

Dorstone Parish Council Update **December 2015**

1. Neighbourhood Plan

Details of the Draft Neighbourhood Plan have been published and are covered in separate notices/emails. The consultation period on the contents of the draft Plan runs from November 25th 2015 until 31st January 2016. Details on how to comment are set out in Notices around the Village, in a DFR email as well as a leaflet delivered to homes not receiving the DFR service. Copies of the Plan are available to borrow from the Dorstone Front Room.

Drop in sessions for Parishioners will be held at the Dorstone Front Room on the following dates:

- Thursday 7th January between 10.00am and 12.30pm
- Saturday 9th January between 10.00am and 12.30pm

Members of the Steering group will be available to discuss any aspect of the Plan and answer questions and receive comments. Free refreshments will be served during these times.

2. Parish Precept

The Council has agreed to put forward a Parish Council precept of £4000 for the coming financial year 2016-17. Over the past few years the Council has followed a policy of gradually increasing the precept, which is collected as part of Council Tax bills. This ensures that the Council's expenditures are covered by the Precept, rather than continually drawing on reserves which have been gradually been running down. The figure proposed for the coming year now matches the expenditure levels of the Council. Please note that the Council has also been reducing and eliminating a number of expenditure headings. The net effect of the increase of the precept is to increase the estimated annual payment from £21.60 to £ 22.78 for a Band D Council Band property.

The Council is aware that Herefordshire Council's budgets are under severe pressure as a result of reductions in central Government's grants. Although no firm proposals have yet been developed by Herefordshire Council, it is possible that Parish Council's could be asked to take on and fund certain services in future years. The proposed precept takes no account of such changes. However if any proposals are received Parishioners will be kept fully informed and consulted over the implications of any proposed change.

3. Pollution of the River Dore

During the consultations and publicity over the proposed Broiler Chicken Sheds at Bage Court, there was one report in the Independent newspaper on May 22nd. 2015 which stated that "the River Dore which runs along the Golden Valley is already polluted according to locals".

Council members were concerned that, if true, such as statement might have a negative effect on tourism, and therefore investigated the facts surrounding the report. Environment Agency staff visited the site, above Dorstone House, on 28th May 2015. and confirmed the water was running clear, dissolved oxygen levels good, and there was an abundance of fresh water shrimp which is indicative of good water quality. This was also indicative that there had been no increases in ammoniacal nitrogen or biochemical oxygen demand which any previous pollution might have caused. In high rainfall it would also be expected that the water would colour and foaming is not unusual. The Environment Agency has also visited Bage Court and had given advice on farming activities but concluded that there was no reason to believe that there had been any significant pollution arising from farming activities, Following contact with the Editor of the Independent an additional line on the on-line edition report was made which stated that “others disagree and say a recent environment agency inspection showed the river to be in good shape

4. Tree Wardens

Herefordshire is in the process of establishing a Tree Warden Network (HTWN) linked to the National Tree Council's Tree Warden Scheme. Parish Councils can appoint a tree warden for the Parish and HTWN can offer support and training. HTWN is also affiliated to Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and the Herefordshire Tree Forum, which bring together statutory bodies and other local organisations and experts concerned with tree care policy.

Would you like to be a Tree Warden(s) for the Parish? You'd be offered on-going training on the welfare of trees, how to spot diseases, recognise & protect notable veterans and plant for the next generation. Tree Wardens also encourage an appreciation of trees and involve others in local tree events. Trees are increasingly valued not just for their timeless beauty and timber but also for their contribution to our wellbeing, flood prevention, air quality, biodiversity and as a source of renewable, sustainable energy.

If you might be interested in acting as Tree Warden for Dorstone speak to Tony Usher (Phone 550722 or email tony@gvwebdesign.co.uk) who looks after the Lengthsman Contract and acts as Footpath Officer for the Parish. Or for general information about being a Tree Warden contact Richie Cotterill 01544 231236 / 07777 661252 or email kingtontrees@live.co.uk or go to the following website: www.h-trees.net/htwn/html

5. Progress on Faster Broadband and Mobile Phone Coverage

The Draft Neighbourhood Plan places great emphasis on the required improvements in both Broadband and Mobile Phone services. During the period during which the Plan has been prepared, assurances were given by Herefordshire Council and Fastershire (the organisation created to help deliver faster broadband to Herefordshire) that by the end of 2015

improvements to the speed of broadband in the Golden Valley via the Peterchurch Exchange would be in place. However as broadband users will know, this has not yet occurred and the latest report from Fastershire on their Web site states the following:

“Despite the fact we have stood the fibre cabinet in Peterchurch there is still a large amount of engineering work required in the area. Our progress has been hampered by blocked and damaged ducts. We have a significant volume of overhead cabling required for 'Fibre to the Premises' (FTTP) deployment in the area. We have completed the surveying for the FTTP, and are currently assessing requirements for tree cutting,, so that we can hang the overhead cable.”

It is understood that new contracts are now being let in the New Year to complete this task. We will keep you informed as much as we can, as regrettably the communications from the providers could be better.

On the mobile phone front, progress to improve service is even more disappointing. We have reported in previous Updates that there was the possibility of a mast for the area which would serve all mobile phone service providers, under the provisions of the Mobile Phone Infrastructure Project. We understand however that central Government has pulled this project. Apparently Arquiva, who were the agency charged by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to oversee the delivery of the new mast sites, found it far more difficult that they anticipated, both locally and nationally in bringing sites through to build. This was for a variety of reasons, most typically lack of data transmission links back into the mobile operator's networks and difficulties in identifying suitable physical locations. The Government has therefore ceased any continuing work on mobile sites unless that site had been submitted for formal planning permission. In Herefordshire only one of ten sites had reached that far, in Waterstone. Herefordshire Council had made a strong case for improved mobile infrastructure for the County, and they will be approaching DCMS to rethink their plans. The Local MP Jesse Norman is also aware of the situation.

The Parish Council will continue to monitor progress closely on both these fronts, and lobby the various organisations and political representatives involved.

6. Community Facilities

The Neighbourhood Plan has a whole section devoted to Community facilities and recognises the importance of the work of the various organisations in Dorstone in the life in the Parish. It is perhaps opportune to express a big vote of thanks to all the members and officers of these organisations for their great voluntary work without which life in Dorstone would be much the poorer.

This includes well established committees such as those associated with the Church – the PCC & Friends of St. Faiths, the Village Hall Committee, the Playing Fields Committee, Dormice Play Group, WI, Bowling Club and Young Farmers, and newer groups such as the History Society and Dorstone Front Room. The importance of the Pandy Inn in community life should also be recognised and I am sure everyone wishes the new owners James and Lisa a warm welcome to Dorstone and every success in their new venture.

Colin Thomas - Chairman