

North Hinksey Parish Neighbourhood Plan

Minutes of Steering Group meeting on 18th March 2015.

Present:

David Kay (NHPC, Acting Secretary)
Andrew Pritchard (NHPC, Acting Chair)
Philip Stevens (parishioner, ex-SODC planner)
David Wyatt (HHRA)

David Potter (VOWHDC Neighbourhood Planning Coordinator)

Conflicts of Interest:

No conflicts of interest were declared.

1. Matters arising:

Matters arising from previous meetings will be covered at the next Steering Group meeting as this meeting was specifically devoted to gaining advice from David Potter in order to allow the Steering Group to move this process forward effectively.

2. David Potter introduction:

David Potter explained that he is contracted to the Vale rather than being a full time employee, and he is able to give neutral advice on the structure, process and content of Neighbourhood Plans with backup from the Vale Local Planning Team. He is currently working on 8 Neighbourhood Plans.

3. Consultants:

The advice on consultants is not to employ one until you really know where the Neighbourhood Plan is heading. They are more likely to be useful in later stages of the process, in particular in providing expert knowledge on specialist topics and in ensuring that the final Plan is correctly written up to meet legislative requirements. Make the most of local knowledge and expertise where it exists.

4. Ownership of the Neighbourhood Plan:

It is important that NHPC 'own' the Neighbourhood Plan as they ultimately fund it and publish it. There should be NHPC Councillors in the Steering Group but they should not dominate it (the current level of 2 Councillors is okay). There is no reason why the Chair of the Steering Group shouldn't be an NHPC Councillor, but it is critical that the Chair is the right individual to drive the project forward effectively. It is also equally important that the Steering Group as a whole, plus individuals working within Working Groups feel that the NHPC aren't trying to unduly influence the Neighbourhood Plan process without having the necessary detailed knowledge.

5. Financial Control:

Funding is up front, with the grant paid to NHPC. It should be in the range £10k to £15k based on the Local Plan settlement hierarchy. The Steering Group needs to agree with NHPC how expenditure is authorised. One possibility is for minor expenditure up to an agreed level to be allowed without referral to NHPC, but higher levels of expenditure would require authorisation via a vote at an NHPC meeting.

6. Transport:

A complicated topic, especially as the A34 is controlled by the Highways Agency (N.B. sometimes the Highways Agency actually have more money available for funding projects in comparison to the County Council). A County Council transport expert (probably a Transport Engineer) could be asked along to discuss transport in the context of Neighbourhood Plans with the Steering Group and a Transport Working Group.

7. Working Groups general principles:

- They should only have a few members.
- Topics for them to handle will probably match with section headings in the final Neighbourhood Plan and should be based around groupings of identified important local issues.
- Topics typically include Housing, Infrastructure, Employment and Transport, however they might have less obvious names such as Green Spaces, or Urban Design and Social Issues – choose ones that work for the local area.
- Gaining information for the database could be carried out within these ‘topics’ Working Groups or could be obtained by a separate second series of Working Groups operating concurrently.
- Working Group meetings do not need to be fully minuted, however notes from the meetings must include clear records of action points and decisions. Working Group Chairs will report back to the Steering Group, and subsequently NHPC representatives on the Steering Group report back to NHPC with formal minutes recording important decisions in both of these cases.
- Often the Chairs of Working Groups are also members of the Steering Group. An alternative is to invite Chairs of Working Groups to Steering Group meetings to report back and discuss matters without them being voting members of the Steering Group.
- It is important that Working Group members feel that their input is being used appropriately in the process and that they have some say in the shape of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan whilst ensuring that the Steering Group maintains overall control of the project.
- Working Groups should initially set clear objectives on issues within their remit. For example within housing one appropriate objective might be to identify ‘what is an appropriate level of housing?’
- Responses to questions 5 and 6 in the questionnaire should be considered by all Working Groups as part of the process.

8. Setting up Working Groups:

A possible event to launch Working Groups might involve inviting all volunteers (but not other members of the public) together with Steering Group members and David Potter. After an introduction to the process and the Working Group topics there could be a table assigned to each where volunteers could find out more about that topic before choosing which Working Group to join, if any. Tables could be manned by one or two knowledgeable members of the Steering Group and/or a few pre-assigned volunteers with known specific interests and/or knowledge of that topic. One possible problem is the large number of potential Working Group members vs. the limited number of Working Groups and the need to keep them at a manageable size. Another potential problem is the possibility of some heavily oversubscribed Working Groups and other 'unpopular' ones – who makes the final decision on which Working Group volunteers end up in, and on what basis?

9. Overlapping / interlinked issues:

It is important to clearly identify and understand the many areas within planning where topics / issues overlap and impact on each other and to take account of this within the Neighbourhood Plan. N.B. Sometimes seemingly less important topics can have a stronger influence on an issue that seemingly more important ones (e.g. the requirement for better infrastructure driving appropriate levels of housing more strongly than input from a Housing Working Group).

9. Non-planning issues and 'policies' vs. 'projects':

Non-planning issues can be included in a Neighbourhood Plan if handled appropriately, and don't necessarily need to end up in a supplementary document. Neighbourhood Plans usually include a mixture of policies and projects. Policies have legislative weight in the formal planning process, whilst projects do not. Projects are, however, issues that the community has identified as important and that they wish to resolve through appropriate channels in order to end up in the better world that the Neighbourhood Plan as a whole is aiming towards. Seemingly non-planning issues can be included within projects, but can also be linked with a formal planning policy. For example a policy requiring major developments to have a specific level of design and finish might be followed by descriptive notes including anti-graffiti paint as a requirement.

10. Next steps for Steering Group meeting on 25th March:

- Identify appropriate themes / topics for the Working Groups incorporating all of the issues identified in questionnaire responses.
- Decide whether to set up additional Working Groups to gather information for the supporting database, and if so what their remit would be.
- Identify the best method and timetable for setting up Working Groups.