



SHIPSTON ON STOUR
NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN



Producing a Neighbourhood Plan

Scoping Report

Prepared for Shipston-on-Stour Town Council

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November 2012

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1. Background

1.1 The Localism Act 2011 introduced¹, amongst various planning changes, the opportunity for communities to take some responsibility for the development of planning policy in their locality through a Neighbourhood Plan. This empowerment, coupled with a share in the benefits of development through the Community Infrastructure Levy, can encourage community ownership of plans and their delivery. The Government aim is to help communities to become more active regarding: a) development that is more in line with local needs and provides greater public amenity; b) increased civic engagement; and c), more certainty for local residents and developers and other applicants for planning permission. Importantly Neighbourhood Plans will generally conform to the strategic aims and policies of the development plan for the local area. This is to ensure that the delivery of strategic infrastructure proposals is not compromised.

1.2 Regulations were published in April 2012², setting out the process for producing a Neighbourhood Plan; how such production will fit in with the ongoing policy aims and plan-making work of local planning authorities; and the material support by local planning authorities for communities preparing a Neighbourhood Plan. The Department for Communities and Local

Government [CLG] is funding guidance and support for Neighbourhood Plans through four nominated professional bodies, and covering the costs of the mandatory inputs from local planning authorities. A programme of CLG-supported Neighbourhood Plan 'front runners' has been active and guidance based on their experiences is becoming available.

¹ Assent November 2011

² Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012





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1.3 STC was alerted in late 2011 to the opportunity to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan, and this was explored. It was then apparent that the emerging Core Strategy needed to move forward before the strategic context would be suitably clear. A draft Core Strategy³ was published in February 2012. With the as-noted CLG March 2012 publication of the regulations, guidance and support arrangements, the timing is now right for a start. STC has lately resolved to make that start, subject to a positive reaction from the community at a 'launch event' on 24 October 2012.

1.4 Given the need for Neighbourhood Plans to be guided by 'top down' planning policy it is essential this is nationally and locally up-to-date and clear. Radically revised and streamlined Government planning guidance was issued earlier this year⁴ [National Planning Policy Framework - NPPF]. Progress by Stratford-on-Avon District Council [SDC] with an updated Local Development Framework [LDF], in particular the emerging Core Strategy [as now aligned with the NPPF], has by November 2012 reached the point, after due local consultation, where the stated vision and objectives are adequately defined for the purposes of taking forward a Neighbourhood Plan. The likely SDC programme for concluding the Core Strategy work suggests adoption in late 2013. That is quite good timing for parallel work, such that the resulting Neighbourhood Plan would converge with and add to the LDF the 'bottom-up' local view aligned with the 'top-down' strategic view. Thus if and when adopted the Neighbourhood Plan policies will carry significant weight when development proposals are in preparation and planning applications are being determined.

1.5 Section 4 covers the 24 October 2012 launch event actions and feedback. In brief the attendance was about 80 people, with a good level of approval to the usefulness and preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan. Importantly the requested feedback identified the important local issues the plan might address; and active help and participation in the plan-making was offered by a good number of those attending.

1.6 The research for this scoping report included dialogue with SDC planning⁵ and economic development officers⁶. This clarified the help and information that will be available, and the stages during the plan-making when SDC will be formally supporting the work as required by the regulations. It also demonstrated to SDC that a sound and professional approach is being taken by STC from the outset. There has also been contact with CLG about funding arrangements; and with their nominated support organisations in respect of the guidance and practical help that they can offer.

³ Stratford-on-Avon District Local Development Framework Draft Core Strategy February 2012

⁴ National Planning Policy Framework, Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2012

⁵ Meeting Stephen Miles + Fiona Blundell 01 August 2012

⁶ Emails and conversation Stephen Miles + Nancy Singleton 02 October 2012





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2. Statutory context

2.1 As noted there are published regulations setting out the legal requirements and formalities of Neighbourhood Plan production. The main points to note are a) that the required process mirrors [in a slightly streamlined form] what is done by a local planning authority when they prepare a development plan; and b) that there will be an independent test of the draft plan to check it is soundly based on evidence, that it conforms to the strategic policies of the Core Strategy, and that the community engagement has been thorough and effective.

