

Our Emerging Plan

A consultation document asking for your response about:

- A vision and objectives for our community
- Issues and options for the Plan



Supporting
Communities in
Neighbourhood
Planning Programme

Foreword from the Chairman of the Group Parish Council

Dear Neighbour,

This document is an important milestone in drafting our Neighbourhood Development Plan. It is the first set of proposals for what should be included in the Plan. It is based on what you said were the important issues during the consultation events and questionnaires earlier this year.

This is where choices are to be made about which policies should go in the Plan, and so is one of the most crucial stages of the whole NDP project. This is your opportunity to shape the content of the Plan.

It is essential that we base those choices on your views, so **we are asking for you to respond by returning the enclosed sheet** in the envelope provided, **by Sunday 19 October**. There are several ways in which you can return the sheet:

- The volunteer who delivered this will call back to collect it
- Leave it at drop-off points at Stoke Prior Post Office or The Old Post Office, Risbury
- Send it to the Clerk to the Council at Great Marston Farmhouse, Risbury HR6 0NJ
- Bring it to one of the two drop-in events on 16 and 17 October

We are holding two drop-in events where you are warmly invited to come and discuss the document and the development of the Plan with members of the Steering Committee:

Thursday 16 October from 4.00pm until 8.00pm in Risbury Village Hall

Friday 17 October from 4.00pm until 8.00pm in Stoke Prior Village Hall

There will be some posters summarising the different Issues discussed in this document, and a short presentation will be given at 7.00pm. Free refreshments will be available. Everyone is most welcome, and I hope to see many of you there.

Yours,



William Jackson
Chairman
Humber, Ford & Stoke Prior Group Parish Council

October 2014

Introduction

Our Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) will define local planning policies for the group parish, and so guide how it will develop over the next 20 years. So far we have been gathering the views of you, the residents of our group parish, about this, through the *Your Community Your Future* events in April 2014, and the questionnaires in May 2014. Nearly 40% of residents came to the April events and 82% returned their questionnaires. We have completed the analysis of all that information (you can see the reports on the NDP web-pages: www.hfspgroup.org.uk) and have now arrived at the point where we start to produce a Plan to address the issues you raised.

This document is the first step in drafting the Neighbourhood Plan. It summarises the issues which you have said need tackling, and identifies the available options to do this. Preferred options will be identified from this consultation and included in the first draft of the Plan, to be prepared later in 2014. A copy of the draft Plan will be provided to every household and there will be a statutory consultation period before the Parish Council approves the final draft Plan to be submitted for independent inspection, and ultimately your vote in a referendum in 2015.

Presenting the issues and options

Your views have shaped this paper, by defining the main issues which were covered in the questionnaire, and then through that questionnaire by telling us which options would receive the greatest support. Each main issue is briefly summarised, then a proposal or possible options are set out to tackle these. These are not written as actual detailed NDP policies, but are presented in more general terms: detailed policies will be developed and written with professional help once all preferred options are identified.

For many of the issues there is more background and contextual information given in an Appendix. This includes some information about relevant national or local policies (including the Herefordshire Core Strategy, which is the future basic planning policy document for the county) and how the options have been identified from your questionnaire responses.

A Neighbourhood Development Plan is a statutory planning document, so must be concerned with issues relevant to 'development' which is subject to planning controls. Not everything covered in the questionnaire will therefore be appropriate to include in the Neighbourhood Plan, even though some of them are major concerns (for example highways maintenance and broadband). These issues will be tackled outside of the planning policies of the Neighbourhood Development Plan, by action to be overseen by the Parish Council over the coming months and years. So some of the issues have proposals which will be included in a separate Parish Action Plan.

Our Community – Vision and Objectives

C1. The character of our community

What is valued by most residents about our community is the rural atmosphere, the quietness and safety of the area, and a strong sense of community, including knowing neighbours and participating in community activities. The small scale of the community and the relatively tranquil unspoilt rural environment are, for many people, things to value and preserve. However, there is also appreciation that some development is inevitable and desirable – specifically to provide mainly smaller types of housing for local people, to improve our community facilities, and to encourage the types of businesses appropriate to the neighbourhood.

This has led to the formulation of an overall vision statement for what our community will be like over the period of the Plan, and also broad objectives which will guide subsequent specific policies.

NDP Proposal C1: An overall vision statement for our community and objectives for the Plan

Vision for our community 2015-2031:

Our community will be a place where people can enjoy living and working in a rural setting. The predominantly quiet, small-scale nature of our villages and hamlets will be preserved, whilst accommodating the growth and development needed to maintain a sustainable and thriving community life.

Objectives for the Neighbourhood Development Plan:

Our Plan will:

1. Accommodate future development in a way which retains the rural character of our neighbourhood.
2. Ensure housing needs, particularly those of local people, are met by providing the required number and type of new houses, within the limits and provisions set for such development.
3. Retain and develop our community facilities.
4. Lessen the harmful impact of traffic and make our roads safer.
5. Support and encourage the development of small home-based businesses and traditional farming.

Our Future Housing

H1. Housing Growth

The views of residents through responses to the questionnaire, and the results of the Housing Needs Analysis survey undertaken by Herefordshire Council in May 2014, indicate that there is a need for a small number of additional – mostly smaller – houses for local people. Nearly 85% of questionnaire respondents wished to see overall growth in the Group Parish of no more than 30 new houses, and there were many concerns voiced over the scale of developments and their impact on drainage and traffic levels.

The Core Strategy sets a target growth level of 15% for the main villages of Stoke Prior and Risbury by 2031– this means a minimum of about 11 new houses in Stoke Prior and 9 in Risbury. Steen’s Bridge is identified as a smaller village where ‘proportionate’ growth will be limited to smaller market housing for local people. Outside these places, new housing will be controlled, limited to certain exceptional categories, for example to support a rural enterprise.

