

Minutes of the Parish Plan Meeting –13 January 2010 at Hunton Village Club

Present: Mrs Sue Heaton (Chair), Mr Carl Adams (Speaker), Mr Jim Boot (Speaker), Mr Alan Bishop, Mrs Sandra Bullivant, Mr David Bullivant, Mrs Alison Ellman-Brown, Mr Michael Ellman-Brown, Mrs Di Martin, Mr Guy Oliver, Mr Nigel Parsons, Mr Roger Sawtell, Mrs Barbara Wright

Apologies: Mrs Gillian Devas

Welcome and Introduction

1. The meeting welcomed two guest speakers: Mr Jim Boot, Community Planning Co-ordinator, Maidstone Borough Council and Mr Carl Adams, Rural Officer, Action with Communities in Rural Kent (charitable organisation).

Guest speaker: Mr Jim Boot, Maidstone Borough Council

2. Mr Boot explained that one of his roles involves Parish Plans. Maidstone has the highest number of Parish Plans in Kent and he is the person to contact for help and advice in taking the plan forward. Mr Boot works closely with Mr Adams.
3. He explained that Parish Plans, also known as 'Community-Led Plans', could take 18 months to complete (in some cases 12-14 months in small communities). Essentially they condense a community's views and create a consensus. However, it is critical that the views are representative of the village not just the Parish Plan Committee. When a plan is completed he believed approximately half of the actions within the plan can usually be tackled by the community without outside intervention. The remainder of the points raised can be used to influence the Council and perform an important role in improving the Council's services.
4. Many positive outcomes can result from a Parish Plan: it can instil community spirit, help set up clubs or even help to have speed cameras installed (although the latter would involve external organisations). He suggested that a Parish Plan can result in the village reaching a consensus on a particular issue e.g. roads, fly tipping, general litter, flooding or youth activities. However, he advised that one single 'bug bear' should not be allowed to hijack the entire Plan.
5. Mr Boot gave examples of villages where the use of a Parish Plan enabled them to improve their village: Lenham was able to set up a community hall and Harrietsham established a community dance for children, following up with a tea dance for the elderly.
6. The meeting informed the guest speakers of the proposed footpath on West Street which, subject to permissions from the landowners, would allow people to walk along West Street in safety and would ease current parking problems near the school by encouraging parents to use the car park at the village hall. It would also link Hunton's main amenities: school, village hall and playing

fields, church and the village club. This was viewed as a good example of a project that ought to be added to the Parish Plan.

7. Naturally, the Plan should be a good representation of the views of residents and ideally it was felt that for it to be so at least 60% feedback was necessary. The meeting accepted that creating a Parish Plan would be challenging and that it would be necessary to involve more people from the village to achieve this and to benefit from their experience and skills.
8. The most interesting Parish Plans are those that have used fun activities to bring the village together. It is a good idea to be creative to get people involved. Mr Boot runs 'ideas' nights that we could get funding for from the Parish Council.

The Parish Plan and Local Planning

9. A Parish Plan can identify areas where there is a need for local housing whether it be affordable housing for young people or sheltered accommodation for the elderly or disabled. What a Parish Plan cannot prevent is large-scale housing development. At this point the meeting expressed some concerns over this, especially as the Council have to meet the shortfall in housing by 2026. Mr Boot tried to reassure the meeting by explaining that the majority of new development would occur in urban areas and added that developments approved in rural areas were generally small scale. The meeting commented that there is a lot of land being sold in the village at the moment and there have been concerns as to what the land could be used for in the future.
10. Planning applications for development on individual plots of land would still go through the Council and its Planning Office although a Parish Plan would enable the community to be more 'savvy' where Council matters were concerned, meaning residents could go straight to the relevant department to get the right information and take the appropriate action. Mr Boot gave Detling as an example of how planning could be managed. They established a 'Village Design Statement' so that the Council were aware of what type of housing and style had been reached by consensus. He suggested that the meeting might wish one of Maidstone's Planning Officers to attend a future meeting to discuss the meeting's concerns.
11. The meeting commented that the environment was a very important factor in the parish and some may wish to see it remain as it is or, it may be possible to enhance its qualities making sure to preserve its present character. It was stressed again that the larger the consultation the better the overall picture.
12. The issue of illegal siting of mobile homes was raised. Mr Boot explained that there is clear planning guidance as to what is and is not permitted. He told the meeting that he could provide more information and could ask a member of the Planning Enforcement Team to attend one of our meetings if requested. This issue is not an action for the Parish Plan.
13. The meeting was made aware that land could be bought for community use - information available on request.

