

SADBERGE PARISH PLAN



NOTES OF THE OPEN MEETING HELD IN SADBERGE VILLAGE HALL ON WEDNESDAY 21ST MARCH 2007

1. This Open Meeting addressed a range of issues relating to the future of Sadberge.
2. There were 41 names on the attendance sheet.

As well as local residents, the following people were present:-

- Brian Jones Ward Councillor for Sadberge & Whessoe
- PC Julian Brown Beat Officer for the rural area around Darlington
- Ruth Bernstein Head of Libraries and Community Learning, Darlington Borough Council
- Paula Jamieson Sustainable Development Officer, Darlington Borough Council
- Colin Macdonald Energy Saving Trust (EST)
- Rev. Paul Neville Rector of St. Andrew's Church

3. Millie Scaife, the Chair of the Parish Plan Steering Group, welcomed those present and gave an introduction to the topics for discussion.

Law and Order

4. PC Julian Brown introduced himself as the Beat Officer for the rural area around Darlington.
PC Brown is based at Cockerton Police Station. He has been a police officer in Darlington for 20 years.
The following points were made during the discussion:-
 - When PC Brown is off duty the police response will be arranged by the call centre (0845-6060-365) that covers the south of the county.
 - How can he physically cover the area that he is responsible for?
Answer: It is a "suck it and see" exercise. He will try his best.

5. There has been a 35% increase in the precept for policing. Councillor Brian Jones reported that he had had a conversation with John Stoddard, the Acting Chief Police Officer, who told him that if the increase in the precept had been limited to 5% then there would have been a loss of 270 police officers.

Adult Education / Classes

6. Ruth Bernstein explained that classes in outlying venues – including Sadberge Village Hall – had to be stopped because of funding constraints.

There is statutory funding for libraries, but funding for community learning comes from the Learning & Skills Council, which is giving priority to schools, adult literacy and numeracy, and skills relevant to employment. There was a 6% cut in funding for community learning in the academic year that started in August 2006, adult education in Darlington is currently running at a deficit, and next year there will be another cut in real terms. Attention is being focused on areas of high population density.

The Libraries and Community Learning Service has been trying to find an alternative provider of adult education in locations such as Sadberge, and Bishop Auckland College is prepared to run courses provided that there are at least 10 students per course. From a Sadberge point of view, the discussions with Bishop Auckland College will be co-ordinated by the Sadberge Village Hall Association Management Committee.

The following points were made during the discussion:-

- Darlington Borough Council currently charges £35 for a 10-week course. According to central Government figures the charge should be more like £75.

- If the Libraries and Community Learning Service gets more funding for adult education classes then they can come back to places like Sadberge.
- The courses run by Bishop Auckland College will run for 12, 15 or 30 weeks, and will lead to accredited qualifications such as NVQ, City & Guilds, etc.
- Are outlying areas paying the penalty for Darlington's new flagship college?
Answer: The resources – and the courses – went to Maidendale House on Firth Moor. Courses are no longer being run at Maidendale House. They are being run at the Crown Street Library, Cockerton College, The Colridge Centre at Skerne Park, Longfield School and Hummersknott School.
- There has been a very high uptake for the free Family Learning courses, which have approximately 250 learners.
- Is there anyone in Sadberge who would be willing to act as a tutor on an informal basis?
Darlington Borough Council would be willing to provide resources to support volunteer tutors.

Carbon Footprint

7. Paula Jamieson informed the meeting that a Darlington Declaration on climate change was signed in 2005. A Climate Change Strategy is now in place, and the next step is to formulate an action plan.
There is a Climate Change Partnership in the Tees Valley, and there will be a Tees Valley strategy on climate change.
8. Colin Macdonald explained that the Energy Saving Trust (EST) is a national body that was set up by central Government in 1992. It has a network of advice centres that provide a holistic advice service on insulation, micro-renewables, etc., etc. and encourages people to become "low carbon citizens".
9. The following points were made during the discussion:-
 - Low energy light bulbs are only available in a very limited range of fittings. This limits their use.
 - China is commissioning a large coal-fired power station every week. Compare that with us talking about changing light bulbs. Our actions only have a very small impact.
 - The big issue is behavioural change.
 - It is possible to obtain a device that measures instantaneous electricity use and shows the effect of switching on different devices. It might be an idea to buy one and lend it out to Sadberge residents.
 - The EST would be willing to put on a series of sessions – e.g. quarterly – to give people advice on how to take practical action to reduce their energy use.
In a show of hands, 16 out of about 40 people present expressed an interest in such sessions.
 - It would be useful to get advice and practical help on energy supply options, low energy appliances, etc.
 - Are solar panels cost effective?
Answer: Using renewables for heat and hot water is more cost effective than using renewables for electricity generation.
 - Could we do something with the community buildings in Sadberge?
 - Why not switch off half of the street lights between 1 a.m. and 5 a.m.?

St. Andrew's Church

10. The Rev. Paul Neville explained the situation of St. Andrew's Church.
 - There has been a place of Christian worship in Sadberge for a thousand years.
 - There has been a huge increase in the number of people coming to the church in Middleton St. George for baptisms and weddings.
 - The Church is not immune from economic pressures.
 - People think of the Church as being very wealthy. However, the Durham Diocese is the poorest in the Anglican Communion in Britain. There are areas around Durham where the church has ground to a halt.

- St. Andrew's Church operates autonomously. The operating costs – which amount to about £35,000 per year – come from local giving. The main burden falls on the 30 or so people who attend on a regular basis. There are no grants available from public money.
- St. Andrew's Church belongs to the local community, and there is a lot of good will towards the church.
- If nothing changes then in 5 - 6 years St. Andrew's Church will be facing a financial crisis.

11. The following points were made during the discussion:-

- Are there ways that people can help other than by giving money?
- The Parochial Church Council (PCC) needs to find ways of making the church accessible during the week, not just for Sunday services. Could there be musical performances?
- Is there a financial short-fall now?
Answer: The PCC is making ends meet because there is currently money in the bank. However, this money is being eroded away.
- Can church services be made more attractive to local people? For example, the recent Mothering Sunday service was well received.
- Does all of the money that is donated go to St. Andrew's Church?
Answer: £10,800 per year goes to the Church Commissioners. However, this does not even cover the costs of employing Paul Neville.
- Paul Neville has four jobs. He is the Rector at Sadberge, the Rector at Middleton St. George, the Senior Chaplain at the airport and spends a quarter of his time working for the Diocese. The Stockton Deanery has one vicar for five villages.
- An outline planning application has been submitted to develop Dean & Chapter land at Morton Park on the A66 Darlington bypass. Could 5% or 10% of the proceeds go to the churches in Sadberge and Middleton St. George?
- Could the church be given a proportion of the proceeds from the sale of the former Sadberge School site.
- The Church owns land in Sadberge, but it is owned under a trust that restricts its use and prevents it from being sold.
- Sadberge assets were seized by the Church Commissioners.
- A key question is whether this community is prepared to pay £35,000 per year to support St. Andrew's Church.
- What would happen to St. Andrew's Church if there was no money to support it.
Answer: If there was no other option then the church would fall into redundancy. The building would just sit there. The PCC would keep it maintained as best possible.

Social Activities

12. There will be a Midsummer Morris Festival in Sadberge on Saturday 23rd June 2007.

In preparation for the craft display at the Festival, there will be a series of ten craft workshops for adults and children. These workshops will be held from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Tuesday evenings, starting on Tuesday 10th April 2007.

Alastair Mackenzie