

A. Issues of concern to parishioners

The issues of concern to parishioners which are set out in this section of the Plan were identified through the household survey, the youth survey and the "Ideas Harvest".

Transport, Roads and Footpaths

The questionnaire survey showed that although only a small number of people use the bus service regularly, many more people in the parish think that the service is important. Hereford is the most popular destination for bus travel. Changes to the timetable, improved reliability, alterations to routes and cheaper bus fares would encourage people to use the bus service more often. Bus shelters are needed in the following locations:

- at Much Birch Church/the surgery
- on Kingsthorpe Road opposite Tump Lane
- opposite top of Holly Bush Lane.

At the Planning for Real event people identified a need for more bus timetables at the bus stops and on the village green.

People are concerned about the poor condition of roads, pavements, verges and road drainage. More frequent maintenance and more regular cleaning of road gullies are needed.

People are worried about road safety:

- Vehicles travel at excessive speeds on the roads and lanes in the parish: speed restrictions and traffic calming measures are needed, especially on the A49 and where young children walk to school and where there are elderly pedestrians.
- People have asked for pedestrian or pelican crossings at major junctions on the A49, especially at the Tump Lane/A49 Junction.
- Heavy goods vehicles using narrow lanes through the villages create hazards for pedestrians and other road users. People would like to see weight restrictions introduced, especially along Tump Lane. Unfortunately, the highways authority have indicated in previous discussions that this is not feasible.

Most people think the local footpaths are very important and use them on a regular basis, though older people make less use of them than younger people. The main problems people face when using footpaths and bridleways are caused by overgrown hedgerows and vegetation, and by mud and water. There is a particular problem along Pool Spring Lane where debris and effluent from the poultry houses, together with overgrowth from the hedges, sometimes make it impossible to walk along this public right of way between the church and Pool Springs.

A number of people have asked for improved means of access to footpaths for their dogs, e.g. appropriately designed gateways and stiles. People would like to have clearer maps showing the footpaths and clearer signage on the paths themselves.

More parking spaces are needed for the school, the Church, the Much Birch Community Hall, Little Birch Hall, the shop and the Post Office.

The A49 “then and now”



Environment

People have a number of concerns about the quality of the environment in the parish.

Litter is one of the biggest environmental concerns, especially the verges along the A49 and around bus stops and bus shelters, e.g. in Tump Lane.

Poor maintenance of verges, trees, ditches and drainage is a problem, creating hazards to visibility and safety on the roads. Many people feel that the verges need to be kept mown and tidy, though there is also support for letting them grow to provide wildlife habitats.

Environmental problems are caused by poor maintenance of footpaths and bridleways. Overgrown hedges, bushes and nettles cause the greatest problems, though dog mess also makes using footpaths unpleasant.

People use recycling facilities outside the Parish. Most people who replied to the questionnaire would appreciate a regular bulky household refuse collection service.

Residents in some parts of the Parish have problems of flooding from unsatisfactory storm drainage arrangements. Wrigglebrook Lane, Tump Lane and the B4348 just outside Wormelow cause the biggest flooding problems. In the recent past some residents have also experienced the problem of mud draining off fields that have been used for intensive cultivation of potatoes. Changes to crops and to methods of cultivation seem to have reduced this problem.

Many of the suggestions about actions to improve the environment refer to traffic, highways and footpaths. These subjects are dealt with in the section of the plan dealing with "Transport, Roads and Traffic".

In the questionnaire responses and at the Planning for Real event, people suggested planting trees, shrubs, bulbs and hedging material. A tree planting programme could be used to help give more identity to the parish. Benches located at beauty spots would enable people to enjoy the environment.

Shopping and Services

Most people use the village shop and Post Office at Wormelow on a regular basis.

As well as postal services, people use the Post Office to pay bills, collect pensions and allowances, access the Girobank and pick up information leaflets. On a more occasional basis, people also use the Post Office for cash withdrawals, to cash cheques, to buy daily papers and obtain foreign currency and vehicle licenses.

People value all these services, though a number would like a new post box designed to take larger envelopes.

More people would consider using the local shop if pricing were more competitive and the range of goods were increased. People would particularly like a choice of fresh fruit, vegetables, fish, cheese and meat, and the opportunity to buy organic produce.

People are not happy with the car park at the shop. More spaces are needed and action should be taken to improve safety.

Many people in the Kingsthorpe area think the Wormelow shop is too distant to serve as their local shop and would like to see the shop and Post Office at Kingsthorpe re-opened. At the Planning for Real event, interest was expressed in setting up a community shop on Kingsthorpe Road.

