

## Village Plan taking shape – Next Steps

On a cold winter's night at the end of January(30<sup>th</sup>) and yes, even the first snow of the year, 40 plus members of our village left the cosy warmth of their homes to receive an equally warm welcome at the Village Hall. The meeting was called to review and share progress to date since the start of the Village Plan process and to move on into the next phase.

Malcolm Braithwaite welcomed everyone and gave a summary of the significant progress made. Since the return of the questionnaire, a committed group of villagers have worked on the findings. They presented a set of 10 priority actions for discussion, approval or removal! Members of the group gave brief but passionate reviews of the needs, possibilities and proposed actions. They stressed the need for other villagers to join in these new action groups. Questions were posed by the attendees and lively discussions followed. Certainly the enthusiasm of the group came across and the interest and support of the villagers at the meeting was evident.

### Proposed priority actions for inclusion in the Village Plan:

1. Playing Fields and Playground Equipment – Rob Stafford – Baker outlined the project and appealed for villagers to join him, providing input into the design, particularly from the young users. There is a particular need to have a group member able to access funding for this project.
2. Speed Limits – Paul Thompson had prepared an introduction. A lively discussion ensued regarding enforcement and signage. Significant progress has been made by the Parish Council in this area already, but a team to identify where signs will be placed, and then to help with enforcement, needs to be assembled. A potential review of a 20 mph speed limit in Church Lane, or the installation of speed bumps, needs to be assessed.
3. Broadband - Jonathan Burchall described this as “a complex issue”. A range of potential solutions was put forward. Data now need to be collected, estimates of costs determined, benefits detailed, and villagers responses then sought when they received the information. Businesses operating in the area need to be approached regarding funds for a business-enabling system. A team to build this programme needs to be assembled.
4. Aggregated Procurement/ Energy Savings – Great interest in saving money – but advice and guidance needed on how information might be provided through an Energy group or by local business(es), particularly noting the grants available (e.g. Green Deal in 2012). Energy generation might also be considered.
5. Local Food - Trisha Roberts – encouraging the production and buying of food grown locally has many benefits. The Community shop already has a local food policy and could extend its activities to sell local produce. There are lots of other opportunities too and a group is needed to think through the possibilities.
6. Business Directory- Graham Berry has registered a domain name, [www.toppesfieldlocal.co.uk](http://www.toppesfieldlocal.co.uk), and could build a community website where businesses can register their activities. Modest costs would be charged for entries. Trading may be possible through the website.
7. More / Clubs Activities- Mary- Ann Stevenson – relating to use of Village Hall, but thought not likely to be a main project for the VP.
8. Footpaths - Ann Reed – enthusiastic presentation on what is needed to improve and maintain our footpath network and provide guide maps. A focussed group needs to liaise with BDC in the “Parish Paths Partnership”.
9. Transport- Richard Evers – car dependent society could consider number of solutions to provide better transport options. Information on what is already available (e.g. Braintree Community Transport scheme) and formation of Car Club(s) might be useful.
10. Young Persons Council - Alan Collard – Young people had participated in the VP process and expressed views, sometimes quite strongly. A possible vehicle for their continuing involvement could be via formation of a Young Persons Council to be recognised by the PC and to work together.

With the exception of No. 7, those present approved the inclusion of the proposed projects into the Village Plan. There was some discussion on how to communicate information across the Parish, and better Broadband might help. However, it seemed apparent that the VP might include some proposals for improving communication and this would replace No. 7 in the list.

Villagers were invited to take part in a photographic competition to provide photos for the final Village Plan document. The theme for these photos would be to help to illustrate “what makes Toppesfield and Gainsford End such a special place to live.”

What can we do next? The above groups need the help and support of us, the villagers. The members of the Village Plan Group are working hard to give us the village we said we wanted in the questionnaire responses. Now it is our turn to support and help by giving our time, talents and commitment. Please contact the relevant group leader, or Malcolm Braithwaite, independent chairman of the VP group, Tel: 01787 238138 or e-mail: [braithwaite38@btinternet.com](mailto:braithwaite38@btinternet.com), if you can help to take this project further.