

Wilbarston Parish Plan

Draft revision document 2015

Background and Introduction

The Wilbarston Parish Plan was published in 2010 as a means of expressing the collective views of residents on various aspects of Wilbarston as it then was and how it might develop in the future. At that time it was intended:

To identify what is valued and what we want to preserve

To indicate how we arrived at the present position

To clarify outstanding issues and what needs to be done to rectify them

To act as a signal to bodies such as the Parish Council, Kettering Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council about what is needed and valued.

The Parish Plan has been a useful document both as evidence to the wider world of the community view and as a mandate to the parish council, but as the fifth anniversary of publication approached it was time for a review. Of the original objectives some had been achieved or had become less relevant and some were still current. Furthermore, changing times suggested new objectives were necessary in some areas.

Volunteers were requested and a small review group was formed. The existing objectives were assessed as achieved, redundant or requiring review and areas were identified where new objectives might be set. A questionnaire was circulated to gather fresh information and data was also received from a survey of younger villagers and regular visitors to the village.

For various reasons including the level of information to be imparted and possible cost it was decided not to replace the existing plan in its entirety, but to publish this update to be read alongside it. The update explains changes which have been made, lists the amended objectives and generally brings the process up to date.

Parish Plan or Neighbourhood Plan?

At the time the Parish Plan was being prepared Wilbarston was one of a number of parishes pursuing such a path. Currently we don't know whether anybody else is carrying out a review such as this one but we haven't heard of one. One reason is the arrival of the Neighbourhood Plan in the planning hierarchy. Whilst a Parish Plan can be adopted by a planning authority, as ours has, it only has advisory status when decisions are being made. It is an indication of the views of the population of a parish but those views can be noted

and ignored. A Neighbourhood Plan, on the other hand, once adopted is a statutory document which cannot be ignored.

Given the above one would assume that Wilbarston should now be looking at a Neighbourhood Plan but the choice is not as simple as it seems. Neighbourhood Plans are a product of central government policy, with a designated process for drawing them up. In many ways it does not differ from the process we have already followed, but before conclusion it is necessary to hold a formal referendum, at a cost, to confirm support - if a sufficient majority is not obtained the plan will not go forward for adoption.

A neighbourhood, (which where a parish already exists is likely to be that parish), does not have a blank canvas. A Neighbourhood Plan is very much focussed on the built environment, whereas a Parish Plan is a much broader document. Above it sits a hierarchy of national, sub-regional and local (Kettering, for us) plans, each of which must fit with its 'parent'. In our case, for example, if Kettering Borough planned for a number of new houses to be built in Wilbarston we could draw up our own plan suggesting where those houses should be sited but we could not suggest a different number.

At the moment Kettering Borough is in the course of finalising its local, or 'site specific', plan for the villages. Until this is complete it is not possible to finalise a neighbourhood plan to 'localise' its terms. We are aware, anyway, that current proposals do not include designating any land outside the village planning envelope for development, other than for small scale affordable housing.

For these various reasons the group felt that the Parish Plan should be updated, rather than be left to lose relevance, but that the Parish Council should continue to monitor developments and assess periodically whether a Neighbourhood Plan, or some other document not yet known, would be desirable or necessary. Parishioners with an interest are encouraged to put their views to the Parish council from time to time as a part of that process.

The Review Group felt that the four intentions listed above remain valid.

Wilbarston in its Setting

Some detail has changed since 2010. Pipewell is no longer part of Wilbarston Parish, following a Community Governance Review in 2013/14. (It now forms part of Rushton). The Pastures has been extended by a smaller new development, The Laurels, and now comprises 22 plots.

Wilbarston and its Facilities

Existing Key Objectives:

To ensure that the present facilities within the village are maintained and where possible enhanced.

