

STEP 2

ESTABLISHING THE STEERING GROUP



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WHAT IS A STEERING GROUP?

A steering group can be made up of between eight and fifteen people from within the community which is conducting the Parish Plan process. The group should be a representative cross section from the community and should include a wide variety of residents such as Parish Councillors (maximum three!), village hall committee member, representatives from local groups / clubs / societies, the local vicar, the Head Teacher of the local school or school governor, business owners (shop / pub), as well as local residents. You also need to try to have a spread of age groups, interests and different residential areas and including young mothers, families, the elderly, disabled, young people, a resident from a new estate or other housing that is on the fringe of the community, thus ensuring as inclusive a selection as possible from all backgrounds.

Primarily the steering group has the responsibility of overseeing, co-ordinating and leading the entire Parish Plan process. Above all, the steering group needs to have a firm commitment to ensuring that consultation is conducted in such a way that it involves all community members, especially those who may be thought of as 'socially excluded'. The steering group must also have a strong desire to see that actions actually occur, rather than obtaining the views of the community, producing a glossy report and then doing nothing.

WHAT DOES A STEERING GROUP DO?

- Raises awareness about the process and gets people involved
- Establishes links with the County, Unitary and District Councils and strategic bodies
- Publicises the action plan process
- Sets objectives and a timescale and sticks to it
- Schedules tasks and activities - determines who does what at an early stage
- Researches and discovers necessary resources, including people
- Involves people with a range of skills, experience and knowledge
- Plans the project activities and determines the costs involved
- Supports and co-ordinates the work and efforts of those connected to the project
- Monitors progress and continuously feeds back progress to the community
- Provides regular updates on the progress of the Parish Plan to the Parish Council
- Promotes positives and remedies negatives
- Initiates each new phase
- Has an eye for detail
- Generates creative ideas and solutions to problems
- Arranges and launches the final report
- Implements ideas and does actual tasks



The steering group will manage the production of the plan but need not do all the work. You can establish working groups to investigate specific topics or issues that are of interest to the community e.g. housing, younger people, or based on tasks such as communication, IT / computing or recruiting volunteers. These groups can be established either now or when draft plan is being formulated. See *Terms of Reference Resource sheet 2/2*.

HOW DO WE SET UP THE STEERING GROUP?

After the open day event, or whatever activity you have undertaken to get started, the initial group of councillors or residents call a meeting open to all, but with invitees from the main organisations and groups such as the village hall, youth club, school, church, allotments etc and any other known activists. Most importantly however the list should include those who stated an interest at the event you held. One of the objectives of carrying out the Plan is to encourage a wider participation by residents in community activities.

The objective of the meeting would be to establish a representative steering group from the people present together with a chairperson. This can be done by part choosing, part volunteering (and part election if required). Any gaps in the representation can be filled with co-opted people at a later stage. Ideally the chair should not be a Parish or Town Councillor so that the plan can be seen to be delivered and owned by the community. Ensure those that are not on the steering group will still assist in activities such as delivering questionnaires, help with publicity etc.

This meeting is important as it really establishes whether the community has the will, the enthusiasm and more importantly sufficient people willing to give time to undertake a Parish Plan

SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AS A STEERING GROUP

- What is the overall purpose of the Action Plan?
- What is the scope?
- What do you want to achieve?
- How much time can each member of the group commit to the process?
- In what ways can community views be obtained?
- How to ensure continued support and commitment from the community as a whole?
- How to develop a programme of work to meet the objectives?
- If you have a number of settlements in your parish consider how the steering group reflects this.

Many communities have found it useful to adopt a written constitution for the steering committee. It helps give a direction and focus to the process, and reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings. See *Model Constitution Resource sheet 2/1* for details. This is put forward as a suggestion, so please feel free to adapt it to your needs:

At the end of this stage you need to have:

- A representative steering group with a chair, secretary, treasurer, publicity officer and a volunteering co-ordinator
- A constitution if required
- A list of other volunteers to help with tasks at a later stage
- A steering group member nominated to act as communication co-ordinator with the community and public bodies.



STEP 2**ESTABLISHING THE STEERING GROUP****STEERING GROUP MODEL CONSTITUTION**

Here is an example of a constitution you could use, which can be adapted to meet local circumstances.

Name

The name of the organisation shall be the (name) Parish Plan Steering Committee, hereafter referred to as the committee.

