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CROXLEY · GREEN
PARISH · COUNCIL

Community Way
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Rickmansworth
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Council Meeting – 25 March 2021

Agenda Item CC2185/21

Croxley Green Parish Council Strategic Plan

Background

The Council agreed in July 2020 (item 2117/20) to adopt the high-level strategy developed by a working group that was formed to agree on some immediate and longer-term responses to the coronavirus epidemic. This paper introduces an extended version of the agreed upon strategy.

Discussion

The high-level strategic **vision** of the Council is:

The Parish Council works to enhance the well-being of the residents of Croxley Green"

The **aim** of the Council is

The Parish Council will represent the interests who live, learn and work in Croxley Green and will collaborate with others to deliver, maintain and improve the range of services available to the community, addressing environmental and social issues, whilst managing resources effectively.

The intent is then developed into some strategic **objectives:**

The Parish Council works to promote the well-being of all the people in our community by:

- *Encouraging and maintaining a sense of community*
- *Supporting the development of community activities and increase participation in them*
- *Increasing the engagement of the community through effective communication*
- *Protecting and sympathetically improving our natural environment*
- *Protecting the character of the built environment, and encouraging sustainable development*
- *Maintaining the safety and security of residents, their homes and possessions*
- *Managing the affairs of the Council on an efficient and effective basis*

When the Council adopted the **intent** and **aim and objectives,** it agreed that further extension of the statements would be required to explain **what** the points mean and **how** the Council might deliver on its promises.

Various drafts have been shared between January and March 2021 with Councillors, Officers and the Ranger team for consultation and their comments incorporated. Additional material, in the form of comments and explanations, was collected during the process and is available in an 'unofficial' version of the strategy document.

Appended to this paper is the final version for approval that, if adopted, will be published on the Council's website and used, until it is replaced, to guide decision making in the future.

Recommendations

- That the detailed statement of the Council's strategy is adopted
- That Council's website be updated to align with the new version
- That the document is reviewed at least once each year before the annual budgets are approved.

Cllr Nigel Cole
March 2021

Croxley Green Parish Council
Strategic Vision, Aims, Objectives and Actions

Strategic Vision
The Parish Council works to enhance the well-being of the residents of Croxley Green

Strategic Aims
The Parish Council will represent the interests who live, learn and work in Croxley Green and will collaborate with others to deliver, maintain and improve the range of services available to the community, addressing environmental and social issues, whilst managing resources effectively.

Strategic Objectives
The Parish Council works to promote the well-being of all the people in our community by:
1. Encouraging and maintaining a sense of community
2. Supporting the development of community activities and increase participation in them
3. increasing the engagement of the community through effective communication
4. Protecting and sympathetically improving our natural environment
5. Protecting the character of the built environment, and encouraging sustainable development
6. Maintaining the safety and security of residents, their homes and possessions
7. Managing the affairs of the Council on an efficient and effective basis

Encouraging and maintaining a sense of community

Why and what does that mean?
Community is, perhaps, a rather opaque concept but the central idea is that well being is enhanced when people are part of interactive networks – whether they are networks of friendship, neighbourhood or interest. Networks can be informal, such as groups of people who gather once a week in their pub for a quiz; formal, like a Parent-Teacher Association; occasional, like ones that organise annual events; or remote, such as people who get together to discuss books that they have read alone. These networks can also extend to the familiar faces that you occasionally see in a local shop or at a bus stop and greet. These networks are about social interaction; with the notion that the higher the quality of social interaction in a community, the higher the sense of community and cohesion, that is engendered.
A number of studies have found that individuals are increasingly isolated as they engage less with their neighbours and more with social media. This trend has been amplified during the coronavirus pandemic due to the impact of lockdown and other restrictions on social interactions mandated by national governments. This leads to increasing social isolation.
It should be the Council's task to seek to reduce social isolation and increase a sense of community.

How do we intend to achieve it?
By positioning the Council as a central presence in people's lives, providing essential services, maintaining local facilities and supporting local activities.(See also objective 2)
We will encourage grant applications from groups that offer possible solutions to the problem of social isolation and prioritise funding to that purpose.

We will directly contact organisations that already run community events (e.g. Revels, Croxfest) and those that are set up to run community events but do not for lack of funding (e.g. interschool competitions, The Guild, Community Centre) to increase the volume and reach of Council events (with branding/co-branding).

Councillors will represent the views of residents at meetings outside the Parish Council, articulating the concerns of the community and giving it a voice and reach.

Objective 2

Supporting the development of community activities and increase participation in them.

Why and what does that mean?

