What has the Neighbourhood Plan Team been up to since the April Newsletter?

As a reminder, 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 2014, decided to form a steering group, which would be a committee of the Parish Council, to take the project forward. And, more importantly, when the work of the Neighbourhood Plan group is finished it has to go to a village public vote for acceptance.

The Steering Group has changed slightly since April. Roger Bowder has taken over the chairmanship, Julia Weaver has now joined the fray with Amanda Webb and Andy Murdock coming off the group.

Thus the Steering Group is now: Roger Bowder, Phil Long, David Gibley, Julia Weaver, Steve Upton, Richard Barribal, Bob Mitchell, Ian Drummond, Heather Ingram, Mike and Ela Yates, Lucy Walsh, John Boulter, Brian Hemmings, Neil McKay and Gary Kirk (from YourLocale, the consultants helping us through the process).

So what has been happening?

1. Working groups have been set up covering four key areas:
   a. Community Facilities
   b. Environment, Heritage and Conservation
   c. Housing and Design
   d. Transport, Highways and Employment.

Villagers with interest in these topics have been encouraged to come along and get involved and thank you to all those that have.

The leads of the working groups now meet regularly with the chair to ensure everyone knows what is happening so that the groups are all working in the same direction.

2. The questionnaire has been completed and analysed, (see overleaf for a brief summary of the findings) which will help with the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan.

3. The writing of a key response from the Neighbourhood Plan group concerning Harborough District Councils (HDC) proposals surrounding its Local Strategic Plan. We hope that you all individually responded to this.

4. The establishing of a clear timetable of key dates so that the Neighbourhood Plan can become active:

   > Work of theme groups put to community 28th November 2015
   > Theme Group outputs finalised by end January 2016
   > Draft policies prepared by end of February 2016
   > Sign off of draft Plan by Steering Group/PC March 2016
   > Plan subject to statutory 6 week consultation ending mid May 2016
   > Submission to Harborough DC of final draft plan - June 2016
   > Independent Examination and referendum at which the Village will be able to vote on the Plan. If a simple majority is in favour the plan will be formally ‘Made’
   > Aim to have full legal force around October 2016
**Village Questionnaire**

Early in 2015, Harborough District Council (HDC) instructed Midlands Rural Housing (MRH) to look at the local housing needs of Great Easton. This formed part of a rolling 5 year programme of Housing Needs Surveys as Harborough District Council (HDC) have to understand the housing needs of its rural communities.

The Neighbourhood Plan group worked with MRH to tailor the questionnaire and 260 were delivered across the village. We had a terrific response with 157 returns (60%). This large number gives us a wealth of information for future discussion.

One key point concerned the need for homes over the next 5 years for people with a local connection. It was initially found that 4 ‘open market homes’ and 4 affordable properties were needed. However further research has revealed that actually 9 affordable homes may be required.

**School Questionnaire**

At the outset the Neighbourhood Steering Group were keen to ensure that the designated area for the plan included Brinhurst School. Consequently it would seem daft if the schools composition and future plans were not known.

So at the same time as the village questionnaire went out in May 2015 we also gathered information from the school. This include aspects such as student numbers and age split; staff and student travel from where and how. Which schools students move on to and what are the future plans of the school itself.

**November 28th Event**

Keep this date in your diary. There will be an open session in the Village Hall on Saturday 28th November 10am-4pm where you will be able to come along and see in more detail the work of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and ask questions.
Working Group Reports

Community Facilities Group (CFG): Leads: Bob Mitchell; Lucy Walsh

Through a range of interviews with individuals and groups, the aim of the CFG was to find out:

• What improvements residents want to see to existing facilities and services.
• What new facilities and services residents would like to see developed during the course of the Neighbourhood Plan over the next 16 years.
• What other aspects of life should be considered in the Neighbourhood Plan in order to maintain and improve the wellbeing of residents of all ages in the Parish.

Over 70 residents across the age spectrum have been interviewed and some themes are emerging:

• The vast majority of residents see Great Easton as a safe and secure community with little or no antisocial behaviour or crime.
• There is a strong sense of pride in the community and in the environment which residents would like to see developed further, especially through improved channels of communication and volunteering.
• Residents feel there is a strong community spirit in the village, which they would like to see extended to include a greater sharing of responsibility and an increased participation in parish life.
• Funding permitting, the CFG would like time to develop a communications strategy that informs all residents of community events, notifies residents with up to date information, encourages recruitment of volunteers and the creation of new clubs, societies and community events.
• Community events are seen as one of the real strengths of the parish, particularly those that foster a sense of community and belonging. Residents feel this sense of community can be enhanced with improved facilities at the village hall and the park. Suggestions include refurbishment of the village hall and additional facilities in the park for teenagers (skate park and covered seating area) and sturdy fitness equipment for adults and teenagers. There is a strong view that these improved and new facilities would enhance more social interaction and could also encourage healthier lifestyles for a broad age group.