Taken together, this supports putting forward an option which sets a target for housing growth at the levels in the Core Strategy, with a similar level of growth for Steen’s Bridge. However, over the period for the Plan, the community may wish to have greater flexibility, so an option for slightly higher growth is given. The target of new homes for each village given in the Options below does not include other categories of development, for example the conversion of rural buildings (See Appendix ‘Housing Policy’ for further details), which would be in addition to these target numbers.

NDP Option H1.1: Housing Growth, 2011-31, meeting the Core Strategy targets

A target will be set for the provision of new housing in each of the main villages, which will be limited by the criteria in proposals in H2-H5 below:

Stoke Prior: a target of 11 new houses;

Risbury: a target of 9 new houses;

Steen’s Bridge: a target of 5 new houses.

Outside these areas, growth will be limited to the categories permitted by the Core Strategy.

NDP Option H1.2: Housing Growth, 2011-31, exceeding the Core Strategy targets

A target will be set for the provision of new housing in each of the main villages, which will be limited by the criteria in proposals in H2-H5 below:

Stoke Prior: a target of 20 new houses;

Risbury: a target of 15 new houses;

Steen’s Bridge: a target of 8 new houses.

Outside these areas, growth will be limited to the categories permitted by the Core Strategy.

H2. Siting of new housing for the villages

There was no consensus from residents' responses on particular areas where new housing should go, although suggested sites tended to cluster around existing settlements, and two-thirds of respondents said that new housing should be entirely or mostly confined to the villages. There were suggestions for new housing on numerous sites in open countryside, although this would be strictly controlled under the Core Strategy policy that generally isolated development in the open countryside will not be permitted apart from exceptional categories, so this is a separate issue from the growth of the villages. Many residents were concerned with the character of developments, and on avoiding both sprawl and filling in all open spaces in the villages.

The Core Strategy already says that new development should be located within or adjacent to the main body of the villages (see Appendix), and residents' comments support this broad policy. The option of identifying specific sites for new housing has not been put forward because there is no consensus from residents' responses on where most new houses should go; also, the process of identifying all possible sites, undertaking a full sustainability assessment of these sites (including whether they are available) and justifying the choice of some sites over others would probably take many more months, delaying the adoption of our Plan.

The view of residents therefore suggests a criterion-based policy for the siting of new houses in the villages rather than defining specific areas or sites; these criteria arising from the most frequent comments received.

NDP Proposal H2: Siting of new housing in the main villages

The siting of new houses in Stoke Prior, Risbury and Steen's Bridge will be determined by criteria which may include the following factors:

- (a) A location within or adjacent to the main body of the village
- (b) An appropriate density of development (See H4 below)
- (c) Protection of particular areas, eg prime agricultural land and valued green spaces including woodlands
- (d) The need to address foul drainage and potential flooding of properties and roads (see E1)
- (e) Other environmental safeguards
- (f) Access requirements
- (g) Other suggested factors that may be raised during the consultation.

H3. Types of housing

Responses to the questionnaire gave some support for most types of housing, indicating that an appropriate mix of types is required, although the greatest support was for family homes, affordable homes and self-build. A large majority of residents supported giving priority to the needs of local people, reflecting a commonly-expressed view that in the past there had been too many large houses built which were unsuited to the needs of young local families.

The Housing Needs Analysis of May 2014 also identified that the needs were predominantly for 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom properties, including some more rented accommodation. This is in line with the

Core Strategy which emphasises the need for the right mix of housing and facilities, including more affordable housing, more family-sized and smaller homes for younger families (2- and 3-bed).

The neighbourhood's age-profile is rather different from that of Herefordshire generally, in that there is a much greater number in the age-range 55-64, this being by far the most numerous group, and markedly fewer people aged under 45. This means that the neighbourhood potentially faces a more acute 'ageing population' problem than the county overall, and there will probably be a need over the next 15-20 years for some smaller housing units suitable for older people to remain living independently in the community.

NDP Proposal H3: Predominantly smaller houses to be built, prioritising the needs of local people

In order to meet the identified needs of the community, new housing will predominantly be one of the following:

- (a) smaller open-market houses (up to 3 bedrooms);
- (b) affordable-rented and low-cost market homes for local people;
- (c) housing with features to enable suitable small businesses to be run from the premises.

Proposals for local people to meet the above needs with self-build projects will be supported.

H4. Density and design of housing

Many residents made comments about the importance of site and building design in maintaining the character of the neighbourhood. This included restricting the density of developments and ensuring that houses were designed to be in sympathy to their surroundings, including adjacent properties. The Core Strategy has a default target housing density of between 30-50 dwellings per hectare, which is appropriate for urban locations but would be completely out of character with a rural area such as our neighbourhood.

NDP Option H4.1: Design and density of new housing determined by surroundings

New housing will be sympathetic in design and size to its immediate surroundings, including nearby properties, and should reflect the existing character and building density of the area in which it is to be located. To keep the open character of the villages some green spaces will be retained and there will be no presumption of development infilling (see also E4).

NDP Option H4.2: Low density of new housing defined

The same criteria as in H4.1 will apply, but with a specific appropriate maximum density for particular locations of, for example, 12 or 20 houses per hectare (approximately 5 or 8 per acre).

H5. Housing Estates

Residents were equally divided on whether there should be small housing estate developments, although support was greater in the northern (Steen's Bridge) area. Of those supporting, most

wanted estates of no more than 5 to 6 houses. Affordable housing or social housing developments are often of several small units, and so should probably be excluded from the idea of 'estates'. Two options are therefore presented, including one which would permit about 50% of growth to be in small estates of market-housing.

NDP Option H5.1: No housing estate developments permitted

Development of market-housing 'estates' will not be permitted. Small developments of affordable or social housing units will be supported.

NDP Option H5.2: Some housing estate developments permitted

Development of one or two small estates (of about 6 houses) will be permitted. Small developments of affordable or social housing units will be supported.

H6. Redundant farm buildings

There were several comments from residents supporting the sympathetic conversion of redundant farm buildings into dwellings. Policy RA5 of the Core Strategy will already provide for this, so no supplementary policy is proposed for our Neighbourhood Plan.