This objective should be considered in tandem with objective 1.

Community activities serve several purposes. They serve to bring people together, reducing social isolation; they increase cohesion among participants creating a sense of belonging, from which flow community pride and common purpose. Additionally they highlight the role that the Council has to play in the community and are visible evidence of precept payers monies spent well.

The Council has experience of successfully initiating and running relatively small events for the community by itself or in cooperation with local groups. Examples of this are Wassail, Easter Egg Hunt, Peace Picnic, Dog Show, Festive Karaoke, Xmas Market.

The Council's role, in general, is not to organise and run large scale events, nor to find direct solutions for this or other challenges. The Council is, primarily, an initiator, a motivator, a seed corn provider and an ideas tree. In these cases, the Council is primarily a funder and sponsor.

The Council will explore working with existing event organisers to enable them to grow events, for example expand Croxfest from a one-day music event to a two-day arts festival spread around the village.

Consider hiring a part-time events officer, whose sole role would be to plan and deliver events on behalf of council and work with other organisations to do so.

The Council will continue to fund the provision by the Community Club of free hall hire or meeting space for local groups (approx 21 hours/week)

How do we intend to achieve it?

We will promote the organisation of activities that further the above purpose. Example activities set out below are not a programme of activities (!) more as a prompt of possibilities:

- Neighbourhood meetings (Annual Parish Meeting)
- Community projects
- Community/local markets
- Street parties
- Outdoor cinema
- Community picnics
- Quizzes
- Karaoke

Objective 3
Increasing the engagement of the community through effective communication

Why and what does that mean?
Public awareness and understanding of local government varies in several ways. Depending on the situation, the public may be highly conscious of their council and what it does, whereas, in a different context, knowledge of the council may be hazy.
Local government is thought to have an important affect on people's lives; public awareness of local councils is above that of other political institutions and people consider local authorities to be more influential in everyday life than more distant national government. There is a strong relationship between how well informed people feel they are kept by their local council and their perception of its performance. People who feel well informed about what their council does are much more likely to be able to judge whether it provides high quality services that reflect the needs of the locality and offers residents good value for money.

How do we intend to achieve it?
- Encouraging attendance at meetings of the Council, its committees and the Annual Parish Meeting. During restrictions placed on holding meetings in public during health epidemics, the Council will seek innovative solutions, including videos and streaming. The Council will issue press releases and social media updates after each Council meeting
- Increasing the visibility of Parish Councillors,
  - using videos to introduce them on the Council's website.
  - Encouraging Councillors to author articles for the council newsletter and other locally published media
  - Encouraging councillors to be proactive on social media and better at engaging with residents, in person and on line.
- Ensuring the Council's website is accurate and up to date; contains only useful information; is changed regularly to encourage repeat visits; is formatted so that it reads well on mobile devices and desktop browsers where it needs to be navigable with a keyboard; and is accessible to all with accessibility issues.
- Improving the flow of communications to all stakeholders, including passive (newsletters, reports, noticeboards) and active (consultations, 'chat' forums)
  - The Parish Council newsletter will be published at least four times per annum. It will focus on 'personal' stories within the village, information of voluntary events, and progress being made by the Parish Council on projects and events. Council to consider purchasing more advanced design software to improve the quality, look and feel of the current rather old-fashioned format.
  - A regular e-bulletin will be introduced to include a calendar of events, including parish Council and local organisation; local news, and a short essay on local matters
- Facilitating and launching new initiatives – including consultation with residents in the vicinity before commencement
- Encouraging district and county Councillors to support local events
- Local press and news websites will be invited to public meetings of the Council

Objective 4
Protecting and sympathetically improving our natural environment

Why and what does that mean?
The key point is to try to support biodiversity and reduce our carbon footprint- minimise the impacts of human activity on the natural world and encourage a nurturing environment for humans and all other forms of life.
The bat boxes are a deliberate (artificial) improvement.
There are our direct impacts - the vehicles, tools and methods we use, the land we maintain. There are our indirect impacts - for example through the Neighbourhood Plan and comments on planning applications. And there are our indirect impacts through supporting other groups.

