

The Parish Plan Twelve Months On

Why the Parish Plan?

We all know, and sometimes even complain, about Government, local and national, and other sectarian interests which seem to determine where and how we live. Sometimes the perception comes with a shrug of resigned shoulders – that's how it is and we can do nothing about it, even though we don't always like it very much. The Parish Plan idea was developed in the understanding that the people of a community have aspirations, insights and energies and the plan was the means whereby the voice of the community could be developed and heard. It recognised that change of all kinds is inevitable and that the management of change is as much the responsibility and opportunity of those who live and work in the communities as it is of the legislators outside them. The Plan aims to present an analysis of the aspirations of the whole community to assist the legislators, as their partners, in the processes of effecting and managing change.

Where we Started

Six years ago, Cradley produced its first Parish Plan. You can see a copy of it at our website, www.cradleyandstorridgepp.org.uk or hard copies are available from any of the people named below. Of course, since then, the shape and expectations of the village have changed; some things in the original plan have been achieved, some remain to be completed and many had not then even been anticipated. With this in mind, last year, we took the decision to revise and update the original document.

How We're Organised

We have a steering group which oversees the process. It comprises Mac Brown (881035), Rosemary Diamond (880367), Peter Diamond (880367), Pat Edwards (Treasurer) (8800656), Mark Higgins (Chairman) (880226), Tanya Lloyd-Jones (881035), Nils Purser (07711 518 334), Sue Ronan (Co-ordinator) (884 646) and Jerry Thomas (880868).

There are six working groups with special responsibilities for Footpaths, Health and Education, Community and Leisure Facilities, Planning, Transport, Small Businesses and these consist of approximately eight members each, all of whom have volunteered to take part, representing the large variety of interests, expertise and experience to be found in the villages.

How We Work

From the beginning we have been aware that one of our major aims is to involve as many members of the community as possible in an inclusive process of consultation which, in turn, will lead to a Parish Plan. It is not yet clear precisely what form that Plan will take given that the situation we are likely to be dealing with is changing rapidly; it is more likely that we should wish

to think of it as a living and continuously evolving process with, as it were, a series of interim, evolving reports than a finalised submission completed in a specific time, say two years.

It has been one of our principle convictions, arising from discussion within the groups, that before any general process of consultation takes place we should research very carefully what are the parameters within which choices are to be made. That hasn't been as straightforward or as easy as it seemed; we are a complex society already living within a system of constraints and it has been useful as well as challenging to identify what those are. To take a silly example; if we were to include in a questionnaire about 'Transport', say, the question 'what sort of transport would you like to take you from Cradley to Birmingham?' it would be both absurd and counter-productive to invite an answer that required the building of a railway station and railway line in the village; or about Leisure Facilities, an answer that demanded the provision of a boating lake; or about Planning Development, a number of affordable houses but, always, at a different location in the village and that despite the fact that land might not be available or building permitted for all sorts of other reasons. So we have tried to draw a sort of map, in respect of each of the designated areas of enquiry, which defines what might be possible and desirable. Decisions, or preferred options, of course, will be up to everyone who joins in the consultation and, of course, there may well be areas of interest or 'parameters' which emerge in that process which we haven't even thought of.

Where do we go next?

When the above process is complete – and, for a number of the groups, that is already the case – we will begin the consultation. Our preferred method of doing this is by means of public meetings and questionnaire and these are most likely to happen during the early part of July. These will be fully advertised in next month's newsletter. Of course, this consultation will be most successful when as many members of the community as possible take part in the exercise.

In the Meantime ...

There is still room for anyone with time, interest and ideas to join any of the discussion groups. Please get in touch with any members of the steering group, as above – you'll be very welcome.

And, of course, watch for the notification of the consultation meetings in July and come and take part.

It's all about

Our village Our future Our Voice

Peter Diamond, May 2009