Considerations for the Questionnaire

14. To create and fine tune a questionnaire could take 4-5 months and ought to be tested out on willing volunteers beforehand. In the build up to the final version, Mr Boot suggested 2-3 public meetings to talk about the Parish Plan prior to the questionnaire's release, as it is essential that people engage in the process.
15. To get a high percentage of respondents, the questionnaire should take no more than 20 minutes to complete and it is important to find various ways to have the questionnaire completed and returned.
16. When analysing the data afterwards the topics with the highest percentage of comments can be deduced as being priority tasks to be undertaken. However, there may be some cases e.g. responses from the very elderly or the disabled, where their comments in the questionnaire may produce a small percentage in the overall scheme but their needs may be just as urgent.
17. Once the results are evaluated, Mr Boot recommended organising an event to talk about the outcomes of the feedback. It is also a good idea to keep the Parish Council, District Councillors and County Councillors informed.

Council Funding

18. Kent County Council (up to £10,000), Maidstone Borough Council (up to £2,000) and the Parish Council all have funds which can be used for projects resulting from Parish Plans. Mr Boot is able to provide more information on this. For some funding it is advisable to form a group within the Parish Council so that the VAT can be claimed. In other cases (see below) foundations/charities are only willing to fund projects through a constituted (established by formal means) Steering Group that does not fall within the Parish Council.

Guest speaker: Mr Carl Adams, Rural Officer Action with Communities in Rural Kent

19. Mr Adams explained that funding is critical to a project like this and he is able to help through every stage of the Parish Plan. A 9-step process, a document listing ways to achieve a successful plan, was distributed at the meeting. He can provide support on arranging funding, devising questionnaires and creating a realistic plan with realisable targets.
20. Mr Adams', concurring with Mr Boot, reiterated that the best Parish Plans have been those that have used innovative methods to involve the community and have tapped into local talent. He stated various examples ranging from a photograph competition of the best areas of the village, which could take the form of a school competition, to a suggestion/idea box placed in various parts of the village.

21. The meeting heard that involving schools and other groups/clubs/organisations in Hunton is vital in order to achieve an accurate picture of life in the village. Some people may not live in Hunton but their attendance at school etc. is part of their lives nevertheless. Mr Adams suggested connecting with local groups to invite an elected representative of the group to attend a Parish Plan meeting. Perhaps contacting Headteachers and PTAs to see if a young representative could attend to register the views of the children. Engaging local groups such as scouts/brownies, sports clubs to help deliver questionnaires was one idea mentioned or creating a model of Hunton to exhibit at an event.
22. Arranging events to inform the community of progress was essential for they performed the following functions: to impart community spirit; to answer questions on the Plan; to provide an opportunity to record comments; and to volunteer. Action with Communities in Rural Kent has promotion boards that villages can use and the meeting decided to do so on 13 February at the first 'Quiz Night' at the Village Hall. The meeting suggested other possible events such as the snowdrop event at the church, the forthcoming Applause event at the Village Hall and on Polling Day. This so called 'piggy-back' method of publicity, without the Parish Plan being the main event, creates a slow drip effect until such time a series of events solely organised for the Parish Plan can be arranged. Obviously approval must be sought from the organisers.

Foundations and Charitable Funds

23. Several organisations could provide funding: Kent County Foundation (Grass Roots Programme) (up to £5,000), County Initiatives in Rural Kent (£750) to produce the Plan itself or otherwise, Defra has a small fund (£3,000) which Action with Communities in Rural Kent would like to divide between 3 villages (£1,000) and Beautifying the Village (£1,000). Mr Adams agreed to send details of the criteria for funding. Other avenues the committee could pursue are the National Lottery, Co-op Community Chest and larger corporations with social responsibilities i.e. EON. Once the Parish Plan is completed Nigel Turley, of Action with Communities in Rural Kent, could help find 'funding buddies' – private enterprises willing to fund certain projects. In some instances funding will be given only after the plan has been completed.

