



Rock Parish Plan

June 2005

Acknowledgements

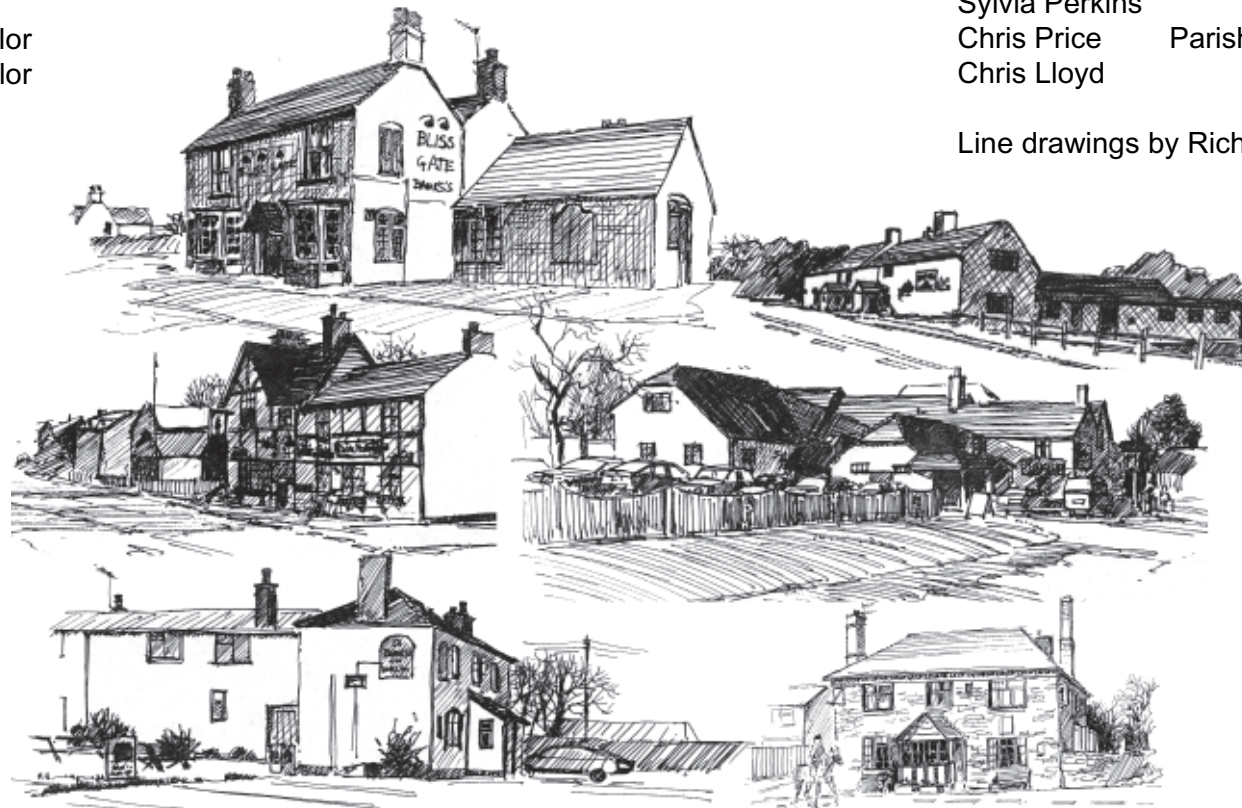
Working Party members

Sarah Marshall
Pam Harvey Parish Councillor
Cath Lloyd
Keith Perkins Parish Councillor
John Simmonds Parish Councillor
Ray Simpson
Albert Ward

Other helpers

Terry Harvey
Ruth Jackson
Sylvia Perkins
Chris Price Parish Councillor
Chris Lloyd

Line drawings by Richard Bell



Organisations

Community First Malvern
Countryside Agency
Coventry University
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Rock Parish Plan

Introduction

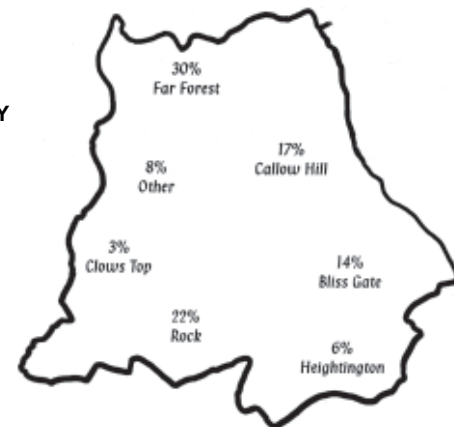
The Parish of Rock is situated to the west of Bewdley in the north of Worcestershire, comprising the communities of Bliss Gate, Callow Hill, Clows Top (part), Far Forest, Heightington, Pensax (part) and Rock. Included within the boundaries of the Parish is a significant part of the Wyre Forest, a much-loved area for walking, riding and the appreciation of nature. The geographical area is 3614 hectares or 13.95 sq miles with a population of 2366 (2001 census). It is still generally regarded in geographical terms as being the second largest Parish in England. The area is wholly rural with the population outside of the main communities well spread out.

