

# Parish Plans – All You Need To Know 2008

**A Workshop for any community or organisation  
interested or involved in parish planning  
Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2008  
Chieveley Village Hall**

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## PURPOSE OF WORKSHOP

This workshop was based on the experiences of communities in West Berkshire in developing and implementing parish plans. It was inspiring, if not awe-inspiring! Parish plans appeared to be advanced in West Berkshire, which consists predominantly of rural communities and a few small towns. This differs from East Berkshire, which comprises of a number of borough and district authorities. West Berkshire is the integrated western half of the old county. Of the scores of villages contained in the area, only five or so had not then produced a plan.

## PRESENTATIONS

Jeremy Sandwell, Director of *Community Action West Berkshire*, said that parish plans are a rolling feature of community life to deal with new problems and needed new people from time to time to bring fresh ideas. He remarked that surveys and consultations had produced surprising results, for example in revealing the number of people in the community who worked from home. In a small community, this impacted on the number of vehicles on the road. He remarked that future planning would be supported by the Sustainable Communities Bill at present in the House of Commons, which would provide for bottom-up plans and decentralisation of power. Conspicuous among needs expressed by several of the villages was the need for community shops and post offices.

Sarah Ward, Planning Development Worker for *Community Action West Berkshire*, described progress on parish plans for Hampstead Marshall and Hampstead Norreys. Apparently, the Inkpen plan owed its origins to the formation of a chess club by four players who previously were unknown to each other. These villages are typical of small rural communities on the edge of urban areas that exist in West Berkshire. She said they used the National Planning Toolkit to design their schemes and availed themselves of opportunities to Meet the Experts.<sup>1</sup> Advantage was taken of the *Community Council for Berkshire* and *Community Action for West Berkshire* workshops in planning their schemes. Sarah spoke of the *Downland Youth Network* for young people to address the issues of rural social exclusion for children and young people in West Berkshire.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Bi annual **Meet The Expert** evenings assist teams in understanding the different steps in the process'. This means creating a Village Plan and then using it to raise funds and get things done. [From the front page of the March issue of the CCB Community Newsletter included in the fact packs from the Chieveley Workshop].

Alan Law, a District Councillor, in describing the Streatley and Upper Basildon Parish Plan, said they had formed working groups to cover the issues of traffic, development and planning, facilities and services, the countryside and environment, and young people. He felt the problems encountered in these areas would be the same everywhere. He added that having a parish plan helps your Borough or District Council to represent you and gets the costs of *your* actions into *their* budgets. He emphasized the need to agree actions with the police where necessary. Alan described how the Parish Plan fed into the Village Design Statement, so that they could stipulate the kinds of buildings they prefer in the village. The sequence of events from action plans and beyond was to prioritise requirements, agree them with the local council, present them to the Council Area Forum <sup>2</sup> for adoption, set up implementation committees, apply for and receive implementation funds. In Streatley, there was a core of eighty people who participated in the process, representing ten percent of the population.

Teresa Sousna from the SUN (Sulhampstead and Ufton Nervet) Business Forum created a business group for the area to encourage networking and exchange of ideas. They invited motivational speakers to address their meetings.

Ian Bacon of the Blewbury Energy Initiative recounted how the energy initiative had developed from the Parish Plan. (Blewbury is actually in Oxfordshire but Ian could act as a consultant). The Initiative was based on the impact of building stock on the environment. He illustrated the poor insulation of homes, especially older properties that predominate in rural communities. His organisation was able to advise on methods of better thermal insulation and sources of grants. He remarked that many people think the cost of insulation considerably higher than actually it is and consequently fail to take advantage of its benefits and the government grants that are available for it.

Nick Carter, the CEO of West Berkshire Council, described the need for low-priced childcare for lower income families and for the input of young people into positive actions to reduce crime.<sup>3</sup> Nick Carter also mentioned that West Berks was in conversation with government over its requirements and that it fed information upwards.

In the session on questions that followed it was commented that village design statements did not have statutory force but were referred to in planning applications, as they were similarly in planning appeals.

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<sup>2</sup> West Berkshire Council has set up *Area Forums* to give local people the opportunity to meet Councillors and Council Officers. They aim to provide a focus for local discussion and to provide an opportunity for all sections of the community to air issues of local concern.

<sup>3</sup> I made a sidenote saying that Twyford should encourage the participation of Wokingham's CEO in its planning.

## BREAKOUT WORKSHOP: 'WHAT'S INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING A PARISH PLAN'

Alan Law commented on the sequence of events in creating the Streatley Parish Plan that he considered efficient. This was a particular way of combining a general consultation among villagers with the sectoral opinions of groups such as scouts, parent-teacher associations and young people to give input to the steering group. This uncovered other matters for consultation and the total range of issues then formed the basis of a questionnaire. Subsequently, this was administered by a band of thirty streetwalkers. He felt much scepticism was dispelled by early production of plans and Streatley had developed theirs in just eighteen months, below the time other parishes normally take, which he attributed to the design of their exercise. Alan stressed that the Parish Council must sponsor the exercise and that therefore collaboration was absolutely essential.

In the workshop, the necessity to include other parishes in producing the plan was underscored. A large number of foot-soldiers is needed for the work. Children should be involved and consultations could be undertaken at playgroups and school fêtes. Children encourage adults!

Grenville Annets from Oakley Green and Fifield, one of only a few villages in East Berkshire currently conducting an exercise, commented that it is essential to maintain pace and momentum. He thought two years was the typical time taken to develop a plan. They had decided to call theirs a community plan. The best points in the year to launch the consultation were in January and September, when holidays were over. There were comments that government provides no resources or education for developing parish plans. Sometimes there were problems in maintaining enthusiasm.

