

Rural Parish presents Plan for the Future

One of the first Neighbourhood Plans in the country has been published to the local people of West Hoathly, Sharpthorne, Highbrook and the surrounding areas. The Plan sets out the development of the area for the next 20 years. Based on a year's research through workshops, focus groups and surveys, West Hoathly Parish Council are now encouraging their residents to comment on the draft version of the community's plan. A printed copy of the Plan has been posted to each of the 800 homes. Householders will have 6 weeks, until 3rd June, to make their comments through the local website (www.HoathlyHub.info) or using the response form.

Parish Council Chairman, John Downe, who has been leading the project, explained "Our Plan sets out to address the priorities and concerns identified by local people in a way that will conserve and enhance our area well into the future. We now really need everyone to read the Plan and express their opinions about it."

After this local consultation phase, the feedback will be assessed and changes made to the Plan. Then it will go through further statutory stages before the acid test of a "yes/no" referendum of all parish voters in late 2013. A "yes" majority will mean that the Plan's policies will be used by Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) to determine the outcome of local planning applications and by the Parish Council to prioritise spending on local infrastructure. A "no" will mean all local control will be left to the District to decide.

Among the top priorities the Plan seeks to progress are:-

- reducing the impact on residents' lives of the heavily used "C" road through the parish
- achieving more homes for young families and older residents, including more affordable homes
- supporting local services such as the school and shop, and local employment
- protecting the surrounding High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty countryside and the wealth of historic buildings

Helen Schofield, a local resident and Clerk to the Parish Council, commented "Over the last year it has been a fascinating exercise to involve hundreds of people in the identification of what they like and what they would wish to see improved about our local area. The draft Plan we have published reflects the consensus of those views and how people's wishes can be acted upon. We now need to know if our fellow residents agree!"

An exhibition of the Plan will be held at 8pm in West Hoathly Village Hall on Monday 22nd, Sharpthorne Church Hall on Wednesday 24th, Highbrook Village Hall on Thursday 25th and at 11am in West Hoathly primary school on Saturday 27th April. Refreshments will be served and Parish Councillors will be there to answer questions.

Contacts

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Notes for editors

- Neighbourhood Plan legislation was introduced by the 2011 Localism Act.
- Parishes or other local community groups can apply to develop a plan for their area. If they don't their planning and infrastructure decisions will be made by their District Council or equivalent.
- West Hoathly Parish Council was an early applicant for the central government's "Frontrunner" Neighbourhood Plan funding and was awarded up to £20,000 through MSDC to assist with the Plan's development. The Parish Council approved the draft plan on 25th March 2013 at their Council meeting.
- The civil parish of West Hoathly has a population of approximately 2100. It is entirely within the AONB, contains two historic Conservation Areas (in West Hoathly and Highbrook) and has 55 Listed buildings.