

STEP 2

ESTABLISHING THE STEERING GROUP



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.