These factors give rise to a major problem for the Parish Council of accurately representing the views of such a widespread and diverse population. In late 2003 the Parish Council decided that it would be appropriate to participate in an initiative funded by a grant from the Countryside Agency to produce a Parish Plan. This would enable it to develop a plan of action for the whole Parish for the next 10 years as a way of bringing all the communities together. The key element of the Plan was that it should be produced by the Community for the Community and not solely by the Parish Council although the latter would be represented.

Following the seven public meetings in the Parish a Working Group was formed. After considering how best to obtain the views of the parishioners a questionnaire was put together. This process took several months and in mid September 2004 the questionnaire was posted to each property in the Parish.

Of the 1006 questionnaires posted out 423 (42%) were received back. The percentage of the responses received as they relate to the communities in the Parish is shown below.

SURVEY RETURNS BY COMMUNITY



The questionnaires were analysed during December 2004 by approved statistical methods and work began on preparing the final plan at the end of January 2005. The conclusions reached by the Working Group and contained within this Parish Plan are based only on the responses from the received questionnaires. However the analysis of the personal data matched very closely with that of the 2001 Census. The data showed that the male / female split was almost exactly 50:50 and this is confirmed from data extracted from the 2001 Census. Similarly the age profile matched very closely with the 2001 Census with approximately 20% 0-17, 55% 18-59 and 25% over 60.

It was agreed by the Working Group during the review of the analysis of the questionnaires that the Plan would focus on the following areas:-

Communication
Environment
Leisure and Tourism
Safety and Security
Services including Housing and Education
Transport

The actions which are detailed in the main body of the Plan are all independent of one another, even when it appears they may conflict. The object is to list them all and ensure that they are properly considered. Similarly where timescales are listed in the Action Plan shown at the end of the Parish Plan document they must be regarded as indicative only, as they may be dependent on the availability of funding from bodies other than the Parish Council. Where funding from the Parish is required this will be dependent on the approval of the appropriate Parish precept which is determined annually between January and March.

As part of the original presentation to each meeting, it was stated that once completed by the Working Group, the Parish Plan would be accepted by the Parish Council and the associated Action Plan adopted for implementation. The Action Plan will then be reviewed annually at a Public Meeting. This meeting will allow the opportunity to consider issues and emerging situations not included in this initial version of the Parish Plan.

Finally, subject to the successful implementation of the Parish Plan, the Parish Council have concluded that this will then be a significant building block for moving towards Quality Parish Status, a key objective the Council has set itself to achieve within the next 3 years. This will then pave the way, if considered desirable, for the Parish to take on more responsibilities and to control them locally.

**Rock Parish Working Group
June 2005**





Actions

- 1 *Investigate putting on regular computer courses*
- 2 *Implement a Parish website*
- 3 *Advertise contact details for Parish Councillors.*
- 4 *Explore ways to advertise local job vacancies*
- 5 *Implement a regular Parish newsletter*
- 6 *Seek to eliminate postcode problems.*
- 7 *Investigate notice board provision and produce a common policy for the Parish*

Communication



In today's fast moving society this is an area which is very topical especially with the focus on the Internet and how it is supposed to be a great tool to help us all. Nearly 70% of respondents have direct or indirect access to the Internet and this was spread over all age ranges.

There was also a thirst for computer courses to broaden people's skills in this area.

The Rock and District News is widely read in the Parish although not everyone has access, either through choice or unawareness of its existence. This publication has grown immeasurably and could form the basis of a more wide ranging publication for the Parish especially with 67% of respondents being in favour of it reflecting what is going on in the Parish.



The Rock and District News is also seen by 54% as an avenue to advertise local employment opportunities. However, because of time constraints, the topicality of a particular job could be severely constrained; nevertheless it needs to be explored.

