

Churcham Parish 'Where are we and where are we going'?

After taking on the role of Chair of the Parish Council I have been looking at the parish not only as it is now but where it could be in the future. Churcham Parish which includes Bulley, Birdwood and Churcham is disparate and cut in two by the A40 with no village centre. I was taken by the lack of interaction across the community and whilst there is a good connection between residents neighbour to neighbour, there are no set groups (apart from the Gardening Club) to cause people to get together and thus enrich the parish. That was the reasoning behind the setting set up of 'My Churcham' which would hopefully facilitate the community feeling within the parish.

The main challenge is where we are now as a parish and where we want the parish to be. This includes what we all want from our community and what type of a community we want to live in. We have to identify what the parish looks like now and the pressures on our community. This could be the demographics of the parish. There is an aging population and with a lack facilities within the parish we need to find ways to support our parishioners. What routes are there to funding or support as we all age and how do we set up a mechanism to action this?

There is also the issue of housing. Does the current housing stock suit the needs of our community and does it allow for development? I am not just talking about building houses or sheltered housing but how we could use our existing houses more 'wisely' to benefit the homeowner and the community as a whole. Multi-generational living could be a way forward making our existing houses work for our families by bringing new people into the parish and supporting our older residents.

Work life balance in our community is as I see it key to our sustainability as a parish. If everyone is always traveling away from the parish to work or for social activity we are much poorer as a community so we need to look at a strategy for improvement. This could encompass connectivity re. our lamentable broadband service, more working from home and perhaps a business development strategy for the parish. I would envisage that the transport infrastructure i.e roads/buses would come under this category.

We need to look in detail at what we have in the parish – our footpaths, school and churches and decide whether they are core to the wellbeing of our community and if so what we can do to support, secure and develop these for the future.

At present if you look at the Forest of Dean core strategy, Churcham Parish hardly gets a mention. In fact apart from the 'exception site' that the parish council fought hard to establish in Chapel Lane, there has been no new building within the parish for the last 50 years so it is no wonder that the school and the fabric of our community has had a slow decline over the years. The Forest of Dean uses the tag of 'sustainability' for development and classes the Parish as 'unsustainable' from a planning perspective. Our lack of inclusion in the core strategy and our own lack of direction as a parish has left us out of any development or 'way forward'. Are we content to let this state of affairs continue?

My offering is to develop a Neighbourhood Plan (as they have just completed in Longhope) to address the needs of our community and give us a platform for the future. We need a steering group to work with the parish council and the community to get this off the ground. I would suggest this would consist of 7 people chaired by the chair of the parish council. This grouping from within our

community will ideally have a range of skill sets to analyse, suggest and direct as the Neighbourhood plan develops. Remember this is an official document and if audited and approved it is binding on the district council to take our views as a parish into consideration, without it we have no say as to what happens to us.

If you wish to be involved please contact the parish council clerk or me directly.

Thank you

John Francis (Chair Churcham Parish Council)

CHURCHAM PARISH PLAN

A PARISH OR COMMUNITY LED PLAN WILL



- Reflects the views of **all** sections of the community through consultation
- Identify what people like and dislike about their community and how to improve it
- Identifies how residents would like the community to develop in the future and become resilient to change
- Identifies local issues and problems including a wide range of social, economic and environmental issues and how they might be addressed.
- Promotes partnership with service providers, volunteers and other organisations and business

IT IS ABOUT ACHIEVING ACTION

A PARISH OR COMMUNITY LED PLAN CAN...

- Highlight new projects and show evidence of need for projects. Some national funders even see the completion of a parish plan as good evidence
- Identifies important skills of residents in your community bringing residents together and helping forge greater community spirit
- Consult effectively with all groups in the parish and train people in consultation techniques



- Influence and inform others

PARISH PLAN SCHEDULE

Usually less than a year

LAUNCH THE PLAN	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get started. Publicity, discussions with the community and launch event. 2. Establish Steering Group from various parts of the community 3. Establish a project plan and timetable
EVIDENCE LOCAL NEED & ASPIRATION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Understand your community. Consult with all the different sectors and different organizations and clubs. Give plenty of opportunities for the community to have their say. Analyse all the responses
AGREE & PRIORITISE ACTIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Prioritise achievable aspirations that can be actioned to include who will be involved, how long it will take and if there is any cost. Write an action plan. 6. Draft the plan and publicise for comments 7. Finalise the plan
DELIVER & MONITOR ACTIONS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Adoption by Parish Council. Formally adopt and include in minutes 9. Implement & monitor actions regularly to ensure they are progressed and accomplished. Decide when to review and refresh the plan (annually, five years) and add this to the timetable.

