Rural Area Working Party
27 January 2014

Parish Conference

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1.   Summary and reasons for recommendation

1.1   The last Parish Conference took place on 22 October 2013. A greater than expected number of delegates attended due to the location and the nature of the topics under consideration.   As a result a number of housekeeping issues arose.

1.2   This paper reflects on the feedback received from delegates and presents some options for shaping the next conference. Once the Working Party has given a steer officers will identify a suitable date for the next conference at the end of April or beginning of May.

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2.   Recommendation

2.1   That Working Party members note the feedback from the Conference on 22 October and indicate how they wish the agenda for the next Conference to be shaped.

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3. Corporate priorities

3.1 The recommendation(s) meet the following, as contained within the Corporate Plan:

(a) Corporate priority: *'Working together for strong, healthy and diverse communities."*

(b) Vision 2025: St Edmundsbury will be a place which: (V:E2); 'where local support networks for the whole community are on hand to provide advice and emotional and physical support'

4. Key issues

4.1 The feedback from the conference in October has been collated and the following main issues have been identified (some of which were specific to the night, and some of which would apply more generally):

(a) size of room;

(b) temperature/comfort of room;

(c) audibility of speakers;

(d) registration slow/pre-select workshops to speed up process;

(e) stick to the timings/make questions and answer concise;

(f) too many topics;

(g) refreshments needed before start of the conference, as well as during the break;

(h) delegate pack comprehensive;

(i) desire to see more collaborative and partnership working between St Edmundsbury and the Parish and Town Councils;

(j) community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was the most frequently mentioned topic for future workshops, along with feedback from workshop sessions, Broadband and Footpaths;

(k) a desire for more information on the workshops in advance to allow them to be informed debate, not information giving;

(l) most delegates thought the length of the event was right; and

(m) the 6pm start time was by far the most favoured from those delegates attending with no clear second preference.

4.2 The issues identified at (a) to (d) arose mainly as a result of a significantly greater number of delegates attending than had booked places (or attended previous conferences). It is believed this was due to the location of the event and/or the interest in the agenda. Either way, this increase in numbers led to the unfortunate issues identified, including the people sitting further away from the speakers than had been envisaged. The learning for officers organising

future events is to cater for more delegates than anticipated (or have booked) and to ensure sufficient staff are on hand at the start of the event to manage greater numbers, if needed.   In relation to any future parish conferences at the Apex, the main auditorium will be used.

4.3   Items (d) to (g) and (i) to (m) need to be taken account of in shaping the agenda and arrangements for the next conference.

4.4.   The last two feedback points suggest that the current start time and length remain appropriate. This is consistent with previous feedback and therefore no change is proposed.

4.5   In addition to the formal feedback, officers have met with one chairman of a Parish Council who, prior to retirement, frequently ran big meetings using the 'Open Space' approach. He has suggested that the Council might consider piloting this approach to widen the ownership of the agenda of the conference, ensure it is relevant to all the delegates attending and provide a collaborative approach to the events, rather than the traditional format of presentations. See Appendix A for an outline of how an Open Space event works.

4.6   Officers have identified the following elements or questions which could inform a discussion about the agenda for the next Parish Conference, a date for which is sought at the late April/early May. Bearing in mind the feedback about not attempting to cover too many topics, the Working Group is asked to indicate which elements they feel should be incorporated into the next agenda.

(a)   Welcome from Leader and Chief Executive (including update on corporate developments e.g. new strategic plan).

(b)   Feedback from the meetings of the Informal Town and Parish Council Liaison Group meetings.

(c)   Consider, as a trial, replacing the Open Forum question and answer session with a longer Open Space slot where the delegates shape the agenda so it is responsive to them and provides the opportunity for parishes to share issue of concern, good practice and advice in an informal and inclusive setting. The effectiveness of this approach could then be evaluated

(d)   A workshop (possibly split into two groups, if popular) on Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), as requested by the parishes. A factual overview of the scheme could be provided in advance focussing on the implications for Parish and Town Councils. It should be noted that the position on CIL is still emerging (and hasn't changed significantly since previous briefings for parishes) and therefore it might be sensible to widen this theme to cover CIL and Section 106 funding.

(e)   Offer a further workshop in respect of one of either Broadband, footpaths or a further exploration of issues discussed by the Informal Town and Parish Council Liaison Group.

(f)   Should the conference aim to reconvene at the end of the workshop sessions? This can be problematic when workshops finish at different times and people drift away, and it might be more effective to look at the way that workshop sessions are closed.

5. Other options considered

5.1 All options are available for consideration through this paper.

6. Community impact

6.1 **Crime and disorder impact** *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

6.1.1 None

6.2 **Diversity and equality impact** *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 None

6.3 **Sustainability impact** *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 None

6.4 **Other impact** *(any other impacts affecting this report)*

6.4.1 None

7. Consultation *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

7.1 The options for the next conference take account of the feedback received on the October 2013 conference, which was the best attended in recent times.

8. Financial and resource implications *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 Within existing budgets.

9. Risk/opportunity assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

Risk area	Inherent level of risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual risk (after controls)
The conference is not perceived as relevant by those invited to attend	Medium	Seek feedback after each event, learn from it and use it to help shape the agenda and organisation of future events.	Low

10. Legal and policy implications

10.1 None

11. Ward(s) affected

11.1 Primarily rural wards but open to all to attend

12. Background papers

12.1 None

13. Documents attached

13.1 Appendix A – overview of Open Space

Open Space

This approach allows the participants at a meeting to create the agenda/subject matter for the meeting. This is done as follows:

1) Prior to the meeting a way of dividing the space available is established to provide a number of discussion spaces – this can be by clustering chairs or sitting around tables.

2) The discussion spaces are identified (often by giving the names of local villages or landmarks).

3) A "wall" is created consisting of the names of the different discussion spaces with a space below it to add a discussion topic. "Walls" are usually created by sticking papers to a wall or display board.

4) At the meeting the facilitator invites delegates to write down the outline of a topic they wish to discuss.

5) The facilitator gets the person proposing the topic it announce it to the meeting (a microphone is usually needed).

6) The proposer of the topic then places their topic under one of the discussion places.

7) Once all the discussion topic slots have been filled the facilitator will invite the group to view the "wall" and see which topics they are interested in.

8) Once everyone has had a chance to look at the wall and identify topics they are interested in the facilitator announces the start of the discussion time.

9) The person proposing a discussion topic is expected to go to the relevant discussion place and start the discussion.

10) Ideally bullet points will be noted down either by the proposer or someone else in the group (so pens and paper are provided at each discussion space).

11) Delegates can stick with just one discussion area but are encouraged to move around and engage with other groups.

12) At the end of the discussion period there will have been a number of concurrent discussions the bullet points from which will be captured and fed back to the audience.

13) Feedback does not usually take place at the time, although it is possible to draw out highlights if there is a gap between the open space session and the feedback slot.