On a more serious issue, a large number of respondents 46% were unaware of how to contact a Parish Councillor. This is clearly an issue which the Council must resolve if the Council is to be seen as effective by everyone in the Parish. Local democracy must be for all and not just keen interest groups. It must be a tool for working, investigating and implementing projects for all Groups.

One issue which has plagued the Parish is that of the 'postcode lottery' when it comes to deliveries, with over 90% feeling there is a significant problem.

There were many respondents who considered the use of Parish notice boards a useful way of getting messages out to the community. However there does not appear to be a clear understanding of where they are and to whom they belong.



Environment

Nearly 45% of respondents claimed that they lived in the area because of their 'love of country life' and perhaps this is not unusual when considering the many positive aspects in the Parish, Wyre Forest with its flora and fauna, ancient churches and the open countryside with many magnificent views. It is essential for the future protection of the countryside that these and many other assets are guarded by the implementation of suitable actions.

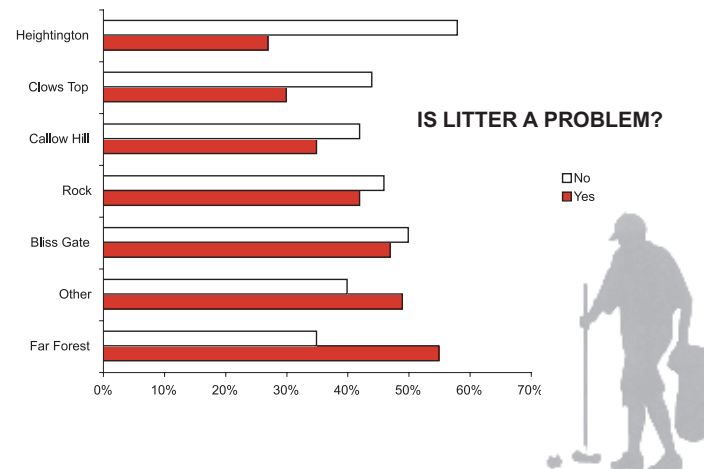
The Lengthsman scheme which has been running in the Parish for just over 12 months has proved to be extremely beneficial even if some within the Parish are not wholly clear as to what the role entails. The effectiveness of road drainage and the tidiness of verges is appreciated by everyone and the retention of this scheme must be maintained and if possible expanded. Visual impact has a very distinct bearing on how the Parish is perceived by its inhabitants and visitors alike. In fact 80% of respondents rated the environment as a major area to promote, with 40% saying they were prepared to help in schemes within the Parish which focussed on improving the environment. There have been examples where a 'spring clean' has been done each year and this should be expanded, perhaps on the basis of getting families, groups or organisations to adopt parts of the parish.

Similarly from a visual aspect, the keeping of hedges is important although the cutting of hedges by flail does have the downside of depositing on the highway a great deal of debris which can cause damage particularly to tyres.

There have been limited attempts in the past to improve the Parish's appearance, for example planting bulbs on verges, this now needs to be built upon. The Parish must improve the signage to make the boundaries of the Parish clear.

Whenever the environment is mentioned, the first thought that often comes to mind is recycling. Here again some facilities have existed/do exist but it is a very loose structure and not universally applied. There is a definite need to be more effective. It is Government policy to increase the level of recycling and we must play our part for the benefit of the countryside.

Sustainability especially of local agriculture is another area where a more constructive approach should be considered and we must promote the use of local produce.



Actions

- 1 *Expand the Lengthsman role*
- 2 *Reduce debris from hedgecutting and other sources, by implementing existing legislation*
- 3 *Improve visual aspect of Parish and proper Parish boundary signage*
- 4 *Explore and encourage provision of recycling facilities and promote recycling in general*
- 5 *Implement effective litter policy with a regular programme for tidying up*
- 6 *Investigate use of local produce both locally and in the surrounding areas*

Actions

- 1 *Develop and promote Parish 'image'*
- 2 *Liaise with Bewdley/Stourport to promote tourism 'grand tour'*
- 3 *Publish comprehensive footpath guide for the Parish*
- 4 *Expand the display of footpath maps at key points within the Parish*
- 5 *Consider after further investigation the provision of a full facility sports hall*
- 6 *Coordinate and expand activities at village halls to promote better use – these are a valuable asset for the community*
- 7 *Exploit existing facilities within the Parish not already mentioned*
- 8 *Identify accommodation for carrying out Parish Council business*
- 9 *Liaise with existing groups to advertise and encourage membership*
- 10 *Work with youth groups to ensure an effective policy for supporting their activities*
- 11 *Work with all other groups to ensure an effective policy of support for their activities*
- 12 *Work with Wyre Forest District Council planners to review the provision of holiday accommodation*

