

Report to Berwick Town Council on the progress of the ad-hoc Steering Group for the Berwick-upon-Tweed Neighbourhood Development Plan

Prepared for Berwick Town Council by Eric Goodyer 28th August 2015

1. Background

A meeting was held on Friday 21st August that was open to all members of the public to discuss how to proceed with preparation of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Neighbourhood Development Plan (BNDP). The meeting was supported and advised by David English the NCC lead for Neighbourhood Planning, who has supported numerous parish councils involved in neighbourhood planning across the County. This report contains feedback from that meeting, plus my own comments for consideration by Berwick Town Council.

The meeting discussed the structure and governance of the Steering Group; criteria for membership and how the consultation should be structured.

2. Structure & Governance

The power to prepare a neighbourhood plan lies with the Town Council. The content of any plan prepared should be endorsed by the Town Council prior to consultation with communities across the plan area and other stakeholders. A final version of the draft plan must be agreed by the Town Council prior to submission to the County Council who would then organise an independent examination. This ensures that only a plan that has the formal backing of the Town Council would be submitted for approval to the County Council.

The Steering Group's role will be to manage the day-to-day activity associated with preparing the Plan. This should include: managing public consultation and engagement; organising the collection of evidence; analysing evidence; drafting the plan; and analysing the responses made to publicity and consultation about the draft plan.. The Steering Group's role is strictly advisory. All their recommendations are to be presented to a full Berwick Town Council meeting for approval of a Draft Plan. The Draft Plan is then tested through examination by an external inspector, and is then subject to a local referendum. It can then be formally adopted by Northumberland County Council to bring it in to force.

It was agreed to recommend to Berwick Town Council that the Steering Group would consist of 7 Councillors, and 7 other Berwick residents. It was also agreed to recommend that our three County Councillors are invited to attend Steering Group Meetings, without voting rights.

RESOLUTION 1

Members are asked to agree the following Governance Arrangements for the Berwick Upon Tweed Neighbourhood Development Plan Steering Group. Hereafter known as the SG.

The SG consists of 7 Town Councillors and 7 other people who live within the agreed Plan

Area.

These 14 representatives will have voting powers to manage the public consultation, and evidence gathering process.

Our 3 County Councillors will be invited all SG meetings.

The purpose of SG meetings is to manage the preparation of the BNDP. Meetings will not be held in public.

The SG will have devolved authority to take decisions to progress the development of the plan, but all decisions taken will be reported back to Berwick Town Council by means of a written report.

The written report will be presented at least once every 3 months to a full meeting of Berwick Town Council. A verbal update may be presented to the Town Council at any other meeting.

Based on the outcome of consultation and engagement with communities and stakeholders, and on evidence collected to support the Plan as it emerges, the SG will prepare recommendations for draft planning policies to be included in the Plan to Berwick Town Council. The Town Council will have the final authority to endorse draft policies for consultation and to agree the draft Plan for submission to the County Council.

3. SG Criteria for Membership

It is extremely important that the Steering Group works quickly and effectively to steer what is a complex process with a plan to be delivered in a short-time scale. The SG needs the right mix of skills and commitment to succeed. A range of skills and experience are certainly needed, for example - local knowledge; consultation expertise; communications; understanding of the planning system including policy writing skills; problem solving; mediation; ability to work effectively in a group; experience of public engagement.

Put bluntly we need people who will work hard and well together, and bring a full range of their skills and expertise. Some expertise may be recognised by qualification, other by experience, all are equally valuable.

The recommendation therefore presented to you is that the Town Council seeks Expressions of Interest (EoI) from anyone who wishes to join the SG, to be accompanied with a personal statement as to how they will contribute to its work.

RESOLUTION 2

That Expressions of Interest be requested from anyone who lives within the plan area to join the SG. These Expressions of Interest should include a brief personal statement as why you wish to support to the SG.

All Expression of Interest are to be sent to the Town Clerk. The closing date for the SG will be October 15th 2015.

The Town Council will review the Expressions of Interest and appoint 14 member of the SG, for a period of 1 year, ensuring that the SG contains a wide range of skills, expertise and commitment to work together in an effective way.

3 Topic and Locality Working Groups

It was agreed that the NDP process needs to focus on a specific list of Topics. The initial SG meeting drew up a long-list of possible topics, these are to put out for public consultation. Based on feedback from the public engagement the SG will select the list of topics to be considered at this time. That recommendation will be submitted to the Town Council for approval.

Working Groups (WG) will be created to support the development of policies related to each topic.

We should also seek expressions of interest to join, and to run, WGs on behalf of SG. This will widen engagement and aid dissemination. I would propose that there is no limit to how big a WG is, or who can join them. Leaders of Working Groups can also be members of the Steering Group

It was agreed to recommend to the Town Council that public consultation should start as soon as is possible on the Key Topics that the NDP would consider.

The long list of Topics was suggested as follows

- Employment
- Retail
- Tourism
- Housing
- Sport & Recreation
- Culture & Heritage
- Transport
- Youth
- Education
- Health
- Environment
- Urban Design

These are suggested in order to assist in starting the public consultation process. Once the responses are in then a short list of topics will be selected by the SG and recommended to the Town Council.

The first task of the Steering Group will be to present a Vision Statement for the BNDP that will set out its Aims and Objectives.

RESOLUTION 3

That Berwick Town Council agree to open a public consultation on the topics to be covered by the BNDP, and request that the Steering Group should establish open Working Groups to advise on each of the topics.

RESOLUTION 4

The Berwick Town Council invite Expressions of Interest from community groups, 3rd sector organisations, business, and other interested residents to form Locality Working Groups to support the public consultation process.

That Expressions of Interest are sought from individuals, business and other organisations to form, operate or join a Topic WG.

These expressions of interest should include a brief personal statement as to why you wish to join the WG. Living within an area covered by a locality grants you automatic right to join

a Locality WG.

RESOLUTION 5

The progress of the Steering Group will be monitored by the Town Council, who have the power to dissolve the Steering Group by majority resolution.

Progress will be determined by an examination of the outputs against an agreed schedule of deliverables to be agreed at the quarterly report to the Town Council. The next full report will be during January 2016, and the required deliverables are as follows –

- 1) Appointment of the Steering Group**
- 2) Selection of the Topics**
- 3) Appointment of Working Groups for each Topic**
- 4) Preparation of a statement of the Aims & Objectives of the BNDP**

5 Equalities Considerations

To ensure the widest participation in the NDP development process all reasonable measures must be taken to ensure maximum engagement. This is to include seeking representation on the SG and WGs from individuals and organisations with a remit to address a specific equality issue. Input would be particularly welcome from groups with an interest in disabilities, older people and youth, as well as other disadvantaged groups.

6 Financial Considerations

The advice from NCC, and based on experience elsewhere, is that we should wait until we know the scope of the Plan before applying for funding to support the NDP development process.

An initial Expression of Interest has been submitted to DCLG to cover the costs of the first round of public consultation.