**Nettleden with Potten End Parish Plan – Outline Approach**

**Draft 3 – October 2020**

**Section 1: What is a Parish Plan?**

The overall objective will be to frame, develop and deliver a Parish Plan for ratification by the Parish Council. The work will be done under the leadership of the Parish Plan Working Party (hereafter PPWP, see below for discussion of members), which will oversee any sub-groups that will work to complete separate workstreams within the PP.

What is a Parish Plan?

It is a document that sets out a vision of how we would like our Parish to change, develop or be preserved in the coming years, and tackles important issues that may influence our villages in the future. It usually covers the key issue of planning & development, but can also tackle strategies for preserving communal areas, community events, micro-economy, sustainability, transport, facilities, etc.

A Parish Plan is not the same as a Neighbourhood Plan, which is primarily a Planning document. Please see Appendix for fuller explanation.

Whilst a Parish Plan has no statutory weight, it has the ability to empower us as a community to take action to bring about local improvements. Indeed, in forming a PP, we will as community be able to think through many of the core issues that shape our area, and form a proactive approach to them.

A Parish Plan is first and foremost a Community Led Plan (CLP), and its development must be explicitly and genuinely a bottom-up process. It is incumbent on the PPWP to find multiple and creative ways of engaging the local community (more on this below).

It is critical that a PP takes account and conforms with other key documents that pertain to the area (more on this in section 2).

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**Section 2: Scope of NWPE Parish Plan**

There will be two conceptually separate strands to the PP, although they may overlap in practice.

* Firstly, we will seek to document the current standard operation procedures of the parish council, to ensure institutional memory is preserved and our processes are standardised. This will also include a current Asset management plan. For shorthand, this is referred to as SOP hereafter.
* Secondly, we will aim to set down a vision for short, medium and longer term goals for the Parish. The development of this section of the PP will represent the bulk of the effort, if not necessarily of the finished document. It will require sustained and detailed engagement from the community.

Whilst a large part of the “finished product” may be made up of the SOP portions of the PP, it is currently envisioned that the bulk of the “work” will be in formulating the forward looking element.

Within both of the strands above, the work will be separated into subject areas that will likely overlap with existing working parties to differing degrees.

Thinking ONLY about the second strand of work, i.e. a vision for the future of the Parish, these are some of the areas we currently propose to explore:

Planning & development:

The Local Plan (Dacorum Borough Council) deals with development in villages such as Potten End, Frithsden and Nettleden, as well as the rural areas around them. However, it is not always as specific as we would like when it comes to development in the villages and areas in between. The PP would be an opportunity to first and foremost define how and where our village should grow, and how the streetscape should evolve.

Sustainability and Environment:

We are all aware of the threats to our environment posed by climate change. We also know that it is the responsibility of all of us to do something about it – from the supra-national organisations right down to each one of us making decision in our daily lives. In between those two extremes, local governments have a role to play in making small changes that enable individuals to more easily make environmental choices. Some Town Councils in our areas have been leading the way on such initiatives, and we can also set an example of how a Parish can make a difference. Some ideas could include:

* More recycling bins in central locations
* EV charging points facilitation
* Facilitation of lift sharing for commuters and school parents
* Ways to promote biodiversity around the rural areas
* Village sponsored “car boot sale” for recycling of all our collective clutter!
* Could include a formal motion on the Climate Emergency as recently adopted by a wide number of local councils in our area and nationally (Parish, Town and District), with a commitment to considering this imperative in all future decision making.

Parish Information, History and Maps:

The PC recently developed and published a Parish Map, which was very well-received by the community.

The PC could further consolidate some historical information and documents about the Parish, in a way that can be accessed by parishioners (e.g. online, on website). This could include:

* Parish maps and links to historical ordinance maps
* Historical documents relating to the PC, scanned
* A “hub” of local memories, stories and photos – e.g. “Did you know”? with interesting facts about Parish or individuals therein.