2.2 A local planning authority is required to:

- Confirm the status of a proposed neighbourhood forum [if relevant]
- Confirm the geographical area of the proposed neighbourhood plan
- Provide expertise and advice to neighbourhood forums or parish councils
- Check legal conditions have been met
- Appoint an independent examiner with the consent of the parish council or neighbourhood forum
- Hold referendums
- Adopt neighbourhood plans where all the requirements have been met.

Where the promoters of a neighbourhood plan are able to demonstrate adequate local support for the proposed plan and the promoters are designated a 'qualifying body' the local planning authority has a duty to provide advice or assistance. This might cover good practice in plan-making, or whether the emerging proposals are in general conformity with the local plan and consistent with national policy and EU law. They also have a duty to provide practical support such as facilitating community engagement and helping with consultations with other public bodies. There is no duty on the local planning authority to provide financial assistance, but it may do so if it chooses.

2.3 What the above means in practice is that the neighbourhood plan-making process has to follow specified steps and be thorough, and proven as such. This will require suitable effort and dedication; and enough time has to be allowed to do things properly, and meet the required statutory periods for such as confirming the proposed geographical area.

2.4 In common with the production generally of development plans evidence must be provided to prove the community engagement has been appropriate and effective. A consultation statement will be submitted with the draft neighbourhood plan, and this document will be considered as part of the independent test.





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2.5 It may also be necessary, and it is certainly good practice, to apply a planning tool called 'sustainability appraisal' to the plan-making process, and to submit a report with the draft plan. If the draft plan, or options that have been considered, relate to development greater than that identified in the Core Strategy, such an appraisal is required. If the plan area includes certain designated areas of environmental significance there is also a similar requirement, an Appropriate Assessment. In any case these planning tools are well-established; and the Sustainability Appraisal is a simple method of evaluating and comparing the social, economic and environmental benefits of options and proposals. It will generally inform and assist the plan-making team.

2.6 The above noted requirements and good practice need to be included in the set of tasks involved, the time needed, and the costs. There is a need for further dialogue with the local planning authority so that their support intentions and capacity is clear. This scoping report therefore makes some assumptions about who respectively will do what, and why so. There is an ambiguity in the regulations and published guidance, in that communities are being encouraged to take on what is a challenging process, yet much support is required of local planning authorities currently pressed for capacity and resources. Also there is the point that you could insist that a local planning authority contributes a great deal, such as the engagement and good practice guidance: but that would shift the responsibility and actions away from the community. As ever there are grey areas.

3 Process

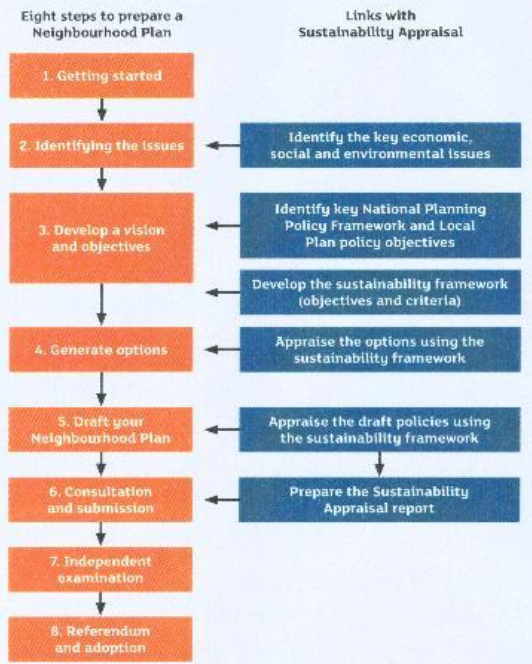
3.1 The following flow chart shows the key stages of the process. Steps 1 to 8 are used as the basis of a project plan, programme and budget, as set out in sections 6 and 7.





