



Neighbourhood Planning Constitution and structure for a neighbourhood planning steering group



Introduction

The legislation¹ behind Neighbourhood Planning defines who can undertake a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) on behalf of the community.

Good management is key to the delivery of a meaningful NDP and ensuring that you have a range of people with a good mix of skills to sit on the Steering Group and in various task or theme groups should ensure that your plan has the best chance of success. This guidance provides information on the organisation and structure of groups supporting your NDP, and the types of skills that will be useful.

The Qualifying Body

Where there is a town or parish council, they will always be the qualifying body that will take forward a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) (see guide note 'The Qualifying Body'). The qualifying body has formal responsibility for:

- ☐ submitting a proposal to Cornwall Council to initiate the process of preparing an NDP;
- ☐ submitting the draft NDP to Cornwall Council, together with the 'Basic Conditions Statement', 'Consultation Statement' and other supporting documents (if required);
- ☐ agreeing with Cornwall Council on the appointment of an independent examiner (who will check the NDP and recommend if it should proceed to a referendum).

The qualifying body is also responsible for submitting formal proposals to Cornwall Council to make Neighbourhood Development Orders and/or Community Right to Build Orders.

Most town and parish councils will usually establish a Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group that will be responsible for leading the process and developing the plan. The relationship between the town or parish council and the steering group should be set out in published terms of reference.

The Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group

Membership of the neighbourhood planning steering group will feature current local town or parish councillor's but it will also be important to include representatives of the wider local community who can bring value to the project. The selection of members should reflect different sectors of the community and the range of skills, knowledge and experience that will be required to develop the NDP. Where possible, you should try and ensure that the group is demographically representative of your community, with a

Neighbourhood Planning Constitution and structure for a neighbourhood planning steering group **March 2021**



Neighbourhood Planning Constitution and structure for a neighbourhood planning steering group

range of ages and backgrounds.

Typical membership and representation might include:

- ☐ Parish Councillor's representing the council's different interests, e.g. planning, environment, leisure, transport, finance and resources etc.;
- ☐ Local residents;

¹ Part 2 of Schedule 9 to the Localism Act 2011



Neighbourhood Planning Constitution and structure for a neighbourhood planning steering group



- ☐ Representatives of local community organisations;
- ☐ Local business owners.

The more representative the neighbourhood planning steering group is of the local community, the better the plan is likely to be. However, it is important to recognise that too large a group may be difficult to manage effectively. An ideal size for the team is probably around nine members. Additional members of the community with specific skills may be co-opted at a later date if they are likely to bring additional benefits to the project.

Terms of reference

The steering group should have agreed terms of reference which should be approved by a meeting of the town or parish council. There is a steering group sample terms of reference available on the Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit and you can find more examples online. These are good places to start but remember that the terms should be tailored to reflect the specific relationship between your group and the town or parish council, including the degree of autonomy and budgetary control that the steering group has.

The neighbourhood planning steering group structure and resources

If you are thinking about preparing an NDP you will need to think about whether your group has the people and skills necessary to prepare a plan.

If you follow the steps set out in the neighbourhood planning toolkit and make use of assistance from Cornwall Council, it should not be necessary for your group to have special professional skills in order to prepare an NDP. However, your neighbourhood planning steering group must be able to fulfil some key functions to ensure that the work is done and decisions are made and recorded. There needs to be:

- ☐ someone responsible for coordinating and managing the process and who is willing to act as the main point of contact for the neighbourhood planning steering group (chair/project manager);
- ☐ someone who makes records of the meetings you have, decisions that are made and actions to be taken (secretary);
- ☐ someone who keeps a track of any money that you receive and spend to make sure that the finances are in order and give confidence that money is not being wasted or misspent (treasurer);
- ☐ a group of people who the town/parish council and/or the wider community



Neighbourhood Planning **Constitution and structure for a neighbourhood planning steering group**

have given the authority to make key decisions in the neighbourhood planning process on their behalf (neighbourhood planning steering group).

There may also be other people you can call on to help in preparing the plan. There are lots of ways that you can organise people to do the work. However, it can work well if you create task groups that are tasked with looking at certain themes. It makes sense to have task groups that cover the three roles of planning which are:



Neighbourhood Planning Constitution and structure for a neighbourhood planning steering group



- ☐ an economic role – this means providing the land and infrastructure necessary to create jobs and contribute to a vibrant economy;
- ☐ a social role – this means ensuring the housing, services and facilities are in place to meet the needs of the community;
- ☐ an environmental role – this means protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment and ensuring that future generations can benefit from the same, or better, quality of environment as enjoyed by the current generation.

You may feel that some issues / tasks are more complex and require a working group all to themselves. This may be true of housing issues or where your plan seeks to allocate specific sites for planning. The way that you set up your working groups is a matter for your steering group to decide although we are happy to offer advice.

Each task group might prepare information and develop recommendations for a particular theme, e.g. environment. To bring together the recommendations of the task groups and start to develop policies you may want to form another policy development working group or alternatively this could be done by the neighbourhood planning steering group. Cornwall Council's Neighbourhood Planning Team is happy to help groups to develop and write their policies.

Checklist of useful skills

Producing a neighbourhood plan can be a challenging prospect. The plan can potentially cover a wide range of topics. It does not necessarily require expert or professional advice. The plan will be better if people in the community undertake as much of the work as possible. However, there will be people in your community that have skills and experience (see below) that will be useful and it can be valuable to try to involve them. In most relatively small communities' Parish Councils tend to have a good idea of what skills people in their communities have and there is nothing to be lost in asking people to be involved directly.

A limited amount of help and advice is available free of charge (e.g. from Cornwall Council, rural community councils or statutory bodies with a duty to provide some advice etc.) and if you have access to funding you may wish to buy in expertise.

Relevant skills and experience that may be useful to your steering group

- ☐ Project management;
- ☐ Planning e.g. general familiarity with the planning system, development plan documents, writing policies etc.;



Neighbourhood Planning Constitution and structure for a neighbourhood planning steering group

- ☐ Community engagement and communication e.g. understanding community engagement processes and methods, leadership, motivation and communication skills;
- ☐ Marketing, promotion and consultation e.g. designing leaflets, promotional material, questionnaires and surveys;
- ☐ Funding and delivery e.g. sources of funding, grant/funding applications, fund-raising;



Neighbourhood Planning Constitution and structure for a neighbourhood planning steering group



- ☒ Writing, editorial, graphic design e.g. report writing, editing/proofing, design of reports, maps, plans and other graphics;
- ☒ Computers and information technology e.g. word-processing, spreadsheets, managing website, social media, web-based information;

- ☒ Expertise in specific topic areas, e.g.
 - Population and demographics
 - Business and economic development
 - Housing needs
 - Land and property markets
 - Transport
 - Public services (health/care, education, crime, recycling etc.)
 - Community services
 - Landscape
 - Wildlife and biodiversity
 - Archaeology and local history
 - Architecture and urban design
 - Energy infrastructure
 - Communications infrastructure
 - Sustainability.