

VILLAGE PLAN QUESTIONNAIRE

Question 1 --- What is good about CM and should be preserved?

Answer

- a. The general size, character and nature of the village.
- b. The general sense of village identity, unity and community.
- c. The friendliness and helpfulness of residents.
- d. The traditional village aspects of church, school, shop, pub and recreation ground.
- e. The wide community mix of old and young people.
- f. The wide range of groups/clubs/organisations which provide myriad activities.
- g. The Parish Council and its hard work in support of residents.
- h. The Parish Newsletter.
- i. Most people being supportive of, and appreciating, village activities.

Question 2 --- What would you like to see improved in CM?

Answer

- a. The adoption of a 30 mph limit along Main Road (to village boundaries) and then enforcement of the same speed limit throughout the village.
- b. Small but distinct directional road signs throughout the village to indicate the routes to, and locations of, the Village Hall, Rec Ground, Shop, Church and School.
- c. A proper footpath or marked "walkers" lane through the village for pedestrians esp. schoolchildren (c.f. Kington Langley's "pedestrian way").
- d. Better and more frequent road (and edges) maintenance.
- e. Improved liaison and communications between the various village groups to minimise activity/event date clashes. A village web-site can help in this.
- f. A copy of the consolidated activities/events list from the Parish Newsletter to go on the Notice Board outside the shop.
- g. Better upkeep of rights-of-way and stiles --- plus production of a village large-scale map of such routes.
- h. Greater sense of urgency and action (legal or administrative) in respect of land use/development decisions/enforcement measures --- plus regular and more frequent updates to villagers.
- i. More detailed and regular reports to residents by the Parish Council on

their ideas/plans for re-use of “derelict” brownfield sites (eg former Gravel Pit) within the village boundaries. More consultation with villagers on land control and its development via specific meetings/briefings.

j. More regular and sustained anti-litter/fly dumping campaigns.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

At the risk of teaching the Steering Group to suck eggs, and being aware of the minutes of the latest (4 May 2004) Parish Council meeting, including the Chairman’s Annual Report, we feel that, if the Village Plan (VP) is to have any real status, accuracy, meaning or favourable medium-to-long term outcomes for villagers, then the following issues need addressing:

First, villager support for a VP. From attendance at the 20th October 2003 inaugural meeting, one got the impression that only about 70 people were present (less than 10% of the villagers?) and the final view, at the meeting’s closure, of whether or not a plan should be pursued was about 50/50. Responses to the various “List Boards” around the hall elicited an unknown number of exact items/comments on the 48 “post-its” from that audience. The subsequent establishment of the Steering Group was an obvious proactive first step in the process and its successful effort in winning a grant of some £2800 is excellent news. However, we feel that any VP actions or documentation (which may later be used as evidence of decision-making or preferences) must in future record all the statistics, facts and figures of any activity. Villagers must be assured that a proper audit trail exists regarding the VP, for many agencies will use its contents in the future as positive or negative “evidence” for a potential idea/policy/plan/project. The current questionnaire is an excellent tool to help establish the degree of villager support. The idea of a VP must be “sold” to a much higher number of villagers before it can claim to represent the ongoing views of a large majority and therefore carry genuine weight, authority and credibility.

Second, re-inventing the wheel. In assessing the many ideas/suggestions submitted as aspirations for the village, it would first be wise to return to the past (consulting records and older or previous residents) and ascertain if the “new idea” has been around before --- and if so, what happened --- since inevitably someone has had a similar idea before, but because detailed records were not kept at the time, its merits/failures go undetected and obvious lessons are not learned from the past.

Third, liaison with neighbouring VPs. It is clear that the CM VP needs to have some convergence of interests with the VPs of neighbouring villages. To this end, there must be liaison with other villages in order to be aware at our boundaries of any conflicts of interests; and hopefully to exchange useful information. As an example, we believe that the future development of Lyneham could have an impact on events within CM.

Fourth, “hidden” or political agendas. This issue needs appreciation if only because such unattributed forces can often sabotage much community endeavour spent on arriving at formally agreed plans. Equally, there must be an agreed process (cf delegated authority) for purposes of emergency action or special decision taking at critical times. A high degree of transparency is called for in the implementation of a VP --- and any undue exercise of power and influence by individuals or groups/cliques with undeclared interests may well be publicly challenged. Some code of ethics is a simple start-point.

Fifth, record keeping. It is vital that full and open records of virtually everything pertaining to the VP are kept for perusal and audit, both for current and future residents or other authorised agencies. History seems to repeat itself and future generations should not have to just speculate why events connected with the VP turned out as they did.

Sixth, influence on VP of Parish Council/NWDC.

It is clear that any successful VP must closely reflect aspects of the ongoing Parish Council (or NWDC) views/decisions on village projects already in being or planned for. These matters need to be

taken into account early on by villagers when they might be thinking that a VP can be independent of politics. Village projects and funding will undoubtedly need the wholehearted support of our elected council representatives.

In summary, we submit the above observations for the Steering Group to consider and act upon as it thinks fit.

PS Has anyone yet actually seen a completed or operating village plan from anywhere? If so, what can we learn from it?