

EARDISLEY GROUP PARISH COUNCIL

**Chairman:
Clive Skelton
Rose Cottage
Eardisley
Hereford
HR3 6LU**

25 March 2010

Mr Peter Yates
Forward Planning Manager
Local Development Framework
Forward Planning
Herefordshire Council
Plough Lane
Hereford HR4 0XH

Dear Mr Yates

Place Shaping Paper

Thank you very much for agreeing with John Hope, our County Councillor, that we could have an extension until this Friday for submitting our response to the above paper. We held a public meeting on Tuesday 23rd March that was so well supported that some people had to stand outside the room. We estimate about 50 residents of Eardisley attended. Extracts from the Consultation Paper were circulated.

Following a long discussion it was clear that there is broad agreement that residents of Eardisley will embrace carefully planned growth as a balanced community with good facilities, work opportunities, and a solid infrastructure. There was determination to retain a settlement boundary but it was understood that it might be necessary from time to time to have small, negotiated increases in this boundary. There was also agreement that it would be necessary for work to be done up front to support the infrastructure which, especially in respect of the A road and the sewage system, is already overloaded.

There was broad support for many of the ideals on which the questions in your questionnaire were based and the initial response of the meeting to many of those questions might have been an unqualified 'yes'. However, there was strong feeling that even where residents are committed to the ideal, the assumptions underlying Herefordshire Council's proposals and the vehicles offered for bringing change about were flawed, and in some cases could be damaging. We decided Herefordshire Council will gain more accurate information about Eardisley Group Parish Council position and Residents' views in a letter than you would from questionnaire responses.

There was enthusiasm for the creation of 'knowledge-based and high-tech businesses' in Herefordshire and we would be pleased to see a few of these located

within some of the empty commercial property in Eardisley. However, most people were highly sceptical about Herefordshire Council's ability to attract these new high-tech jobs and expressed a view that your 'vision' was just a dream. We had little confidence that it could be achieved by 'promotion' alone and were concerned that priority for job creation would be given to the market towns.

The meeting expressed the wish that the Parish Council should ask you to provide details of any new high-tech jobs you have brought to Herefordshire and to give a clear indication of how Herefordshire Council actually plan to accelerate this process. There needs to be evidence that large numbers of jobs will be created now and in the future, not only in Hereford and the towns but also in the villages, so that increased numbers of residents can work locally without costly travel.

We then discussed your plans to increase the housing stock across Herefordshire by a mean of 25% (based on your Preferred Strategy) when the population in Herefordshire (discounting the effect of inward migration) is currently declining. Most thought the jobs promised should be introduced before the houses but a few thought some houses should come first. The consensus was that houses and jobs should evolve together in a planned way according to what is required at the time. History has many examples of people moving to urban areas to find work, and jobs have often been taken to regions where there is cheap labour available, but we know of no cases where people have been relocated first and jobs have followed later.

The proposal to make Eardisley a Rural Service Centre, was questioned by those at the meeting. They were of the opinion that Kington is the established natural rural service centre for this area. Some people expressed concern that if we did not accept the status of 'Rural Service Centre' for Eardisley we could be penalized and might even lose some of the facilities we currently enjoy.

We would expect to have much more clarification of what being a 'Rural Service Centre' involves, for example what services one is expected to provide and what influence the local Council could exert over decision-making.

Most people accepted the need for change and growth and wanted Eardisley to remain a significant – and, indeed, a 'Main' – village. But, with the housing stock of the village having already increased by 73 since 1996, there was little enthusiasm for adding up to a hundred further units without significant control and phasing. Our Parish Plan was quoted – and we enclose a copy for your reference.

Most importantly, there was overwhelming support for retaining a settlement boundary. If for example, there were any implication by definition that the settlement boundaries of Rural Service Centres would be removed, residents of Eardisley would have to oppose the status. Herefordshire Council has already made it clear that it can seldom turn down planning applications within the settlement boundary because of lack of funding to fight appeals. Removing those boundaries could expose Rural Service Centres to the risk of unchecked building driven by speculative builders rather than by responsible planners.

It was agreed that Eardisley should be a mixed village in every respect, with a diversity of people by age and socioeconomic grouping and with a variety of employment options. With respect to any new social housing, it was suggested this should include dwellings available on a shared-equity basis.

For the last 18 months or so many industries have been working short time and so the volume of HGVs passing through the village has been lower than previously. Even so, for pedestrians Eardisley has continued to be an uncomfortable place, especially for children, disabled and older people, for whom it is dangerous. With the economy recovering, and with proposed expansion in the housing stock, the population and, perhaps, local commerce, the conflict between people and vehicular traffic could become intolerable. We noted, incidentally, that there was no reference in your paper to an Eardisley bypass.

We realize that this is a long letter and appreciate that a response via your online questionnaire would be easier for you to analyse, but we are responding to a significant paper and by simply completing the questionnaire we could not adequately express the feelings of the meeting or the Parish Council.

Thank you again for allowing us an extension until Friday for our response.

Yours sincerely

Clive Skelton
Chair, Eardisley Group Parish Council

Copies to County Councillor John Hope
 Eardisley notice boards
 Eardisley website