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3.1.1 Getting started at Stage 1⁷ involves the following tasks:

- Establishing that community support exists for the plan-making work and outcomes, and getting an initial view of the local concerns and issues and how people might contribute using various media and methods
- STC reviewing the outcome of the initial engagement, assessing this scoping report, and deciding to proceed or not
- STC asking the District Council [SDC] to advertise and confirm the proposed area of the plan
- Identifying a representative core team of community volunteers and allocate issues according to interest and experience
- Training and capacity building using a CLG nominated resource
- Sourcing, collating and making available a baseline information resource
- Establishing the project Steering Group, terms of reference, and meetings schedule
- Holding a volunteer core team meeting to confirm the key issues and focus of work
- Getting together the 'planning toolkit' to support the issues, vision and options work

3.1.2 The work then moves into stages 2 and 3 when the key economic, social and environmental issues are identified and examined; and an agreed vision and broad objectives are defined and written-up:

- Series of themed [e.g. economic development] community workshops or and/or other media to explore concerns and issues against the baseline information and strategic planning policy context
- Core team review of workshops outputs
- Produce a vision statement and issues report, publicise this, and seek wider community buy-in
- Prepare and issue the Sustainability Appraisal tool to the volunteer core team and train them
- Prepare the Consultation Statement report framework and start using it to record progress

3.1.4 Stage 4 takes the draft vision and issues, and considers a set of development options. Ideally there will be an agreed small number of options, and they will be well-defined:

- Further themed workshops using the same groups to examine options; then those groups present their findings and conclusions at a workshop combining all the groups
- Write-up the combined workshop outputs as a reasoned set of options
- Core team applies the Sustainability Appraisal tool to the emerging options and refines them
- Produce an Options report, including a recommended set of preferred Options;
- Publicise this report, and seek wider community buy-in
- Report overall progress to SDC

⁷ Recommended "workshop manual" by CPRE NALC 'How to shape where you live: a guide to neighbourhood planning' April 2012





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3.1.5 Stage 5 is when the draft Neighbourhood Plan is written. It will be a set of policies that will deliver the changes, such that the overall development vision for the town can be achieved. There will be precision and justification; with an emphasis on the realistic:

- Core team workshop to review community feedback on Options report and revise as required
- First draft Neighbourhood Plan written and circulated to core team and Steering Group
- Prepare a proposals map and implementation plan to accompany the draft plan
- Informal check by SDC on conformity with emerging Core Strategy
- Core team conducts a Sustainability Appraisal [SA] of the draft plan and issues a report

3.1.6 Stage 6 is the formal consultations step, conducted by SDC with STC input and support. The draft plan, plus the SA report and, if required, the habitats Appropriate Assessment report, will be publicised and put to the local community and 'statutory consultees' [e.g. the Environment Agency]:

- STC submits draft plan, SA and Consultation Statement to SDC
- SDC checks conformity with legal requirements
- SDC formally publicise submission of proposed Neighbourhood Plan, and collate feedback
- SDC and STC review draft plan and agree an appropriate independent examiner

3.1.7 Stage 7 is the independent examination. The purpose is to check the plan has due regard to national planning policies and the principles of sustainable development, generally conforms to the strategic policies in the SDC Core Strategy and if relevant similar plans for neighbouring areas, and meets the legal requirements of England and the EU. It is likely the examiner will wish to consider written representations, but a public hearing may be held depending on the nature of the issues and proposals, and the consultations responses:

- SDC sets up and hosts the examination
- Examiner issues a report with a recommendation [three options: proceed to referendum; amend then proceed; unfit]
- SDC considers the examiner's report and publishes the decision

3.1.8 The concluding Stage 8 is a local referendum, and if there is a simple majority vote in favour the draft plan is formally adopted.

- SDC organises and pays for the referendum
- Majority approval leads to adoption, with SDC publishing the plan and informing those consulted and making representations in Stage 6





4. Community and stakeholder support

4.1 STC decided to publicise to the local community their wish to create a Neighbourhood Plan. This took the form of a 'launch event'⁸ held on 24 October 2012 at the Townsend Hall. The event was held a) to ask the community if they thought preparing a Neighbourhood Plan was worthwhile; b) if they did, what locally were seen as the important concerns and issues; and c) whether people would volunteer their time and knowledge to help with the plan-making. The event consisted of a short presentation about Neighbourhood Plans: what is involved, the formalities, and the potential benefits. Prior to the event SDC and CLG had been sounded about respectively their support and Core Strategy progress, and the funding position. The information obtained was built into the presentation.