To ensure that the village envelope remains in place. Furthermore, only the highest standards of development should be promoted within the conservation area

Village Facilities were included in the revision questionnaire, with an aim of establishing some sort of prioritisation, to form the basis of an action plan, and obtaining specific ideas for improvement. Good feedback was obtained, with the shop/post office again being the highest scorer (70% rated very good) followed by the allotments (a new entry, 62%) and the school (50%). Others were the church (40%), the village hall (38%), walkers' footpaths (29%), children's play area (25%), the playing fields (23%) and the public house (20%).

This is useful information for the bodies responsible for those various facilities and probably we should seek to improve the 'very good' scores in all cases.

Importantly, the survey gave no sign of any wish to change the role or the extent of the village envelope.

Therefore the group recommends that the Key Objectives remain unchanged.

Future Development and Housing

Existing Key Objectives:

To publicise planning applications being considered by the Parish Council

To ensure that the village plan is a source of guidance when planning applications are being considered

To encourage residents to comment on planning applications to Kettering Borough Council

To instigate further debate designed to resolve the conflict between the need for affordable housing and the lack of space within the envelope.

The parish council has used the parish plan as a reference point for planning applications, both in its own deliberations and in communications with the planning authority (Kettering Borough Council, who have acknowledged Wilbarston's plan as a supplementary planning document meaning that its content is noted but may be ignored).

Generally it is felt that all these objectives remain relevant. In relation to objective four, it

is not unusual for permission to be granted for affordable housing immediately outside a planning envelope and the current draft Kettering 'Local Plan' (Site Specific Plan) includes just such a provision for an extension to Kendalls Close . However, nothing has been heard on the subject for some years and it is prudent to leave the objective in place.

Views were sought on whether the trend towards more property in the parish being rented was likely to have any significance. 60% of those who responded thought it would, although from mixed points of view. Some saw this as a positive development but a greater number thought it would be negative - tenants may not take as much pride in their property as would owners and those on short term lets would not be likely, or have the opportunity, to take an interest in the community. The responses were interesting but did not form the basis of any new objective(s).

The review group recommends that the Key Objectives remain unchanged.

Employment and Services

Existing Key Objectives

To ensure the long term future of the village public house

To promote small-scale employment opportunities within the village

To reduce wherever possible the dependence on the car for work and other journeys

Since publication of the original plan life has not been straightforward for The Fox, it having been disposed of by Greene King and passed through the hands of operating companies whose motives were not always clear. Now, however, things do seem to be on the up and it remains one of the facilities valued by villagers. The parish council has successfully applied to have The Fox listed as an Asset of Community Value, meaning that if the owners now wish to sell it a period of six months must first elapse during which the community can try to put forward its own bid. There is no requirement for such a bid to be accepted, it would have to be commercially attractive, but this mechanism would allow a breathing space during which genuine local interest could be marshalled in the event of any threat arising.

Responses to the questionnaire revealed a significant number (40% of respondents) working from home or running a business from home. Some of these are employed people working from home for at least part of the time but 20% are self employed and running businesses from home - a few employ other people, usually only one or two, and most of those do not expect the numbers to change in the foreseeable future.

Working from home generally requires good broadband speed and this is dealt with elsewhere. The Plan suggested the production of a Directory of Local Businesses. This

has not been published and methods of communicating about businesses and services have changed. It is now felt it could again be pursued as a part of the new website being developed by the parish council.

As an objective the promotion of small scale employment opportunities within the village remains valid, not only for the economic activity it creates but also for possibly reducing the number of car journeys being made travelling from the village for employment (possible other impacts of employees travelling to the village and courier van miles need to be considered) but it is not now considered that a separate objective of reducing dependence on cars for work and other journeys is realistic.

The review group recommends the following Key Objectives from 2015:

To ensure the long term future of the village public house

To promote small-scale employment opportunities within the village.

Transport

Existing Key Objectives

To maintain existing bus service and to undertake a detailed investigation of potential use of new services.

To continue support for the community care scheme

To press for a major and long-lasting upgrade of roads and pavements.

To improve safety at the entrance to the village outside the school by introducing traffic restrictions and improving parking arrangements.