Our Facilities

F1. The Village Halls

Almost two-thirds of residents rate the two village halls as important to them (even though 50% say they almost never use them) and the halls are used fairly equally by a variety of ages.

A large majority of respondents (72%) agreed that **Stoke Prior Village Hall** should be relocated. The school was the most commonly suggested location (32%) followed by land between The Bury and Belmont (24%) and then the pub (22%), the church (12%) and 10% other locations. At present, no specific site can be proposed: location next to the school would require land to be made available and agreement reached with the school and local education authority about any such scheme; concerning the land between the Bury and Belmont, there is no current intention for this to be released for this type of project; *The Lamb Inn* has been purchased privately since the questionnaire and will shortly re-open as a pub – and in any case the site would probably not accommodate the pub's business, car-parking *and* a village hall; St Luke's Church received little support as a possible site, but remains an option for future consideration.

Risbury Village Hall is in a good central location but suffers from a shortage of car-parking spaces.

A general policy is therefore proposed which supports the future re-location of either village hall, and the Parish Council will work with Stoke Prior Village Hall Committee to identify a suitable site.

NDP Proposal F1: Re-location of Village Halls

There will be a policy specifically supporting the re-location of either or both of the Village Halls to more suitable sites in the village with better access and parking, and which would take into account any adverse effects on residents' amenity.

F2. Stoke Prior Community Primary School

The school is a highly-valued part of the community, with 65% of respondents rating the school as important to them. There were some suggestions for expanding the school (although the relatively small scale of the school is one of its main attractions to parents) and particularly the need for additional car parking. The greatest need, however, (59 responses) is for a pre-school/nursery, so that children can have all their early-years education in the same school or community.

The development of a pre-school/nursery would be a matter for the school and the local education authority to take forward, and a specific site would have to be identified. However, given the demonstrated need, the Plan can strongly support the development of a pre-school/nursery provision on a suitable site.

NDP Proposal F2.1: Establishment of a pre-School/Nursery in Stoke Prior

There will be a policy which supports the establishment of a pre-school/nursery on a suitable site with good access and parking in or near to Stoke Prior.

NDP Proposal F2.2: School alterations and extensions

There will be a policy which supports appropriate development necessary for the maintenance and improvement of the school's viability, such as the provision of car parking or extensions.

F3. The Lamb Inn

The Lamb Inn – closed since December 2012 – was ranked as the 3rd most important facility in the group parish by all age brackets, with 73% of respondents saying that it was important to them.

At the April consultation events and when the questionnaires were circulated in May 2014, the future of the pub was still uncertain, as the pub remained closed and the property on the market. The Parish Council had obtained the funding and had bid for the property in 2013, but the preferred option was always for a publican to buy it, and it has now been sold to a publican who is currently undertaking major refurbishment. Although it will shortly re-open, and pubs have general protection against change-of-use from county policies, it is still important to underline the value placed on this community facility so as to guard against losing it permanently. Therefore a policy is proposed which supports the development of the pub to be a viable business and would not permit its loss.

NDP Proposal F3: The Lamb Inn

There will be a policy supporting proposals for development of *The Lamb Inn* which will enhance the pub as a facility for local people and visitors or which enhance the viability of the pub's business. This will be on condition that the proposal is in keeping with the character of the surrounding village and protects residential amenity.

Any proposal for development of *The Lamb Inn* which would lead to the loss of the site or part of the site as a facility for local people and visitors, will not be supported.

F4. The Post Office

60% of people regarded Stoke Prior's part-time post office as important, with those living in Stoke Prior itself and older people generally valuing it particularly. There were some suggestions that the post office could be combined with a small community shop. The viability of a small shop would require careful exploration.

NDP Proposal F4: Stoke Prior Post Office

There will be a policy which supports proposals for the sustainable development of Stoke Prior Post Office which will enhance facilities for local people and visitors. In the event that the post office needed to be re-located, proposals for suitable sites within the group parish would be supported, to enable this facility to continue.

F5. Sports and Recreation

At present the only sports or recreation facilities within the group parish are the School site and two businesses at Ford, and a play area at Humber Close. *The Grove Golf and Bowl* facility was rated as important by 60% of people, while *Leominster Golf Club* was rated important by 36%. There were suggestions made about providing more children's play areas, sports facilities (specifically tennis courts or playing fields) and village greens.

Identifying suitable sites and demonstrating the viability of facilities would take time. There are also many issues that go with providing recreational facilities such as health and safety and insurance. However, we can propose a policy to support the development of existing and new facilities, and work on identifying which are feasible and where.

NDP Proposal F5: Sports and Recreation facilities

There will be a policy which supports proposals for the sustainable development of existing sport and recreational facilities, and also supports viable new sports and recreation facilities located on suitable sites which have sufficient local backing.

Our Roads, Footpaths and Transport

T1 Roads and lanes

Although not strictly an NDP matter, more residents commented on the need to improve the surface of our roads and lanes than almost any other subject. Over 90% (422 people) of questionnaire respondents thought road maintenance was highly or fairly important. This reflected a similar response by those attending the April events, who posted 31 comments on the message boards, picking out Blacksmith's Lane and Wickton Lane as being in special need of attention.

In addition to the general state of the roads, residents commented on four particular aspects. Of high or moderate concern were the following: excess surface water (67%)[see E1]; lack of gritting when freezing (56%); litter (54%) [see E5]; surface mud from local fields (45%).

Parish Action Plan T1: Roads and lanes

The state of our roads and lanes will be constantly monitored by parishioners and defects reported. The Parish Council will work with, and if necessary press for action from, Hereford Council and their contractors and local land owners where this may be appropriate.

Since 2012 the Parish Council has its own small local stocks of salt-grit, and these will be used to keep salt-grit bins filled and to grit dangerous stretches of road where necessary. The Parish Council will provide new salt-grit bins where needed, and push for Herefordshire Council to re-instate some local roads as gritting routes.