4.2 In response to ongoing local concerns about plans for an edge-of-town supermarket STC convened⁹ a facilitated community discussion, held at the High School on 24 September 2012. It was explained that a Neighbourhood Plan launch event would take place soon. The meeting, attended by about 100 people exposed issues and diverse community views about the perceived quality and affordability of the existing shops, and a concern about sustaining the vitality of the town centre. Clearly these issues would be considerations in a Neighbourhood Plan, and it was left that the meeting outcomes would be taken forward to the launch event.

4.3 The launch event was attended by about 80 people. There was overall a positive reaction to the opportunity for a Neighbourhood Plan, the benefits, and the effort and community support required. Feedback was requested about the important local issues as seen by those attending, and the willingness to help to produce a plan. One third of those attending completed feedback forms; and there was discussion at the event about many of the concerns. Offers of substantial help were received from 10 people.

4.3 The main local issues and concerns identified by the launch event are:

- *The need for a stronger local economy with local employment opportunities*
- *Whether or not significant additional housing is a good thing*
- *Meeting local affordable housing needs*
- *Improved infrastructure, particularly highways and traffic management including parking, and flood defences*
- *Conserving and sustaining the vitality, functionality and heritage value of the town centre*
- *Better social and welfare facilities [including healthcare, schools, youth facilities, needs of an ageing population]*
- *An improved environment, specifically recreational and public open space, and access to it*
- *Making the town more suited to local needs and sustaining those changes*

⁸ Refer to Forum and issued display boards (retained for display by STC)

⁹ Refer November 2012 Forum report





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4.4 This feedback is very helpful. For the plan-making work it means the community has identified a consistent and limited number of topics, so the effort can be focussed on what really is seen to matter. In terms of alignment with the emerging Core Strategy, and the published national planning guidance and priorities, there is an apparent good match of visions and objectives. In particular the published draft Core Strategy 'Vision'¹⁰ is:

To maintain and enhance the heritage and green environment of the District while building healthy, safe, informed and active communities who are able to enjoy local services and employment opportunities

This is expanded as a set of objectives¹¹ [no order of priority]:

- *Planning to meet the challenges of climate change*
- *Planning to protect the character of settlements and the countryside*
- *Planning to meet the District's heritage and distinctiveness*
- *Planning to promote and diversify the local economy*
- *Planning to provide for housing needs*
- *Planning to support the main commercial centres*
- *Planning to meet the need for improved infrastructure, community facilities and services*
- *Planning to increase the use of sustainable transport*

So the launch event feedback chimes with the above listed issues, which set out a strategic planning context for locally taking forward the plan-making.

Further, the local feedback suggests that the identified issues and consequent work on them can be grouped as follows:

- *Sustaining the **economic vitality and local employment** potential of the town, especially town centre shops and services*
- *Creating the right amount, types and tenures of **housing**, particularly affordable housing, **to meet local needs***
- ***Better infrastructure and social facilities** to match the needs of the community and local economy*
- *Conserving yet **making more useful the local environment** and heritage assets*

This implies four 'topic groups' can be set up to examine the issues in depth, and feed their conclusions into the plan-making. This will get to the heart of the expressed concerns; and is a manageable number.

¹⁰ Refer Section 3 February 2012 Draft Core Strategy

¹¹ Refer Section 4 Draft Core Strategy February 2012





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4.5 The offers of help received at the launch event match the above topics pretty well. Several of the respondents have specialist knowledge of interests in the identified subjects, so there is a basis for volunteer teams to examine the issues and channel the findings into the plan-making.

5. Resources: information and capacity

5.1 Information

5.1.1 The quantity, quality and availability of the essential background planning and technical information have been assessed. Overall the position looks very good. STC has over recent years produced a Town Plan including a significant input from the community by way of an in-depth questionnaire to gauge views about the town and future expectations. A town Design Guide was published in 2011.

