

Terms of Reference

Cirencester Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

1. Vision

To shape the future of Cirencester, through planned sustainable growth, which meets the social, economic and environmental needs of the community and adds value to Cirencester's unique culture and heritage.

2. Objective

- 2.1 The objective of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan is to add detail and complement existing policies relating to Cirencester within the Local Plan and introduce new policy on that which the Local Plan is silent; for example, there are no specific policies on out-of-centre retail or design policy for Cirencester. Also, there are no specific policies on Cirencester's community infrastructure, cultural offer, cycle routes or play areas and, perhaps most importantly, the proposed master plan covers only a small part of the town centre.
- 2.2 Such a Plan will bring important strategic and policy-making benefits, future-proofing the forward planning of Cirencester, taking into account the need to adapt to change in retail and the impact on the town of the Steadings development.

3. Purpose

- 3.1 The purpose of the Steering Group is to deliver a community led Neighbourhood Plan; through active involvement at various stages of its development, in reviewing consultations and local planning documents, preparing a sound evidence base and being involved in and overseeing the preparing of planning policies, signposting non-planning issues and responding to planning applications and consultations.
- 3.2 The Steering Group will also play an important part in the collaborative preparation and delivery of a town centre masterplan. This is in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Town Council and Cotswold District Council in agreeing to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan and Town Centre Masterplan in partnership.

4. The Qualifying Body

- 4.1 The Steering Group has been established by Cirencester Town Council, which is the qualifying body for the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan. Neighbourhood planning was introduced as a new power to communities by the Localism Act 2011 and the District Council, as the local planning authority, has a legal duty to support the development of Cirencester's neighbourhood plan.

- 4.2 The Steering Group will provide progress reports to the Town Council at each step of the process and will recommend the draft plan prior to consultation and submission to the local authority for independent examination.
- 4.3 The Town Council will be the account holding body for the budget and consider recommendations from the Steering Group.
- 4.4 Project and administrative support will be provided to the Steering Group, subject to the availability of resources; day to day liaison and contact with the Town Council shall be through the Town Council's CEO and progress overseen by the Planning Committee. A standing item will be included on the Planning Committee agenda for regular reporting and minutes of the Steering Group meetings will be circulated to all Councillors.

5. Role and Remit

The role and remit of the Steering Group, as approved by the Town Council, is to:

- develop a timetable and strategy for preparing the plan;
- develop aims and objectives for the plan;
- make recommendations regarding the use of the plan budget;
- prioritise funding needs within the allocated budget and oversee the appointment and work of specialist consultants or advisers;
- initiate, co-ordinate and organise community consultation and engagement;
- gather additional evidence about the geographical area covered by the plan and evidence to test proposed options and policies;
- use the evidence collected, including that from consultations and engagement, to prioritise and develop a plan;
- oversee the drafting and finalising of the plan;
- co-opt additional non-voting members onto the Steering Group for specified functions and/or task and finish periods of time;
- respond to planning consultations and applications which are relevant to policies being prepared in relation to the plan;
- advise the Town Council and Cotswold District Council on planning consultations and applications;
- advise and support the preparation of a town centre masterplan, in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Town Council and Cotswold District Council;
- establish thematic or sub-groups to undertake specific tasks.

6. Membership

- 6.1 The Steering Group consists of up to 12 community representatives, 3 nominees from the Town Council and 1 nominee from CDC, all with voting rights.
- 6.2 The Steering Group also includes the following non-voting advisory appointments:

Cirencester Town Council, Chief Executive Officer
Cotswold District Council, Forward Planning Manager
Chair of the Cirencester Town Council Climate Change Advisory Group

- 6.3 The work of the Group is supported by Cirencester Town Council's Project Officer, and also the Community Partnerships Officer at Cotswold District Council.

7. Appointments

- 7.1 In the event of any vacancy arising, the Steering Group will arrange for the vacancy to be filled as soon as is practicably possible.
- 7.2 The membership of the Steering Group shall include a broad range of people with interests, skills, knowledge and experience which will strengthen the community led process in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan; ensuring effective and far reaching engagement within the community.
- 7.3 Community representative appointments will be administered by the Steering Group in consultation with the Town Council's Corporate Group; expressions of interest will be invited via social media, word of mouth and other communication methods.
- 7.4 Ex-officio and advisory appointments are made by the respective Councils.

