



ROSS-ON-WYE TOWN PLAN REPORT AS OF AUGUST 2008

REPORT BY THE STEERING GROUP (the Group)

This report summarises the position to date and sets out proposals for the remaining phrases. The steering group was established following a call by the Town Council for the community to produce a town plan. A general appeal resulted in the establishment of a Steering Group (the Group). If you were not involved at that time, you may be from now on simply by contacting the secretary via the website address below.

It is a Public Document, published on the internet at www.ross-on-wye.org. It was adopted by the Town Plan Steering Group on September 11th 2008.

The Steering Group are:

Rob Brain: (Ross Chamber of Commerce)
Brian Atherton: (Ross Chamber of Commerce)
Cllr Jane Roberts:
Cllr Jo Lane:
Cllr John Edwards:
Cllr David Ravenscroft:
Cllr Chris Bartrum:
Denis Claringbull: (Churches Together)
Nathan Avard: (Resident)
Mary Brewin: (Resident)
Caroline Utting: (Resident)
David Smith (Resident)
Dai Harries: (Resident)
Mark Herriott: (Resident)
David Dawson (Co-opted Ross Civic Society)
Cllr James Weatherhead: (Co-opted Ross Rural)
Colin Gray: (Co-opted Tudorville Residents Society)
Stephen Earl: (Co-opted member sport)
Nigel Gibbs: (Co-opted member – tourism)



The Ross Town Plan will be a document that expresses the opinions and aspirations of the residents of Ross-on-Wye. It will achieve this through extensive consultation with the people of Ross, a consultation process of which this document forms a part.

This report is an internal document that sets out the background and some possible solutions to issues that were identified by residents during an initial consultation phase that took place between November 2007 and January 2008.

It is hoped that it will be read and used by everybody to stimulate further comment and to identify new issues.

Purpose of the Plan

There is a perception that we have to sit back and let Central Government rule us and run us; the “Top Down” approach that creates so much dissent but little response. That perception is only intensified by the establishment of Regional Authority and the need for the County Council to be subservient to their paymasters, Central Government. But despite this perception of autocracy, we do live in a democracy and a Town Plan opens the door to a measure of “Bottom Up”. Ross bodies such as the Town Council, the Area Partnership and the Chamber have demonstrated that, given a rational argument, “Bottom Up” can have significant impact. In turn, the County Council hopes to achieve the same with its approach to the Regional Spatial Strategy. A well thought out and deliverable Town Plan can reinforce this approach, to the benefit of all.

For the Town Plan to be effective we have to recognise that Ross does not exist in limbo or isolation. It must form part of and gain strength from existing and developing overarching processes and strategies, e.g. the Regional Spatial Strategy and the Local Development Framework. It should give a positive steer to the direction and form of growth in Ross and seek the status of a Supplementary Planning document within the Local Development Framework. We have an opportunity to influence the planning agenda in Herefordshire and play a strategic role.

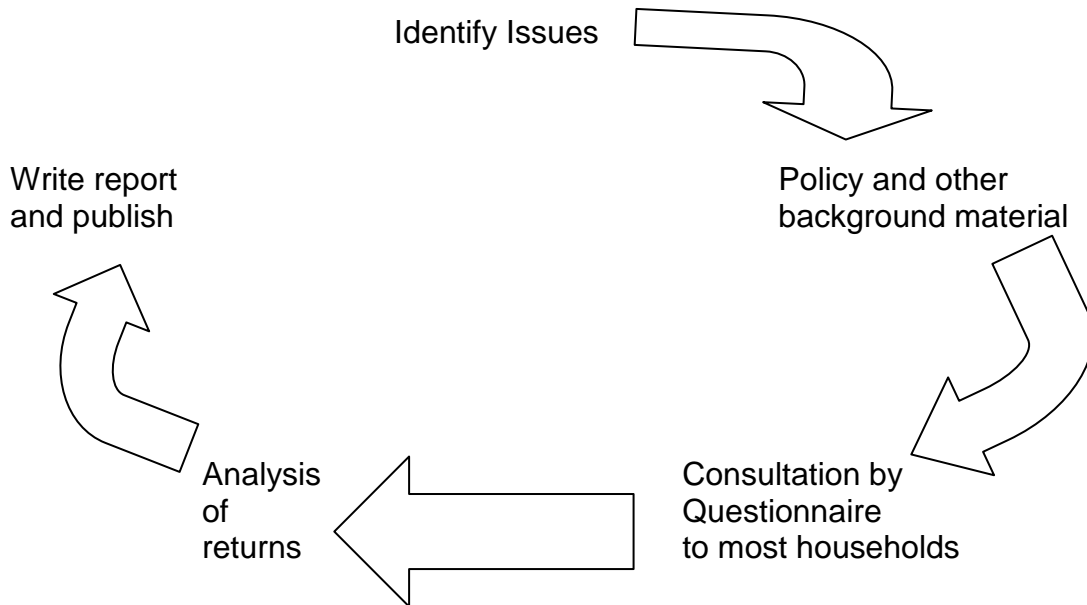
The plan must show why Ross is different, distinctive and why its Town Council should be more responsible for local matters such as parking, signage, sports, leisure, housing and employment. It must emphasise the town’s role as the service centre for the surrounding parishes. It should show that Ross is important to Herefordshire as a whole because of its potential for attracting new wealth into the county, through its road and telephone connections.