In addition to historical information, having a hub of useful local info would also serve the community well. This could include:

* Local information such as events, churches, clubs, schools, police contacts
* Local shops and businesses

Community Events and Engagement:

This is a critical component of the PP. The Parish Council is thinking about ways it can contribute to the vibrancy and cohesion of the community, and looking at the type of events it could sponsor. Community engagement in this area will be key, to get more ideas, volunteers and preferences.

Some initial suggestions the PC has been considering are:

* Summer Fete (in conjunction with other Village "institutions" such as the school, businesses, church, etc)
* Christmas events or decoration (such as Christmas tree on the green, Christmas lights, Santa's Grotto, mulled wine)
* Open Gardens around the village (in conjunction with the Gardeners Society)
* Campaign to End Loneliness (events to help engage those living alone and elderly)
* Events looking specifically at Frithsden and Nettleden and ways to include those areas
* Arts / Entertainment event (such as open-air cinema, "Potten End's Got Talent", Craft Fair, etc)
* Street / small neighbourhood parties

Parish Facilities, Economy & Connectivity:

The villages are served by several businesses and other facilities, many of which are considered of inherent value to the community. It is important to bear in mind that the PC does not have control over how these enterprises flourish or fail. However, it may be that the PC can play a role in safeguarding the facilities that are of greatest value to the community, and helping improve others. In this regard community consultation will be paramount. Facilities encompass:

* Businesses such as Village Shop, Pubs, Farm Shop, Barber shop, etc.
* Parish owned facilities such as playing fields, play equipment, benches, allotments, pond
* Other Parish “institutions” such as Village Hall, School, Footpaths

In addition, many parishioners work from home, commute locally or into London. It will be important to find out whether they are well served in terms of telecoms connectivity and transport link. This will allow the PC to formulate priorities with respect to these services.

Highways:

What ambitions do we have with respect to the highways (and byways) in our parish?

* Stretches of road where a reduced speed limit is appropriate (e.g. The Common, from PE to the trident junction; Stretches of Nettleden Road where horse-riders are often out)
* Improved car parking in the village
* Maintenance of foothpaths, verges, street furniture, signage
* Maintenance of road condition and markings
* Considerations around street lighting, traffic calming
* Concerns around road safety, especially near the school
* Maintaining speed cameras and speed indicator devices
* Bicycle lanes and bicycle parking

Finance:

A PP should set out our expectations for our financial balance sheets in the coming years. As our PP develops, it may come with financial ramifications. An idea may emerge that has broad communal support that would require financial investment (for example new facilities for young people or the school). This could mean that we do some of the suggested events mentioned above with a view to fundraising towards such an idea.

One recent innovation in this area has been the introduction of the Parish Grant.

**Section 3: Participants & Stakeholders**

The Parish Council & PPWP:

It was mentioned above that the process will be overseen by a Parish Plan Working Party. This PPWP will be reporting to the Parish Council, but should not be made up exclusively of councillors. It will be very helpful to consider ways of bringing in, from the earliest stages, other members of the community who can contribute to the formulation of the plan.

With respect to the SOP section of the PP, much of this will be covered by the relevant Working Party and the Parish Clerk.

The Community:

Each and every parishioner in the Parish is a stakeholder in this PP. They should therefore also become engaged participants, contributors and consultees. It is incumbent on the PC to find creative and multiple ways of engaging all sectors of the community.

The Potten End Village School:

The School is a central pillar in the community, and should be a key participant in many aspects of the PP.

The Potten End Village Hall:

Unlike many other villages, the PEVH is a separate organisation and operates as Trust Premises, under the management of the VH Council. It is a central asset in Potten End village, visually, geographically and functionally. The PC therefore recognises that it has an important role to play in shaping the PP.

Churches in the Parish:

The two churches in the Parish (Holy Trinity in Potten End and St Lawrence C of E in Nettleden) play an important role in their respective communities.

