

Parish Council Update – May 2014

This Quarters Update is a summary of the report presented by members of the Parish Council to the Annual Parish Meeting held on May 21st 2014.

Normal Activities

- **Planning:-**
Comments have been provided on all new planning applications and we have also been monitoring any new developments, such as the placement of caravans in open countryside. We have also followed up that action on previous planning commitments has occurred.
- **Highways**
The Clerk and Councillors have been chasing the Council to carry out much needed repairs on many of the roads in the Parish and with the support of our local Councillor Philip Price, have had some success, although there is always more work to do. It is worth noting that the change of Herefordshire Council's contractor from Amey to Balfour Beatty has not gone entirely smoothly. However the Lengthman's Scheme continues with Mark Price undertaking excellent work throughout the Parish during a difficult winter.
- **Flooding**
It is proposed to establish a Flooding Working Group in the Village with local residents. Anyone interested in taking part should contact Tony Usher.
- **Mobile Phone Coverage**
Mobile Phone Operators have been contacted to try to secure improved coverage for the Parish, but we have received little encouragement from their replies. Herefordshire Council has been given some additional funding to improve rural coverage but details of which parts of the County will benefit have yet to emerge.
- **Broadband improvements**
Improvements to broadband speed as part of the Fast Shires Project are happening and we are still hopeful that these improvements will reach Dorstone by the end of this Year.
- **Improved Community Web Site**
Tony Usher has revamped the Dorstone Community Web site and we continue to look at ways that the web site can help life and activities throughout the Parish.
- **Precept**
The Parish Precept was increased again this year as part of the Council's plan to ensure that necessary expenditure is covered. In terms of the County as a whole, of the 138 Parishes 108 have higher precepts than ours and the amount charged is the equivalent of 35p per week for a Band D household.

Neighbourhood Planning

Reminder of a few Basics

Why we are doing it

The main reason is to ensure that the Community has an equal influence as the County in the Planning process. At present for example it is possible to have a sizeable development imposed upon us, indeed this is a reality for some Parishes in the County as developers try to get planning approval before Neighbourhood Plans and the new Herefordshire Local Plan are in place. That is partly why we had a banner at our Neighbourhood Planning tent on Plant Day asking for views on where we could put 50 new houses in the Parish. We can assure that this is not a reality and there are no such plans but it was a way of drawing attention to the importance of the Neighbourhood Plan as a way of protecting our Parish.

How and when we are doing it

The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group of 15, (half Parish Council – half Volunteers) have been meeting monthly and in sub groups at other times. We have also recruited a part time Consultant Claire Rawnsley, funded by a Government grant, and we also continue to received excellent support from Herefordshire NP Team leader Sam Banks.

The Neighbourhood Plan must be based on evidence particularly the Community's views. So our initial task was to consult the community to identify issues that matter to you, prepare, distribute and analyse a Questionnaire, results are shown on the Neighbourhood Plan section of the Dorstone Web Site. We are now drafting the Plan itself, continuing to consult as we go via such events as Plant Day, the Annual Parish Meeting. We will also consult the Neighbourhood Planning Forum, i.e. 35 Parishioners who have expressed a willingness to look and comment on documents as they are prepared. We will also be arranging a meeting during the summer with farmers and small business owners to secure their views as employment and business development will form part of the Plan.

Revised Timescale

Our original plan set when we started work in January 2013 on the Neighbourhood Plan was to finish by the end of 2014 including the referendum of Electors required to approve the final Plan. Whilst we have made good progress the Group feels that it is important to informally consult the community as far as possible as we go, which needs more time. Also the draft Local Plan for Herefordshire is still not approved and is unlikely to be so until early in 2015. It is important that Dorstone's Plan is based upon the latest version of the local County wide Plan. For these reasons the Group has agreed a revised Timescale. This involves

- Draft Plan by the end of August
- Formal Consultations with Community in September/October
- Submission to Herefordshire Council – November
- Inspection by the end of year/early New Year

- Referendum early in 2015

Even this timescale may be ambitious but as a Group we would prefer to get it right rather than rush and make mistakes.

Neighbourhood Planning – Vision Statement

Whilst a Vision Statement may sound a bit grandiose it is important that we have an overall idea as to the kind of place we want Dorstone Parish to become in the years ahead. We included our draft Vision Statement in the Questionnaire and received positive comments back from Parishioners so it is worth repeating here

Draft Vision Statement

To enhance, retain and protect the essential features that Dorstone currently provides – namely:-

- *An attractive place to live that caters for the needs of all age groups from young to old*
- *A vibrant community that looks after its members whilst being welcoming to new residents and visitors*
- *A location which promotes and encourages successful farming and small businesses, an environment where young members of the community can seek employment and remain in the parish*
- *A sustainable environment preserving the natural landscape and wildlife and providing a peaceful and enjoyable way of life*
- *A small community that recognises that modest changes and limited growth can help the aspirations and the way of life of all those living in it.*

Drafting the Plan

In drafting the Plan we split into 3 groups to prepare the first drafts of the key sections. These were:-

- Housing/Settlement Boundary
- Renewable Energy
- Tourism
- Infrastructure – mobiles/broadband etc
- Small Business/Farming/Employment
- Conservation/Heritage/ Landscape
- Environment/Flooding
- Community Facilities

These were then brought together into a consolidated format with each section setting out in as simple and straightforward terms as possible

- Evidence
- Vision – Overall Objective
- Policy
- Community Action

Having discussed this consolidated form and taking into account comments from our Consultant and Neighbourhood Plan team member we are now working on a 3rd draft which we hope to circulate to Neighbourhood Plan forum members in July.

To illustrate what this looks like, set out below is the outline of the main points that the Housing and Settlement Boundary Section seeks to cover.

“Housing & Settlement Boundary

- *Herefordshire’s Draft Local Plan – Golden Valley - 12 % housing growth in Village Area housing*
- *Based on our figures this = 8/9 houses – credit for houses not yet finished on Village Green – net figure = 5/6 in the period until 2031.*
- *Housing Need – the issue of Affordable Housing needs examination*
- *Questionnaire Results – small infill developments up to 3 houses – no large scale development – preference for 2/3 bedroom*
- *Majority in favour of restoring settlement boundary.*
- *Draft Plan therefore is based upon*
 - *Accepting modest growth as stated*
 - *Deals with affordable housing*
 - *Sets a new settlement boundary - essentially the previous boundary with some minor additions*
 - *Develops criteria for new housing sites within a Settlement Boundary*
 - *Protecting the Village Environment*
 - *Design Statement*
- *Rules for dealing with Housing in Open Countryside”*

Further Information

Further information can be obtained on the Plan from the Neighbourhood Planning Section of the Dorstone Community web site - www.dorstone.org.uk/neighbourhoodplan.

Please note the timescale shown is the old one and has not been updated yet to reflect the revised target dates described above.

Colin Thomas
Chairman