The process of producing the plan is as important as the plan itself. The community must understand that it has been involved and must acknowledge that the plan is not written on a clean sheet of paper. It builds upon what exists and what is good.

The plan does not represent the views of the Town Council or any institution in isolation. It represents a collective, community voice which seeks to resonate beyond the built environment of Ross Town.



The Plan Process



Identifying issues

The group wrote to 88 separate voluntary organisations and community groups in and around Ross, distributed in excess of 500 newsletters within the town, advertised and had letters published in the press, set up a website with a response page and created a Facebook presence. 55 responses were received. The COMDEV Survey of 2003 was reviewed as were the letters pages of the Ross Gazette since January 2007.

The next step is the Planning for Real exercise which will take place during September/October. It will be held in five locations, under the Market House, in the Larruperz, at Brampton Abbots School, at Tudorville and within John Kyrle High School, the last specifically for a “youth” response.

Policy and other background material

Meetings, discussions and other consultations have been held with Herefordshire Councillors and Officers and distilled into reports that have contributed to the options topics. There is more detail on the website.

Consultation by Questionnaire to most households

The final Options Topics will be presented as a questionnaire that will be widely distributed, mainly by post with a free returns envelope but also by hand and by distribution services such as the Ross Journal. It will also be placed on the website. See detail of this in the section “Consultation” below.



Analysis of returns

The responses will be turned into a “league table” of importance to relevant special interest groups and to the community as a whole. During this process, all contributory information will be made public via the website.

Write report and publish

Written by a Group nominated person, the final report will be presented in “draft” form on the website and widely publicised. Depending upon response it will then be presented to the Town Council for adoption and formal publication.

Consultation

- Consultation to date to produce this Options Report has relied upon
- The ComDev Survey (2001)
- Work of the Ross Town Council, Ross and District Chamber of Commerce
- A trawl of news items and letters in the Ross Gazette in the recent past
- Contact and discussion between the steering group, community group and individuals
- Steering group knowledge and liaison with outside agencies, e.g. Herefordshire Council

We now need wider consultation across the whole community to ensure and test the validity and acceptability of the issues and what the ROSS TOWN PLAN has to say. We are aware that direct consultation to date with certain key groups is missing – e.g. elderly, infirm people, young people, youth groups, some clubs and organisations, economic migrants and seasonal workers. We should also document what schemes are in the pipeline in various groups in the community.

The principal means of achieving wider consultation is a community questionnaire. This will be supported by organising Planning for Real events at various venues in town convenient to where local residents live. The content of the questionnaire of events will seek to correct, confirm and extend what the options report says. To back up this work we will need to design the questionnaire carefully so that it reinforces other questionnaires (e.g. core survey Local Development Framework) but does not duplicate and gives a clear guide for the ROSS TOWN PLAN. We also acknowledge that the Ross Gazette, the local paper with the widest circulation and acknowledged status, has a special role to play in the consultation process. We will be discussing ways of publicising events and promoting the ROSS TOWN PLAN with the Gazette.

In the design and distribution of the questionnaire we will embrace the following considerations:

- I. Revisiting the ComDev questionnaire and survey to enable comparisons then and now
- II. Complementing the LDF core strategy questionnaire recently circulated
- III. Ensuring minority or relatively disadvantaged groups and individuals get an equal opportunity to participate



IV. Keeping records of how many people are consulted and explicit recording of response levels across the community

In the follow up to the questionnaire Survey and Planning for Real, the Steering Group will not only analyse results but also follow up with discussion or focus groups where merited. This may be particularly valuable in relation to an issue like ROSS TOWN PLAN seeking the status of a supplementary Planning Document. Another important related matter is the background reports (viz. LDF Core Strategy) - which form the evidence base here too e.g. Housing Land Availability Assessment, Open Space Study PG17, Transport Study (ongoing) which have not yet been considered in detail. These might enable better informed spatial choices in due course. The process by which the ROSS TOWN PLAN achieves the status of a Supplementary Planning Document also needs to be considered during further consultations.

September 11th 2008.