To encourage solutions to parking problems in the village.

To seek a joint solution with Stoke Albany Parish Council and the highways authority for the provision of a paved footpath between the two villages.

Roads, pavements and public transport have never been far away from the parish council agenda since 2010. The statement made then about bus services remains absolutely current today and a new survey of potential use has just been completed. Responses to the plan review questionnaire suggested that only a few people make use of the bus service and reasons for not doing so included unreliability and fragmented service as well as unsuitability for young children. The more recent survey focussing on potential use if service improved still did not generate a lot of responses but did demonstrate that for those who do use it a reliable bus service is an absolutely essential piece in the pattern of

their living in the village. The parish council should continue to hold to account the levels of authority with budget for the provision of rural bus services and to consider possible options when these continue to fail.

The community care scheme continues to provide a valuable service to those without transport needing to visit doctor, dentist, etc outside the village.

As a result of a sustained programme of activity by a committed parish councillor the standard of roads and pavements in the village has significantly improved since 2010. The objective now should be to continue this at a maintenance level to make sure that ground is not lost.

Parking around the school gates at start and finish times has continued to attract comment. Various solutions have been suggested and tried, but have not produced long term change. The fact is that for each person who, for whatever reason, has to make the journey by car to drop off or collect it will be necessary for that vehicle to park and for the child(ren) to be escorted to/from it. Localised restrictions may move the problem around the village, but that is all. There is something to be examined here, but it's broader than the mechanics of parking restrictions so this very specific objective is not now relevant - in effect it was achieved when the 30 mph limit was moved round the corner to improve advanced warning of parked cars. But the need to encourage solutions to parking problems in the village remains very relevant.

The suggestion of a footpath between Wilbarston and Stoke Albany may continue to appeal to some but it would be difficult to achieve. The cost would be out of proportion to the likely usage, and the two parish councils may have differing views. The proposal has not been raised since the plan was published and realistically it should not remain a key objective.

The review group recommends the following Key Objectives from 2015:

To maintain the existing bus service as a minimum and seek improvements in frequency and reliability.

To continue support for the community care scheme

To monitor the condition of roads and pavements and continue dialogue with Northamptonshire Highways to ensure that upkeep is maintained.

To encourage solutions to parking problems in the village

Utilities

Existing Key Objectives

To monitor both electricity supply and the reliability of the postal delivery service

To consider ways and means by which the broadband service could be improved as quickly as possible

Electricity supply was deemed to be improving at the time of the production of the plan and the postal service was felt to be acceptable with some reservations. Since that time there have been no deteriorations in either service and it is not felt that monitoring of them remains a key objective.

Concerning broadband, at the time of writing BT fibre optic cable (to box) has arrived in Wilbarston and a further provider, Gigaclear, is expected to follow. The original key objective may be said to have been achieved but this subject is high profile (raised unasked by 34.4% of questionnaire respondents) and it should be amended to reflect the changed circumstances rather than removed.

As previously water supply, sewerage and rainwater drainage did not attract sufficient comment to generate a new objective.

The review group recommends this Key Objective from 2015:

To monitor quality of broadband provision to the village and continue to seek the best options as technology develops

Leisure and Community Facilities

Existing Key Objectives

To open and maintain a dialogue with landowners to ensure continuation of the full network of footpaths and bridleways, etc., and promote correct usage through the active promotion of a country code

To maximise the use of the hall, so providing funds to upgrade the hall's facilities and security

To ensure the maintenance of the Village Green, investigate the possibility of some form of Christmas display and to look for partner organizations/sponsors to mount small scale activities on the green

To investigate - perhaps with other parishes - current initiatives which could be used and to seek volunteers to establish a local youth club

To form an organising committee for village events and to provide all possible

support thereafter

These areas attracted a range of responses but generally the shop/post office, village hall, allotments, public house, playing fields, children's play area and walkers' footpaths were all rated as good or better. The problem of dog mess was commented on and prior to writing additional bins have been provided to help address this. Suggestions for maintenance and improvement were made and the existing key objectives generally remain valid, albeit with slight amendments.