Environment and Heritage Group: Leads: Ela Yates; Heather Ingram

The purpose of the Environment Group is to ensure that any development in the Neighbourhood Plan area (ie primarily the parish of Great Easton) takes account of the need to protect and enhance the quality of the environment, both natural and man-made.

One way to protect sites of environmental importance is through official designations.

During July and August 2015 the Environment Group carried out a comprehensive survey of all the open spaces in the village. Each site was assessed according to 11 different criteria and was graded according to their importance. The most important sites were then listed and plotted on a map which will be available to view at the Village Consultation Day on 28th November.

The Environment Group is not just about open spaces. The built environment of Great Easton is just as important if not more so, as the village contains a rich historical, archaeological and architectural heritage which must be protected if at all possible. There is a great deal of local knowledge not only within the village but also in the Environment Group itself which is immensely helpful. Most of the village of Great Easton is in a Conservation Area and contains a large proportion of Listed Buildings both of which provide a degree of protection for our built environment. We are aware that there may be some buildings of historical importance which are not yet “listed” and will be looking at these.

The wider area of the parish is also being considered. Within the parish boundary there are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), woodlands, water courses, historic ridge and furrow fields, and some spectacularly beautiful views over the Eyebrook Reservoir, all of which deserve to be protected. Advice has been sought from the Welland Rivers Trust and the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and further research will need to be carried out in this area.

Consideration will also need to be given to the impact of any future development, such as housing, which may affect the local environment, and ensure that measures are put in place to mitigate or minimise these.
**Housing and Design**

**Leads: Ian Drummond, John Boulter**

The Housing Group has now had three meetings during which it has set about looking for the best ways to meet the needs identified in the questionnaire. However, it also needs to take in the requirements of Harborough District Council for the village to take housing as part of the wider district Plan.

The Housing Group is looking at a range of housing numbers, to reflect the options open to Harborough District Council, as it consults on its options for the District Plan. We understand that we may have to provide for a number of houses ranging from 5 to 51. This is a very wide range and presents very different challenges. 5 almost certainly wouldn’t enable the village to meet the demand for affordable housing, whilst 51 would be difficult to deliver without a major impact on the village.

Therefore we have decided to look at the impact of a range for 7 to 25 houses, to begin with, to see how these could be delivered and where they might go. But of course this doesn’t mean that this is the final number.

The Housing Group would like your views on two major decisions. Firstly, does the village agree that the majority of the new houses that will come to the village over the Plan period, up to 2031, should be at the lower end of the market, i.e. affordable houses and market houses of three bedrooms or fewer? Also, when new houses are provided, should they be in one or two developments or a smaller number of houses on several sites, either in previously developed sites (“Brownfield”) or in other smaller packets? It is worth understanding that no development of fewer than 10 houses has to pay for any improvements to the village.

The implications are that we must show how affordable housing can be delivered when the market has little appetite for it.

We shall be at the consultation event on the 28th November and would like to hear your views.

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**Transport, Highways & Employment**

**Leads: Neil McKay, Stephen Lott**

The group has started to put together and understand emerging issues in order to produce Transport and Employment policies for the Neighbourhood Plan. Any additional ideas from the village would be welcome as we still feel this is work in progress. The themes emerging include:

**Transport**
1. Speeding/Inappropriate Speed Limits - particularly at each access point to the village.
2. Parking/Safety concerns - particularly at school drop off.

**Employment**
1. Protection of existing businesses.
2. Business growth where appropriate.

We are looking at ways that these issues might be addressed e.g. in Transport we have joined a Speed Watch initiative run by Leicestershire County Council and have collected the necessary signatures required to enter this programme. Thanks to everyone who signed up (in record quick time). We have more volunteers than places available on the course which demonstrates a desire to address this issue! We aim to take part in the first available slot for this scheme which is April 2016.

So if you have any thoughts on Transport and Employment please do get in touch with the group co-

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**Response to HDC Planning Proposals**

The response re-enforced the villages Selected Rural Village (SRV) status confirming the relative size of Great Easton is both proportionate and appropriate to SRV status of a small conservation village.

It also highlighted the fact that the range of options suggested by HDC had a wide impact on the potential housing need (5-51) within the village, thus urging HDC to make a quick decision enabling our plan to be produced with some certainty.

The point was made that options for some form of urban concentration were more sound as sustainable development, allowing residents of new homes better access to those facilities that are provided in these urban areas.

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**ALLOTMENTS.**

The recent village questionnaire identified a need for allotments. A form will be available to register your interest at the forthcoming information day on Saturday 28th November. If you are interested in putting your name forward to join The Great Easton Allotments Group please send your name and contact details to: Bob Mitchell bobmitchell51@gmail.com, 01536 771801 or 07725486602.