Action: Barbara Wright to contact Carl Adams

Environmental Matters

24. The meeting viewed the document 'Steps Towards a Sustainable 21st Century Rural Community'. This raises issues such as community orchards, cycling paths etc. Its format was concise, visual, and creative. The meeting felt that this would be suitable as a form of Parish Plan as it was in the style of a foldout pamphlet. It was deemed more environmentally friendly as well as an easy format to read. Mr Boot added that the cartographic department at Maidstone Borough Council could provide large-scale maps and models to help publicise the questionnaire and plan. He maintained that visual ideas could be more engaging.

Action: Barbara Wright to contact Mr Boot regarding large-scale maps

Community Shops

25. The meeting learned that Mr Adams works with community owned shops, 6 having opened in Kent alone. He informed the meeting that a shop in Matfield will open next month. Community shops can operate in pubs or in recently closed down shops, or even shipping containers (beautifully decorated by the village). For example a farm shop could open within existing premises, even in the corner of a club that could extend to a Post Office counter for example.
26. Establishing a shop can be set up via a Parish Plan and funding is readily available for this type of project. The meeting was not sure whether Hunton could sustain a project such as this as all the shops had closed down some time ago and it was felt that residents had adapted to this situation, especially as the village was well placed for businesses at Coxheath and Maidstone and there was a farm shop and street market at Yalding. However, discovering whether or not a shop should return to Hunton could be put in the questionnaire. Mr Adams was happy to come back for further discussions on this.

Minutes of 9 December 2009 – Actions arising

27. Paragraph 3: Maidstone Borough Plan. The meeting was informed that the Maidstone Borough Plan no longer existed although some local planning policies have been 'saved'. A new 'Local Development Framework' is currently being developed.
28. Paragraph 3: Advance questions to Mr Boot. Sue Heaton has received answers to these questions by email and will send to all who have attended the meetings.
29. Paragraph 6: Invitation to a member of East Farleigh Parish Plan Committee. No action taken as yet. The meeting felt an invite should be sent in a couple of month's time. It was recommended that a letter be addressed to John Wilson in the first instance.
30. Paragraph 13: Parish Plan and the village website. A web forum/chat room on the Parish Plan would not be possible without buying software costing £125 a year. Creating a page on Twitter or Facebook is a possibility. Putting the minutes and agenda on the website is straight forward with a section already set aside. It is also possible to create an on-line version of the questionnaire.
31. Paragraph 14: One improvement for Hunton. The following improvements were offered:
- Establish a youth club
 - More frequent bus service
 - Re-introduce village allotments
 - Speed Watch/camera in West Street
 - Set up an Amateur Dramatic Group
 - Resolve the flooding problems

- Establish a community composting system
- Mend potholes and restrict 40T lorries on Hunton's roads
- All houses to go on to mains drainage
- Stop illegal developments
- Hunton village gathering around Christmas/New Year
- Re-instate the village fete
- More village participation

Agreeing a time plan and future meetings

32. The meeting agreed that monthly meetings would be preferable. Susan Heaton tabled an example of Preston's timetable to discuss. It is hoped that a completed Parish Plan would be ready by May 2011 in time for the Parish Council AGM.

Quiz Night

33. Friends of St Mary's Quiz Night will take place on 13 February at 7.30pm in the Village Hall. Thanks to Ron Porter's agreement, the Parish Plan Committee will set up promotion boards. Thanks too to Alison and Michael Ellman-Brown, Sue Heaton, Di Martin and Barbara Wright who have volunteered to do this.

Action: **Barbara Wright to contact Carl Adams for promotion boards**
Sue Heaton to contact Phil Nichols regarding quiz questions
Volunteers to contact each other prior to quiz

Applause event

34. The next Applause event, Jeff Lang, will take place on 19 February at 8pm in the Village Hall. Thanks to Alan Bishop's agreement, the Parish Plan Committee will set up a stand.

Any Other Business

35. The meeting was asked to consider for the next meeting what sub committees may be needed. Also, to place an article in the Hunton Herald asking for help, tapping into local talent. **Action: All**
36. To consider for the next meeting what groups/clubs/teams there are currently in Hunton for February's meeting. **Action: All**

Date and Venue of Next Meeting

37. It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on **Wednesday 17 February** at 8pm in Hunton Village Club with subsequent meetings on **17 March** and **14 April**. This and all future meetings are to be open meetings for anyone to attend. **Action: Liz Oliver to place an ad in Kent Messenger and Downs Mail of all meetings listed**