

## Baylham Parish Meeting – 21st January 2020

I am sorry not to be here this evening and be able speak to you personally.

For any of you who have arrived in the village in the last 7 years or those longer resident but have forgotten, I had my arm twisted in 2010 to chair a group to produce a Village Plan. After 2 years of endeavour and the support of most of the village we were able to put together a Plan reflecting the views and priorities of residents. The Plan was adopted by the village in 2012. A copy can be found on the village website.

It has been asked whether the production of the Plan had been beneficial and produced results and, by implication, whether it was worth the effort - a good question to ask before we launch forth with its replacement or revision.

Looking through the existing Plan there are a number of things that featured in it that have happened:

- 1) Village Hall – the Village Plan survey helped gauge the preference of the community as to whether the Hall should be renovated or rebuilt and where – the hall has subsequently been modernised and improved.
- 2) Church improvements – again the exercise provided the PCC with an indication of the level of support for their proposals. A kitchen area and toilet have since been installed.
- 3) Internet speeds – the village now benefits from access to high speed fibre broadband.
- 4) Speeding issues – this is now being actively pursued with the County Council.
- 5) Passing places – several areas of eroded verge were properly surface as passing places.
- 6) Litter picking happens.
- 7) Tree planting has recently been undertaken
- 8) Churchyard maintenance continues.
- 9) Village Fete - although not an annual event, the Baylham Bash was organised the other year.

It is open to debate whether any or all of these things might or might not have happened without having a Village Plan. I suggest that having the Plan certainly played a part.

Many other things that featured in the Plan have not happened. To be realistic though nothing very much is going to happen unless there is the interest and motivation on the part of residents to make it happen. It was hoped that the Plan might prompt people to join together to pursue these other ideas which they particularly wished to see become a reality. In this respect the Plan was not successful.

The purpose of the Village Plan, though, was not just to promote and implement what you might call concrete projects. It was also about identifying accurately the 'community view' on a range of issues and making that view known. It also provided evidence of the strength of feeling on matters when they were in question – for example to the planning authorities in relation to planning applications.

It is very difficult to quantify the value of this. It is impossible to identify the number of people or organisations who have looked at the Plan – nobody knows. It is also impossible to measure how much influence it may have had over the decisions those people made about the village.

On balance, the Parish Meeting Steering Group feels that it would be worthwhile to revise the Plan for the following reasons:

- 1) As we are seeking to form a Parish Council, it will provide the new Council with an accurate and up to date view as to what residents feel are the important issues and guide it in what it should do. It would be equally useful to the Steering Group in the event that the Parish Council is not established.
- 2) Experience gained since the Village Plan was written has shown that the Plan is weak in its influence and impact concerning planning and development matters. It is very important to address this weakness as we are seeing a greater level of planning applications which potentially may put at risk the rural nature of the village and its surroundings which the majority of villagers are particularly keen to preserve.

With this second point being so important, our initial work to date has been to look in detail at the two main options which are (a) producing another village plan or (b) producing a Neighbourhood Plan and considering the relative benefits each as well as the implications in terms of workload.

Developing a Neighbourhood Plan is a significantly more involved and time consuming process – taking about 18 months to 2 years to complete - but should deliver greater control and influence to the village in the type, nature and location of development and in protecting areas important to the community. So, this is the preferred option.

The problem is though that Parish Meetings are not legally empowered to develop Neighbourhood Plans although Parish Councils can. So a formal start on a Neighbourhood Plan will have to wait. Those seeking to build will certainly not wait and we can expect no pause in planning applications.

So to minimise any delay, our plan of action is to work towards revising the Village Plan and to undertake it in such a way as to be valid for the Neighbourhood Plan process as well. We certainly wish to avoid lumbering you all with two lots of very similar questionnaires, surveys and ballots to complete!

To this end, we are arranging a meeting with the District Council Planning Policy Officials after which we will be able to let you know exactly how we will go about it.

It is likely though that the process will broadly follow the format adopted when producing the original Village Plan namely a survey to capture all the issues, opportunities for public information and discussion, the formulation of proposals and some form of vote to gauge the level of support or concern.

A start has been made on collecting information to improve section 1 of the existing plan which is a little thin on detail in certain areas. As Keven mentioned in the last issue of Baylham News this involves identifying and mapping what we have in the village – particularly things we value including buildings, landscapes, wildlife, habitats, amenities etc.

One of the key requirements of the Neighbourhood Planning process is that it has to be open, democratic and conducted with the support and involvement of the whole community - so, if you have any questions now or later please ask.

We are always happy to discuss or explain any matters with you at these parish meetings, coffee mornings or other suitable occasions.

Thank you

Jim White