Leisure and Tourism

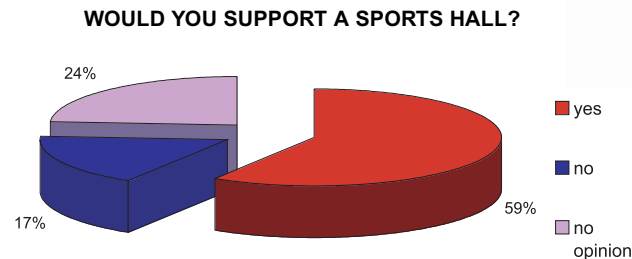
With so much natural beauty on the doorstep, this is an area to be enjoyed but without causing 'damage'. How should the Parish proceed? This is not an easy question to answer especially when thinking of the impact it could have if not tackled correctly.

There is the Visitors Centre for the Wyre Forest that attracts many people both during the week and at weekends who spend a great deal of time walking the Forest paths. The Visitors Centre also provides a valuable educational resource for schools and other organisations across a wide area.

What about the footpaths in the Parish? Many of these are seldom trodden except by dedicated enthusiasts of whom 35% say they use a local footpath or bridleway at least once a week.

Although tourism could be a significant contributor to the local economy there were many remarks added to the questionnaire where people stated they did not want to see any more caravan sites. This was countered by a strong feeling from others looking for an increase in the provision of 'bed and breakfast' accommodation.

With more leisure time 41% favoured the setting up of a local history society.

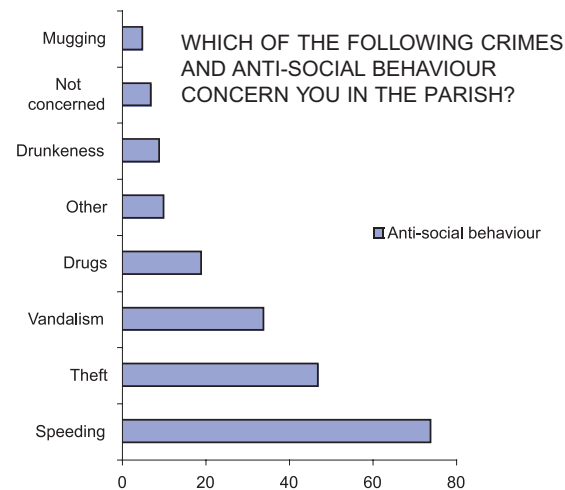




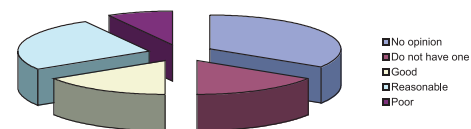
Safety and Security

The introduction of a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme was supported by 68% of respondents even though there would be difficulties in providing such a scheme outside the main areas of population. It was felt that with 47% and 34% of respondents considering that there is a theft and vandalism problem such a scheme would be worthwhile.

Speeding was seen as the most serious threat to safety, with 74% respondents reporting that this was a serious problem not only on the main roads A456 and A4117 but also on the narrow side roads.

