

## HIGH EASTER PARISH COUNCIL – COMMUNITY LED PLANNING RESPONSES, DECEMBER 2020

Community Led Plan Option	No of electorate responses	No of households responses	Electorate responses to question of assisting with any plan			
			Yes	No	More Information	No view expressed
Neighbourhood Plan	10	9	5	1	3	1
Village Design Statement	1	1	0	1	0	0
Parish Plan	3	2	0	1	2	0
None of the options	13	8	1	11	1	0
No view either way	1	1	1	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL PARISH *</b>	<b>604</b>	<b>270</b>				

\* Excludes Parish Cllrs and the Clerk

Below is a summary of the responses received by 'community led plan option'. Similar comments have been grouped together. Personal comments with reference to Parish Cllrs have been removed. Where questions have been asked or comments have factual responses, these have been added in red by the Parish Council.

## 1. Neighbourhood Plan – Reasons for choice and comments

- 1.1. Any process which gives the residents some degree of influence in a planning decision affecting their Neighbourhood should be beneficial to the village. A Neighbourhood Plan would give local people a stronger say in shaping and controlling future development in High Easter.
- 1.2. It would streamline the planning process and remove uncertainty and hopefully dissuade landowners from making applications which fall outside what the village has said it wants. It will help to protect areas from development such as the cricket pitch and playing field.

Residents, developers, landowners can and will still submit planning applications for small scale developments, however an approved Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the district development plan and Uttlesford must consider this when making any decision. Local Plans should also include policy to protect against development on public open spaces.

- 1.3. The process of preparing the Neighbourhood Plan will ensure that the views of all parishioners are considered, not just those of the councillors or those who attend parish meetings. A Neighbourhood Plan will support the Parish Council in assessing planning applications objectively against the criteria established in the plan.
- 1.4. I am pleased that the Parish Council is considering this initiative seriously.
- 1.5. If we embark on the process the Neighbourhood Plan will provide a more thorough blueprint of the direction that the village want to go. I am a firm believer that a strategy document or similar is the best way of managing

decision making. To some extent it will avoid ad hoc decisions that while reasonable in their own right at the time, can be in conflict with other decisions made at a later date.

- 1.6. Only caveat in supporting this would be the question of cost which seems somewhat open ended. If there is sufficient support for the Parish Council to consider going ahead, this should be accompanied by a budget cost.

**There are some grants available to support producing a Neighbourhood Plan although restrictions apply. Any shortfall will need to be met from Parish Council funds, via resident's precept. Budgeting will be essential as Parish Councils do not hold significant surplus funds.**

- 1.7. I am keen to do and/or encourage anything possible to retain and develop what I see as High Easters virtues. If established and managed properly a Neighbourhood Plan should ensure that planning decisions affecting the village are more compatible to the needs and vision of its inhabitants.
- 1.8. Unlike a Parish Plan or Village Design Statement, a Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the statutory development plan and should be considered alongside the Local Plan when determining planning applications. As a result, a Neighbourhood Plan should enable the local community to play a much stronger role in shaping High Easter.
- 1.9. It would be beneficial for any working group to include at least some residents who are not Parish Councillors. This should help to ensure that there is wider community involvement in the process and support for the final Plan.

**A working group (committee of the Parish Council) would need to be set up to manage any community led plan and its membership would have to be residents alongside some Parish Councillors. An agreed terms of reference would guide this membership and its responsibilities, it is important that any committee has the support of the residents. Any community led plan is not for a Parish Council to embark on alone.**

- 1.10. A comprehensive plan needs to be produced to maintain the integrity of the village now and into the future.
- 1.11. Given the potential loosening of government planning restrictions and the increased pace and pressure of housing development in our region it is important for us as a community to ensure the right balance of preservation of the character and environment of our parish on one hand and pragmatic economic development on the other to ensure sustainable and sympathetic development. A document created by our community with most influence as a guide for those making planning decisions that impact our community is preferable.
- 1.12. The village has grown organically over time and should continue modest sympathetic development in line with anticipated needs of residents and local businesses. One of the reasons we have few village facilities is lack of growth.
- 1.13. Uttlesford has had two failed Local Plans and the current planning policies are from the 2005 approved plan. This lack of up-to-date planning policy could be addressed, for High Easter at least, through the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan.