8. Decision Making

Decisions made by the Steering Group and recommendations to the Town Council are to be confirmed by a clear show of hands, by way of a simple majority; in the event of equal votes then the Chair shall have a casting vote. If the casting vote is not taken, then the matter being considered will be deferred to the next meeting. Decisions and recommendations can only be made if a majority of community representatives is present.

9. Quorum

The quorum for formal meetings of the Steering Group is one third of the appointed community representatives and ex-officio, with voting rights, members and shall not be less than 5. In the event of a formal meeting being inquorate, items for decision will be deferred and a written note of any discussion recorded for information.

10. Chair

- 10.1 The appointment of the Chair shall be made, each May, by the Steering Group; ex-officio members are not eligible for this role.
- 10.2 Due to the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan being a community-led process it is important that the role of Chair is undertaken by one of the community representatives, independent of the Town and District council.
- 10.3 The primary role of the Chair is to oversee meetings of the Steering Group, ensuring that the Steering Group conducts its business within the terms of reference.
- 10.4 The Chair is the lead point of contact for the Steering Group and commits to fostering, in a positive and mutually beneficial way, the working relationship with the community representatives and that of the Steering Group with both the Town Council and District Council.

- 10.5 The Chair will also work alongside the CEO of the Town Council and the Project Officer through regular briefings to ensure that actions and decisions of the Steering Group are followed up in a timely manner and to oversee the delivery of the project plan.

11. Meetings of the Steering Group

- 11.1 Meetings of the Steering Group will be convened on a regular basis and no less frequently than monthly.
- 11.2 The Group will ensure that arrangements are in place to effectively engage with the public and provide access to minutes and information in a timely manner.
- 11.3 To ensure that as many people as possible are able to participate in the meeting, the dates and times will be scheduled in advance.
- 11.4 The agenda will be prepared and dispatched by the Project Officer in consultation with the CEO of the Town Council and the Chair of the Steering Group.
- 11.5 The agenda will be dispatched by e-mail to the Steering Group at least two clear working days in advance of the meeting.
- 11.6 Agendas and minutes of all meetings will be made available on-line for the public via <https://cirencesternp.org/>
- 11.7 Draft Minutes will be circulated following each meeting after approval by the Chair, along with a note of arising actions and progress.
- 11.8 In the absence of the Chair, the Steering Group shall appoint a community representative to chair the respective meeting.

12. Code of Conduct

In the same way that local councils are required to adopt a code of conduct, which sets out the rules governing the behaviour of elected members, it is important that these guiding principles are also adopted by the Steering Group.

The code of conduct seeks to ensure that members observe the highest standards of conduct in their representative civic role under seven guiding principles:

Selflessness - Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity - Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity - In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability - Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness - Holders of public office should be as open as possible about the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty - Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership - Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership, and by example, and should act in a way that secures or preserves public confidence.

The code of conduct has recently been reviewed and a new national model code has been prepared and endorsed. It was adopted by the Town Council on the 8th June 2021, alongside an update to the Council's Standing Orders:

Whilst the code of conduct applies to elected and co-opted Councillors in respect of their role as Councillors, and any individual co-opted with voting rights by the Council on to a committee, all other community-led, ex-officio and co-opted appointees are expected to comply with the Town Council's code of conduct. In the event of an alleged breach of the code, effective from June 2021, and formal complaint through the CEO/Proper Officer, the matter will be considered for referring to the Personnel Group and upon recommendation to the Council could lead to the community-led, ex-officio and co-opted appointee ceasing in their role.

13. Declarations of Interest

Members of the Steering Group should declare an interest if any matter being discussed is directly related to them in a financial way or relates to them, a family member or friend, whereby the perception/reality is that a decision made on a policy position could be of financial or other benefit.

14. Changes to the Terms of Reference

The Steering Group may recommend changes to the Terms of Reference for approval by the Town Council.

15. Dissolution of the Steering Group

15.1 The Steering Group shall be dissolved by the Town Council upon the formal adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan. The overall process is estimated to take a minimum of two years.

15.2 As at June 2021, the estimated date for submitting a final draft Plan to the District Council is Spring 2022, with an estimated referendum date and adoption being no sooner than late 2022/early 2023.

15.3 Upon dissolution of the Steering Group any unspent funds in the earmarked reserve shall be reallocated by the Town Council, for the benefit of the community, in accordance with Financial Regulations.

Updated: June 2021