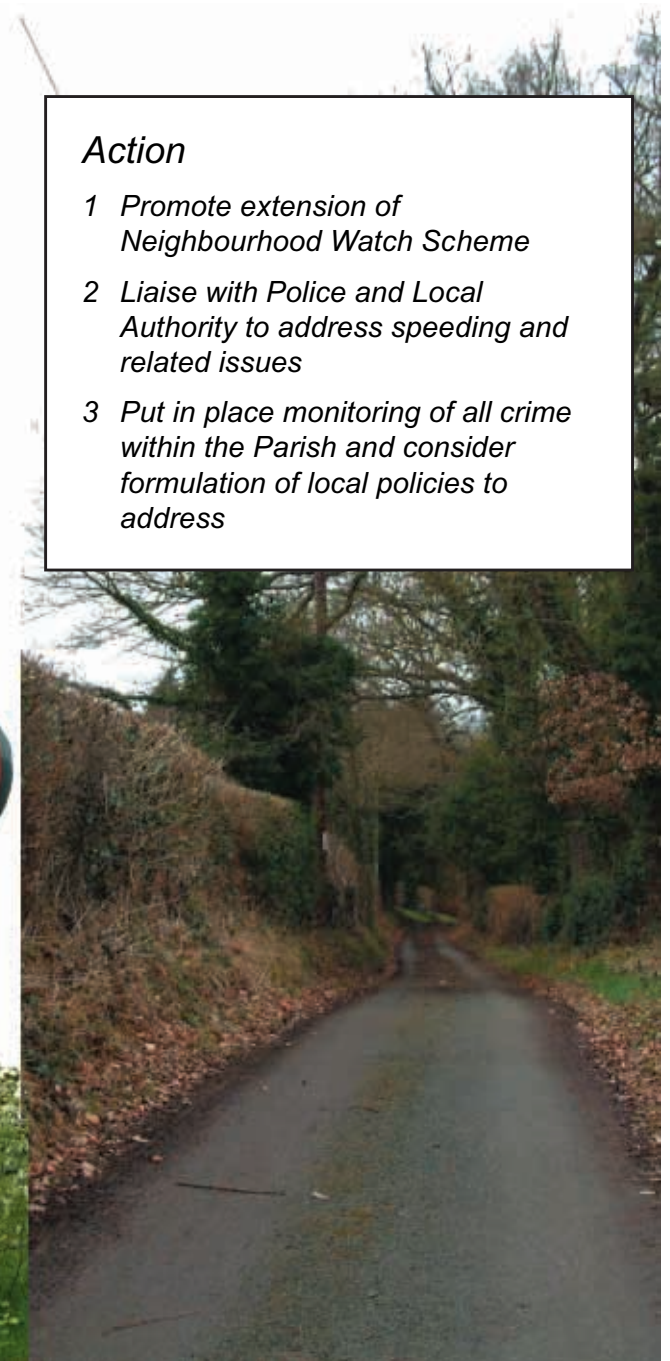


WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE SERVICE PROVIDED BY YOUR COMMUNITY OFFICER?



Action

- 1 Promote extension of Neighbourhood Watch Scheme
- 2 Liaise with Police and Local Authority to address speeding and related issues
- 3 Put in place monitoring of all crime within the Parish and consider formulation of local policies to address



Services Action

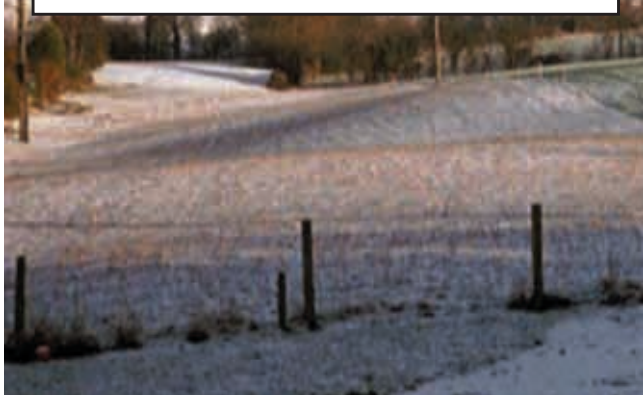
- 1 *Ensure there is a clear policy for all aspects affecting those who are disabled*
- 2 *Promoting use of local services*
- 3 *Investigating the viability of a tradesperson co-operative*

Housing Action

- 1 *To consider how to proceed with the investigation of some form of affordable housing scheme for the Parish and its parishioners*

Education Action

- 1 *Evaluate how more use could be made of the school and village halls to fulfill the need for Education/ Learning*
- 2 *Consider how the Parish could provide 'drop-in' facilities*



Services including Housing and Education

Services

Over 59% use a local shop and find such facilities very useful. This should be considered a plus point for the Parish when just to the east are the very large and diverse shopping centres in Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley.

One problem for many people is the availability of tradespeople. As a consequence, 56% of respondents would support the introduction of a tradesperson co-operative.

Interestingly 6% respondents were registered disabled and no significant problems of access were reported. Where problems did occur they centred around poorly maintained pavements (64%) and access to village halls and shops (31% and 23% respectively).

Housing

At the end of 2003 a Survey was undertaken on behalf of the Parish Council to investigate the need for affordable housing in the Parish. The overriding view - 85% - felt that this should be investigated further.

Education

Far Forest Lea Memorial School is the only school and is attended by children from both inside and outside the Parish. 48% of respondents considered the school should be the focus for holiday activities, a further 26% that there should be an after school club and 12% a homework club.

Adult education featured as a need by many respondents, for example computer courses 39%, keep fit classes 35%, language classes 33% and creative art classes 30%. The first choice for location was a village hall but the second preferred location was again the school. This is an area for development, as is the provision of a location for 'drop-in' facilities which was supported by 65% of respondents.



