

Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council

PARISH PLAN STEERING GROUP

PROJECT UPDATE

In accordance with the requirements of the DEFRA parish plan grant awarded to Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council in February 2007.

October 2006 – 14 May 2007

Launch of Parish Plan Project

Following the receipt in February 2007 of a DEFRA parish plan grant for £1,690, Wye with Hinxhill Parish Council hosted a public meeting to launch the Parish Plan project on 19 March 2007. It was publicised by means of a leaflet drop to every household in the parish. The leaflet and meeting were organised jointly by the Parish Clerk and a Parish Councillor and the meeting was chaired by the Chairman of the Council. About 40 people attended. A power-point presentation was produced for the occasion by the organisers and there was open discussion as well as an opportunity for people to place post-it notes on four wall-sheets (one to indicate what they like best about Wye, another to say what they most dislike, a third to identify one action they would like taken to change Wye and a fourth to indicate what interest groups in the village are hard-to-reach in any parish plan process). Feedback forms were provided that encouraged people to volunteer to help with the project. A number of people showed an interest in helping steer the parish plan. Several more had volunteered for this purpose before the meeting as a result of the leaflet drop.

A meeting was then organised by the Clerk on 10 April for all those who were interested in forming a steering group. Seven of the twelve volunteers attended as did Victoria Lawson of ACRK. The Clerk provided written feedback on the post-it exercise eliciting people's views at the recent public meeting. Victoria Lawson explained the role of ACRK in supporting parish plan projects in Kent. There was then a lot of discussion about the way in which Wye's project should be progressed in view of the fact that Ashford Borough Council is working on the Tenterden and Rural Sites Development Plan Document that will identify sites for future development in rural areas, including Wye. It was agreed that this provides the parish with an opportunity to express its views on the future growth of Wye but it is impossible for the whole parish plan process to be completed in just a few months. Accordingly, it was agreed that the process might be phased, so that land use issues are addressed initially, and broader issues are left to a second, more comprehensive phase. It was recognised that the parish plan process must be as inclusive as possible and that this will take time and a lot of volunteer effort.

On 21 April the Wye Community Land Trust held an open event at the village hall. The steering group had a small stand, organised by the Parish Council's Clerk. It provided an opportunity to introduce the project to some of the participants. The display included a summary of the main issues highlighted by participants at the March 19 public meeting as well as maps of the village and parish, and information provided by ACRK.

On 24 April, the Parish Council's Chairman, plus a Councillor and the Clerk met with ABC officers from the planning policy unit to discuss the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD and Wye's parish plan project.

The steering group met for two brainstorming sessions on 2 May and on 8 May to discuss the parish plan process. Varying though not necessarily conflicting approaches were discussed and worked on during this period. One approach prioritised the use of (a) a parish-wide questionnaire to elicit views purely on land use issues in advance of a consultation event that ABC plans to hold (to discuss site submissions relating to the parish) possibly in July and (b) a network of volunteers to deliver and collect questionnaires from up to 25 households each, on an area basis. This network of 'patchworkers' would, hopefully, provide a personal link between the steering group and parishioners during the later, main phase of the parish plan process when other issues would be addressed by means of a further questionnaire and other consultation techniques.

Another approach put forward placed its emphasis on stakeholder dialogue and envisaged the parish plan project beginning with a participatory workshop in early June followed by a questionnaire covering all the issues raised, plus an analysis of its results, by the end of July. It appeared that land use issues would not be prioritised and the proposed questionnaire would be the only one undertaken during the whole parish plan process.

The next main meeting of the steering group was held on 14 May 2007. By this time one volunteer had stepped down but a second parish councillor had been nominated to join the group. The meeting was attended by ten

of its twelve members (two sent apologies because they were away). A constitution was agreed and Ian Coulson was elected as chairman, Peter Vujakovic as vice-chairman, Mary Braithwaite as secretary and Jenny Oram as treasurer (in her private capacity, not as PC Clerk). In view of the prevailing circumstances and time constraints the meeting agreed unanimously to adopt a two-phase strategy and to start by setting up a volunteer network of patchworkers in the parish to undertake a land-use questionnaire, the results of which would be ready by the time ABC conducted its own consultation event on the emerging Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD. The purpose is to develop a set of principles, recognising parishioners' priorities and values, that can be used to influence decisions about development in Wye. The process for achieving the broadest possible participation was discussed as were the main steps in the process and their timing.

14 May – 29 June 2007

Phase 1 of the parish plan process

At the meeting on 14 May the PP Steering Group discussed and agreed the budget for the first phase of the parish process. It also agreed the content of a leaflet, to be printed and distributed throughout the parish, updating people about the project and calling for volunteers to become patchworkers. A summary of the text was published in the parish magazine for June. .

'Patchworker' is the name being given to volunteers who are prepared to be responsible for a group of around 25 households in a particular road or area of the parish – which will become their 'patch'. The role of patchworkers is to (a) distribute and collect the land-use questionnaires in their patches, (b) help the people in their patches to understand the parish plan process and participate in its component elements, and (c) listen carefully to people's views on Wye's development, and help validate the final analysis of the responses to the land use questionnaire.

On 17 May a progress report was presented to the Parish Council which ratified the budget for the first phase of the project. Over the next three weeks (21 May – 11 June) the Steering Group finalised the household questionnaire, devised a questionnaire for children/ young people on land use issues particularly relevant to them, and finalised supporting documents (an A4 sheet providing background information, and maps of Wye village and Wye with Hinxhill parish printed on a double-sided A3 sheet) all for inclusion in the questionnaire pack. Recruitment of patchworkers eventually yielded over 40 volunteers who were allocated throughout the parish which was divided for the purpose into 11 areas.

During the first week in June, arrangements were made to print and assemble 1100 questionnaire packs in unsealed A4 envelopes (that were overprinted with brief instructions and were for use by participants for returning their completed questionnaires). Each questionnaire had a unique number and will be allocated an area code on its return so that the response rate within the different areas can be assessed. The questionnaires are themselves completely anonymous.

The Steering Group organised a session for patchworkers on the morning of Saturday 9 June in order to brief them about their tasks. Those patchworkers who could not attend were visited by a member of the Steering Group in their homes. Patchworkers started distributing questionnaires during the week beginning 11 June with a view to collecting them over the following two weeks. Each patchworker has been assigned to a member of the Steering Group who is responsible for supporting a set of patchworkers during the distribution and collection stage. The whole exercise has received publicity mainly via posters and www.wyeweb.org. (The Parish Plan Steering Group maintains a mini-site on this new website.) By 29 June nearly 600 questionnaires had been collected which represents about a 66% return rate.

The Steering Group now has to arrange for the analysis of responses. An IT professional living in the parish who is also a patchworker and who has recently joined the Steering Group, has designed a database for the analysis of the Phase 1 questionnaire. Data entry will be an exacting task, and the Steering Group is currently seeking to identify volunteers to undertake the task. Once the task has been completed an interim report of the analysis will be produced, a leaflet summarising the findings will be distributed to every household, and a validation exercise involving patchworkers will be held. There is a possibility that the consultation exercise (on the Tenterden & Rural Sites DPD) that ABC originally suggested would be held in July might be delayed to September, in which case there will be more time in which to produce a thorough analysis and to undertake wider community validation of the results of the Phase 1 Questionnaire if necessary.

Meanwhile, the Steering Group is arranging a social event for its members and all patchworkers at the home of the Group's Chairman on 9 July. This will act as a 'thank-you' and will enable patchworkers to meet one another and discuss issues that have emerged during the questionnaire process.