## **2. Village Design Statement - Reasons for choice and comments**

- 2.1. I suspect the Neighbourhood Plan encourages discussion but ultimately more conflict as individuals feel empowered by platform. I am happy that the Parish Council have our interests at heart.

## **3. Parish Plan - Reasons for choice and comments**

- 3.1. A Parish Plan should include everything that is relevant to the community, including social, economic, environmental, and planning related issues. This can then be used as a working document by the Parish Council to represent/implement the views of the residents.

- 3.2. Have the Parish Council consulted with other local villages to see if there is interest in producing a joint 'Neighbourhood' plan?

Not at this stage. The 'area' that forms the Neighbourhood Plan does not have to be the parish and is one of the first decisions required of any working group. It can be a small part of the parish and be focused on a small number of issues of particular concern to residents. It could include all or parts of adjacent parishes, including crossing districts. It would be for neighbourhood plan process to consult with adjacent parishes to determine any interest and ultimately the area.

- 3.3. How will the Council publish the questionnaire results?

For the Parish Council to consider at its meeting. It was agreed to appendix these to the January 2021 minutes.

- 3.4. What are the criteria being used to determine which option is taken going forward?

For the Parish Council to consider at its meeting.

- 3.5. I think that a plan for the future of the Parish would be a useful document. In the longer term a Neighbourhood Plan should be developed but I am not sure of the usefulness of producing such a document before the Uttlesford District Plan is issued.

From government website. *'Legally an up-to-date local plan is not a pre-requisite for Neighbourhood Planning. For a Neighbourhood Plan to be successful it needs to be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the existing development plan for the local area. Where Neighbourhood Planning is undertaken before an up-to-date council plan is in place, collaboration between the community and the council will be critical.'*

#### 4. None of the options – Reasons for choice and comments

- 4.1. The first question the Parish Council should ask is 'do residents want further development in High Easter'. it is disappointing that this question was not asked. There is a feeling the Parish Council is very pro-development, and this circular gives a bit more weight to that feeling. I have opinions on the planning situation in High Easter but am unable to express them through this process so far. I cannot understand why villages such as High Easter need development when there is so much expansion ongoing in surrounding towns.

The questionnaire was in response to resident's comments during the recent extraordinary meetings, see minutes 27 July 2020. It was a questionnaire to determine if residents supported a process in which they would directly contribute to shaping the future of High Easter and if they did which of the formal processes they thought appropriate to achieve that aim. It was not an attempt to ask the specific questions about whether residents support development in the parish, what scale or form that might take, where that might go. These and other questions are for any community led plan process to ask if they are to carry any weight in planning discussions and decisions.

Uttlesford is responsible for producing the Local Plan which guides where development will go in its district; residential, employment, infrastructure. Uttlesford is in the process of developing a new Local Plan, a process which is open to all to make their views known.

- 4.2 In terms of timing, it would be better to reflect on the whole question when Uttlesford has produced the new Local Plan and when the Government has finalised the proposed changes to the planning laws.

This point is relevant to Neighbourhood Plans only, see comment 3.5.

- 4.3 We already have a Parish Plan.

High Easter does not have a Parish Plan.

- 4.4 We have a village design statement, and little has changed to require an update.

High Easter does not have a Village Design Statement

4.5 Who are the people that have specifically asked for a Neighbourhood Plan? A Neighbourhood Plan will not benefit the village it will only benefit wealthy landowners and developers.

Neighbourhood Plan was specifically mentioned by a resident in the extraordinary Parish Council meeting of 27 July, see minutes. At that same meeting a resident stated, *'It is timely to consider the future and whether there is a need for the village to grow – sustainably - to allow it to survive and thrive'*.

The Parish Council has not specified a Neighbourhood Plan as the way forward. It has suggested the three community led plan options that exist. Each of these options has its own structured process so that it is properly constructed, expresses the views of all those in the community, residents, landowners, businesses, groups, and is non-biased and has legal standing.

Neighbourhood Planning enables communities to decide for themselves where and what type of housing should be built locally, and not 'wealthy landowners and developers'.

4.6 The current system where the local council makes the decisions seems to be working well. Putting more power in the hands of the parish council will raise questions regarding impartiality.