People would like to see improvements to the winter weather service (highway gritting and snow clearance), to TV reception and the mains electricity supply. There is support for mains gas, mains drainage and broadband internet access in the parish. People would like post boxes provided on Wormelow Road and Wrigglebrook Lane.

Housing Development

Views are mixed on this subject.

Respondents were asked if they thought that Much Birch parish had enough homes for the needs of the current population; 53% (137 people) thought there were enough homes, 22% (56 people) didn't think the parish had enough homes, 18% (47 people) had no opinion, and 5% (14 people) did not respond to the question at all.

Respondents were then asked if they thought that the mix of homes was right for the current population. 46% (119 people) believed that the mix was right, 28% (72 people) did not think the mix was right, 17% (44 people) had no opinion, and 8% (20 people) did not respond to the question at all.

Parishioners were then asked a further question on what kind of additional accommodation was required. This was a multi-choice question where respondents were invited to tick as many of the 11 boxes available that they felt applied. On average, respondents ticked two or more boxes, and in some cases, ticked as many as eight. Ten people ticked the 'none' box and yet proceeded to also tick several categories of accommodation. The following table shows these citations (ticks). It is important to remember that the number of ticks should not be read as the number of people wanting a particular type of accommodation, but rather, as the number of times each category was cited (ticked.)

None	87	ticks
Homes for single people	50	ticks
Homes for couples	57	ticks
Homes for larger families	14	ticks
Homes for the retired	45	ticks
Homes for the disabled	38	ticks
Sheltered homes	49	ticks
Homes to buy on the open market	19	ticks
Affordable homes	96	ticks
Executive homes	5	ticks
Other	3	ticks

Subsequent questions found that 5 young people might leave their current home to form a new household, 4 of whom wished to stay in Much Birch, and one wishing to live outside the parish, but still in Herefordshire. 21 people felt that they might need sheltered housing in the next five years.

At the very end of the questionnaire, where people were asked to write additional comments or suggestions, the issue of housing development was frequently raised. Many people felt that there should be no further development in the parish at all. On the other hand, one person felt that housing in the area was too expensive for their children to remain here, and another, that they might need sheltered accommodation. It was also felt, that allowing some 'infilling' might bring cohesion, or encourage more shops and

other facilities. Whatever the opinion expressed, it was clear from these comments that any development that did take place, should be strictly controlled. There were various ways in which people felt that might be achieved; waiting for mains drainage before allowing any further development, renovation of any existing derelict housing, and the consideration of ecological impact and design in all planning schemes.

The parish council looked into the possibility of selling the land it owns adjacent to "Rosebank" Barrack Hill, for residential development to finance the provision of low cost accommodation on the land it owns to the rear of "Valley View" Barrack Hill. Porosity tests on the land adjacent to "Rosebank" revealed that drainage was too poor for development to be feasible. The question then was, should the land to the rear of "Valley View" be leased, or sold outright to a private developer and the revenue raised used for other projects in the parish. Parishioners requested that the parish as a whole be consulted, and a vote taken on this matter. The results of this vote were:-

To lease the land at the rear of "Valley View"	154 votes
To sell the land to a private developer	42 votes
Spoilt papers	3

Accordingly, tenders for the rental of this land were invited, and the parish council resolved at its meeting of 6th April 2006 to accept the highest. The new tenant, a Much Birch parishioner, will use the land as an allotment.

Education, Health & Care

80% of respondents to the questionnaire felt that Much Birch School is important or very important to the community. People would like to have a nursery, a playgroup, after-school clubs and holiday play schemes for the children, plus adult education and evening classes. Other suggestions included classes during the day, social activities and access to a resource library or the internet.

61% of respondents were interested in attending adult education or evening classes. There was more interest in evening classes amongst the employed than the retired population. The most popular classes, in declining order of popularity were, computing, arts/crafts, languages, aerobics/keep fit, history, D.I.Y, photography and music. Some people suggested canvassing every house in the parish to discover the skills that local people could provide and pass on to others in an informal group atmosphere. A creche would help some people to attend.

Most people are happy with the health and care services they have received. The majority of people use the G.P.'s surgery in Much Birch.

Social activities, Much Birch Community Hall and Little Birch Hall

Of the respondents to the questionnaire, 8% use Much Birch Community Hall weekly and 12% once or twice a month; 53% of the respondents seldom use the Hall and 21% have never used it. The level of use is higher in the 60 – 74 age group than amongst the questionnaire respondents generally, with 13% using it at least weekly and 21% using it once or twice a month. Despite these levels of use, 45% of respondents rate the facilities at the Hall as good and a further 27% as reasonable.

