

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN UPDATE

Following public consultation, the Parish Council decided to start a Neighbourhood Plan in September 2019. The reasoning behind that decision was that we believed that the residents of Ravensden should have a say in how they wanted their village to develop over the next 10-15 years. When complete the Neighbourhood Plan will be used, alongside Bedford Borough Council's own local plan: to determine planning applications, decide the locations for any new development, and promote measures to protect and enhance key environmental and heritage features.

A Steering Group was formed in October comprising seven members in total (including 3 Parish Councillors): from Cleat Hill, The Crossroads and Church End. The group have met monthly (virtually, recently) and will continue to do so, to move the plan forward.

We have set up a designated website : <https://ravensdenplan.info> which gives a great deal of information about Neighbourhood Plans in general - but also, our plan in particular.

In February/March 2020, we held two drop-in sessions - at Mowsbury Golf Club and at the Village Hall, which were both very well attended. The aim of these launch events was to keep everyone informed of the aim of the Neighbourhood Plan, our progress so far, and also to collect thoughts and views on issues in the parish. A residents' survey also went out to all households in March. We had a 35% response rate which is an exceptionally high return. Bedfordshire Rural Charities Commission collected and analysed all of the data from the responses, and a full written report on the survey is available to view via the website. A business survey has also gone out, which will be analysed in turn.

PLANNING

The PC has provided comments on more than a dozen Planning Applications last year, covering new housing, conversion and alterations to listed buildings and housing extensions. The PC agreed in principle to the Graze Hill development, especially when the proposed housing number was reduced from 200 to 165. However, we strongly disagreed with the access to the development being from a new roundabout at the junction of the B660 and Graze Hill. Unfortunately, the planning department passed the plans including the access, and denied us the footpath which we had requested to run from the Country Park to Ravensden Crossroads.

LOCAL PLAN - The Borough Council adopted the "Local Plan 2030" in January but work is already underway to prepare the next one, which will potentially determine where major development will be located up until 2040. A "Call for Sites" will be made this summer and there will be a Public Consultation on the Draft Plan, including the sites put forward next June. There will be great pressure for a village scale development to the north of Bedford, which would have consequences for local road safety. The PC will publicise the location of sites when more details are available.

WILDFLOWERS FOR OUR VERGES

Thanks to the Ward Fund, Ravensden has a budget for planting wildflowers to enhance verges or other sites which you suggest. Native plants such as cowslips, meadow cranesbill and bird's foot trefoil will be available to plant in the autumn. The parish has a wonderful Roadside Nature Reserve along Grazehill Lane, but other areas could be enhanced. If you can suggest a safe location, please let us know.

Community Trust

The Community Trust aims to serve the community of Ravensden. Grants are awarded for personal development, and people who are in need. This might include students or youngsters furthering their education (for example, to buy text-books, laptops or equipment, or for career development. It might also include people who struggle to finance unforeseen expenditure, for example washing machine or boiler breakdown.

The grant might also be awarded for people in financial need who require taxis to hospital, or parking fees to visit relatives. Carers might also apply.

The Trust wants to support the local community, so please apply. All applications are treated in confidence.

For more details contact Bernie Russell, John Collins or Jane Ferguson. This year the trust provided a gift to all the school leavers from Ravensden Primary School. It also provided tables for the Church to use at social and fundraising events.

Community Litterpicks

This year we had only one litter pick in October. The one scheduled for April was cancelled because of the lockdown. Thank you to everyone who helped in October, and those of you who have tried valiantly to keep our paths and verges clear of rubbish by doing your own individual litter collection. We hope to be able to have a communal litter pick in October.

There was no bulky waste collection this year.

HIGHWAYS

After having repeatedly complained to the Highways Department about the state of the road on Church Hill, it was finally resurfaced early in the year, as was Sunderland Hill and the stretch of the B660 near Wayside Farm Park.

TRAFFIC SPEEDS

We have continued to monitor the traffic along Oldways Road, using our camera which stores data. From that data we know that about 22% of vehicles are speeding, and of those, many are in excess of 60 mph. We also know that in normal times there are about 5000 – 7000 vehicles travelling each way every week. The maximum number we found is 205 per hour. We hope we can use this data as evidence of increased traffic when any new development is built, such as Graze Hill. For this reason, we now have another pole to fit our camera to, along Butler Street (courtesy of BBC). When the lockdown eases, we will be able to collect data from there as well. This is a long-term project, and one of our aims is to provide enough evidence to the Council to provide us with either traffic calming or a Variable Speed Camera. The latter are very expensive, and we have been asking for a grant from BBC, to have at least one, for several years. Even with a grant, the Parish Council's contribution would be £10,000 towards the cost.

UPDATE ON EAST WEST RAIL (EWR)

Despite the covid-19 pandemic, and the fact that a number of public meetings with local communities were cancelled, we understand that EWR are continuing with their planned timetable. They still plan to undertake public consultation on the preferred route alignment at the end of the year 2020 or early in 2021.

We have queried the exact criteria that will be used to decide the preferred route alignment. EWR have indicated that this will be the same as that used to select the preferred route option itself - these criteria they tell us can be found "*on pages 11 to 14 of 'Chapter 4, Evaluating route option within the preferred route corridor' - of the Bedford to Cambridge Route Option Consultation Technical Report*". This report can be found on their website www.eastwestrail.co.uk. However they also tell us that "If for any reason it is considered appropriate to vary the criteria previously identified, the reasons for doing so will also be clearly explained" - this will however be at the time of the consultation on the chosen preferred route alignment which is far from ideal.

EWR say that they remain open during the current pandemic to contact from local communities and we would encourage everyone interested to continue to lobby them for more advance information on their plans, prior to the formal public consultation later in the year.

Their contact details are:

Email: contact@eastwestrail.co.uk Send a message online: www.eastwestrail.co.uk/get-in-touch Write: Freepost EAST WEST RAIL Call: 0330 134006

The Parish Council wants to support our community to do what we can to influence the detail of the chosen route (if that is possible). So, as well as working with our local Councillors, talking to EWR and lobbying our MP, we are also contacting neighbouring Parish Councils for discussions around joint activities.