

Notes

There are very few rules about how councils are to go about making a neighbourhood development plan. The outcomes of the process are specified, and the fact that it is the parish council which must present ('make') the plan is specified, but not much else. Councils have gone about it in different ways – Hallow has decided to form an independent steering group.

Most parishes have used a steering group model because it gives the maximum amount of flexibility/freedom to the group about the manner in which it functions; it also allows members of the steering group to make decisions pertinent to the creation of a plan and to vote on measures under consideration. If it were a Parish Council 'owned/run' organisation only Parish Councillors would be able to vote and contribute to making decisions.

As Hallow's NDP Steering Group and the Parish Council are separate bodies; it therefore follows that lawfully the Steering Group cannot enjoy the privileges enjoyed by the Parish Council (e.g. right to commit the PC to expenditure; use website; use Parish Council titles; or noticeboard etc).

As the Hallow NDP Steering Group is seeking a web presence for its on-going use (and because as an independent body it is not able to use the PC site) the simple solution is for the Steering Group to set up a blog – before making the recommendation at the September meeting I checked my advice with CALC and David Clarke at MHDC who both confirmed that this would be an acceptable solution to meet the Steering Group's functional needs.

Hallow PC website contains links to parish organisations (e.g. Hallow Village Community Group and the Church) so a similar link could be set up to take enquirers to a steering group blog.

In line with the rules re NDP the Parish Council website will need to host the draft and final plan consultations – as the PC is the only lawful body which can put forward a neighbourhood plan they are the only body who can consult on draft and final plans. Before those stages are reached the PC will have need to 'approved/owned' them. In addition if the Steering Group wish to ask the PC to host their formal minutes on the website, this is permissible if the PC first resolves to approve the content of those minutes.

In the model Hallow has adopted the Parish is not involved in the day to day procedure of the NDP. Matters such as steering group related data protection, register of interests, publication of survey material, agendas etc are the responsibility of the Steering Group. All parishes that I am aware of have included a report from the 'NDP lead' at each PC meeting; not least because the PC is responsible for underwriting agreed costs and there is a need to show good governance and diligence in monitoring how public monies are spent.

It behoves a wise steering group to ensure that its activities are beyond reproach and cannot be called into question by third parties (e.g. a future disgruntled developer for example, or residents who might be opposed to a plan). The safeguards the steering group employ is a matter for its own deliberation; but there is wisdom in achieving transparency by mirroring the high standards imposed on Parish Councillors such as declarations of interest.