## GRANTS AND FUNDING

A range of grant-awarding bodies was mentioned but, with some, eligibility was restricted to West Berkshire. Within the *Berkshire Community Foundation*, there were schemes for children, for example *Give a Child a Chance*. *Sport Relief* provides funds for the disabled. *The Strategic Grant* gives £5,000 over two years and can pay part-time employees. *The Grass Roots* scheme awards grants in the government's funding programme to boost local community organisations, permitting much-needed access to small grants and long-term financing. Grant levels of £5,000 were mentioned. The *Vibrant Village* fund awards from £5,000 to £15,000 that requires matching but this can be in kind, for example the recorded hours of voluntary helpers. It supports action plans both within parish plans and those that are separate. If robust plans are submitted to West Berkshire Council for consideration, £5,000 to support them can be requested and this sum is available for every year a good plan is submitted. Full information on community grants and funding was given in the information pack for the conference and reveals a multiplicity of opportunities.

#### BREAKOUT WORKSHOP: PROJECT FUNDING

Liz White described the work to refurbish Pangbourne Village Hall, an action arising from the Parish Plan. The scheme required £180,000. Liz mentioned the 'highs' of fundraising and the effort required. For example, a *SEEDA* application for £40,000 that they had made required two applications, a presentation and an assessment. These needed enormous care in preparation, with no guarantee of success. Pangbourne already had gained £50,000 from an earlier Millennium grant. They also had £20,000 from *BIFFA* (landfill tax reclaim), £15,000 from *WREN* (Waste Recycling Environmental Limited), £500 from Vodaphone, and £500 from *The Engelfield Trust*. £7,200 had been allocated by the *Big Lottery Community Buildings Fund* to develop the project (for buildings that will be hubs for communities, hosting a wide variety of activities for everyone, young or old). The village also arranged its own fundraising events. Because of initial funding shortfall, it had been necessary to divide the work into stages. Stage I had been completed, which encouraged the villagers to work towards the next. Mention was also made of Pangbourne's application for *Big Lottery SMART<sup>4</sup> Project* funds. Liz White commented that the range of funds for which Parish Councils were able to apply was limited. Charitable status conferred more eligibility and it might be necessary to involve a third party.<sup>5</sup>

Kate Booth described *Social Enterprise Berkshire*, which could help make a successful business case for a social enterprise such as a community shop and post office.

#### BREAKOUT WORKSHOP: TOP TIPS TO A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

This was held by Ian Bacon, leader of the *Blewbury Energy Initiative* <http://www.blewbury.co.uk/energy/energy> Its mission is to reduce energy consumption in buildings in Blewbury and to encourage the effective use of renewable energy resources. Ian is an expert because his day job is as a community energy adviser with *TV Energy* [www.tvenergy.org](http://www.tvenergy.org) an organisation promoting and facilitating sustainable energy solutions. Ian was keen to convey the idea that, for schemes to be realistic, they had to be those where the most people could come on board. Once involved and organised, communities then could deal with bigger issues.

An energy usage survey and was circulated to every household in Blewbury. Those who returned their survey received an [Energy Survey Report](#) and two low energy light bulbs. The group went on to take thermal images of some homes to use as visual examples. The results of the surveys led to simple, basic

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<sup>4</sup> The following was found under on 'Q and A' on the BIG Lottery website.

**Q. Will I be required to provide project outcomes? How do I make these 'SMART'?**

We want to know about the changes that will happen as a result of our funding. We call these changes 'outcomes'. We will ask you to describe three outcomes that you expect your project to achieve. In your application, you will need to make your project outcomes **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-based). Some examples are included in the guidance notes. Part of our decision to award you a grant is based on our assessment of the quality of your project outcomes.

<sup>5</sup> In Twyford, Groundwork Thames Valley, a regeneration charity, had been able to access reclaimed landfill tax for the skate park and was able to provide design and consultancy utilising that fund.

advice. Homes needed proper insulation, should make better use of timers on boilers, change to energy saving bulbs and, very simply, use thick curtains. Ian went on to say how significant energy savings could be made with new builds – using ground source energy pumps and under floor heating, as examples. Other ideas to produce energy include solar heating, wind power, e.g. on road signs, and small-scale hydro projects.

Both the *Blewbury Energy Initiative* and *TV Energy* have fantastic websites that deserve a look and TV Energy will assist with producing a survey and an Energy Survey Report.

We then discussed energy efficiencies such as car sharing, bike riding and cycle paths, buying local produce, improving access to recycling and having recycling days. In West Berks they have a school walking bus scheme called ‘*Go Kinetic*’ where children are given a card to be stamped when they walk to school. For 25 stamps, they have a free swim at a West Berks pool and for 50 they can choose an activity day. The ‘*Go Kinetic*’ scheme is run by the *West Berks Council School Travel Plan Adviser*.

The energy initiative is very important. Not only is it the right way to go but also in the future probably, we will have to show how we plan to save energy with any new scheme when applying for funding and grants.

#### BREAKOUT WORKSHOP: ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

This started with a discussion about public rights of way, how to ensure they are maintained and who is responsible.

There was discussion on setting up ‘*Green Gyms*’ – groups, usually with a trained leader, to undertake clear-up work/hedge planting/improving green spaces/creating a community garden. This can involve lots of community groups, including schools.

We talked briefly about the *Walking to Health Scheme* that is coordinated by The British Heart Foundation but, in Twyford, we can set up our own village walk and pram-walk for mums with babies.

#### CONCLUSION

The Chieveley workshop dispelled some of the mystique of parish planning and the experiences of communities in West Berkshire were illuminating. Twyford should be aware of opportunities to learn from other villages and send delegates to training opportunities in project development and parish planning whenever possible.

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05 April 2008