

Neighbourhood Plan Forum Terms of Reference

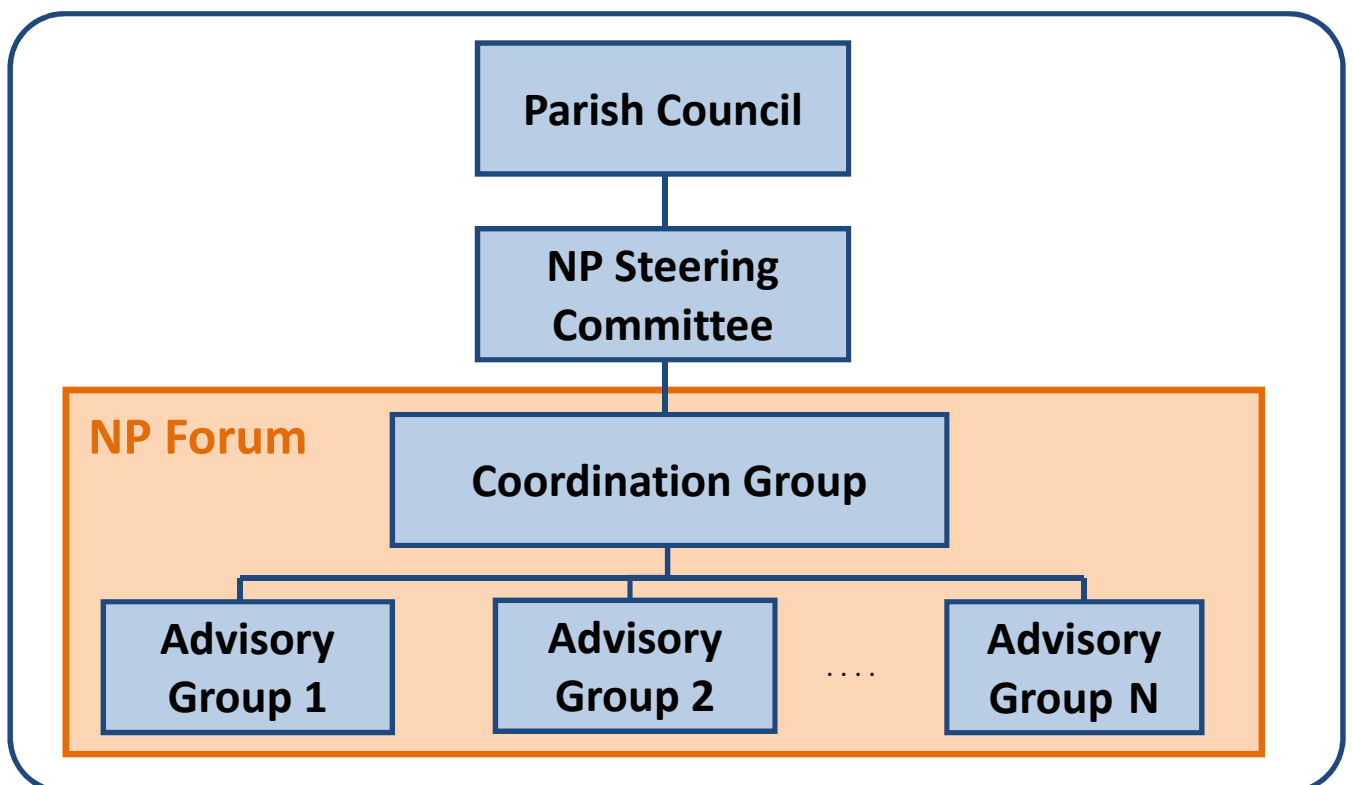
Objectives

To prepare elements of the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) to timescales set by the Steering Committee.

Context

Under the SODC's 2012 Core Strategy, Watlington has to accommodate 79 more houses in the period to 2027, but revisions currently being carried out by SODC to the Local Plan for the period to 2031 may increase this number significantly. It is in Watlington's interests to define where these additional homes are built and to ensure that the infrastructure needed to support this increase in size develops in parallel with the growth of the town. A Neighbourhood Development Plan as defined under the Localism Act 2011 Schedule 9 gives the community some ability to control where new development takes place. The Watlington Neighbourhood Plan should use these powers to ensure this development is acceptable to the community and preserves the scale and character of Watlington.

To ensure the community is well engaged with the NP, a community forum is used to carry out much of the information, gathering and reporting. This group, the NP Forum (NPF), will be responsible to the NP Steering Committee for preparation of the WNP. Their role is to manage aspects of the work needed to prepare the WNP, using one or more advisory groups to carry out the bulk of the data gathering and analysis work. This structure is illustrated in the diagram below.



The NP Forum is a community group formed independently of the Parish Council but responsible to the Parish Council for work needed to prepare the Watlington Neighbourhood Plan. It is expected that a number of separate groups will address specific topics or tasks as allocated to them by a Coordination Group drawn from the NPF. Parish councillors may be members of the Forum but to ensure independence of the Forum are expected not to be members of the Coordination Group.

The WNP will be produced in accordance with current legislation and procedural requirements in consultation with SODC.

