

## MAKING IT HAPPEN

There are two main parameters within government's policies on community involvement and sustainable development with which there must be compliance in the preparation of a Parish Plan. Compliance should ensure support by local authorities at County and District level and the effective implementation of the planned proposals, subject to funding. The first of the two main parameters is the faithful and transparent interpretation of the community's aspirations and priorities in formulating the proposals. The second parameter requires the proposals to fall within current national, regional, county and district policies.

The community consultation process resulted in the return of 34% of questionnaires delivered to all households, (this compares most favourably with the 2.5% in the consultation exercise for the SBDC local plan review). The returns represent the sole basis for the Taplow Parish Plan Action Areas identified in Part Three, above. On the second parameter policy conformity has been assured with the following:

- Planning Policy Guidance 3: Housing
- Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport
- Our Countryside: The Future – a fair deal for rural England. White Paper  
CMD 4909
  - Review of the Rural White Paper (Cmd 4909)
  - Local Strategic Partnerships: Government Guidance (DET&R)
  - Planning Policy Statement 1: The Government's Objectives for the Planning System
  - Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks
  - Planning - Creating Local Development Frameworks: Supporting documentation to PPS 12, Papers 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 & 9
  - Statutory Instrument 2004 No. 2204 (Town and Country Planning Regulations)
  - Statement of Community Involvement and Planning Applications (ODPM)
  - Community Involvement in Planning: The Government's Objectives (ODPM)
  - Parish Plans: Guidance for Parish and Town Councils (The Countryside Agency)
  - The countryside in and around towns (The Countryside Agency)
- Buckinghamshire County Structure Plan
- Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Rural Strategy
- Bucks CC Local Transport Plan
- The Landscape Plan for Buckinghamshire
- South Bucks District Local Plan

The concept of the Parish Plan as a vehicle for sustainable development through close community involvement has been an important facet of government policies driven by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department for

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Countryside Agency. It has been formalised since publication of the Rural White Paper entitled *Our Countryside: The Future*, in the year 2000. In 2004 the Countryside Agency provided the manual, *Parish Plans - Guidance for parish and town councils*. This comprehensive document offers advice on the preparation of Parish Plans, Action Plans, budgeting and the relationship to the statutory planning system. Parish Plans as a **“bedrock of the new Local Development Frameworks”** is pervasive in government literature. The Countryside Agency sees the role of Parish Plans as **“guiding and influencing local development proposals and contributing to the review of broader planning policy”**. This, it records, can be achieved by:

- providing a greater level of detail than in the local development framework,
- ensuring that local characteristics, needs, opportunities and concerns are considered,
- enabling parish councils and local communities to take the initiative in setting out guidance and proposals planned to meet local circumstances,
- responding to community aspirations and interests and facilitating involvement in planning matters.

In short, a Parish Plan **“spells out how residents want the community to develop in the future”** and **“prepares a plan of action to achieve this vision”**.

The incorporation of Parish and Town Plans into the planning system is new. Though they do not form part of the statutory process it is clear that it is the intention of government that they should form an integral element in reaching decisions on development matters and service provision and that communities should have the opportunity of negotiating their proposals into the Local Development Framework. The Parish Plan also provides a sound basis for communities to play a proactive role in development control. Statements in PPS 1 makes palpable government’s intentions regarding the role of communities and Parish Councils within the planning process as the following quotations attest:

- • **The aim is to build strong, empowered communities in which people increasingly make decisions for themselves,**
- **----parish councils, through parish plans, should play a key role in developing full and active community involvement in their areas.**
- **Local communities should be given the opportunity to participate fully in the process for drawing up specific plans or policies,**
- **Pre application discussions are critically important-----proposals can be adapted to ensure they better reflect community aspirations (for development control procedures),**
- **Community involvement in planning should not be a reactive, tick box, process. It should enable the local community to say what sort of place they want to live in at a stage when this can make a difference,**
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- **----community involvement----is a process of dialogue as well as----building on common ground to build consensus’**
- **----involvement of communities----will be “front-loaded” in the local development framework production process. “Front-loading” means more active involvement (right from the start),**

- ----many elements of the local development framework will require joint working between local planning authorities-----involving communities at an early stage,

Parish Plans should be comprehensive in scope. According to the Countryside Agency they can include everything that is relevant to the people who live and work in the community whether social, environmental or economic. No format or content is identified by government for a Parish Plan; it is up to the community. The content, character and level of a Parish Plan will also be dependent upon the skills available to the communities. In the case of this parish research, planning, financial, environmental and economic skills have enabled preparation of a plan with a more detailed technical content than would otherwise be possible. Reference is made in PPS 1 to the relationship of parish plans to components of the Local Development Framework. Depending on content a parish plan is seen as appropriate for provision as a Supplementary Planning Document or part of one. It states “**Authorities will (also) need to consider how best to incorporate parish plans within a Supplementary Planning Document**”. The Taplow Parish Plan offers itself as an **area action plan** in view of its relative comprehensiveness in planning content. As such it can complement the Community Strategy. The latter is a particularly suitable vehicle for planning for service provision and the former for providing a local spatial component in development.

Government’s strong commitment to community involvement as an integral part of the planning process and the form and content of a parish plan will determine the institutional structures, roles and procedures for incorporating community aspirations and priorities, **as a key factor**, into a Local Development Framework. For this purpose a fresh start is required. Current public participation techniques, appropriate for the purpose for which they were designed, will not answer as they are primarily concerned with the provision of information and the gathering of reactions by the public to already formulated policies, proposals and options. Response to community attitudes is at present at the discretion of the local authority and therefore not in keeping with government policies that take community involvement to the heart of the planning process. On the issue of form and content there would appear to be a compelling argument for the Taplow Parish Plan to be incorporated as a component of the Local Development Framework in the form of an Area Action Plan. This parish plan would also serve as a basis for development control and management offering opportunities for the tiered approach to community involvement in planning applications, (*Statement of Community Involvement and Planning Applications – ODPM 2004*).

The ODPM publication *Community Involvement in Planning (2004)* states “**Strengthening community involvement is a key part of the Government’s planning reforms**”. In support of this policy Local Planning Authorities are required to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement. This document will set out the means by which to “**ensure the active, meaningful and continued involvement of local communities and stakeholders throughout both processes**”, (i.e. Local Development Documents and consideration of planning applications). Preparation of the Statement of Community Involvement is itself a subject for consultation for which a period of six months is provided. On completion the SCI will be independently examined by an Inspector and may be challenged through an appeal procedure. Once approved by the Secretary of State the SCI will provide the

structure, which must be followed, for all community involvement and public participation. The particular and technical nature of the Taplow Parish Plan requires a mechanism which will provide for an ongoing and continuous dialogue between the Parish community and the appropriate institutions at County and District level. This is an essential prerequisite by which to achieve consensus for the implementation of the planned proposals and actions within the Taplow Parish Plan. Early negotiations with SBDC are required on arrangements within the SCI for public participation in respect of the aspirations and priorities of the Taplow community. Early negotiations are also required with BCC on transport, rights of way, landscape and environment.