

Chairman's Report for the year 2017/2018

Neighbourhood Development Plan

This year has seen the completion of the Neighbourhood Development Plan and its adoption by Herefordshire Council as a set of policies to take into account when assessing planning applications.

The Plan is the culmination of several years' work. A small steering group of local people helped set the overall approach and conduct local consultation to identify what people thought a plan should contain. This culminated in the issue of a formal questionnaire.

From this stage the basis of a plan was based on clear evidence that local people wished to see future developments which were in keeping with the local area, in terms of the kind of buildings and their materials and in terms of the scale of development.

The second stage of work, led by the Parish Council, involved further consultations, with local people, and with departments of Herefordshire Council and other external organisations. Once Herefordshire Council judged it was ready, the plan was examined by an independent assessor who concluded that it met all the national criteria for such plans. Finally the plan was put to local people in a referendum which demonstrated very strong support for the policies in the Plan.

All those who took part in the work to produce a plan, including the steering group, those who attended meetings, completed a questionnaire and voted in the referendum are to be congratulated.

The Parish Council hopes that the policies in the Plan will be taken into account by Herefordshire Council in assessing planning applications. Certainly the Planning Authority has referred to the need to reflect local building styles and materials in its response to several recent applications. We hope that the decision to allow the building of seven new homes in Lower Maes-coed – which ignored not only the policies in our Neighbourhood Plan but also those in Herefordshire Council's own Core Strategy, does not set a precedent for future applications.

The Parish Council's Finances

The Parish Council sets a "precept" which reflects what resources it needs for its work and this is collected from local people as part of the council tax. The level of precepts set by parish councils in Herefordshire varies significantly, reflecting local decisions made over the years. As a small Council, with no property holdings, our precept has been relatively low. It was raised in recent years to reflect the fact that we are taking increasing responsibility for recruiting and paying for the parish lengthsman service. Resources for this service were provided through Herefordshire Council, but for the last two years the Parish Council has been required to contribute to the costs of the lengthsman service and from 2018 we have to find the full cost. The lengthsman service is the main element of our budget, followed by the salary of our part time Parish Clerk. The Parish Council's annual accounts are published on our website.

Parish Council Website

The Parish Council has updated its website to enable our Clerk more easily to manage the material we publish there. Resources to do this were provided from national funds. We hope to make the website more useful to local people, not only by providing more information about our work but also by providing space for local organisations to publish information about what they do, including links to their own websites. It is now easier to use our website to access Herefordshire Council's own website to view and comment on planning applications. We want during the next few months to make it possible for people to report issues about local footpaths directly. Ideas for developing the website further would be very welcome.

Involvement with the Parish Council

The Parish Council has a relatively small role in local affairs, but one which is likely to increase given the withdrawal of central Government funding from other local councils, such as Herefordshire Council. We can only perform our role with the involvement of local people who are willing to become parish councillors. This is not a major commitment of time. It would be very helpful to see more people express an interest in playing a part in our work when there are vacancies for councillors.

Paul Mason