Neighbourhood Plan. What is it?

What has the Village done?

The whole Neighbourhood Plan process is lead by the Parish Council and due to the rising political importance of Neighbourhood Plans and their influence on future village developments, Great Easton Parish Council, at its meeting of 6th October, decided to form a steering group, which would be a sub-committee of the Parish Council, to take the project forward.

The Steering Group comprises of volunteers from the village and these are: Phil Long, David Gibley, Andy Murdock, Steve Upton, Richard Barribal, Amanda Webb, Bob Mitchell, Philip Parker, Ian Drummond, Heather Ingram, Mike and Ela Yates, Lucy Walsh, John Boulter, Brian Hemmings, Neil McKay and Gary Kirk (from YourLocale).

The Parish Council has also employed the services of specialist consultants, YourLocale, to help guide us through this whole process.

Neighbourhood Planning is the Government’s attempt to introduce the principles of the Localism Act into Planning. This has long been seen as a complex, over bureaucratic ‘closed’ system that is distant from and therefore doesn’t take into account the needs of the communities that are affected by the decisions made. As such it sits alongside Clinical Commissioning in the NHS, Free Schools in Education and Personalisation in Social Care. It is trying to take into account what people need at community level.

The Neighbourhood Plan needs to demonstrate that it has been subject to the widest possible consultation and the final result has to be voted on by the community.

A Neighbourhood Plan, therefore, enables communities to shape planning policy in their area. It can be used to:

> Develop a shared vision for the community.

> Choose where new homes and other developments should be built. This will need to take into consideration the types of housing, number, density and the design parameters.

> Identify and protect important local green spaces and buildings.

> Protect trees, footpaths, cycle ways and paths and consider sustainable measures for the community.

> Consider the road infrastructure, pedestrian routes, disabled access and public transport.
Consultation Event - 2014

YourLocale was commissioned by Great Easton Parish Council to assist the Steering Group in the delivery of a drop-in event on Neighbourhood Planning at the Village Hall on Thursday 20 November 2014 between 1:30 pm and 7:30 pm.

The aim of this event was to help inform the community on Neighbourhood Planning and to gain some initial feedback from residents on their views about a range of areas that the Neighbourhood Plan hopes to impact upon – including Local Green Space and environment; heritage; facilities and services; traffic and transport; housing and design; business and shops and leisure and community facilities.

It was also hoped that named individuals would come forward as a result of the consultation exercise and express an interest in joining either the Steering Group or one of the Theme Groups as the process continues.

What did you say about Employment and Housing?

Employment – It was acknowledged that improved Broadband access would be beneficial for those operating businesses in the Parish. Large scale development is not welcomed but there is support for small-scale business development.

Housing – although some expressed the view that the Village should remain as it is, the majority recognise the need for some housing development, understanding that this will help to support the local shop, pub and school, and a strong preference was expressed for small scale development rather than development on large sites. Attention was drawn to the lack of suitable infrastructure (roads, facilities, sewerage etc.) for large numbers of new housing. The design of any new housing was seen as being important – to remain in keeping with the Village.

What did you say about the Environment and Heritage?

Environment – Most respondents expressed the view that the open spaces within the Village (especially the paddocks) should be preserved as they reflect the character of Great Easton. One expressed this in terms of saying that the Village Core is precious. Footpaths were also identified as being important and the detrimental impact on wildlife of any new development was stressed. A desire to prioritise new build on previously developed land was expressed.

Heritage – Many people were very clear about the need to retain the character of the Village by preserving the many buildings of heritage value and by ensuring that any new developments are sympathetic and in keeping with existing buildings.
**What did you say about Facilities, Roads?**

**Facilities** - The need to retain the existing facilities including the shop, pub and village hall was identified. Also the poor public transport to Market Harborough was mentioned.

**Traffic and Roads** - A large number of people highlighted the problem with congestion outside the school at peak times. Other issues include speeding and lack of adequate parking.

