

PARISH PLANS IN TEST VALLEY

Test Valley Borough Council: valuing rural communities, encouraging and supporting Parish Plans.

Foreword by Roger Tetstall, Chief Executive

As a Council serving the beautiful Test Valley, we are committed to the well-being of our rural communities. Half of our 42 wards are rural – accounting for over 80% of the land and 30% of our population.

In 2006, the Council was successful in becoming part of a National Rural Mentoring Project, which, by providing the opportunity to share best practice and to learn from the experience of others, aimed to strengthen the capacity of councils in rural areas to act as community leaders in helping their rural economies and communities. I see Parish Plans as a key component in this process and am keen to promote and encourage their use.

The Borough Council's role is to provide advice and assistance to enable local communities to identify their needs and to support local initiatives and solutions which help to meet those needs. The Council's support will be led by Community Development but will include others as necessary such as Planning and Economic Development. Officers will liaise closely with Community Action Hampshire, who will continue to be the principal and continuing source of support for Parish Councils.

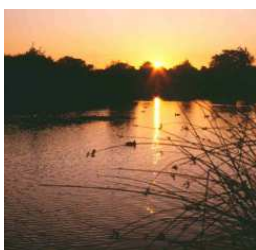
Roger Tetstall
Chief Executive, Test Valley Borough Council

How does it work in Test Valley?

The Borough Council plays only a supporting role in the Parish Plan process; the real work is done within your local community.

Community Action Hampshire (our local Rural Community Council) is the lead organisation in Test Valley. Their Community Development Officer has expertise in Parish and Community Planning, and is the first point of contact if you have any queries about Parish Plans, or if you decide you want to do a Parish Plan in your area. Examples of the advice and assistance Community Action Hampshire can provide include:

- guidance on establishing a steering committee
- support to facilitate a meeting/workshop
- advice on how to word a questionnaire
- putting you in contact with people from rural communities in other areas who have already gone through the process
- help to ensure that you reach all members of your local community, to make sure their voice is heard



- contact details for other organisations.

Although Community Action Hampshire will be your main contact, Test Valley Borough Council can also offer advice and assistance – in particular if the issues raised during the Parish Planning process are to do with Council services. We may also be able to offer a range of practical (rather than financial) assistance, such as photocopying questionnaires, printing colour posters, advertising a meeting, and loaning equipment such as flipchart stands, and signposting to statistical information within the Borough Council that might be useful.

A Parish Plan is about your community's issues – however, to make sure that your plan is more than a “wish list” if you contact us early on we can make sure that we do respond to you and link you into appropriate departments and officers.

Grant funding

Test Valley Borough Council has existing grant schemes that may help you achieve some of your identified actions, eg. capital grants for Parish Councils and village halls. The Council also has a small fund available to help with the cost of printing Parish Plans.

In addition, two small grant schemes are currently available to rural parishes. Hampshire Alliance of Parish and Town Councils (HAPTC) administers the Rural, Social and Community Fund for Hampshire, a grant scheme (£100 - £10,000) available to Parish Councils and community organisations, and can help with the early stages of developing a Parish Plan, as well as achieving some of your identified actions. From the Hampshire Strategic Partnership, the Community Strategy Fund is a small grant scheme (up to £750) available to community groups undertaking Parish and Town Plans.

In addition to the specific grants schemes listed above, there are more general grants schemes that may be relevant to your Parish Plan. For example, National Lottery funding.

Test Valley Community Strategy

It is important that your Parish Plan is owned by your local community. It is also important to be clear how your Parish Plan links with other relevant plans and strategies.

The Test Valley Community Strategy is produced on behalf of the Test Valley Partnership, a multi-agency coalition bringing together a wide range of statutory, voluntary, community and private sector organisations working together to improve the quality of life of residents of the Borough.

The Community Strategy sets out a long term vision for the Borough and encompasses a range of strategic plans covering key quality of life issues such as health and well-being, the economy, the environment, education and learning etc. Parish Plans are an important element of the community planning process as they set out a detailed expression of needs and aspirations at a genuinely local level.



Parish Plans sit within the overall umbrella of the Test Valley Community Strategy and provide an invaluable local focus and an evidence base relating to community priorities.

In order to secure the support of other key agencies, not least because some of the issues and actions identified are likely to be directed towards those agencies, it is appropriate for Parish Plans to be referred to the Test Valley Partnership for endorsement.

Planning

Parish Plans are not intended to be a response to planning issues and are not planning documents. Unlike Village Design Statements (VDS), which many Test Valley Parishes have produced, Parish Plans do not focus on built environment issues. They are about what is important in your local community and cover the whole spectrum of social, economic and environmental issues. Issues that involve planning policy may or may not come up as part of your Parish Planning process – but more importantly they are about issues that are important to your community – and include, for example, improving access to health services, reducing waste and encouraging energy efficiency initiatives, as well as day to day issues, such as running a play group, speed restrictions – even dog fouling!

Again, unlike the VDS, the Council does not propose to adopt Parish Plans as supplementary planning documents. However, any elements applicable to planning where justified and relevant will be taken into account in formulating new planning policy and in decision on planning applications.

There are certain important links between Planning and Parish Plans:

Local Plan (2006) Policy ESN06 provides a mechanism for any proposals for the development of housing, employment or community facilities which may be justified by a Parish Plan to be considered through the planning process. The policy requires evidence to demonstrate need for the development and how existing or new community facilities will be sustained. If housing is proposed this should also satisfy any existing need for affordable housing.

The justification for any development should be comprehensive and consider all relevant issues such as population, housing needs, employment and availability of social and community facilities and transport. The involvement of the community is an integral part of the Parish Planning process. Those preparing Parish Plans will need to complete the ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) national toolkit evaluation form (Resource Sheets 3/10 and 3/11) available from Community Action Hampshire in order to demonstrate, publicly, how all groups within the community have been consulted and involved as part of the process.

Contacts and Resources in Test Valley

To keep things simple, Community Action Hampshire, Test Valley Community Services, Test Valley Borough Council and Hampshire County Council have all agreed to have one key person to contact.



These four people will not be able to answer all of your queries, but will know someone who can. The aim of this approach is that you will not have to search for the right name or number to contact about a specific issue, or be passed from person to person without your query being answered – instead, your contact will either find out the answer to your query, or provide you with a name and telephone number / email address of the person you need to speak to.

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Community Action Hampshire

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Test Valley Borough Council

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Hampshire County Council

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Test Valley Community Services

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