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Tell us about your street!

The Datchet Neighbourhood Plan team needs to know what's good and bad about where you live, says Alison Crampin

In the recent Datchet Neighbourhood Plan (DNP) survey, you told us what you like and dislike about the village, what you'd change and what you'd keep. The DNP team now has a good overview of your issues and concerns which will inform and guide Datchet's Plan.

The next step is to investigate what you've told us in greater detail and gather factual evidence to support it. Your key concern was that Datchet should keep its character and feel as a village. We now need to put together a strong evidence base to explain what that means in planning terms so that our Neighbourhood Plan can aim to ensure that growth within the Parish is sustainable, meeting the needs of residents and businesses without compromising the heritage, friendly atmosphere and community spirit of the whole village.

We need your help

Good evidence is key to a successful Neighbourhood Plan. Like any other planning document, its policies have to be informed by the participation of the local community and backed by facts. That's why, this spring, we're launching a series of Character Assessment walks and we're asking for your help to gather evidence street by street. We want to find out what works well in your area, what are the forces for change and opportunities for improvement. We can then set up topic groups and/or other public consultations to consider the issues raised.

What is a Character Assessment?

A Character Assessment is a document which describes the appearance and feel of a road or area. Compiling one is a straightforward process. You walk around your area noting your observations about the key features and characteristics, and taking photographs to illustrate your points. There's a standard form which asks you to record details of, for example:

- The buildings and 'street-scene'
- Footpaths and cycle paths

- Traffic and road-use
- Green or natural features, and open spaces
- Important views and landmarks
- General impressions, observations and specific local issues.

Character Assessments are best undertaken by small groups as this encourages discussion. The aim is to identify the important features and consider what works well in your area, in planning terms, and what you think is inappropriate. Could more be done to maintain or improve the character of your road and its surroundings?

Why are we doing Character Assessments?

Good design, that is visually attractive and functional, stems from a thorough understanding of a development's setting and the character of the local area. Poorly-designed development proposals are often due to a lack of understanding of the character, feel and appearance of the local area.

Our Character Assessments will detail what makes our village distinctive and unique. They will help developers and their architects understand local character and what is likely to get planning permission or not. The intention is not to stifle creativity and innovation but to ensure development proposals respect and complement Datchet's character, and conserve or enhance the unique qualities of our area.

Are there some issues which can't be covered?

A Neighbourhood Plan is about planning. It must focus on the use and development of land, and it must comply with national policies such as National Planning Policy Framework, and existing regulations relating to the flood zone, Green Belt and Conservation Area. It can consider topics which are part of the Local Authority's planning process. It can't promote less development than the Borough Local Plan but it can allow us to have a say in that development. If there are important local issues of a non-planning nature, such as traffic management or street cleaning, there are provisions to include these as separate projects to be taken forward by the relevant bodies.

Will the DNP bring financial benefits?

When the DNP comes into force, after examination and a village-wide referendum, Datchet will be eligible for more funding through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). This is a levy that local authorities, such as RBWM, can charge on new development in their area. Its purpose is to fund the provision, improvement or replacement of infrastructure, or anything else concerned with addressing the needs arising from growth. The money raised can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure projects such as:

- transport schemes or cycle paths
- schools
- public spaces, parks or green spaces.

Currently the CIL is worked out at a set fee per square metre of development. Some types of development are exempt and the rate varies according to the location.

- Without a Neighbourhood Plan, Datchet would receive 15% of the CIL receipts in the Parish capped at £100 per existing dwelling.
- With a Neighbourhood Plan in place, Datchet would receive 25% of the CIL receipts in the Parish uncapped.

The DNP can have a say in how we would like to see these CIL funds used by the Parish Council. The Plan can propose and support infrastructure or enhancement requirements arising from development in our area, but these must reflect local priorities and be based on sound evidence. The DNP team will be asking for your ideas and opinions on this.

Assess your street

Could you join us for a Character Assessment walk around your area? Or, as the DNP team is just a small group of volunteers, could you and your neighbours get together to do a Character Assessment of your road? We'll provide you with a form explaining what to do.

If you'd like to get involved, please make sure you're on our mailing list. Email your contact details and address to DatchetNP@DatchetParishCouncil.gov.uk and put 'Character Assessment' in the subject line. Alternatively, send your details to 'DNP Character Assessment', c/o Datchet Parish Council Office, 1 Allen Way, Datchet, SL3 9HR, or leave them for us at The Bridge.

We can then let you know when we'll be visiting your street or help you set up your own Character Assessment walk. We will also be posting details of the walks around the village, on Facebook, and on our website. And, if you see us out and about with our clipboards, please come and join us.

For more information, see www.DatchetNeighbourhoodPlan.org

ENDS

See page 4 for suggested image.

Photograph and logo supplied as separate files



Caption:

Help Datchet's Neighbourhood Plan team by telling us more about your road.