T2 Hedges, verges, ditches and drains

This is another matter of importance to residents which is not an NDP issue, but is being tackled through other means. For our hedges 86% thought the maintenance was good or average (14% rated it as poor) – it should be noted that responsibility for cutting hedges along roads lies with the adjacent landowner. When commenting on the maintenance of our road verges, satisfaction rates dropped to 69% (316 people) and those rating it as poor doubled to 30%. However drains & ditches did not fare so well as more than half of those responding gave a 'poor' rating. Over 200 people reported that their properties had been adversely affected by flooding due to defective drains and ditches [See E1]. Adverse comments were also posted at the April events, with Stoke Prior and opposite Holly Barn (Risbury) being picked out as problem areas. The maintenance of most ditches rests with the adjacent landowner, but the Parish Council now has some power to maintain verges and drains itself through the Lengthsman scheme.

Parish Action Plan T2: Maintaining hedges, verges, ditches and drains

The state of our hedges, verges, ditches & drains will be constantly monitored. Where the responsibility for maintenance (hedges and most ditches) lies with the adjacent landowner, the Parish Council will liaise with the landowner and Herefordshire Council's contractors about this. For

verges and drains, the Parish Council will use its Lengthsman contractor to maintain these, increasing spending on this if necessary, or liaise with Herefordshire Council's contractors for major drainage maintenance jobs.

T3 Road safety and speeding

Excess speed of traffic was second only in importance to road maintenance as an issue, with 362 people (79%) concerned about this. Again the Questionnaire evidence supported the 52 comments posted at the April events, when specific concerns focussed on school traffic, the access from Humber Close to the A44 and the presence of heavy lorries in our narrow lanes.

NDP Proposal T3: Road safety and speeding

There will be a policy that new housing development must have suitable access from the public highway which is designed to promote safety and the amenity of all highway users.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds from new developments paid to the Council will be used, where appropriate, to ameliorate the impact of the extra traffic generated.

Parish Action Plan T3: Road safety and speeding

The Parish Council will regularly review the effectiveness of current speed restrictions and will work with Herefordshire Council and its Contractors for the provision of appropriate traffic calming measures.

T4 Parking and passing places

At the April events there were a few comments that more and better passing places were needed; in particular the need to improve the passing places in Blacksmith's Lane, Risbury. 64% of questionnaire respondents (294 residents) believed that an improvement in the number and distribution of passing places was important. Of course these increase safety for pedestrians and children as well as for car drivers.

Parking is not thought to be a general problem, but at the April events there were many comments about the need for more parking at the School and at Stoke Prior Village Hall. The Parish Council obtained planning permission for a new car-park behind the village hall in 2013, but this is now on hold while the Village Hall considers the possibility of the hall's re-location. The possibility of more car-parking near the School is being pursued by the School.

NDP Proposal T4: Parking provision

There will be a policy that new housing development must have adequate and suitable off-road parking provision.

Parish Action Plan T4: Parking and passing spaces

The Parish Council will work with Herefordshire Council and their contractors and with local landowners to promote increased provision of passing places (consistent with road safety) and improved maintenance of those already in existence.

T5 Footpaths and bridleways

Over half of residents (257 people) walk a footpath at least monthly. A large majority of all questionnaire respondents (62%) thought that improvements are needed in the care and repair of our footpaths and bridleways, and there were many comments about this at the April events. There were numerous suggestions that stiles be replaced by kissing gates to aid older and disabled residents enjoy use of the footpath network.

Parish Action Plan T5: Footpaths and Bridleways

It is the policy of the Parish Council to promote the use of our footpaths and bridleways by all residents. To this end it will encourage and support landowners in converting stiles to kissing gates of a design which ensures the safety of stock in adjoining fields. The Council will try to help to find funds for this.

The Parish Council supports expansion of the Public Rights of Way network. It will work with Herefordshire Council, their contractors and local landowners to improve the provision and maintenance of our footpaths and bridleways.

T6. Pedestrian footways and street-lights

Some residents suggested that short stretches of pedestrian footway would be helpful in the centre of Stoke Prior and outside Risbury Village Hall. Apart from this, 69% had no or little concern at the lack of pavements and some comments opposed creating more as being out of character with our rural area. An even higher proportion (84%) was unconcerned about the lack of street lighting, and comments opposing street lights as being inappropriate for a rural area greatly outnumbered those wanting them.

NDP proposal T6.1: Pedestrian footways

There will be a policy strongly supporting the creation of a footpath in Steen's Bridge along the A44 from Humber Close to Stoke Prior Lane, to improve the safety of children attending Stoke Prior Primary School and accompanying parents.

Other proposals for the creation of pedestrian footways will generally not be supported, as being out of character with the rural nature of the area, unless these are shown to be essential for pedestrian safety.

NDP proposal T6.2 Street lighting

Proposals for the installation of street lighting will generally not be supported, as being out of character with the rural nature of the area.

T7 Public transport

Though not an NDP matter, the provision of a local bus service was supported by 25 comments at the April events and by 63% of residents in the questionnaire. A local bus service is clearly regarded as an important feature of village life, despite the fact only 15% (69 people) use it at least monthly. Of course it is a lifeline for those 69 residents. In August 2014 the 426 bus service was reduced to being a service to Hereford only, removing the service to Leominster.

Parish Action Plan T7: Public transport

The Parish Council considers the provision of a regular public transport service, connecting Risbury, Steen's Bridge and Stoke Prior with both Hereford and Leominster, as an essential service. It will continue to press Herefordshire Council for the reinstatement of a bus service to Leominster. In the absence of funding for a bus service being provided by Herefordshire Council, the Parish Council will explore the provision of alternative means of community transport to and from Leominster, in conjunction with neighbouring parishes.

Our Businesses

B1. Local Businesses

Nearly one in five of questionnaire respondents run a business in the group parish, nearly half of these related to agriculture. There is strong support for the development of agricultural-related businesses, craft working, food & drink, community services, tourism and livery/stabling. There was general opposition to intense farming, intense horticulture, offices and manufacturing in the group parish, and concerns about the road network being unsuitable for larger business developments. There is a moderate preference for not allocating further land to business use.

