

## January 18<sup>th</sup> 2010

As ever, I'm aware of a strange, and inevitable, dislocation as I write two days before a significant event in the life of the Parish Plan, the Open meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> January, which will have been and gone by as many weeks at the time you are reading this account. Despite some trying intervention from the weather which undermined our preparations, today, 16<sup>th</sup> January, we are hopeful that next week's meeting will be well attended and found to be worthwhile. In a sense, this is an important watershed for the project; after the consultations, the discussions and, more widely evident, the 'Planning for Real' exercise and the most recent Questionnaire, it was an appropriate time to take public stock of what we'd achieved and where we are going. We are more than ever aware that the project has widespread support in the community and of our responsibility as well as our desire to give regular accounts of what we are doing.

The Newsletter is, of course, a vital resource available to us all in this process of communication. In brief, I can summarise the progress of the Parish Plan as ...

- The five-week 'Our Village' project at the school involved visits, interviews and an exhibition in which all the children took part during a five-week period in the autumn of 2008 - the next generation of citizens joining in an exploration of the life of the village, its opportunities and responsibilities;
- Ten discussion groups meeting regularly to research the satisfactions as well as the problems associated with specific aspects of community living, from Housing and Transport to Wildlife and the Environment – and all stations in between; often their deliberations have benefited from the expert help and experience of full-time professionals, our 'partners' in the world beyond the villages, most notably officials of the Herefordshire Council;
- 'Planning for Real', an exercise conducted over four days in different locations in Cradley and Storridge when nearly 200 people gave their ideas, in a very practical form, by sticking flags into a map of the parish to indicate where they identified opportunities and needs for change; and, of course, the talking generated while this was going on was immensely creative and challenging;
- Smaller, more impromptu, gatherings, most notably at the *Evergreens* annual coffee morning, where the Planning for Real team took their exhibition out and about as a travelling 'road-show';
- All this activity culminated in the Questionnaire which was carried out in September and with subsequent analysis and further processing. There have been a series of opportunities for everybody who wished to read and digest the results of this survey; copies were available in The Post Office and Stores, The Butcher's, The Surgery and at a series of 'open' occasions in each of the village halls and, of course, crucially, the website at [www.cradleyandstorridgepp.co.uk](http://www.cradleyandstorridgepp.co.uk). What use we are, together, going to make of these results was to some extent the focus of the Open Meeting.
- For the future, many of the issues have been teased out as further opportunity for discussion and research within both the existing and newly constituted discussion groups;

some of them are being implemented, or indeed have been, in conjunction with the Parish Council and other representative forums – for example, the Parish Council now has established its own website to address specifically those matters which you felt needed more obvious public exposure and, largely through an initiative developed by committed, and energetic residents of Storridge, major concerns about the use and potential hazards of the A4013 are being vigorously addressed in the right places – an example of community responsibility and involvement at its best. Others are familiar ‘chestnuts’ which remain to be properly roasted – the condition of Rectory Lane, Cradley, is an old favourite – and many others, new since the first plan of 2004, have emerged for the first time.

- The Village Design statement, originally researched and published as a separate document is now to be incorporated into the new plan. This identifies a number of significant issues related to planning decisions – the conservation and settlement boundaries, for example, and the sorts of housing and its construction which we think acceptable to new building in the villages – and is, really, as far as Herefordshire Council is concerned, the crucial planning element in the Plan as a whole. The County is immediately involved in a revision of its attitude to these issues and, for that reason, this aspect of our work, the review of the VDS as completed five years ago, is the first ‘chapter’ to be completed by the end of March 2010. Your contributions to the questionnaire and in discussion of all kinds have been invaluable to the efforts of the Planning/VDS group. As is the case with all our activities, you will be able to find a copy of the completed document on our website when it has been approved and published. *(Since this was written, it has become apparent in conversations with Hereford Council, that their new planning framework is so near to completion that we have decided to postpone this element of our plan until we have had time to incorporate their new recommendations in our own thinking. A meeting with their officials is planned for 3<sup>rd</sup> February – more for us to report, no doubt, after that.)*
- For the rest, we aim to complete the rest of the work by the end of July 2010. The completed Plan will take a number of forms:
  - (i) An Action Plan which will summarise all those aspects of change and development which we will, as a community, hope to implement in the future;
  - (ii) A completed report which will elaborate the thinking and strategy informing those actions, a full and evidenced explanation as to how and why we have reached the conclusions and recommendations summarised in the action plan.

Throughout all this, we have two strong convictions. First, that the Plan is only as good as its Actions. We don’t expect what we produce to look good and gather dust. It will be the duty of the whole community and its representatives, to work, to chase and to harry, if necessary, to see that these specified aspirations are fulfilled or their failure adequately explained. Secondly, leading from this, the Plan is a ‘Living Plan’. Even within the time we have been involved in the project we have seen circumstances change; a plan which we could have written two years ago might well now be stale or even redundant in some of its elements. For that reason, our Plan must be reviewed and revisited regularly; see the Parish Plan as a folder within which files can be removed or added and

where the section labelled 'Achieved' is constantly growing – and probably, too, its close neighbour, 'For attention', expanding at the same rate.

That's what you will, or might, have heard next Monday evening. You can read a full account of the presentation and discussion on [www.cradleyandstorridgepp.co.uk](http://www.cradleyandstorridgepp.co.uk).

One last and most important thing ... Nearly 100 people indicated in their questionnaire returns that they would be willing to be involved in preparing the plan or in activities relating to it. We have made an attempt to contact them all. If you wish to be included and, thus far, either haven't been approached or haven't offered and would like to do so, please speak to Sue Ronan (01886 884644 or [sue@ronan.me.uk](mailto:sue@ronan.me.uk)) It really is Our Plan; the more of us involved, the more weight our findings will carry.