

Parish Council Update – April 2016

Neighbourhood Plan

Comments received during the consultation period on the Final Draft of Dorstone's Neighbourhood Plan were reviewed and various amendments have been made. These changes are summarised in the Consultative and Communications Statement shown in the Neighbourhood Plan section of the Dorstone Community Web site.

The Final version of the Plan has now been adopted by the Parish Council and has been forwarded to Herefordshire Council for their final review and a further six week consultative period. It will then be hopefully submitted for an independent examination of the final Plan by an Independent examiner. The Inspector can recommend the Plan moves to a Referendum, or may propose some minor amendments or could be refused. Indications from Herefordshire Council so far are very supportive of the Plan and hopefully we can proceed to Referendum later in the year.

All documentation, including the Final Plan itself are available on the Dorstone Community website – <http://www.dorstone.org.uk/neighbourhoodplan/index.html>

Mobile Phone Coverage

AS EE subscribers will know the Peterchurch mast was switched off last November resulting in a complete breakdown of the limited service Dorstone residents received from EE. The Parish Council wrote to EE, Jesse Norman MP, and Herefordshire Council regarding the problem. David Phillips, on behalf of the Council, and the Parish also lobbied at the highest levels in EE and with the MP, which resulted in the mobile phone system being repaired and service restored on Wednesday 17th February. The even better news is that EE have told David that they will be upgrading this mast to 4G and hopefully this should be completed in May this year. You may have noticed that the height of the mast has been raised by a couple of metres thereby overcoming the problems of trees in the vicinity harming the signal but this has also improved reception.

Broadband

Given the continued delays in the improvement of the broadband service to Dorstone the Parish Council invited Councillor Graham Powell, the lead person on broadband in Herefordshire Council, to our February meeting so we could explain the frustration of Parishioners over the delays and to ask for early action to resolve the problem. Graham has succeeded in ensuring the Dorstone was high on the priority list and as a result the critical "Green Junction" box which brings fibre cable into the Village area was installed in March and we understand is now operational, so Broadband users should now be able to receive faster speeds. It is worth contacting your ISP provider to check out what is now available. New fibre optic cables are also being installed for

Parishioners linked to the Clifford exchange and again improvements should be not too far away.

Donations Policy

The Council received 3 applications for grant assistance from Village organisations under the terms of the Council's Donation Policy. It was agreed to give the £400 budget to the application by the Playing Field Committee to enable goal posts and corner flags to be purchased for the newly formed Dorstone junior football team to use. The Council was delighted to receive a note of thanks signed by all members of the football "squad". Good luck to them in the future.

Annual Parish Meeting – May 25th

The statutory Annual Parish Meeting will take place on **Wednesday May 25th at 7.30 in the Village Hall** to which everyone is invited .In addition to the annual report of the Council, a brief progress report will be given on Neighbourhood Plan.

There is also the future issue of funding of local services. Parishioners will be aware that Herefordshire Council's finances are under severe pressure due to reductions in central government grants and the proposed phasing out of such grants by 2020. The Central Government plan is to allow Councils to keep business rates raised in the County, but at the same time the Chancellor is proposing to remove business rates from many small businesses. The proposal to turn all schools into academies also has an impact as local authority schools pay business rates whilst Academies do not. The potential impact on the Council's finances could be very serious with a knock on effect on services provided to the Parish.

Currently the proposal is to reduce to half, for 17/18, the grant aid for the lengthsman scheme in the Parish, which is vital in maintaining drains and ditches, minor verge, road maintenance and other work to prevent flooding. The parish would have to fund approx £1900. There is also a proposal that parishes will have to fund the sandbags used to help prevent flooding, this could be another cost the parish may have to fund.

The Parish Council wants to start to sound out Parishioner's opinion as to whether, if this support for the Lengthman's scheme was reduced or even withdrawn, would Parishioners be willing to pay extra precept to the Parish Council for this important work to continue.

Please come along and express your views, we are hoping that our local Ward Councillor Philip Price will be able to attend. Refreshments will be provided.

Colin Thomas - Chairman