Therefore, a general policy is proposed which encourages the types of existing business and discourages larger enterprises unsuitable to the rural character of the group parish. New development should mostly be confined to already-developed land.

NDP Proposal B1: Local businesses

Within the group parish, the development of local businesses appropriate to the rural character of the area will be encouraged. This will include traditional farming, stabling, home-working (various including craft and food & drink), tourism (including B&B and holiday lets) and smaller business enterprises – especially sustainable live-work units. Any proposal for a community or farm shop, if a suitable site becomes available, will be supported.

All non-agricultural business development should be compatible with the mostly narrow lanes and the desire by the vast majority of residents for the peaceful enjoyment of their rural homes.

Proposals for industrial-scale intensive farming and/or industrial-style businesses will not be supported.

The use of greenfield sites for industrial development will not be supported; rather the use of existing properties for businesses appropriate in scale and type to a rural area will be favoured, in addition to the use of redundant rural buildings. In the latter instances criteria to protect amenity, the highway network and the environment will be necessary.

B2. Computing, broadband and telephone

Most of our residents have a computer (85% of questionnaire respondents), but about 12% of these do not have broadband – mostly those aged over 65. Broadband speed is a major issue, which should be addressed for most properties by the *Fastershire* Broadband project which aims for at least 2 megabits-per-second broadband speed to our areas by December 2016. Most respondents were happy with their telephone service, but the service in the east of the neighbourhood is worse, and mobile phone reception is poor over much of the neighbourhood, especially in the west (where the topography has greater effect).

Parish Action Plan B2: Computing, broadband and telephone

The Parish Council will seek the funds for and oversee a project encouraging and enabling all residents currently not using a computer and the internet to do so.

The Parish Council will monitor the rollout of faster broadband services to the group parish, and work with Herefordshire Council and other partners to help any properties which may benefit from this.

The Parish Council will press mobile phone service providers to improve signal strengths.

Our Environment

Residents felt that it is important to retain the rural character of our group parish and that the natural and historic environment should be protected, but more renewable energy should be developed (see Vision Statement C1).

E1. Flooding

48% of questionnaire respondents were concerned about flooding on the roads, and 169 people (36% of respondents) had been affected by flooding to their property or the access to their property. There was concern expressed about further development causing additional flooding, including by using impermeable ground surfaces. Core Strategy Policy SD3 already requires new development to reduce flood risk by, for example, including flood storage features, and SD4 requires environmentally-sustainable foul drainage (usually a package sewage treatment plant or septic tank). We could supplement these policies with a specific policy for our villages, perhaps specifically requiring the use of permeable ground surfaces for new developments.

NDP Proposal E1: Drainage and flooding

There will be a policy that new development proposals should not result in increasing surface water flood-risk. Proposals should show that the issue has been fully addressed and should include measures to address surface water problems in the general area. On-site measures will be looked for, including the use of permeable ground surfaces.

Developers' contributions will be sought to help address particular existing environmental problems where their development may make those problems worse.

Property owners, the Parish Council, Herefordshire Council, and – potentially – the Environment Agency need to work together to deal with existing flooding and flood-risk to property and highways:

Parish Action Plan E1: Reducing the risk and impact of flooding

The Parish Council will continue to review sites where flooding has occurred and work with their Lengthsman contractor, Herefordshire Council, other agencies, and property owners to ensure that:

- road drainage is kept clear and repaired/upgraded where required;
- watercourses passing through private property are maintained;
- there is a local emergency contingency plan to deal with flooding events.

E2. Renewable energy

There appears to be a local consensus in favour of the need to introduce more renewable energy sources, with greatest support for solar power and ground/air heat schemes. Wind turbines are

more divisive. A common suggestion was that there should be an obligation for new development to provide a source of renewable energy.

NDP Proposal E2.1: Renewable energy generation in new developments

There will be a policy that new developments should, wherever practicable, incorporate the generation of renewable energy, having regard to the requirements of proposal E2.2 below.

NDP Proposal E2.2: Renewable energy proposals

There will be a policy supporting small-scale renewable energy planning applications where they would not have a significant adverse impact on the landscape, rural character of the neighbourhood and amenity of neighbouring properties.

E3. The natural and historic environment

The importance to residents of views of the countryside was the highest rating issue in the questionnaire responses, with 95% (436 people) saying it was important or highly important. This was followed by trees, hedges and plant verges scoring 94% of those responding. The vision statement of C1 reflects this feeling.

Questionnaire respondents identified numerous green spaces which should be preserved. There is already considerable legislation at national and local level already to protect trees, hedgerows and other natural habitat.

NDP Proposal E3: Protecting our natural and historic environment

There will be a policy that in any development there will be a presumption against the removal of important features such as valuable trees and hedgerows. Also, we would wish to protect the character and local distinctiveness of the villages by utilising provisions such as Tree Preservation Orders and local orders identifying green spaces.

E4. Litter and vandalism

Considerable concern was expressed about litter and vandalism (including the defacing of signs) which have an adverse impact on our environment. Defaced road signs have now been replaced by Herefordshire Council, and the parish has two volunteers who regularly collect litter.

Parish Action Plan E4: Litter and vandalism

The Parish Council will try to recruit more volunteers to pick litter and provide them with necessary equipment and facilities for disposal.

The Parish Council will continue to report fly-tipping and vandalism to Herefordshire Council.

A Parish Action Plan

Many of the issues discussed above do not fall within the technical remit of a Neighbourhood Development Plan (which is a statutory planning document) but will be tackled by action to be overseen by the Parish Council over the coming months and years.

