

**MINUTES/NOTES FROM THE PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON 7<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2012  
AT 7.30PM AT EAST FARLEIGH PRIMARY SCHOOL, VICARAGE LANE**

**Present:** Mrs F Gordon (FG) (Chair)  
Cllr G Charlton (GC) (Chair of East Farleigh Parish Council - EFPC)  
Mr R Morris (RM) (Chair of Village Plan Action Group -VPAG)

**In attendance:** 81 members of the public (a copy of the attendance register is attached)

These minutes have been reviewed by those listed as present above and by Mr D Hussein, who has represented the views of a group of residents who are against the feasibility study proposed by VPAG.

The meeting was called to hear residents' views on that proposal by VPAG to employ a firm of consultants to undertake a feasibility study into ways of solving some of the issues in the village, identified as part of the Village Plan – namely, traffic problems around the school and on the Bridge, the lack of a centre in the village – and to look at how solutions could be funded.

After welcoming those present, the Chair asked RM to set out the background to the VPAG proposal. In response, RM hoped to explain in more detail what the proposal was and was not and, in so doing, it was hoped to respond to some of the questions and concerns already raised and to open up the debate about how to proceed. He stressed that VPAG want what's best for the village and nothing more and it is down to the village to decide what it does and doesn't want.

In his introduction, RM set out the background to the 2009 Village Plan and progress since and referred to the following documents:

- East Farleigh Village Plan 2009
- East Farleigh Village Plan Update, June 2010
- East Farleigh Village Centre/Green Feasibility Study Survey, October 2011
- East Farleigh Village Appraisal 1989
- Two leaflets distributed by David Hussein on behalf of a group of residents opposing the proposal for a feasibility study

Note: The Village Plan and Update, along with responses to the Feasibility Study Survey are available from <http://www.eastfarleigh.net/village-plan/village-plan.php>

Having ticked off most of the more easily achieved ideas that came from the Village Plan, as explained in the Village Plan update, VPAG had moved onto the more difficult issues and had sought residents views through the Questionnaire. He explained that the basis of the proposal was the response to that questionnaire, the results of which were:

1. Questionnaires issued: 650
2. Questionnaires returned: 223 (approx one third)
3. Those in favour of the question "Do you support the proposal to commission a professional feasibility study considering the principle and options for a village centre/village green? " : 61% of those who responded. 37% of those who responded were against.

Note: During the meeting:

1. the interpretation of the statistics was questioned by some:
  - did a no-reply mean that those residents agreed/disagreed/?
  - the statistics do not reveal that some of the votes were qualified
  - did the low level of response (about 20% of residents as only one form per household) justify the feasibility study or could/should more have been done to get a bigger response before proceeding?; and
2. it was also questioned whether the wording and design of the Questionnaire affected the response. For, in contrast to the outcome of the 2011 questionnaire, it was noted that, during the consultation in 2009 when 60% of the residents responded to the questionnaire, only 6% said that there was a need for more housing in East Farleigh. Some residents were in favour of affordable housing being built and this has been carried out in Gallants Lane.

In responding to some of the points raised in the leaflet produced by the group against housing developments on agricultural land in East Farleigh, RM explained why the likely cost of the feasibility study had increased. The initial quote was for a restricted study by a local consultancy with an estimated cost of £3,000. This is now unlikely to be sufficient because, as the scope had increased to accommodate highways matters, the local firm had withdrawn and there was a need to go to a larger consultancy organisation. Both factors were contributing to an increase in cost.

Funding of the feasibility study had been investigated by VPAG with some possibilities identified, although the attaching conditions might not be compatible with the possible proposal arising out of the feasibility study.

Some of the questions raised:

- Do we need a village green?
- Do we need a village green in addition to the Recreation Ground?
- What form should it take and where should it be located?
- Who would use it?
- Can we afford it?
- If housing were to be the source of funding, how many houses and where? The last three housing developments in the village (Castacrete site on Dean Street; sustainable housing off Gallants Lane and the new housing in Pleasant Lane) were on brownfield sites, not on agricultural land.

In each case, RM said that the answer was “don’t know”, as, at this stage, there is no proposal, just a decision to conduct a feasibility study and generate some proposals. Only then could those questions be answered.

RM also noted that the biggest concerns in the village relate to traffic, the repeated damage to the bridge and the congestion at the school at drop-off and pickup times. These he noted were the source of major concerns, and were also recorded in the 1989 Village Appraisal, carried out jointly by the Parish and Parochial Church Councils and the WI.

During the meeting, the role of the VPAG was explained as, clearly, there was some confusion in residents’ minds about the respective roles of the Parish Council and the Village Plan Action Group and the democratic legitimacy of VPAG.