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**Things the Steering Group have been working on**

1. Successfully securing grants to help us with the project. Monies amounting to £17000 have been obtained.
2. Seeking advice and communicating with Harborough District Council about how the village is designated. Currently it is a Selected Rural Village and we want it to stay that way. This is still work in progress.(See below)
3. Holding an initial village awareness/consultation event.
4. Based on your feedback from the consultation event, creating an interim view of how we might want the village to be in the future.
5. Devising a village questionnaire to run in conjunction with a Housing Needs Survey being done by Midlands Rural Housing on behalf of Harborough District Council. More on that later.
6. Devising a questionnaire for the school.
7. Creating ways in which we can talk to everyone in the village. (see later)

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**What did you say about open spaces?**

You were asked to place on a map (see above) blue stickers depicting an area of open space important for leisure and green stickers in a place with a good or important view. As you can see there is remarkable consistency. Most people expressed the view that the open spaces within the village (especially ‘the paddocks’) should be preserved as they reflect the character of Great Easton.

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**Village Status**

Great Easton is currently classified by Harborough District Council (HDC) as a Selected Rural Village (SRV). Essentially this means this limits the extent of growth of the village because of things like its character. In a number of recent HDC documents it has been suggested that Great Easton might move up to the next level which is called a Rural Centre (RC) mainly because of the number of facilities that we have. If this were to happen this changes the criteria on what might happen to the village in particular the number of extra houses that could be built. As you might expect we were very concerned about this and after taking expert advice have written to HDC with a plethora of arguments of why this shouldn’t happen. HDC has a meeting on 22nd April when their plans, not only for Great Easton, will be discussed. We have asked for their decision about our status ahead of that meeting and if necessary will ask to attend. In the meanwhile it is our intention to send all committee Council members a copy of our letter to make them aware of our views. We have also been seeking the views of our current District Councillor, David Beaty.
The village consultation event was a useful first exercise to give the neighbourhood plan group a feel of what villagers thought.

However, one of the express requirements for building our village neighbourhood plan is to ensure that it is evidence based so that we can support any statements or decisions we make. Failure to do this means the plan might fail when it is ultimately reviewed by assessors or challenged in the future.

One of the best ways to do this is through a comprehensive questionnaire. As it transpired, Harborough District Council (HDC) also wanted a housing needs survey (HNS) carried out across their district. We have therefore taken the opportunity to talk to Midlands Rural Housing (who are doing the HNS for HDC) to incorporate some specific questions of our own.

By doing the survey in conjunction with Midlands Rural Housing this has meant that they will do all the analysis for us.

It is essential that we get a very good response to the questionnaire from all villagers as it will allow us to understand more thoroughly your thoughts which will make the neighbourhood plan more relevant.

We are expecting that the questionnaire will be delivered to you by the middle/end of April and there will be a month to fill it in.

If anyone needs help in completing the form we can arrange that too.

We will let you know the final details in the coming weeks, so do look out for them.

At the same time we are also putting together a questionnaire for Bringhurst School. We have managed to have the school included in our plan area so it is very important we understand their thoughts, both staff and pupils and future plans.

This is being finalised currently but we hope to have the two questionnaires out at the same time.

Combining the results from both these documents will give a good basis on which to plan our village future.

**So when you get your questionnaire please fill it in**

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**How do you find out what is going on?**

**How do you feed in your thoughts?**

We are very aware that we need to keep everyone abreast of what is going on. For the technologically minded of you there is a 'neighbourhood plan' page on the parish council website. It is anticipated that minutes of the steering group will be posted there.

We have also created a Facebook page which will be more of a fast moving comment/feedback facility.

If you wish to feed in comments/suggestions then please use the e-mail address. All of these are listed below.

For those not wishing to use 'electronics' we will publish a newsletter of which this is the first edition. Again constructive feedback on this will be gratefully received. There will also be updates in the Parish Magazine.

From time to time we will also arrange further consultation events in the Village Hall, but we will let you know about these in plenty of time.

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