The boxes headed 'Parish Action Plan' will be included in a draft document, which will the Council will consider for adoption. In addition, there are two issues which were raised in the questionnaire which do not fit into one of the sections above, which will be included in the draft Action Plan:

P1. The Group Parish Council

Most residents (over two-thirds) think the Council is doing a good or excellent job. It can still improve, though, and it is vital that it represents our residents and takes forward the Neighbourhood Plan and a Parish Action Plan in the coming years.

Parish Action Plan P1: The Parish Council

Information about the Group Parish Council, the role of councillors and how to stand for election will be publicised in early 2015 in advance of the elections to all seats on 7 May. The new Council will serve for four years, and much of its work will be set by the agreed actions and projects which come out of the Neighbourhood Plan.

P2. The Parish Pump and Parish website

The Parish Pump is read and valued by most residents as our community's main bulletin. We have a community website so that we can all share more information more quickly, and this is being continually updated.

Parish Action Plan P2: Community information and communication

The parish website (www.hfspgroup.org.uk) will continue to be updated and improved by the Parish Council, to broaden the pages available and the completeness of the content. The Parish Pump is now available on the website. Maintenance of the website is likely to be an increasingly time-consuming activity, and the Council will consider trying to recruit a local volunteer web-master to do this.

Appendix – background information and planning policy context

This Appendix gives some more local background information to the issues and options discussed in the main paper. It also includes some information about relevant local and national planning policies. This is important because firstly, in the absence of our Neighbourhood Plan stipulating any specific policy about something, it is these policies which would apply. Secondly, our NDP must be in 'general conformity' with national planning rules and the Herefordshire Core Strategy, so these must guide, or in some cases restrict, the available options.

Your views – where to find the results of the questionnaires

Residents' views were gathered through the *Your Community, Your Future* events in April 2014, and all the comments gathered at those events, and photos of the maps, can be found on the NDP web-pages at www.hfspgroup.org.uk, as well as a summary and analysis of all the comments and flags placed in the maps.

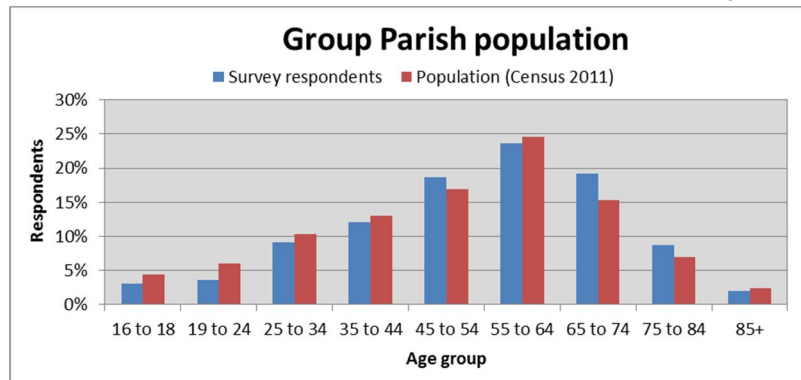
The results of the questionnaires given to every resident in May 2014 are also available on the website:

- A full report on the adult Residents Survey.
- An anonymised list of comments from the adult Residents Survey.
- A report on the Young People's Survey.
- A report on the map data gathered from the questionnaires, and a link to Googlemaps where this can be seen.
- A brief report on the confidential Development Land Survey responses.

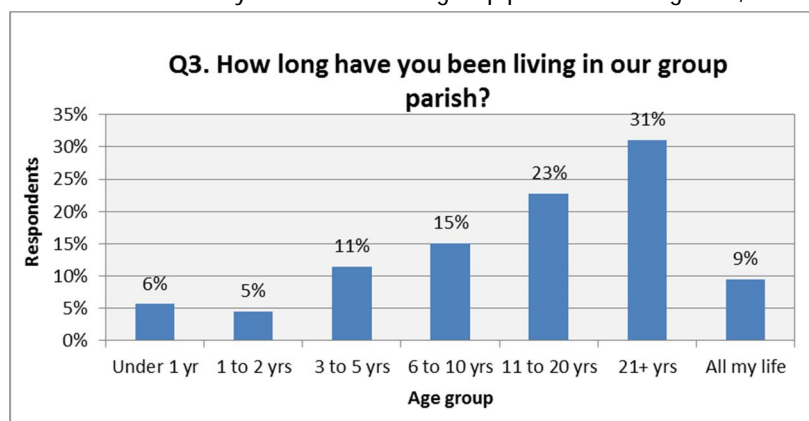
For those without access to the internet, a copy of the reports is available to consult at Stoke Prior Post Office or can be obtained from the Clerk to the Parish Council.

Facts and figures about the Group Parish's population

The Group Parish has a population of about 560, with the following profile:



Approximately 40% of people live in Stoke Prior, 31% in Risbury and the rest are spread across the smaller settlements and rural areas. Many have lived in the group parish for a long time, but there is also a steady flow of new residents:



A large majority of people own their own home (82%) but a significant number (62) depend on rented accommodation. 50% of our residents over 16 are based at home, either working from home, retired or not working. Another 13% work close to home (5 miles), and 37% have to travel further.

Housing – policy context

The **National Planning Policy Framework** prescribes a “presumption in favour of sustainable development”. This is implemented in the Core Strategy by Policy SS1.