Younger people not living in the village but visiting regularly, eg. to attend school, classed the facilities as average or good.

Given the range of organisations already in existence - village hall/social, allotments association, church related, over 60s, etc - and contributing to the calendar of activities it does not seem necessary to form a separate event organising committee at the moment.

Suggestions for new facilities were varied but that most often mentioned was the opening of a café in the village, possibly in the village hall, run by volunteers and selling teas, coffee, cakes and local produce.

It was again suggested that the village needs a youth club. Interestingly, responses to the younger persons survey confirmed this but not in the traditional way probably imagined by adults; of 35 people who responded 27 were in favour and 8 opposed. Comments suggest that what is needed is an informal 'hub' offering opportunities for socialising and for experiencing a flexible range of activities rather than a structured club. Asked who should organise this the most common responses were 'young volunteers' and 'someone fun'.

The review group recommends the following Key Objectives from 2015:

To maintain a dialogue with landowners to ensure continuation of the full network of footpaths and bridleways, etc., and promote correct usage through the active promotion of a country code

To maximise the use of the hall, so providing funds to upgrade the hall's facilities and security

To ensure the maintenance of the village green and to look for partner organizations/sponsors to mount small scale activities on the green

To set up, with the help of volunteers, an informal youth activities 'hub' in the village

Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

Existing Key Objectives:

To consider further the cost, practicality and appropriateness of measures to minimise possible damage in and around the Village Hall and elsewhere

To encourage residents to report all incidents of criminality to the police or to crimestoppers

To revive the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme

To undertake a review of the availability of dog mess bins and review continuing incidents of litter and fly tipping

The first of the above reflected circumstances when the plan was originally drafted and is now more appropriately an ongoing aim of the village hall management committee and parish council.

There was no suggestion that encouraging people to report crime should not remain a priority.

Once again comment was made about dog mess, in particular on the playing field area. Since the original plan was created additional bins have been put in place and the emphasis now is probably more on the servicing/emptying of those.

The review group recommends the following Key Objectives from 2015:

To encourage residents to report all incidents of criminality to the police or to crimestoppers

To maintain the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme

To monitor arrangements for the servicing of dog mess bins and review continuing incidents of litter and fly tipping

Parish Communications

Existing Key Objectives:

To monitor events outside the parish and find the best ways to disseminate this information to local residents

To investigate means of coordinating various notice boards so that key information

can be displayed quickly and effectively on all sites to maximise the impact of publicity

To establish a parish website. This will involve examining opportunities for hosting as well as identifying volunteers to launch and subsequently maintain the site.

Responses indicated that some residents would be prepared to make a contribution to the costs of a website, but not all. Some offered help with its establishment and operation. Subsequently the parish council has identified a model and secured funding for the establishment of a new website, due to go live at the time of writing. Ongoing costs will be met within the annual budget but arrangements will need to be made to keep the site well maintained and up to date.

The other objectives remain valid. Although the 'notice board' option may become less significant as use of the website increases that usage will be far from universal for the foreseeable future.

The review group recommends the following Key Objectives from 2015:

One and two to remain unchanged

To develop and maximise the use of the parish council website. This will include identifying volunteers and establishing systems for maintaining and innovating material.

Pipewell

Pipewell ceased to be a part of the parish in early 2015 and this section is no longer relevant

The Pastures

Existing Key Objectives:

To maintain a safe, secure site appropriate to the needs of the residents

To raise awareness of the site and increase links with the local community

To ensure that any expansion of the site is in keeping with its existing nature

To review the options for secondary education, including the possible establishment of a dedicated unit on site

As guiding principals the first three options have remained useful and valid and no change is recommended to them. In practical terms the fourth is outside the remit of the parish and it is felt there will not be the opportunity to pursue it.

The review group recommends that Key Objectives 1-3 remain from 2015

NR to 03/10/15