5.1.2 The SDC-backed Stour Vision economic development initiative has been active over the last four years. This examined the facts and local aspirations for the wider area in and around the town, and reports were produced as a baseline for assessing bids for community projects. The legacy of that recent work is very useful and available, and SDC has confirmed it should be used. The emerging Core Strategy is based on an extensive raft of evidence in the form of in-depth reports on such matters as employment, housing land needs and supply, environmental quality, retail needs and provision and so forth. SDC has agreed that this information is available for use, with some help to access and interpret it. This will also bring into play information from Warwickshire County Council [WCC] and the Warwickshire Observatory. Much of this information is at the full District level, with some of it disaggregated to the level required, but not all of it. So there is interpretation work to do to make it fully meaningful at the local level. It is possible there will be a need for supplementary fact-finding if the disaggregated data is locally insubstantial: that is an early task, and a time and cost provision will be made.

5.1.3 There will also be local information and views available from some of the main local stakeholders, such as the Registered Social Landlords with current or planned housing stock in the town; those with a regulatory and practical role such as the Environment Agency; the owners and tenants of business units; and the town traders and services providers. An early task is to make contact and collate the resulting information. This will in some instances entail simple surveys, such as a questionnaire for the traders and services providers. A provision for the time and costs of this will be made.





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5.2 Capacity

5.2.1 'Capacity' in this context means the combined time, knowledge, and willingness-to-help of the required plan-making team. There are three components to that team: a) STC as sponsor and project director; b) the volunteer and paid advisors organising the information, process and writing-up the outcomes and plan; and c) the community volunteers, some already identified, who will be at the heart of the fact-finding, view-forming, and community engagement at the heart of the process. The duration of the plan-making is also a consideration, this should be assumed as up to 18 months overall.

5.2.2 The STC capacity seems sound enough, the role is an extension of normal STC business, and the use of the existing business and workspace facilities at New Clarke House has been offered. The volunteered services of Stephen Miles as project director and chair of the steering group [monthly meetings and reporting] is in place. See S8 for more about the STC role in terms of governance and project management.

5.2.3 The required support from advisors will be a combination of some local volunteer support; some assistance from STC [as stipulated in the regulations]; inputs on request from the CLG-funded professional organisations [e.g. Planning Aid]; and some STC funded local professional support. The first category [volunteer support] will include in-depth project management help from Stephen Miles, and Stephen will also be the lead writer of the emerging plan. The STC assistance will be in the form of a) baseline information and stakeholder network contacts; and b) the specified help with the mandatory tasks such as organising the examination of the draft plan. The CLG-funded help needs to be fully explored, and a decision taken by STC after further research as to which organisation(s) to use. They are pretty similar in terms of what they offer, it is mainly help with building the local capacity for collaborative plan-making, facilitating workshops and other events, and the availability of a nominated advisor to support the process and assure the quality of the work done. It seems to be a case of the more you ask, the more you get; so maximising this CLG-funded resource will be important.

5.2.4 There will be a requirement for STC to locally pay for some professional assistance to top-up what has been noted as volunteer or CLG-funded support. This assistance falls into three categories. There is a need to produce and submit documents [S3.1.6 refers] at key stages to STC to advertise the intentions, and later to prove the plan is sound regarding a) effective engagement, and b) proven sustainability performance. A time and cost provision is needed to cover this support. There will need to be local information gathering and research, to supplement the higher-level SDC information, and to find out the facts and views about such as property ownerships, local services and trading, etc. This work needs to be done professionally because it has to be proven as sound information, and such work is best done a step-removed from STC and professionals have the experience and impartiality to handle such work. The final category is the support for the ongoing production of issues reports, surveys documents, and regular communications and reporting via the STC and other media; and the set of emerging, draft and final documents. Account has been taken of the helpful existing STC staff and equipment, and this will be used, but there will likely be a need to supplement this.





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6 Project plan and programme

6.1 Project plan

6.1.1 An outline project plan is included at Figure 6.1(attached). This should be referenced to the process flow chart in S3.

