

Parish Plan – Clarification from Steering Group

Since the submission of a planning application by Clinton Devon Estates to build on land south of King Alfred Way (KAW), the Parish Plan and, more importantly, members of the Parish Plan Steering Group have unjustly come under attack.

First of all, I wish to make it quite clear that the Steering Group was made up of volunteers who made an honest and unbiased attempt to produce the Parish Plan and all of us refute absolutely any suggestion of dishonesty in the process.

The process was entirely open and transparent – items (and appeals for help) in the Parish Magazine, the Parish Newsletter, on the Parish website and regular updates at Parish Council meetings and meetings held in the Village Hall with poster advertising on the Parish noticeboards. There were plenty of opportunities for people to ask questions throughout the process.

The Parish Plan process was recommended and overseen by the Rural Community Council of Devon. The whole procedure was made up of 4 main stages as follows:

1. A meeting was called of representatives of village groups and organisations. These people were contacted by telephone by members of the Steering Group, using the list in the Parish Magazine. Bearing in mind that some attendees represented more than one organisation, there were 14 attendees representing 20 organisations. At this meeting a request was made for volunteers to join the Steering Group.
2. There was a public open meeting in the Village Hall to invite members of the public to voice their concerns and opinions to see what kind of issues were of concern in the Parish.
3. A questionnaire was drawn up by the Steering Group to match the issues that were raised at the previous meeting. Questions were taken from a questionnaire menu supplied by the Rural Community Council of Devon and all questions were required to be 'open'. The Steering Group spent countless hours sorting questions, checking for open-ness, trialling and refining the wording. The Steering Group aimed to get a questionnaire through **every** letterbox in the Civil Parish, persuading volunteers to deliver **and** collect the questionnaires. The survey data was then sent off to be input professionally at Devon County Hall.
4. The final stage was a follow-up public open meeting in the Village Hall, where the Steering Group displayed the results, so that members of the public could respond. The survey results were made freely available in a document called 'Filling

in the Picture'. Attendees at the meeting had the opportunity to question all members of the Steering Group, and much interested discussion was generated.

In September 2012 the final draft of the plan was submitted to the Parish Council, who agreed and adopted it. The plan went off for printing and was delivered, where possible, to all households and businesses in the parish in November 2012.

Since its adoption some pointed questions have been raised about the process and findings:

1. New Community Centre 15 people stated specifically that they would like a new Community Centre to replace the existing Village Hall. It is statistically significant that these comments were made without any leading questions being asked. This need was supplemented by the comments of many of the younger members of the community who feel that there is no local provision for indoor sports. When the original comments and those of the young people were displayed and discussed at the final Open Session there was overwhelming support for the idea

2. Replacement Branch Surgery It has also been said that there is no need for a new medical facility within the Parish. Anybody who has attended Parish Council meetings in the past would be well aware of that the current facility is no longer fit for purpose and, unless something is done, the doctors who are currently prepared to work there may pull out. The Sidmouth doctors pulled out a few years ago, deeming the facility to be inadequate. The possibility of a second consulting room in the existing surgery has been looked into previously by the Parish Council. The proposed new medical facility in the Clinton Devon Estates application is a replacement and not a complete medical centre.

3. Traffic Issues This is the top concern and identified as such in the Parish Plan and potential solutions are listed. In addition, with the provision of an improved surgery, many residents would be able to walk to the surgery for regular blood tests, blood pressure tests etc. without having to take their cars out. This is likely to reduce traffic levels and certainly to reduce pollution.

Finally, I should like to say that the members of the Steering Group (Haylor Lass, Shan Merritt, Joce Dyer and myself, Gill Potter) are all upright citizens with excellent track records of volunteering and supporting the local community over many years. We have nothing personally to gain from the Parish Plan and it has been most distressing for us to learn of malicious comments which have been circulating in the Parish.

Gill Potter

Chair of the Parish Plan Steering Group