

Proposal to the Parish Council to set up a Working Party to review the Parish Design Statement and formulate a Vision for the Future

Summary

As requested by the Parish Council at its meeting on 13th September we have discussed issues around the relevance of the 2003 Parish Design Statement.

The system of Local Governance in Somerset is evolving. It is also believed that the Community Council for Somerset (CCS) will soon be encouraging Parish and Town Councils to initiate new, or review existing, plans describing their vision for the future, for which they will be inviting bids for support to do so.

We recommend that Parish Council initiate the formation of a Working Party, with which members of the Parish are actively encouraged to engage, to update the 2003 Parish Design Statement. As a precursor we also need to form a view on how the communities in the Parish could evolve and devise plans to achieve that vision. The intention is to organise a General Meeting of the Parish to explain the aims and recruit volunteers to take this work forward.

Aim: To update the Ashwick Parish Design Statement

The current Design Statement has been in place since 2003 and has in the past been used as an active guide for planners to ensure that the character of the village is not lost through development that is not in keeping with what exists now.

The Statement was originally put in place with the help of Public Consultations and Workshops in April 1997 within the communities of Oakhill, Binegar, Neighbourne and Benter, Gurney Slade and Ashwick.

Why update the Design Statement?

It describes in detail elements of the village and what makes it unique and helps it to sit in design terms in the local area. It is a document that gives other mechanisms of the planning system teeth, such as the Parish Council, allows us to support sustainable development and manage the evolution of the village in the medium and long term. Being 20 years old it is now out of date, has lost some of its relevance and so needs to be replaced.

Accepting change:

It has been the view of the Parish Council and residents in engagement meetings that we need to keep development moderated. This is still the case but we must be alive to the fact that the village will, and must, evolve over time, so it's important that we have our say as parishioners and work towards a managed evolution. We have all moved to this Parish for a reason, and we need to key into those reasons when we begin to engage with fellow parishioners. We should aim to protect those characteristics. Different people will have different ideas about what a community is, what does it mean to you? What do we want the parish to look like in, say, 20 years' time?

Engagement:

There is much engagement to do but the guiding principles should be clear and come from the community. Some themes that came out of the previous engagement activities were:

Sustainability – each development must offer cheaper housing for local residents, and be built in such a way that adds amenity to the village. We may want to look at empty buildings and think about how we could encourage light industry or other economic development back into the parish.

Support the Community – focus around and give preference to things that support the community such as The Pubs, Village Halls, Open spaces, Surgery, Oakleaf Café, Shops.

Support Wellbeing - Although the term 'wellbeing' was not used in the 1997 consultation, the impact of open spaces is now clearer and a more acceptable conversation in terms of health trends - open spaces and keep the character of the open country side.

Proposed actions:

The development of a new Parish Design Statement and Community Vision could move forward in 4 stages:

1. Write and agree a set of criteria around which we feel as a Parish Council would engage with the local area and consult with the other villages in the Parish.
2. Concurrently with item 1, and in anticipation of CCS launching a new phase of the Community Review Project, prepare an application to the CCS for funding to support an engagement planning day and the production of a new Parish Plan.
3. Marketing activity to engage with the local residents and get them interested, explaining why the plan is important for the future of the village that they live in.
4. Produce the new Parish Design Statement and distribute it widely.

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