How do we intend to achieve it?
- Advocacy: to consider and comment on all environmental matters and work in partnership with other agencies and groups to secure improvements in the physical environment.
- Direct action: to manage and maintain
  - The Green and Stones Orchard on behalf of Three Rivers District Council;
  - footpaths on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council;
  - Weston Wood: land held by the Parish Council for the parish; and
  - litter and dog bins.
- To acquire, opportunistically, other land in the parish that will protect amenity value or, block inappropriate development.
- Consider how the agendas of the Leisure, Events and Environment Committee might be restructured to give additional weight to environmental issues to balance the focus on leisure and events.
- Ensure that future purchases of tools and vehicles are made having fully considered environment matters- example: progressively replace petrol driven power tools with rechargeable battery models
- Ensure the Council secures energy supplies from 'green' supply only.
- Ensure new council building / future buildings are energy efficient, carbon neutral and built from environmentally friendly materials
- Commission an independent environmental audit of the council operations.
- Calculate council carbon use and investigate carbon off setting

Objective 5.

Protecting the character of the built environment, and encouraging sustainable development

Why and what does that mean?

The Croxley Green Neighbourhood Plan represents the collective community view of our aspirations for the built environment, being:

- To maintain Croxley Green as a place to live, work and flourish and to keep the community 'family friendly'.
- To protect and maintain the open spaces and woodland within the Parish Boundary.
- To ensure that the use of land enhances Croxley Green and protects the built environment.
- To maintain the semi-rural character by protecting and improving the green spaces and keeping rights of way.
- To ensure that new buildings are environmentally friendly and built to the highest standards in terms of sustainability and sensitivity to their surroundings.
- To encourage the inclusion of energy saving design in alterations to existing building stock.

How do we intend to achieve it?

- To strengthen the influence of the Neighbourhood Plan on developers at the planning stage and enforcement of the Plan by the planning authority
- Encouraging developers and transport providers to engage with the work of the Planning and Development Committee.
- To produce guidance on design so that the different character areas are respected by housing developers and individual householders.
- To explore extending the Conservation Areas, designating character areas [relating to the design guidance] and landscape areas.
- To develop a business policy in relation to keeping local shops open and viable; to support those working in Croxley Green and to identify whether any new infrastructure is needed.
- To produce a definitive inventory of community assets, including cultural and sports facilities.

Maintaining the safety and security of residents, their homes and possessions

Why and what does that mean?
Residents of Croxley Green benefit from the village being a relatively low crime area and such crime as occurs tends to be antisocial behaviour; shoplifting and burglary, vehicle related crime; and violence and sexual offences. Much of the anti social behaviour is associated with drugs and littering.

Low rates of crime are a 'pull' factor in motivating residents to remain in the village and in attracting new residents to the area.

How do we intend to achieve it?
We will continue to support, financially, the provision of two dedicated Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), under the auspices of the Safer Neighbourhood team working out of Rickmansworth Police Station; part of Herts Police.

PCSOs act as a key liaison point between local communities and the local police service. They are a visible, accessible and approachable uniformed presence in the community and are trained to offer reassurance, defuse situations with threats of conflict, improve confidence and trust, gather information and foster good community relations.

PCSOs are also expected to respond to a wider range of non-criminal issues that contribute to vulnerability and safety within the community. They will be expected to act with discretion, making appropriate use of their designated powers and acting within Force guidelines.

We will seek to improve our partnership with the local constabulary by adding a standing item to full council meetings, three times a year, to invite the PCSOs to give a regular update to councillors and be available to answer questions (submitted in advance to allow time for information gathering).

Objective 7
Managing the affairs of the Council on an efficient and effective basis

Why and what does that mean?
There are three elements to this objective:

- Exercising the powers of the Council in a manner that is in accordance with statute.
- Using Council resources to achieve the desired objectives while maximising value for money.
- Directing precept for the benefit of Croxley Green, to the 'right' purposes guided by consultation with residents.

Efficiency and effectiveness are not the same thing.

Efficiency is the ability to accomplish something with the least waste of time, money, and effort or competency in its performance. We also have to demonstrate that we are offering value for money; that decisions are made in the best interests of residents and in furtherance of the strategic objectives.

Effectiveness is the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired outcome. The Council is the tier of local government that is 'nearest' to residents; Councillors are drawn from local residents and the professional staff have strong ties to the area. Council's workings (meetings, discussions, decision, accounts and policies) are almost fully open to external scrutiny, with limited restrictions due to confidentiality. We will use this openness to demonstrate that we are working to achieve the best outcomes for residents.

How do we intend to achieve it?

Councillors exercise oversight of the Officers and other staff through the committee structure, particularly F&A and HR&C, but also through LEE and P&D. That enables plenty of oversight, and the opportunity to do more probing into the various aspects of the role.

We will institute a rolling review of all Council policies to ensure they are fit for purpose.

We will seek to build better partnerships with the various agencies with which the Council engages, seeking to replace competitive (at best)and adversarial (at worst) with a more cooperative arrangement.