However, this survey information on use probably does not adequately reflect the success and popularity of the Hall. When people were asked in the questionnaire about additional facilities they would like to see in the Hall there was a high level of interest in a stage for performances, additional storage, an entrance cloakroom, larger meeting rooms and additional car parking; activities requested included adult education classes, discos for children and young people, aerobics, yoga, keep fit, badminton and clubs for children and senior citizens. This level of interest in the Hall is reflected in the fact that bookings are high and not all requests can be accommodated. As a result, the Hall Management Committee has produced a Business Plan and drawings to show how additional space can be provided to meet current and future needs (see Part D, The Action Plan).

Of the questionnaire respondents, 3% use Little Birch Hall weekly and 12% once or twice a month; 45% of respondents seldom use the Hall and 26% have never used it. The level of use is highest in the over 75 age group, with 28% of respondents using it either weekly or once or twice a month compared with 23% of the 60 – 74 age group. Little Birch Hall does not fare as favourably as Much Birch Community Hall when people are asked for their views on facilities. Only 9% rate its facilities as good and 31% as reasonable. People would like to see the building totally modernised or even rebuilt, with additional car parking.

In addition to the responses to the questions about the two halls, people also made general suggestions about additional clubs and activities they would like to have in the parish. The most popular suggestions were, in decreasing order, gardening, rambling, University of the Third Age, art, senior citizens group, music, whist, choir, drama, creative arts, yoga and local history.

Places of Worship

The majority of people who responded to the questionnaire are not active members of any of the places of worship listed. A quarter of respondents are active members of the Anglican Church. A number of people travel to places of worship outside the Parish.

People felt that the church would become a more important part of the Parish community if it were used for meetings and social events such as coffee mornings, concerts, music and plays.

The Palm Sunday Procession



Recreation and Leisure

The questionnaire survey asked people for their views on the facilities provided in the children's playground at Tump Lane. However, the level of response to this question was low, probably reflecting the fact that at the time of the 2001 Census only 22% of households within the parish had dependent children and 16% of the residents were aged under 16. Nearly 60% of respondents had no opinion on the subject, 12% felt the facilities were good or reasonable and 5% felt they were poor. Only 19 respondents (7%) indicated that their families use the playground. The people who responded to the question about additional facilities at Tump Lane thought the site should also be used for football and cricket, and that more swings and slides should be provided alongside the existing equipment.

Over a third of respondents to the adult survey (34%) thought that there should be more facilities for children in the parish and in the Youth Survey the two main responses to the question asking “what would make Much Birch a better place for young people to live”? were “greater access to sports facilities”, and “a wider choice of things to do”.

A number of people felt that the playground at Tump Lane was not conveniently located for children living in other parts of the parish, especially those living on the other side of the A49. Additional playgrounds were requested in Kingsthorpe and in Little Birch, possibly next to Little Birch Village Hall. At these playgrounds people would like to see areas and equipment for young children and separate play areas for older children to use skateboards (29 respondents), BMX bikes (17 respondents) and play ball games (48 respondents suggested a football pitch). These findings were confirmed in the Youth Survey. At the Planning for Real event, further support was given for these activities and for a fishing lake, a golf course, a mountain bike track and an archery range. People were also interested in having informal nature areas; suggested locations included the field above Bryngarth, the field near Mannings (no. 8548) and near Castle Inn.

Many respondents thought that more should be done to help children and young people to use their leisure time productively. There was support for a youth club and organised sports, arts and drama events, possibly even a local arts festival.

People also suggested that more use could be made of the Millenium Green, both by children and adults.

Other Issues

Questions were asked in the survey about work, training and employment. Very few people stated that they faced barriers preventing them from taking up employment, training or opportunities for study. On the whole, people wanted to encourage limited development connected with tourism and small businesses. This could include small industrial workshops, farm shops, more overnight accommodation and greater promotion of local attractions such as the church and countryside walks. Some people felt that development should be environmentally friendly and reflect the rural character of the area. They mentioned rural crafts, green woodworking and organic market gardening.

The parish has a Beat Manager who covers a very wide area. A Neighbourhood Watch Scheme covers parts of the parish, but it is not very active and needs revitalising.

Information about local activities and the Parish Plan Survey

Most people responding to the questionnaire think that arrangements to provide information about what is going on in the Parish are good or reasonable, but people are less happy with the way the Parish Council publicises its decisions.

Most people find the Parish Magazine/Newsletter a good source of information, though fewer people find notice boards useful.

A village website should be set up to publicise events, hold parish council minutes and information on planning applications.

There was some evidence that people who are new to the parish find it difficult to make contacts and discover what is going on. Organised walks would be a good way to introduce the parish and make sure everyone knows the area.