

## **Proposal to develop a Culworth Village Plan**

I am making this proposal simply because as a resident of Culworth for twenty years I have enjoyed the privilege of living in a rural setting and wish to ensure that it is as good if not better for future generations.

I believe we all have skills and experiences that if shared, might help ensure the long-term quality of life in Culworth. My own contribution, which I am prepared to offer if this proposal is accepted, is in the area of facilitating different groups of people in developing their shared plans and ambitions for improving the quality of life in their area.

My proposal would entail two parts. The first is in developing a plan, the second is in implementing the plan. The first part would take between 6 to 9 months, and the second part would be ongoing.

The purpose of this letter is to ask the Parish Council if it is prepared to endorse and support the promotion of this proposal to the wider community of Culworth to see if there is community support.

Ken Webster, The Coach House, Culworth.

### **Why does Culworth need a Village Plan?**

- To promote a shared vision for Culworth that over an extended period of time seeks to protect and improve the quality of life in the village.
- To have a plan for maintaining and improving the facilities in the village
- To be prepared for funding applications that might be needed to attract new funding into the village for improvements
- To be prepared for planning issues that might arise
- To protect and enhance our investment in our village

### **What might be in a Culworth Village Plan?**

- The point of the village plan is that it will contain what the people who live in, and who depend on the village think is most important
- In other places where this has been done the plan has covered themes such as the transport and traffic, recreation spaces, building or repairing community spaces, protecting the environment, creating new jobs for local people, increasing the use of local allotments, more community events, schemes for looking after the elderly or those too ill to shop for themselves. Larger schemes have resulted in the community taking over the running of the local shop, and even the local pub which would have otherwise closed. There are many possible ideas which are unknown until the question is asked.

### **We've done this all before.**

- OK, so what can we do better this time?
- There is always a cycle, things come around again.
- Is there a different way of doing things this time?
- It's the opportunity for new people to contribute to their community.

### **Who should be involved in developing a Culworth Village Plan?**

- It is important that the whole community is able to get involved, even if people don't get involved in everything, most have a contribution to make. Would-be external flinders usually ask for evidence that the community have been involved in planning.
- I believe the Parish Council should be central, especially as it is the elected body that is closest to the community.
- It is important the organisations in the village such as the Culworth Gang, WI, Church, Culworth School etc are involved
- The District and County elected members should be invited, though I believe this should not become party political. The District and County Councils now have to develop "Community Planning" as a requirement of the 2000 Local Government Act.

### **How would we go about developing a Culworth Village plan?**

These thoughts are based on work that I and many others have been involved in for several years.

I can provide case studies to demonstrate this.

The approach I would recommend concentrates more on the process of working together to identify the common priorities rather than telling people what they should be thinking. The difficulty some people have at first is that the process can seem a little woolly. But my experience has been that once people get going they get a lot out of it, and much can be achieved.

I believe the following needs to happen, roughly in this order to get things started:

1. The Parish Council to discuss and hopefully support the proposal to develop a Village Plan. Also to therefore support the proposed whole community meetings by funding the meeting space - either in the village hall or in the school hall - and refreshments.
2. To ask the School Governor body to link this proposal to its own current review of the community use of the school premises and the changing role of the school within the community.
3. Ask the other organisations in the village to support the proposal. I am prepared to attend a meeting with these to outline the proposal in more detail.
4. Follow up an initial contact with South Northants District Council and make contact with the NCC to see how much support they are able to give to the process.

### **Agree to an overall time scale for developing the plan.**

I suggest a timetable roughly along the following lines.

I have found that a period of about six to nine months is long enough to develop a plan. Probably the first two months will be taken up promoting the idea to the community and recruiting local people. This will require attending meetings of existing societies and clubs that operate in the

village, knocking on doors to encourage people to participate, prepare materials that explain in more detail what is being attempted. I believe the Parish Council would benefit from being involved in this activity.

### **Planning the whole community involvement.**

There would be a minimum three, maximum four, whole community meetings over the six months. There will be other working group meetings between the whole community meetings. The first whole community meeting, which kick starts the work stage has to achieve three main things;

- Provide the time and space for everyone to develop a shared view of what we are to try and achieve
- Identify the broad headings of what the community believe are the priorities
- Identify who wants to work on each of the themes that are identified, and what they are committed to report back at the next whole community meeting

I can provide materials if people need them, to help them organise their working groups. I am also prepared to run a session with anyone who wants to practice group skills.

The second whole community meeting will need to achieve three main things:

- Each working group will report back on their progress and any barriers to progress
- The working groups will clarify their priorities in order to complete their task in time for the next whole community meeting, the date of which will be agreed at this meeting.
- Agreement of the structure of the final reports in order that the working groups are all heading in the same direction. The structure of the reports will need to be agreed, but it will be useful if they all follow the same structure and order. As a guide they will each need to have a heading and title, a description of the problem or issue the report is addressing, a description of the different parts or concerns within the problem or issue. Most importantly the reports will provide recommendations for what needs to be done, who is considered best placed to do it and in what timescale. Another area that is essential is agreeing how we will know in five or ten years time whether or not we have been successful.

The third whole community meeting will need to achieve three main things:

- Receive reports from each working group using the headings agreed at the previous meeting
- Look at the sum total of all the work put together and identify any contradictions, any similarities and the highest priorities
- Agree the next two things: the first is what form should the finished report take, who will do it, and who should receive it beyond the village, the second is agreeing what needs to be done to implement it.

The above are only the broad headings which will need further detailed planning once there is support for the proposal.

Ken Webster