Duties of NP Forum

The NPF Coordination Group (CG) will:

- plan and manage preparation of one or more draft versions of the WNP for review, finalisation and issue by the Steering Committee;
- create, brief and manage one or more advisory groups to develop specific aspects of the WNP. ;
- in consultation with the Steering Committee prepare and implement a communications plan to achieve, maintain and record a high level of community involvement using the existing database of contacts (held by the Steering Group) as a starting point;
- in consultation with the Steering Committee prepare and implement a project plan to ensure delivery of key deliverables on schedule;
- identify how specific tasks identified in the Steering Group's overall schedule can be addressed by the Forum and whether the necessary time scale can be met. The CG must also identify to the Steering Committee items that the Forum wishes to see included in the schedule as soon as the need for such items becomes evident;
- work with the Steering Committee to prepare monthly reports to Full Council based on meetings and correspondence with the NPF. These reports to detail progress against the plan for the preparation of the NP as well as key tasks for coming months;
- ensure a consistency of approach and content across the WNP documents prepared by the Forum, including resolution of differences in outputs between different advisory groups;
- develop with the Steering Committee a high standard of content and presentation of all public facing outputs, and ensure that this standard is maintained;
- submit all public facing documents to the Steering Committee for issue, based on the Steering Committee's review and assessment of their suitability, completeness and quality;
- identify to the Steering Committee likely or desirable future spending requirements together with justification of the estimated costs. This task must be completed by mid-November each year at the latest to allow time for preparation of the Council budget;

The NPF will:

- NPF must from within its members agree and elect a Coordination Group requiring at least 6 people for managing the work of Forum and advisory groups and to ensure it meets requirements of the Steering Committee;
- review the work already done on the WNP and identify areas where further development is needed. Some advisory groups might usefully be deployed during the review of existing work;

- maintain and add to the existing data repository developed for the work that has already been done on the WNP, following Steering Committee requirements;
- promote discussion and agreement of the interfaces and overlaps between tasks carried out by the Forum to achieve a consistency of approach and content across the WNP documents;
- develop a high standard of content and presentation of all public facing outputs, and ensure that this standard is maintained;
- ensure that all evidence or references used in developing the plan are traceable and available for public scrutiny and evaluate all existing and new data and ensure it is secure in case of challenge;
- prepare material for public consultations to be approved and organised by the Steering Committee, and to assist the Steering Committee as requested in consultation tasks;
- submit all public facing documents to the Steering Committee through the Coordination Group;
- will not collectively or individually have dialogue or meet with developers where this could be seen as presenting the views of the community;
- will not communicate with the media except through the Coordination Group and the Steering Committee. Members of the Forum may of course publically express individual opinions provided it is clear that these are their own views and not those of the project as a whole.

Governance

The Forum is accountable to the Steering Committee for work on the WNP and will report to this committee at least monthly. The Forum will act as an Advisory Group of the Parish Council and, as such, all members will be required to comply with the Code of Conduct and requirements for declaration of interests for parish councillors. Members who are not parish councillors will be required to complete a register of interests form and declare any conflicts of interest that might arise.

The Coordination Group will manage any advisory groups that they assign tasks to, including identification of members for the groups and ensuring they are adequately briefed on what is expected of them. The advisory groups will not take any final decisions on the content of the public facing documents, and the Coordination Group will be expected to ensure that the recommendations from advisory groups reflect the general interests of the community and are not unduly influenced by personal considerations.

Membership

Membership of the Forum is open to all residents of the parish and others who regularly use Watlington, and the Forum need not include any parish councillors. To avoid any conflict of interest, members of the Steering Committee may not also serve on the Coordination Group, although they may be members of one or more advisory groups.

The Parish Council or the Steering Committee may dissolve or alter membership of the Forum, and shall notify such a decision to the Forum at least one month before the date on which the change should take place.

The Forum at their first meeting in each year shall elect from their number a Chairman and Vice Chairman, and may define other roles and appoint members to them as necessary.

Conduct of business

The Forum is intended as a working group responsible for delivery of the WNP, and for this reason procedures will be kept as simple as possible while ensuring adequate accountability is maintained. It is expected that much of its work will not be conducted through general meetings, but the full Coordination Group should meet at least monthly. Notice of these general meetings will be posted on the Community Office notice board three clear days before each meeting giving the time and place of the meeting and its agenda. Also three clear days before the meeting a summons (i.e. the agenda) specifying the business to be transacted must be delivered by email or other convenient means as agreed to each member.

Meetings of the Coordination Group will be open to the public and the press who may, however, be excluded by resolution if publicity in a particular case would prejudice the public interest. A record of decisions or actions from these meetings should be prepared and circulated throughout the Forum. These records shall be kept open for the inspection of any member of the Parish Council or any residents.

The record of work done outside meetings will eventually be recorded as data or as documents for inclusion in the NP files. The Coordination Group should be kept informed of progress or difficulties by advisory groups or individuals working on specific topics to ensure that progress is maintained and important issues are not lost.

Accounts

The Forum will be responsible for ensuring that work is carried out within the agreed budget. The Forum will have no control of any budget, and any expenses they expect to incur must be agreed with the Steering Committee in advance.

Meetings

The Forum Coordination Group will meet at least monthly, and more frequently if necessary. If the Chairman is absent from any meeting, the Vice-Chairman shall preside. If neither is present, the members present shall choose one of their number to preside at that meeting. The Chairman of the Coordination Group may summon an additional meeting of the Coordination Group at any time.

Matters shall be determined by a simple majority of votes of members present and voting, but in the case of an equality of votes the chairman of the meeting shall have a second or casting vote. Voting shall be by show of hands, or, if at least two members so request, by signed ballot.

The Coordination Group shall decide on the number of members who shall form a quorum at meetings provided that the number of members who shall form a quorum shall not be less than 3.