council who will ultimately sign the document off.
- Parish council will submit the Neighbourhood Development Plan to Herefordshire Council.
- Members of the parish council can be in the steering group.
- Conflict within the steering group should be referred to the parish council.
- Terms of Reference used by the steering group will have been agreed by the parish council.
- Utilising someone as a 'bridging co-ordinator', who essentially oversees the communication between the steering group and the parish council.

How to facilitate steering group success

To help ensure a successful steering group the members should:

- Take an active part in the meeting (not just sit there).
- Make positive proposals (when ideas are needed).
- Ask questions (if information is needed).
- Offer alternatives (to create agreement).
- Build on proposals (to cement group vision).
- Test ideas (not reject them out of hand).
- Explain opposition (not just flat rejection).
- Help others (to cement solidarity).

There is no set of rules needed, however, it is ideal that for the steering group meetings there needs to be:

- A 'Terms of Reference' developed that are approved by the parish council, a model example is contained within appendix 1.
- A chair or facilitator, through which all discussion is handled.

- An agenda, which discussion should follow.
- Someone to take notes, to be circulated later.
- Everyone should be clear at the end of each meeting what the recommendations to be taken forward, or work to be done prior, to the next meeting are.
- Ensure that discussions are for the benefit of the whole community.

Finance considerations of your Neighbourhood Development Plan

The financial implications of your Neighbourhood Development Plan will be a key priority throughout the process. However there are some considerations the steering group will need to be aware of.

The steering group cannot make any financial decisions on behalf of the parish council. However, the parish council can delegate authority to the clerk, (usually in consultation with the chairman and vice-chairman) to approve payments up to a certain amount. This must be clearly minuted.

Points include:

- A budget will be agreed by the parish council.
- Large items of expenditure should be placed on the parish council agenda for approval. The threshold of which is to be decided by each individual parish council and written into their Terms of Reference.
- Invoices should be made out to the parish council (to enable VAT reclaim) and should be paid in accordance with the parish council's Financial regulations. The accounts relating to the Neighbourhood Development Plan process will be audited and open to the public.
- Substantial decisions, such as contracting a planning consultant, must be approved by the parish council. The parish council will also need to approve the terms and conditions of the contract.
- Any commissioning of funded expertise from other bodies must be undertaken by the parish council.

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- Insurance - steering groups of the parish council are usually covered under the parish council's insurance, however the clerk should check the details with their insurer.

Terms of Reference

Producing a simple 'Terms of Reference' for the group would be helpful. This should set out the purpose and remit of the group and the reporting and decision making procedures.

Terms of Reference for the steering group should be approved by a meeting of the parish council.

Terms of reference should ensure that the parish council receives regular written reports from the steering group. Draft sections should be endorsed by the parish council to ensure the council is fully on-board with the plan before it reaches completion. The steering group is responsible for liaising with both Herefordshire Council and the parish council.

A model terms of reference is included within appendix 1.

Setting up a steering group

Steering Group Model Terms of Reference

This is an example of a Terms of Reference you could use, which can be adapted to meet local circumstances.

Name

The name of the organisation shall be the (name) Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group.

Purpose

The purpose of the Steering Group shall be to support the Parish Council to carry out the following tasks:

- Investigate and identify support for the Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- Identify sources of funding.
- Take responsibility for planning, budgeting and monitoring expenditure on the Neighbourhood Development Plan and report back to the Parish Council on these matters.
- Liaise with relevant authorities and organisations to make the Neighbourhood Development Plan as effective as possible.
- Identify ways of involving the whole community and gather the views and opinions of as many groups and organisations in the community as possible.
- Determine the types of survey and information gathering to be used.
- Be responsible for the analysis of the survey, as well as the production and the distribution of the final report.
- Identify priorities and timescales for local action in the Project Plan, including the lead organisations and potential sources of project funding.
- Regularly report back to the Parish Council on progress, issues arising and outcomes. (See role of the Bridging Co-ordinator under Roles and Relationships.)

Membership

- The Steering Group will be made up from a good cross-section of the community, including Parish Councillors nominated by the Parish Council.

Defining Roles

- At the first meeting, the Steering Group will elect a Chairperson, Secretary, and Finance Co-ordinator.
- Wherever possible the Steering Group will also elect a Communications Co-ordinator, a Volunteer Co-ordinator and a Bridging Co-ordinator.

