

Elstead & Weyburn Neighbourhood Plan

Michael Organe

A letter from Andrew Jones

"It occurs to me just how little time any one person has to affect things. All we can do is to do our best when we are here. Elstead has been a community for hundreds of years. There was a time when Elstead did not have a main road to it. The Green did not exist. The commons came right up to the church, when they finally got around to building one that is. No shops and only a few houses and farms.

Most of us only occupy the space for 70+ years if we are lucky. Most of us end up doing not a lot to make a difference but some, like the Neighbourhood Plan Working Groups, have a chance to do more than normal. The tasks they have undertaken will affect Elstead's future for decades to come. Let's hope they get it right!"

Andrew Jones

Some thoughts about that.

Andrew Jones was born in Shackleford of parents with roots in the area going back at least two generations and lived most of his life in Elstead. He was on Elstead Parish Council for many years and has done much to help make Elstead the way it is today. He reluctantly left the village and retired as a Councillor this year because he needed to move out of his two bed bungalow here and could not find a smaller place in Elstead that he could afford.

This illustrates a question that needs to be considered about Elstead and many other country villages. Who will live here in the future? There are local families with names that can be traced back a hundred years or more in the church records, some are recorded on the Elstead War Memorial. Others were born in the area and have lived, worked and raised families here. Their children may want to remain in the village but cannot find homes that they can afford. Certainly the average price of a home in Elstead is well outside the range of low wage earners and most first time buyers. Rents in the private sector are also very high.

Some might say "The market rules – OK? Nobody has any right to live in an area just because their families have their roots here." It

might be uncomfortable to extend that argument too widely! The result in many villages has been a population of relatively well-off commuters and the elderly, relying almost entirely on travel to nearby towns for all facilities and services.

The feeling that they belong to a particular place is something that some people feel strongly and many others envy. Where we live and where our people came from is an important part of how we identify ourselves, along with which sports club we support or our religious affiliation. The stability of any society comes from this sense of belonging to and identifying with it and any change that may weaken that needs at least to be managed with great care.

Britain's small towns and villages are a major source of our nation's strength and ability to resist de-stabilising changes. Government policies recognise this but economic factors and population pressures are putting more and more strain on rural areas. The 2012 Act that established Neighbourhood Planning and other local powers, such as the Community Right to Build, aims to give local communities more say in what, where and how development can happen. It must be worthwhile to try to maintain Elstead as a thriving mixed community and the Elstead & Weyburn Neighbourhood Plan gives an opportunity for us to do that. We are responsible for Elstead's future.

Andrew said much more about future development in Elstead in his letter, which can be seen in the Elstead Online Magazine at: www.elsteadplan.info.

SUNDAY 12th JULY ST JAMES" CHURCH PATRONAL FESTIVAL

Join us in our celebrations!

11am in church Family Service with Holy Communion

followed by

12 noon Patronal Picnic on the Rectory lawn (Village Hall if wet)

6pm Choral Evensong with the Elstead Occasional Singers