Purpose

The purpose of the committee shall be to work in partnership with the Parish Council to carry out the following tasks:-

1. Investigate and identify support for the Parish Plan
2. Identify sources of funding
3. Take responsibility for planning, budgeting and monitoring expenditure on the plan and report back to the Parish Council on these matters
4. Liaise with relevant authorities and organisations to make the plan as effective as possible
5. Identify ways of involving the whole community and gather the views and opinions of as many groups and organisations in the community as possible
6. Determine the types of survey and information gathering to be used
7. Be responsible for the analysis of the survey, the production and distribution of the final report
8. Identify priorities and timescale for local action in the action plan including lead organisations and potential sources of project funding
9. To report back to the Parish Council on progress, issues arising and outcomes from the exercise

Membership

- The committee will include up to 15 members.
- No more than three of these members will be members of the Parish Council.
- The committee may co-opt additional members at its discretion, so long as the total number of co-opted members does not exceed the number of elected members.
- A person shall cease to be a member of the committee having notified the chair or secretary in writing of his or her wish to resign.

Officers

At the first meeting the committee will elect: a chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer, a publicity officer and a volunteer coordinator. All other committee members should have a specific role, to be agreed by the committee

Meetings

- The committee shall meet every two months as a minimum, or as may be required.
- At least five clear days notice of meetings shall be given to members by written notices left at, or sent by post to the member's last known address. All notices of committee meetings must detail the matters to be discussed.
- Every matter shall be determined by a majority of votes of the committee members present and voting. In the case of equality of votes, the chair of the meeting shall have a casting vote.
- The committee may decide the quorum necessary to transact business - with a minimum of five members.
- The secretary shall keep a record of meetings in a minute book, and circulate minutes to members of the committee not more than 14 days after each meeting.

Working groups

- The committee may appoint such working groups, as it considers necessary to carry out the functions specified by the committee. Each working group should have a nominated chair, but this person does not have to become a member of the steering committee.
- Working groups do not have the power to authorize expenditure on behalf of the committee.
- Working groups will be bound by the terms of reference set out for them by the steering group

Finance

- The treasurer shall keep a clear record of expenditure, where necessary, supported by receipted invoices.
- Members of the community who are involved as volunteers with any of the working groups may claim back any expenditure that was necessarily incurred during the process of producing the Parish Plan. This could include postage and stationary, telephone calls, travel costs, childcare costs.
- The treasurer will draw up and agree with the committee procedures for volunteers who wish to claim expenses and the rates they may claim.
- The treasurer will report back to the committee and the Parish Council on planned and actual expenditure for the project, and liaise with the parish clerk to set up a petty cash system and enable cash withdrawals and payment of invoices to be made as required.

Changes to the constitution

- This constitution may be altered and additional clauses may be added with the consent of two-thirds of the committee present.

Dissolution of the committee

- Upon dissolution of the committee any remaining funds shall be disposed of by the committee, in accordance with the decisions reached at an Extraordinary Meeting open to the public in the area of benefit called for that purpose. No individual member of the committee shall benefit from the dispersal.
- The return of any unused funding given as grants to the committee may need to be considered if this was part of the condition of the grant.

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TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR WORKING GROUPS

If your steering committee decides to divide the work among smaller working groups, you may decide to agree 'terms of reference' for those groups. This will ensure participants understand what they are being asked to do and the limits to their powers. Set out below is an example that you may like to use as a model.

(NAME) PARISH PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE: TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR WORKING GROUPS

The purpose of each working group is to assist the parish plan steering committee (PPSC) to prepare an action plan for the community. Each working group will tackle a specific issue, or set of issues, or the needs and opportunities facing a specific group of people within the community.

Each working group should:

1. Clearly set out its purpose eg. " to help young people (under 18 years) in the community identify their needs, ideas and concerns and to develop an action plan to meet these needs."
2. Outline how it will gather information and carry out consultations.
3. Set out the timescale and estimated costs of gathering information and carrying out consultations.
4. Produce a short action plan setting out:
 - What is proposed?
 - Why the action is needed
 - Who will be responsible for taking the action?
 - When will the action be taken forward?
 - How the action will be implemented and how much it will cost?
5. The working group must be able to demonstrate that projects it has identified have the support of the local community and show that they have, where relevant, discussed projects with other organisations who will be able to assist in carrying out the action.
6. Each working group will appoint at least one, but preferably two members, to attend the regular PPSC meetings (those persons may already be members of the PPSC).
7. Each working group will be responsible for organising its own meetings and must provide a summary progress report to the PPSC meetings.
8. Financial expenditure in excess of £50 must be approved by the PPSC. Receipted expenses for reimbursement should be passed to the steering group treasurer on a monthly basis with reasons for the expenditure clearly given.