

Notes of the Open Village Plan Meeting 29th November, 2010

The meeting was held at 7pm in the Village Hall, Toppesfield, with guest speaker, Jan Cole, from RCCE.

In total, 62 people came to the meeting which was judged to be a very good turn out.

Malcolm Braithwaite, the facilitator, welcomed everyone to the meeting, giving a brief overview of what a village plan is. He introduced Jan Cole and announced the competition to choose a new name for the VPOG (Village Plan open Group).

Jan Cole gave a talk, using powerpoint slides. This presentation, complete with notes on most slides, is attached.

The session was then opened to the floor for questions and the following issues were raised:

- 1 How long does it take to develop a Village Plan (VP)?
Jan said it takes typically 18-24 months dependent on the volunteers and participation
- 2 How many volunteers are needed on the steering group?
Jan said a minimum of 6 was needed, ideally around 10 with other involved in village organisations (e.g. school) participating when needed. (There are currently 7.)
- 3 What is the relationship between the VP steering group and the Parish Council?
Jan explained that it can be different in every case and should be whatever suits the village. Some operate quite separately with own bank accounts etc. and some are quite integrated. What is important is that the relationship works. The Parish Council must own the VP as it will need to oversee implementation/amendment/updating as necessary.

It was explained that the VP group and the Parish Council (PC) have signed an agreement whereby the PC will hold any funding acquired by the VP group and release it as required. In addition, the PC has asked for a monthly report on VP activity and has appointed John Levick as the PC/VP liaison person.

- 4 What is the level of funding available?
Jan replied that if something is needed in the village, and there is evidence of that need, then it should be included in the VP irrespective of cost and then funding sought. She mentioned the project in Silver End to update the housing – Greenfields has updated its housing stock and the village is now seeking £250,000 to complete the work on other houses. She commented that you never know when a grant may become available. Jan also mentioned that there are many organisations and some Government departments which are actively looking to fund sustainable energy projects.
From the floor it was also noted that Government departments (e.g. NHS) will be pushing to fund local requirements.
- 5 How do we save the pub? (The pub is being sold by the pub owning group and there is a serious risk that it will be sold for development. The worry is therefore that the village could lose its only remaining pub.)
It was explained that the VP is looking at the next 10-15 years and urgent matters such as this need to be taken up with the Parish Council. He also suggested that a concerned individual might take up this issue just as Jonathon Burchill has taken on the need for decent broadband as an urgent issue.

The first part of the meeting ended with a report that only 70 initial questionnaire responses from 230 households had been received. It was stressed that there is a need for participation in the five subgroups to identify those issues that matter and where we can make a difference.

Jan Cole noted that Ridgewell was launching its VP on December 5th, and both Helions Bumpstead and Great Yeldham had done plans. Copies are available on the RCCE website.

There was then a break for refreshments.

The second half of the meeting began by talking about the history of community action in Toppesfield and Gainsford End – noting the continuing success of the village community shop and post office. The feedback from the questionnaires was then summarised by highlighting:

- The Church – could the building be used for more community events? What do we want?
- Village Green – it was suggested that we dig up the area around the pump to create one
- Cash machine – is one needed in the village?
- Transport – virtually non-existent!
- The use of renewable, sustainable energy is a big issue - what is needed?
- Could Parish and glebe land be used for producing truly local food? There are people ready to do just that.
- What can be done to maximise the use of the allotments? (One voice noted: water provision.)
- What can the VP do to aid the long term sustainability of our village school?

What we need is data that supports the need for actions.

We then moved on to talk about communication in the village, asking how the process actually happens. After some discussion, it was agreed that face-to-face contact is needed to get questionnaires answered. It was also agreed that the detailed questionnaire needs to have tick boxes with space for people to add comments if they wish. Jan Cole recommends using a statement followed by boxes offering varying degrees of agreement. She also recommends that it should be 2 x A3 folded maximum and that each question asked should be critically justified by the team. Ask each time what will be done with the answers received – what action will be taken as a result of the information. She added that we have one chance – one hit with one detailed questionnaire. So, make each question count, and deliver and collect the questionnaires face to face.

On the subject of funding, Jan said that there are lots of grants etc. available and she will help us identify sources of funds.

There had been a mention earlier that none of the local farmers had attended the meeting. There is interest among the farming community and hopefully there will be some representation at a later meeting.

With regard to communicating about the VP development process, actions taken and participation needed, it was agreed:

- 1 Send an article about this meeting to John Levick asking that a VP section is added to the parish website. The VPOG should then ensure that this section is kept up to date.
- 2 Update the Facebook page with short notes about tonight's meeting and referring people to the webpage.
- 3 Minutes of the meeting to be distributed to VPOG people.
- 4 Develop flyers to publicise the next meeting

It was confirmed that the next meeting is on January 10th starting at 7pm in the Village Hall and everyone is welcome. (N.B. Parish Council Meeting was January 10th and will change.)

A final question was asked:

- Can the Parish Council stop development of the village outside the “village envelope”? Peter Moore answered that currently, such development would be outside policy anyway, but he is waiting to see how planning decision-making is delegated locally.

The meeting closed with thanks to everyone for coming and people were reminded that we have the ability to determine the future of our own village. Our timing is ideal and that trail-blazers will attract funds. But, it was emphasised that the VP needs the commitment and support of the whole village.

Meeting closed 9pm