The **Herefordshire Core Strategy** is due to be adopted in early 2015, and will be the primary planning policy document for the county. Of relevance to our neighbourhood, it stipulates, in summary the following (please note this is a precis of the policies – for the actual text, refer to the Core Strategy at www.herefordshire.gov.uk/local-plan):

- **Targets for housing growth in rural areas:** Policies RA1 and RA2 together define a 15% growth target for both Stoke Prior and Risbury which equals 11 and 9 houses respectively based on the central village area (as defined in the *Rural Housing Background Paper* March 2013). “Within these villages, carefully considered development which is proportionate to the size of the community and its needs will be permitted only where residential proposals are locally appropriate to ensure villages retain their separate, distinctive and varied characters.” (Core Strategy p142). Steen’s Bridge is identified as a smaller village where proportionate growth will be limited to providing smaller market housing for local people (Policy RA2, p144).
- **Location of new housing:** development should be “located within or adjacent to the main body of the village (with priority being given to the development of brownfield sites) to guard against unnecessary linear, detached or isolated dwellings in the surrounding countryside which adversely damage the character and setting of a village and its local environment.” (Core Strategy p142).
- **Types of new housing:** There is a need for the right mix of housing and facilities, including more affordable housing, more family-sized and smaller homes for younger families (2 and 3 bed). Also there is a need to plan for an ageing population and a strong retirement market by the development of “homes for life” to facilitate independent living and care needs (Core Strategy p17).
- **Sustainability:** By permitting some housing growth in villages which currently have limited facilities and services, the Core Strategy envisages that facilities become more viable (Core Strategy p139).
- **Rural housing outside villages:** Outside the villages of Stoke Prior, Risbury and Steen’s Bridge, new housing will be strictly controlled. Generally, isolated development in the countryside will not be permitted, and new houses will have to meet a specific housing need for a rural enterprise or replace an existing dwelling, re-use a redundant building (see Policy RA5) or be of exceptional quality and innovative design (Core Strategy Policy RA3 – pp145-146).
- **Re-use of Rural Buildings:** This will be permitted under Policy RA5 where the design respects the building’s character and significance, the proposal makes a positive contribution to rural business and is compatible with neighbouring uses, and the conversion can be made without major reconstruction or substantial alteration or extension. Outside villages, conversion solely for residential use will only be permitted for the use of agricultural or rural enterprise workers, or where a building currently detracts from the environment and development will enhance it, or where this is the most viable way of conserving a heritage asset.

Quantity of new housing – background to the options

A **Housing Needs Assessment** for the group parish made by Herefordshire Council in May 2014 identified 14 households wishing to move within the group parish, of which 5 intended to self-build, 4 needed affordable/rented accommodation, and 4 needed mostly smaller open-market houses. Some housing within the group parish would be released by these moves, but might only meet up to three of the open-market needs.

In responses to the questionnaire, a small number of respondents felt that there were already too many houses in our group parish, and 45% thought it was ‘about right’. Another 45% said that a few more were needed. When asked how

many more homes were needed, 41% of those answering this question (172 people) said 1-10, 26% said 11-20, 18% said 21-30, 10% said 31-40, 6% more than 40 (graph needed here for this).

Given that the Core Strategy policy RA1 already places a target housing growth for Stoke Prior and Risbury of 15%, any planned growth in the NDP for less than this would have to be justified by extensive evidence of why this would not be feasible. The Rural Housing Background Paper of March 2013 which underpinned the development of policy RA1, identified Stoke Prior and Risbury as having 71 dwellings and 63 dwellings within the main village envelope respectively. In actual numbers, therefore, the Core Strategy target for new homes is 11 in Stoke Prior and 9 in Risbury, over the period of the Local Plan (2011-2031). This does not include any new dwellings approved before 2011, even if as yet unbuilt, but does include any permissions given since 2011 (currently only 1 in Stoke Prior). It also does not include any 'windfall housing' which may happen in the villages such as from conversions of redundant buildings.

It would be possible to identify a higher target for new housing growth in either main village, if this met a demonstrated need and was considered to be sustainable development. It should be borne in mind that the NDP will – as with the Core Strategy – cover a period as far ahead as 2031, so any planned growth may take place gradually over that period in small increments.

There is no set growth target for Steen's Bridge, but several new smaller market houses for local people, as identified as needed in the questionnaire responses, could be planned here.

Any dwellings approved under Policy RA2 as 'rural exception housing' outside of Risbury, Stoke Prior or Steen's Bridge would be in addition to the numbers for those villages.

The views from the questionnaire summarised above about the necessary level of housing growth cover the whole group parish, so this would include all the above areas. Nearly 85% of respondents wished to see growth of no more than 30 new houses, and there were many comments (see below) about concerns over the scale of developments and their impact on drainage and traffic levels. Taken against the Core Strategy targets, this supports putting forward an option which would set a target for housing growth at the levels from the Core Strategy and setting a modest proportionate level of growth for Steen's Bridge. However, over the period for the Plan, the community may wish to have greater flexibility for growth, and therefore an option for slightly higher growth is given.

Our businesses

18% of questionnaire respondents run a business from within the Group Parish with a total of 46 full-time and 34 part-time employees. Encouragingly 39% felt they may become more profitable in the next few years with only 22% thinking this unlikely. 44% of business are farming related and over 90% [it would be good to have an exact figure – from Ken ? - if this is known as it would emphasise the rural nature of the Group Parish and weighting that farm related matters have] of the Group Parish land is 'farm land'.

Combining the respondents wishing to 'encourage' with those of 'no strong feeling' gave 89% acceptance for both craft working and for agricultural related businesses; 85% acceptance for both food & drink and for community services and 78% acceptance for both tourism and for livery/stabling. This reflects the desire from most residents to retain a rural atmosphere and have businesses relating to the community and to the land. There was general opposition to intense farming, intense horticulture, offices and manufacturing in the Group Parish. There is a moderate preference for not allocating further land to business use; 31% approving and 21% disapproving.

Significant factors affecting local businesses and their ability to grow is the existing restrictive road infrastructure, the poor broadband speeds and poor mobile phone services.

43% of respondents had moderate or quite a lot of concern at the lack of a village shop and there were several suggestions for a farm shop. Younger respondents were most concerned (62% of those under 34 years) about the lack of a shop with highest concern being from those in the Stoke Prior area. The recent removal of nearly all local bus services within the Group Parish (there is still a single Friday bus from Steen's Bridge to Leominster) will only increase

the numbers likely to support a local shop. The possibility of having a shop might combine with, say, the Post Office and/or the Pub and/or the re-location of Stoke Prior village hall and/or the desire by some for a community centre.