6.1.2 Note that if endorsed by STC this outline will be expanded into a more complex plan using one of the established project management tools. That plan will be the basis of the project direction and management, and monthly reporting via the STC steering group.

6.2 Programme

6.2.1 Reference has been made to the protracted nature of the plan-making process. Overall, taking this through to an adopted plan over 15-18 months would be a good achievement. The recommendation is that 15 months from start [November 2012] to adoption [February 2014] is appropriate: this timing has sufficient momentum but is not rushed; it fits the practicalities of working around the main holiday periods; and it makes a fair assumption about the periods when STC will not be fully in control of the process, principally the times when SDC will be dealing with the formalities they will handle. To reduce the risk of a time over-run it is recommended that a draft detailed project plan is submitted at the outset of the process by STC to SDC so that the respective responsibilities are documented.

7. Costs and funding support

7.1 A preliminary budget is at Figure 7.1(attached). Note that this includes the cost of those items over and above:

- The time inputs of Stephen Miles and other community volunteers
- The inputs from SDC officers in meeting their statutory role and responsibilities
- The supporting professional inputs from a CLG-funded organisation
- The STC New Clarke House administrative and communications support and facilities

7.2 It must be stressed that the indicated costs are estimates to inform a preliminary budget. Various assumptions have been made about the likely amount and quantity of community volunteer time, knowledge and enthusiasm. That is the biggest variable. It will only become clear when the plan-making has started and the local network of participants is expanding.

7.3 What is clear, however, is that that CLG funding¹² is available. This happens in two ways:

- funding their nominee professional support organisations, providing on-demand help with the design, management and conduct of the community engagement parts of the process;
- SDC time and information support, mainly in respect of the statutory stages tasks such as advertising the STC intentions, and organising the independent examination of the draft plan.

¹² 29 August 2012 CLG press release of statement by then planning minister Greg Clarke





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With both these categories it is recommended, that as STC is taking a very professional, in-depth and informed 'DIY' approach, and is extensively using volunteer resources, the call on CLG-funded support in cash and kind will be relatively limited. But STC should maximise what is available for the professional support, to add expertise and 'best practice' to what is being done locally. With the CLG funding of SDC time STC should ask for part of that payment to be passed-on to be spent on the actual plan-making, this is reasonable as STC will be minimising the STC support role through the rigour and quality of what is done locally. CLG has confirmed¹³ that the up to £30k per project funding for local planning authority support is not 'ring fenced' and, in line with the published regulations, can be passed-on in all or part to qualifying community organisations.

8. Governance and project management

8.1 At the heart of community-based planning is the need for the lead organisation(s) to be professional, completely up-front, and open. As has been described, a draft Neighbourhood Plan will be independently examined, and the local planning authority and the examiner have to be convinced that the process has been fair, and is representative and based on solid evidence. Achieving this and demonstrating it requires some careful thought by STC.

8.2 The suggestion, which was aired at the 24 October launch event, is that STC is the 'sponsor' and process manager, and that to do this it sets up a steering group to meet regularly and openly. The suggested composition of the steering group was Stephen Miles chairing it, on an independent professional volunteer basis; STC representatives in respect of their Planning Group and Finance Group; and a District Councillor [might be both alternating their attendance]. Including a representative of the wider Stour Valley area has also been considered, so that the inter-relationships between the town and the surrounding area are recognised and prominent. It would be good if the 12 November STC meeting could consider and finalise the membership of the steering group, ensuring above all that it is both accepted by the wider community and accountably represents STC's role and responsibilities.

8.3 As noted the project management arrangements will be rigorous, and the responsibility of the STC steering group. One of the roles of the CLG-funded advisors will be to audit the project plan at regular intervals, and report to the project director so that progress and performance is suitably monitored. An important feature of the project management will be monthly reporting on an open basis such that the wider community is aware and informed. STC is invited to confirm this is acceptable as an approach.

¹³ Emails and conversation 29 October 2012 Stephen Miles + Angela Harrowing [CLG Decentralisation and Neighbourhood Planning Team]

