

PARISH PLAN

NEWSLETTER FOR WORCESTERSHIRE



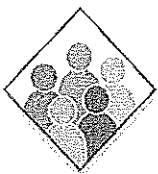
FROM COMMUNITY FIRST

Welcome to the latest edition of the Parish Plan newsletter. I hope that you have all enjoyed the Christmas break and are looking forward to Parish Planning activities in the New Year. The Community Planning team at Community First are looking forward to putting some new ideas into practice as well as building on the many successes from last year.

Our New Year's resolution for 2008 is to 'make Community Plans count' and this is the theme of this newsletter. Find out how we intend to help you write a quality plan and to help others make the most of all your hard work, by using it to inform their plans and projects.

There are currently 36 groups actively working on a plan for their community in Worcestershire and 39 groups have now completed a plan, so half of all towns and parishes in the County are involved in community planning activities. We also have several groups who are about to review their original plans and some who have moved on to doing village design statements, so we're expecting a busy year ahead!

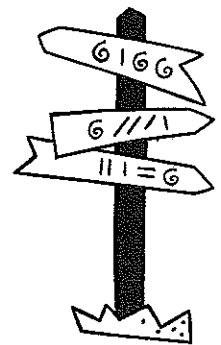
We look forward to working with you.
Karen Humphries
Development Officer – Parish Planning



Community First
Building better communities

Where do we go from here?

Last year some of you received a questionnaire asking you to tell us about the Parish Plans process – what had worked well for you, what hadn't worked well and, most importantly what could be done better in terms of supporting you. We had a really good response, so many thanks to all of you who took the time and trouble to write or talk to us.



Four main themes emerged:

Groups wanted a more defined 'route' through the Parish Plan process and to know what support is available at every stage.

More help was needed with recruiting and keeping volunteers 'on board', and in making sure that the whole community was represented.

Groups wanted Local Authorities to actively support and champion Parish Plans and to say how they would use them.

Service providers and Community Planning groups needed to communicate better to make sure that **both** parties receive the information they need.

In this edition we'll tell you how we plan to address all four concerns and how you can help us to do it!

1. A more defined route...

Some of you will have already received a copy of the Worcestershire Community Planning Guidance – an A4 file full of useful information which should guide you step by step through the Parish Plan process. This pack is available to all new groups who are producing a Community Plan. We hope that this toolkit will be useful but we'll also be using the Community First website, together with e-mail updates and the newsletter to keep you 'on track'.

We're also asking new groups to sign up to a new agreement. This outlines the help on offer from the Community Planning Team and asks you to 'touch base' with us at regular stages so that we can make sure you have the most up to date information and guidance.

2. Recruiting/keeping volunteers

How do you find volunteers in the first place and manage to keep them on board? This is probably the key to making a Parish Plan successful and the biggest problem for most groups.

We're hoping to improve things by sharing with you ideas that have worked well elsewhere and by providing templates that you can use to publicise your plans and events. We'll also be running some events to share tips for getting people 'on board' and keeping them there.



3. Supporting and using Parish Plans

This was probably the main concern for most groups – many felt that their work had been unrecognised by their local authority and wanted to know how the information would be used.

We'll be tackling this primarily through the new Worcestershire Community Planning information bank. This now has all the actions from completed Parish Plans on it, grouped under six main themes, making it easy to find out both what individual Parishes aspire to and to search under 'themes' – all of which makes it much easier for Parish Plan information to be used to inform plans and policies.

In the next few months we'll be working with service providers to show them what the information bank can do, and visiting local authorities to persuade them to show their support for Community Planning.

But we're also asking you to jump through an extra hoop. We want all new plans to be presented at draft stage to the Worcestershire Community Planning Liaison Group, which is made up of many of those who support the Parish Plan Process in the County. This group will 'kite mark' quality plans before passing them on to the relevant District Authority and Service providers – hopefully making sure that everyone has the chance to get involved and that your plans get the recognition they deserve.