A community led plan does not necessarily change the decision-making process. Planning applications are still submitted and statutory consultees (which includes Parish Councils), residents and any member of the public can express their views on applications as they do now. Any community led plan provides the decision makers with the community views.

It is possible to create a neighbourhood development order, these are part of the neighbourhood plan process and allow local communities to determine what forms of development in their area should be permitted without the need for planning permission. This is for the neighbourhood plan process to determine, are optional and subject to the same level of referendum as the plan.

Community led plans are produced by the community, not the Parish Council alone and are designed to represent the views of the whole parish. They enable the local community to become actively involved in the decision-making process affecting the future of their parish.

4.7 The information sheet seemed heavily biased towards the Neighbourhood Plan, dedicating most of the information sheet to it. There is no information about 'Village Design Statements' or 'Parish Plans. I expected a fair, open and unbiased information sheet to help people understand what they were voting for so they could make an informed decision. The information sheet did not do this. You have only asked for reasons why you think community led plans would be of benefit!

It is accepted the information sheet was focused on Neighbourhood Plans, this was in response to the comments made by residents and given this is the tool to influence where development goes in the parish. The Parish Council is very happy to provide additional information on the Village Design Statement or Parish Plan processes if requested.

4.8 I do not think you can take this poll as a vote. People may feel conflicted by personal friendships or employment connections and therefore not feel able to make a response. A proper anonymous vote should be made, and before that people should be allowed to articulate the pros and cons of voting one way or another, that is the democratic way on which our society is based. This plan must be stopped and withdrawn now until a proper discussion takes place within the village by all residents on this subject only, and it should be a yes or no postal ballot to all residents of the High Easter Parish, independently monitored, counted, witnessed by non-Parish Council residents to ensure a fair and balanced vote.

Only the Clerk has seen the personal data of those who responded this has not been shared with the Parish Council as it is not relevant to their discussion or decision making. Anonymous voting may have encouraged some residents to respond, however personal data was only requested to ensure those who responded were on the electoral roll and to ensure multiple response were not submitted from individuals.

The Parish Council felt more residents were likely to respond if the questionnaire was electronic, however it also offered an option for residents to send response via post or email; 1 response was postal and 1 via email, with 26 via the electronic form. At this stage, the purpose of the questionnaire was to gauge whether or not there was sufficient interest from within the community to look at some form of community led plan, it was not to ask specific questions.

- 4.9 In the information sheet you stated that if sufficient interest in the Neighbourhood Plan was shown then the parish council would progress with it. However, you did not define what you meant by sufficient interest, and it seems that the arbiter on this is the parish council, which rather bypasses a democratic vote process!

The information sheet stated 'sufficient interest' in community led planning, not the Neighbourhood Plan. It will be for the Parish Council to consider the responses at its meeting.

A community led plan in whatever format will require the practical and financial support of the Parish Council. Elected by residents (either uncontested or contested) they are part of local government supporting the democratic process and have a responsibility to make decisions on behalf of residents. Democracy does not mean everyone will agree with its decisions, all the time.

- 4.10 I have read the guidance by UDC and the Rural Community Council for Essex. The whole process is exceedingly complicated, lengthy, and costly. Most importantly it has highly complex legal issues and implications that I would suggest are outside the scope and experience of non-professionals.

Yes it is a costly, lengthy, and complex process which requires professional input. A committee (of the Parish Council) would need to be set up to manage this process, its membership would have to be residents alongside Parish Councillors. An agreed terms of reference would guide this membership and its responsibilities, it is important that any committee has the trust and support of the residents otherwise the process will not be achievable.

- 4.11 Looking at the list of communities in Uttlesford that already have a Plan it is obvious that, in the main, they are the larger communities. In my view, High Easter Parish does not have the size or infrastructure to warrant the need for this sort of planning.

Previously the Parish Council decided not to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for this reason and given the previous (now withdrawn) Local Plan had no development proposed for High Easter.

- 4.12 As its historic that High Easter rebuffs any new development I am unsure how this questionnaire has come about.

See Parish Council minutes from July to December 2020 to understand the background to the questionnaire.

- 4.13 The neighbourhood plan would be a negative move, just facilitating more development.

- 4.14 If Uttlesford council or the Government force us to have further development in the future, which is unlikely, then that is different and acceptable.