Appendix 1

- Wherever possible all other members should have a specific role, to be agreed by the Steering Group. (For details see Roles & Relationships.)

Roles & Relationships

- Parish Council insurance will cover the previously agreed activities of the Steering Group and volunteers, but Steering Group members, in liaison with the Parish Clerk, need to ensure that terms of the insurance are not breached.
- A Bridging Co-ordinator may be appointed to liaise between the Steering Group and the Parish Council. Alternatively, Parish Councillors who are also members of the Steering Group, will act as a liaison between the two bodies and provide a regular report to the Parish Council, for endorsement.
- The Parish Council will provide the opportunity for the endorsement of regular reports via its meeting agenda.
- Working Groups will carry out duties specified by the full Steering Group, which may include, but is not limited to:-
 - Data gathering
 - Consultations
 - Making recommendations
- The make-up and purpose of Working Groups will be regularly reviewed by the full Steering Group.
- It is expected that all Steering Group members abide by the principles and practice of the Parish Council Code of Conduct including declarations of interest.

Meetings

- The Steering Group shall normally meet monthly (but every two months as a minimum), or as may be required.
- At least three clear days' notice of meetings shall be sent to members via the communication method agreed with, and appropriate to, each individual member.
- Whenever possible, notices of meetings should detail the matters to be discussed.
- The Secretary shall keep a record of meetings, and circulate notes to Steering Group members and the Parish Council in a timely fashion. The latter will publicise the notes via their usual methods.
- It is recommended that an annual rolling schedule of meetings is set in place, preferably at the first meeting of the Steering Group and made available to the public via notice boards/websites.
- All meetings should be open to the public.
- Copies of the Parish Council's Code of Conduct will be available at all Neighbourhood Planning meetings.

Appendix 1

Working Groups

- The Steering Group may establish such Working Groups as it considers necessary to carry out the functions specified by the Steering Group.
- Each Working Group should have a lead person.

Finance

- All grants and funding will be applied for and held by the Parish Council, who will ring-fence the funds for Neighbourhood Development Plan purposes only.
- Notification of all planned expenditure will be given to the Parish Council before actual costs are incurred.
- The Finance Co-ordinator shall keep a clear record of expenditure supported by receipted invoices and will regularly review and update the budget in liaison with the Parish Clerk.
- The Finance Co-ordinator in partnership with the Parish Clerk, will draw up and agree with the Steering Group procedures for volunteers who wish to claim expenses.
- The Finance Co-ordinator will report back to the Steering Group and the Parish Council on planned and actual expenditure for the project.
- Invoices will be made out in the name of the Parish Council who will pay them at their next scheduled Parish Council meeting.
- Members of the community who are involved as volunteers with any of the Working Groups may claim back any previously agreed expenditure that was necessarily incurred during the process of producing the Neighbourhood Development Plan. This includes, but is not limited to, postage, stationery, telephone calls and travel costs.

Dissolving the Steering Group

- At the conclusion of the Neighbourhood Development Plan project the Parish Council and Steering Group should discuss the future working of the Steering Group. If the Steering Group wishes to dissolve it must notify the Parish Council.

Neighbourhood Planning guidance notes available:

Deciding to produce a Neighbourhood Development Plan

1. Which is the right tool for your parish
2. What is a Neighbourhood Development Plan
3. Getting started
4. A guide to procedures
5. Funding

Plan Production

6. Developing a Vision and Objectives
7. Generating options
8. Writing planning policies
9. Environmental Assessment
10. Evidence base and information requirements
11. Implementation and Monitoring
12. Best practice community engagement techniques
13. Statutory consultees
14. Writing a consultation statement
15. Planning and other legislation
16. Web enabling your plan
17. Using OS based mapping
18. Glossary of planning terms

Topics

19. Sustainable Water Management in Herefordshire
20. Guide to settlement boundaries
21. Guide to site assessment and choosing allocation sites
22. Meeting your housing requirements
23. Conservation issues
24. Recreational areas
25. Renewable energy
26. Transport issues
27. Community Infrastructure Levy

Additional Guidance

28. Setting up a steering group
29. Creating a questionnaire
30. Community facilities
31. Conformity with the Local Plan (Core Strategy)
32. Examinations of Neighbourhood Development Plans
33. Guide to Neighbourhood Development Plan Referendums
34. Tourism
35. Basic Conditions
36. Your plan - Contributing to sustainable development