Dacorum Borough Council:

As mentioned above, a potentially important element of the PP is the development component (particularly if there is an ambition to develop it into a Neighbourhood Plan in the future). To frame this effectively, it will be important to work with the local planning authority – in our case Dacorum Borough Council – from the beginning. It may be possible to pressure DBC to adopt the Parish plan as a *Supplementary Planning Document* that would carry significant weight as a material consideration in the planning decision-making process. Even if DBC decides not to formally recognise the Parish Plan it can still be used as evidence to inform the Local Plan and to inform responses to planning applications, as long as it has been subject to widespread and effective community involvement.

Other community groups, clubs and societies:

* Potten End Scouts
* Groups / societies in Frithsden and Nettleden
* Small local charities, such as the group that sponsored the “Potten End to Loneliness” event.

**Section 4: Consultations & Resources**

Consultation approach

At the moment the ideal approach to community engagement is still being debated.

However, a few things are clear:

* Early consultation can have multiple benefits:
	+ It will get engagement from the community at the beginning rather than the end of the project
	+ It will allow the PC to identify some areas that are clear priorities and others where there is perhaps less interest / clearly defined preference
* Most of the consultations would not be binding or formal, but obviously it would be in everyone’s interest to get as much feedback as possible, as early as possible
* Consultations would need to be distributed through multiple channels to maximise engagement:
	+ Would need to be distributed digitally (on our website, shared to social media and sent to school, clubs, etc)
	+ Would need to be distributed in hard copy (via newsletter) with 1-2 collection points
	+ Could be distributed door to door (depending on frequency, see below)

The current thinking is that a series of short, staged surveys, each devoted to one “topic”, would allow for the most usable feedback.

* Allows us multiple points of engagement with public - more opportunities to get people involved at early stages
* Short surveys that take a couple of minutes are more likely to be done than a long one - Conversely, if we are using more detailed surveys then one long one would be arduous and dampen response rates
* We can start with “easier” topics - e.g. events - and learn from the process, how to ask questions that generate the most informative responses, etc.

Other Resources:

There are many resources to aid communities in developing a Community Led Plan (which a Parish Plan is an example of).

* ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) have produced a toolkit to help communities develop their CLP. They operate a network of local agencies / services, and in our area that is Community Development Action Hertfordshire (CDA Herts).
* There may also be support from DBC in the form of funds or council support (needs further investigation.

Appendix: Difference between Parish Plan and Neighbourhood Plan

It is important to note that a Parish Plan (which is a CLP) is not the same thing as a Neighbourhood Plan (NP). A CLP reflects local opinion on all aspects of community life, on a range of themes such as housing, services, infrastructure, transport, communication and the environment.  A CLP provides a realistic focus on those issues that matter to a community and document how they might be addressed through local collective action over a period of years. Importantly, CLPs have no statutory standing, but act as a blueprint of how communities can help themselves implement their own wish-lists for improvement.

On the other hand, NPs form the third formal tier of local planning policy below the National Planning Policy Framework and Borough Council Local Plans. As such, they focus exclusively on future land use. Provided that they conform to higher level planning policies and are expressed in positive terms, NPs are the means through which local communities can shape the nature, location and extent of future housing and commercial development in their areas, and set out policies for the preservation of valued assets and environments. While much of the evidence base for local NP policies will be the same as that collected for CLP, NP development is subject to far more rigorous examination and scrutiny. In particular, NP must satisfy examination by an independent inspector and be approved through a local referendum. Crucially, NPs do have statutory backing and planning authorities are obliged to give due consideration to NP policies in reaching their decisions on planning applications.

There are three main reasons that the Parish Council has decided not to pursue a NP at this point:

* It is currently the case that any community seeking to develop a NP should already have in place a PP as a precursor. To that end, the current PP would be a useful first step should the Parish Council decide to pursue on in future.
* Costs: There are high costs associated with developing a NP.
* Need: The main benefit of a NP is giving a local community more control over where development occurs. The Nettleden with Potten End Parish is in the lucky situation of not being a prime target for development within the borough, and therefore the need for it is limited. This may of course change in the future, and the PC will remain vigilant to this.