4. Better Communication

Parish Plan groups and service providers both said that better communication was needed between you. Parish Plan groups needed to know who to contact and to get support and advice and service providers wanted you to contact them more and earlier in the process. We'll be promoting Parish Plans throughout the County and helping you to talk to each other.

Village Wardens Herefordshire British Red Cross

Parish Plans in Herefordshire have been used to develop an exciting Village Warden Scheme. On the 31st October the British Red Cross held a showcase event for the Village Warden scheme in Herefordshire. This was an opportunity to hear and learn about the scheme and how successful it has been so far. While some people feel that they can call on their neighbours in a crisis others do not, and this is the focus of the Village Warden scheme. Its uniqueness is that the Village Wardens live in the community they work in. The wardens work with older people in their own communities by helping them in a variety of ways, this can be from running errands, popping in for a cup of tea and a chat, helping to visit friends, attend medical appointments and encourage involvement in local activities.

The scheme has so far been an outstanding success benefiting those in most need within areas where Village Wardens now operate. It is also very encouraging to know that Parish Plans helped provide an evidence of need. It is hoped that this scheme will not only continue once the initial pilot period is over, but will also be extended further a field. If you are interested in finding out more about it, please contact 01432 272522

Faith counts!

A recent survey by the Diocese of Worcester looked at the involvement of Church of England churches with Parish Plans. The results were really encouraging – of 67 churches asked to contribute to community plans, 59 did so. There is always room for improvement though and the Revd John Paxton, Social responsibility Officer for the Diocese of Worcester, met with us recently to find out how churches could find out about Parish Plans and get more involved with them. Whilst spiritual matters are important there are also plenty of other reasons to involve churches in community planning – allotments, tourism, community buildings and schools to name just a few – so if you are working on a parish plan don't forget to contact your church.

GRANTS!

BBC Breathing Places:

Grassroots organisations across the West Midlands can muck in and transform their local spaces as the Big Lottery Fund announces £5 million worth of green grants available across the UK for the BBC-led Breathing Places campaign. Information about this scheme can be found at:
www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces

Sport Relief—apply today for £2,000!

Sport relief aims to fund work which uses sport and exercise to strengthen communities and provide opportunities for people who are excluded or disadvantaged. This may be through low income, rural or social isolation, age disability, race, sexuality or gender. If you want to use sport as a way to create community spirit this grant could be for you. For advice and further information about the fund, contact: Jo Shayler at Community First on 01684 312757 joannes@comfirst.org.uk

Green sky thinking:

The guardian and guardian unlimited have teamed up with UnLtd—the Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs, to give awards totaling around £100,000 to individuals who want to run innovative environmental projects in their local communities or on a larger scale. To find out more check out:
www.guardian.co.uk/environment/greenlivingawards

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Understanding Local Democracy

Thursday March 6th
12:30 for 1pm-3:30pm
At

Willow End Business Park Malvern

OR

6:30 for 7pm - 9.30pm
At
County Hall Worcester

Are you a new Parish or District Councillor, a Clerk or a co-opted member? Are you involved with writing a Parish Plan? If so this course might be just what you need to help you understand local government and the role of Councillors.

Community First will be running two workshops on Thursday March 6th to help you understand who does what at Local, District and County level – and how it all fits together. The workshops will be led by Pat Edwards who has many years experience, both as a councillor and through her work for the County Association of Local Councils, as well as a reputation for informative but enjoyable training.

We'll be repeating the workshops in the afternoon and evening to give as many people as possible the chance to come along and the sessions will be free. We do need to know numbers in advance since space is limited, so please contact me as soon as possible to get a booking form and reserve your place.

Every Action Counts

Are you interested in taking action to improve the quality of life in your parish? The 'Every Action Counts' programme is designed to help community groups take action to protect the environment, create a fairer world and improve quality of life. It's message is simple –taking small steps locally can help make a big contribution globally. With over 750,000 groups, clubs and societies in the U.K taking small actions can make an enormous difference. 'Every action counts' is a quick and fun way to think about what you can do. If you'd like to know more then contact us at Community First and we'll be pleased to help.

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