The Core Strategy identifies the challenges relevant to our community: Diversify the economy; Create more skilled jobs to reduce out-of-county commuting and retention of young educated residents; raise wage levels to reduce the earnings gap; Overcome barriers to business growth and diversification; Capitalise on educational achievements and improve rates of qualification; Invest in and promote tourism. (Core Strategy p21).

For rural areas, support is particularly given to “diversification of existing farm uses either through strengthening food and drink production, adding to environmental technologies or... home-based start-up businesses” (Core Strategy p182). Support is also given to homeworking and live-work units, compatible with a residential environment (p184).

Core Strategy Policy E1 encourages developments which create employment and help diversify the economy where the proposal: is appropriate in terms of connectivity, scale, design and size; makes better use of a previously developed site; is an appropriate extension to a business; provides for new office development in appropriate locations.

Policy E3 (Homeworking) allows the change of use for this to part of a dwelling, provided the dwelling remains the principal residence of the homeworker. Small extensions for the business will be permitted subject to them not adversely affecting the amenity of the neighbourhood.

Policy E4 (Tourism) promotes Herefordshire as a destination for quality leisure visits and sustainable tourism, including encouraging cycling, walking and heritage tourism, and retaining and expanding visitor accommodation and attractions.

Computing, broadband and phone services

85% of questionnaire respondents have a computer. Only 73% of these have a broadband connection although within the business community the percentage with broadband rises to 85%. 18% felt the telephone service poor whilst 54% felt mobile phone reception was poor and 66% rated broadband speeds poor. Shockingly only 6% felt their broadband speed was good and only 11% felt their mobile reception was good.

The relatively new web site had been viewed by only 16% although 76% say they read the Parish Pump regularly so probably most GPC news is reaching all residents by one means or the other. The recent funding for web site development and continued generous input of time NDP Committee members is ensuring it builds and improves. This means it will increasingly become a core resource for displaying and disseminating information and strengthening all community aspects including local businesses.

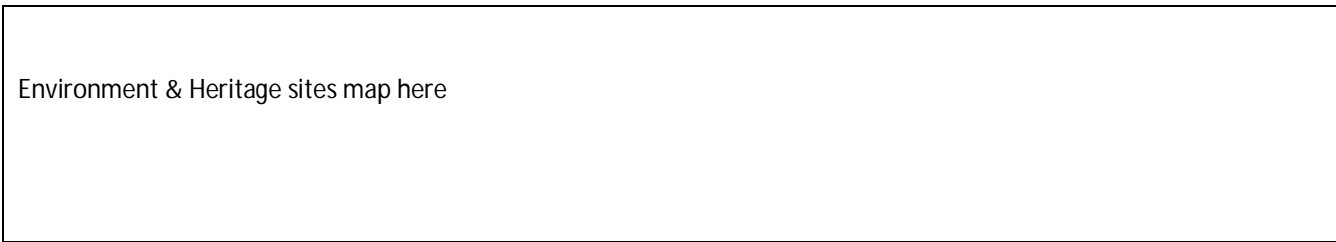
Our environment – background information

A Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Report has been prepared for the Plan, which can be found on the NDP web-pages.

Landscape: The landscape covered within the Group Parish comprises riverside meadows to the west where the River Lugg runs along its edge. East of this is a settled farmsteads landscape with a dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and hamlets, and the village of Stoke Prior. Further east, land then rises to a plateau (Risbury and Marston) where there is a mixture of estate and timbered farmlands, with the former having a more clustered settlement pattern compared to the dispersed pattern in the latter.

Woodlands in various forms are important within all these landscape types – there are three registered Ancient Woodlands in the group parish (The Roughts north of Risbury and two sections of Wig Wood south of Ford).

Wildlife and Nature Conservation: The River Lugg within the western edge of the Group Parish is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and becomes a Special Area of Conservation just to the south beyond the Cadbury factory. As a consequence care is required in accommodating drainage through any tributaries from development to ensure the biodiversity of the river is conserved or enhance. The value of the area’s countryside in terms of supporting wildlife should be recognised: there are 9 Special Wildlife Sites and 2 SSSIs in the Group Parish (The River Lugg; and Hill Hole Dingle, which runs south adjacent to Humber Brook from Risbury Mill).



Village character: The three villages within the Group Parish (Stoke Prior, Risbury, Steen’s Bridge) each have particular characters comprising combinations of their natural and built environments and greenspace. There is support for retaining areas and features that contribute to the villages’ distinctive character, whether buildings or landscape elements.

Historic environment: There are no conservation areas within the group parish although a significant number of Listed Buildings are present. There are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments: the Roman camp at Blackwardine and Risbury Camp.

Flood risk and water: The Herefordshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) identifies some areas in the Group Parish at risk of fluvial flood – particularly the River Lugg catchment and the Humber Brook sub-catchment (see map below). The Herefordshire Water Cycle Study (WCS) identifies that the Humber Brook is one of the worst rivers in terms of ecological status and currently classified as ‘bad’. This will require special mitigation measures from existing and new housing nearby.



Renewable energy

The questionnaire responses showed a consensus in favour of the need to introduce more renewable energy sources but there was a split of opinion for the desirability for wind turbines. It was felt that there should be an obligation for new development to provide a source of renewable energy (which is already a requirement where appropriate of the Core Strategy Policy SD1.)

Solar power received 52% support whilst another 36% said they would support it in some circumstances. Ground/air source of heat received 48% support and 35% in some circumstances. Biomass units received 24% support and 49% in some circumstances. Wind turbines only received 24% support with a further 37% supporting in some circumstances.

Produced by the Humber, Ford and Stoke Prior Neighbourhood
Development Plan Steering Group

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Cover photograph of St Luke's Church and The Bury: Paul & Alex Arnold

Line drawings: Sheila Mundy

For more information about our Neighbourhood Development Plan, go to
www.hfspgroup.org.uk or contact:

the Chairman of the Steering Group, Will Jackson: 07966 178884,
chairman@hfspgroup.org.uk

the Clerk to the Group Parish Council, Philip Brown: 01885 400696,
clerk@hfspgroup.org.uk