Best practice, as recommended by ACRK (Action with Communities in Rural Kent), is for the Parish Council not to lead the village plan process. It should be involved but also separate, in order that it can be independent when considering any ideas put forward by the VPAG.

Following the 2009 Village Plan, VPAG was established by Cllr GC from volunteers, with a view to developing the ideas contained in the Plan and subsequent exhibition. Anyone is free to join. Cllr GC is the Parish Council representative on VPAG

Any proposals stemming from VPAG and needing planning approval would be subject to approval by the Borough Council, a process that calls for comment by the Parish Council.

At various points, the meeting clearly showed that it believed that VPAG could have communicated better with the village. VPAG had intended to issue regular reports to residents but, unfortunately, had not done so. It was also reported to the meeting that at the Parish Council meetings, in the six month's prior to the Questionnaire being issued, the minutes record that there was "nothing to report", which was untrue.

The meeting was then given over to the residents' views. The following is representative of the views expressed by those who spoke:

#### VILLAGE GREEN/CENTRE

The idea of some sort of village green/centre had been well supported at the Village Plan Exhibition and the intention was that the Feasibility Study would generate ideas as to how it might be achieved. Some saw this as an attempt to have another try at developing land on Lower Road, which had been contained in a planning application in 1991.

#### FUNDING

During the meeting it was noted that the Forge Lane footpath had been achieved via a land donation and that other villages with similar issues may have found solutions from which East Farleigh could learn .

#### HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

- The feasibility study was to "Consider options for ..... A small, discreetly-sited, residential development to fund the improvements listed [possible village green/improved parking and traffic circulation]....., it did not suggest where such housing should be built.
- The owner of the land opposite the Church/Bull Pub had said that MBC wouldn't sanction building on agricultural land and that six dwellings would not generate sufficient money for the scale of the work proposed by VPAG.
- There were concerns as to whether the village infrastructure, such as sewers, had sufficient capacity to cope with any more housing.
- There were concerns about the visual impact of such housing. The meeting was advised that such objections carried less weight with Planning these days
- A petition had been signed by over 100 residents against a housing development on agricultural land.

## TRAFFIC

- Concerns about the amount of traffic and size of vehicles using the village roads.
- Objections to ideas of putting a roundabout in the village.
- Observation that the Bull crossroads is not the only source of traffic danger. Solving one problem only moves the danger to another point.

## FEASIBILITY STUDY

- It was questioned whether the proposals arising from the feasibility study could be used against the village in future or if the voice of the residents in response to the proposals was stronger
- Did VPAG need better advice before proceeding with the feasibility study?
- Meeting agreed that there would be fewer objections to building on brownfield land than on agricultural land.
- Many of those present did not see the need for a village green.
- It was reported that Cllr GC had stated earlier in the year that the MBC planning office had said that a village green opposite the church and Bull pub, funded by an enabling build, was unlikely to happen in the next 20 years. It was questioned why, therefore, the Parish council would consider a grant to fund a feasibility study into something that it had already been told was very unlikely to happen

## BRIDGE

The meeting was updated on attempts to restrict access to the bridge, but it was part of a bigger issue, such as the problem of heavy lorries using village lanes, mostly due to satellite navigation systems. Cllr Wilson said that these issues were being looked at County level, and could not be resolved locally. He said that that process had already led to positive outcomes in Yalding, which may also benefit East Farleigh, and that he was close to finalising a petition on the subject of the bridge to demonstrate villagers' concerns.

## SCHOOL PARKING/TRAFFIC

Another common problem across the County. One villager said that she had ideas that might ease the problem. She, and any others with good ideas, were invited to pass them onto VPAG.

The meeting did not reach any conclusions, but RM undertook to discuss the feedback from the meeting with the other members of VPAG in deciding if and how to take the feasibility study forward. He also committed to improving the way VPAG communicated with residents using The Grapevine. Mr Shelford offered his help to create a web based form for exchanging ideas.

In the meeting, there was a mixture of views about how best to develop the village, ranging from "leave it as it is" to the need to see the village in the context of its proximity to Maidstone and to change with the world we live in. The view was also expressed that we need to positively safeguard those things in the village which we value, otherwise we risk losing them.

Whilst much of meeting taken up with the views of those against the feasibility study, at least in its proposed format, at various points during the meeting the members of VPAG were thanked for their efforts on behalf of the village.

After the meeting was closed a number of residents thanked the Chair for the way she conducted the meeting, giving the opportunity to as many people as possible to contribute

These notes were prepared by Perry O'Callaghan.  
April 18<sup>th</sup> 2012

Any questions or clarification should be via the Clerk to the Parish Council, Sarah  
O'Callaghan  
Email: [eastfarleighpc@googlemail.com](mailto:eastfarleighpc@googlemail.com)