

COLD ASH PARISH COUNCIL

(Constituted 4 December 1894)

Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group Terms of Reference

Name

The name of the organisation shall be the Cold Ash Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group.

Purpose

The main purpose of the Steering Group is to oversee the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan in order that this will then progress to Independent Examination and a successful community referendum and ultimately be adopted by West Berkshire Council to become planning policy.

The Steering Group will engage the local community, together with Cold Ash Parish Council, to ensure that the Plan is truly representative of the ambitions of Cold Ash Parish. The Group will maximise support for the approach taken in the Neighbourhood Plan by ensuring high levels of community engagement throughout the plan-making process.

In creating the Neighbourhood Plan the Steering Group shall carry out the following tasks:

- Identify sources of funding.
- Take responsibility for planning, budgeting and monitoring expenditure on the Neighbourhood Development Plan and report back to the Parish Council on these matters.
- Liaise with relevant authorities and organisations to make the Neighbourhood Development Plan as effective as possible.
- Identify ways of involving the whole community and gather the views and opinions of as many groups and organisations in the community as possible.
- Determine the types of surveys and information gathering to be used.

- Be responsible for the analysis of the surveys, as well as the production and the distribution of the final report.
- Identify priorities and timescales for local action in the Project Plan, including the lead organisations and potential sources of project funding.
- Regularly report back to the Parish Council for endorsement of decisions taken.
- Agree, subject to ratification by the Parish Council, a final submission version of the Cold Ash Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Steering Group Composition

The Steering Group shall consist of:

- A minimum of 2 Parish Councillors
- District Councillor
- Parishioners (a maximum of 4)

All members of the Steering Group have voting rights. The group may co-opt non-members on to the Steering group as necessary, but the co-opted members do not have voting rights.

A person shall cease to be a member of the Group having notified the chair or secretary of his or her wish to resign.

Defining Roles

The Steering Group shall comprise the following officers:

- Chairman – one of the Parish Councillors
- Secretary – either a parishioner or a Parish Councillor
- Finance Co-ordinator – one of the Parish Councillors
- Communications Officer – either a parishioner or a Parish Councillor

At the first meeting, the Steering Group will elect a member to each of the above roles.

Decision Making

The Steering Group has delegated authority from the Parish Council to deliver its plan-making functions up to and including publication of the Consultation Draft Plan.

The Group will report monthly to the Parish Council setting out progress on its work and request ratification of any decisions made.

The Parish Council will approve the Submission Draft Neighbourhood Development Plan prior to publication for consultation and independent examination.

The plan-making process remains the responsibility of the Parish Council as the qualifying body. All publications, consultation and community engagement exercises will be undertaken by or on behalf of the Parish Council with appropriate recognition of the Parish Council's position given in all communications associated with the project.

As the NDP progresses, it will become more important for the Parish Council, as the Qualifying Body, to take a more of an active role in the plan making process and navigating the regulatory stages.

Meetings

- The Steering Group shall normally meet monthly, or as may be required.
- At least three clear days' notice of meetings shall be sent to members via the communication method agreed with, and appropriate to, each individual member.
- The Secretary shall keep minutes of meetings and circulate the minutes to Steering Group members and the Parish Council in a timely fashion. The latter will publicise the minutes via their usual methods.
- Meetings shall not be open to the public to observe proceedings, as any public participation will take place through the Parish Council meetings
- Decisions made by the Steering Group should normally be by consensus at Steering Group meetings. Where a vote is required, each member shall have one vote. A minimum of 3 members shall be present where matters are presented for decisions to be taken. A simple majority vote will be required to support any motion. In the case of equality of votes the chairperson of the meeting shall have a casting vote.

Working Groups

- The Steering Group may establish working groups, made up of volunteers from the community to aid them in any Neighbourhood Plan related work.
- Each working group should have a lead person from the Steering Group.
- Members of the community will be encouraged to participate in the process at all stages.

Finance

- The Parish Council shall allocate a budget from Parish funds for the use of the Steering Group in the creation of the NDP. Further funding can be sought from the Parish Council at a later date, although it is expected that the Steering Group will also seek funding from grants.
- The Finance Co-ordinator shall keep a clear record of expenditure supported by receipted invoices and will submit a monthly finance report to the Parish Clerk detailing planned and actual expenditure for the project.
- The Finance Co-ordinator in partnership with the Parish Clerk, will draw up and agree with the Steering Group procedures for volunteers who wish to claim expenses.
- All grants and funding will be applied for through the Parish Council, who will ring-fence the funds for Neighbourhood Development Plan purposes only.
- Members of the community who are involved as volunteers with any of the Working Groups may claim back any previously agreed expenditure that was necessarily incurred during the process of producing the Neighbourhood Development Plan. This includes, but is not limited to, postage, stationery, telephone calls and travel costs.

Conduct

It is expected that all Steering Group members abide by the principles and practice of the Parish Council's Code of Conduct policy.

Steering Group members should complete a Declaration of Interests form on joining the group and they should declare an interest where there is a potential financial or pecuniary benefit to themselves, or their company / organisation arising from the decisions or recommendations of the group. Where there is a conflict of interest, members may not be able to vote on an issue and, depending on the conflict, may result in removal from membership of the Steering Group.

The Steering Group as a whole is accountable to the wider community for ensuring that the Plan reflects their collective expectations. The Steering Group will achieve this through applying the following principles:

- Be clear and open when their individual roles or interests are in conflict;
- Treat everyone with dignity, courtesy and respect regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or religion and belief; and
- Actively promote equality of access and opportunity.

Amendment of Terms of Reference

These Terms of Reference may be reviewed by the Parish Council during the life of the project following representations made by the Steering Group to the full Parish Council.

A review of the roles and responsibilities of the Steering Group and Parish Council was undertaken at the Cold Ash Parish Council meeting on 25th January 2022 and it was decided to adopt the following changes, to take the NDP forward:

Rationale for change

- Ideally, the migration of the NDP, from the Steering Group to the Parish Council, would be gradual, rather than a single step
- The NDP is now at the point where it is necessary for the Parish Council to get fully up to speed with its contents, as it will need to approve the plan prior to submission
- Several the activities being undertaken by the Steering Group, to date, are not strictly NDP activities and would fit better being managed by the Parish Council
- This would enable us to leverage the experience of past members of the Steering Group, without the overhead of them attending two further meetings per month

The Parish Council will:

- own Transport, Traffic and Travel initiatives, producing the necessary documentation to support the NDP
- own the Project List, producing the necessary documentation to support the NDP
- be brought up to speed on the NDP, so that each councillor has the knowledge to fully engage in its development and communication
- take over any work on site allocation, as the site assessment work is complete and documented and the NDP is now 'non-allocating'; so, any future work in this area will be on proposed strategic sites, which are outside of the scope of the NDP
- take a greater role in navigating the regulatory stages
- take an active role in supporting the communication plan
- include an NDP agenda item on all Parish Council meetings and that it be two-way reporting (note: this will require each councillor to provide an update on their agreed actions and the chair of the NDP to provide an update on NDP Steering Group actions)
- continue to manage its relationship with residents, to ensure the best possible climate for the referendum
- actively support any communication events

- be the ‘face of the NDP’

Dissolving the Steering Group

The Steering Group will be dissolved once its objectives have been attained and/or when at least two thirds of its members and the parish council, consider its services are no longer required.

The Steering Group will then dispose of any remaining funds held in accordance with any conditions imposed by the grant funders and in the best interests of Cold Ash Parish.