FAR FOREST LEA MEMORIAL SCHOOL

Transport

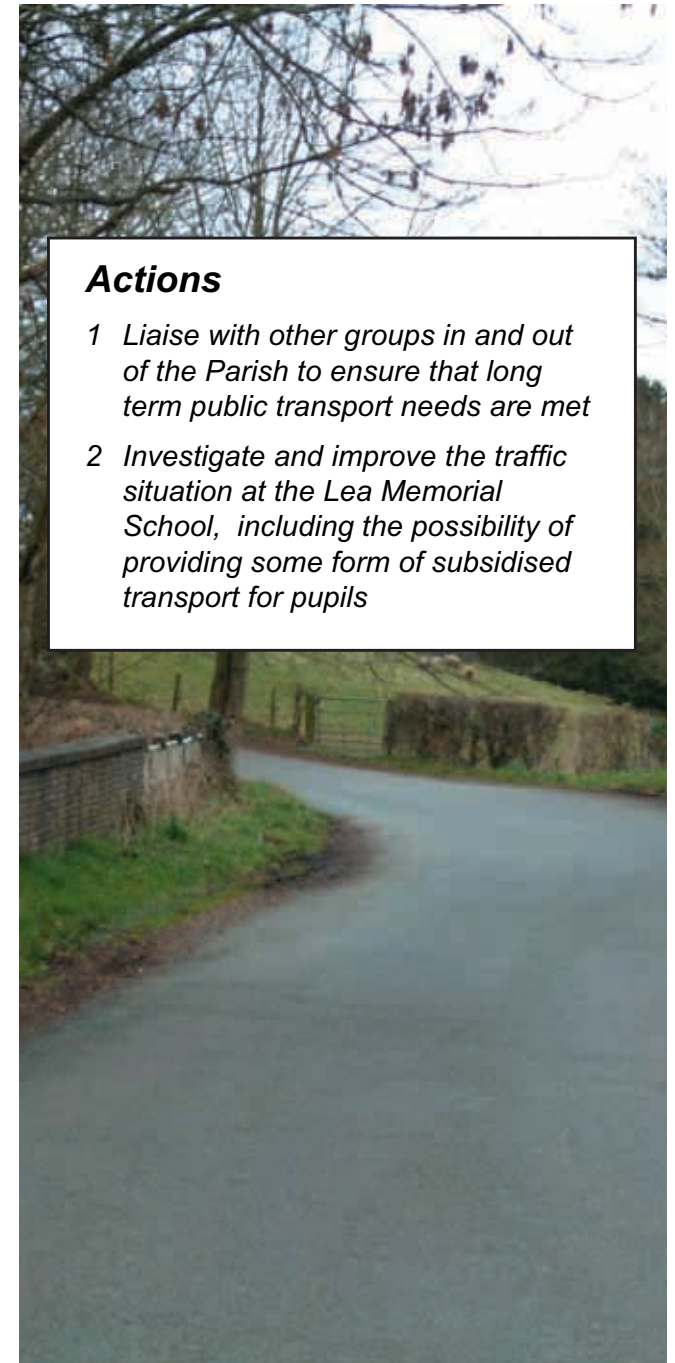
There was a surprisingly high response of 46% for people saying they had 'no opinion' when it came to public transport. At the same time there was a 40% response of people willing to support and/or use a community bus. It should be noted that 82% of respondents claimed their main means of transport was a car or van. In thinking of the future with the continual pressure to be more energy efficient and environmentally friendly, detailed work must be carried out to see how our communities could be served if there were a reduction in personal transport.

The local Far Forest Lea Memorial School is well regarded in the Parish with the majority of school children up to 9 years old attending (soon to be up to 11 with the reorganisation of the school system in the County from 3 to 2 tier). This popularity has the drawback that the number of cars and coaches outside the school at the start and end of the school day causes major traffic flow problems. This produced a high response of 46% who felt more children should use the school bus. The other option would be to make the road one way either all the time or during school hours, but this would probably be very difficult to enforce.



Actions

- 1 *Liaise with other groups in and out of the Parish to ensure that long term public transport needs are met*
- 2 *Investigate and improve the traffic situation at the Lea Memorial School, including the possibility of providing some form of subsidised transport for pupils*



Summary of Actions

= by March 2007

= by March 2010

= by March 2013

Communication

(ADDITIONAL TO PARISH COUNCIL)

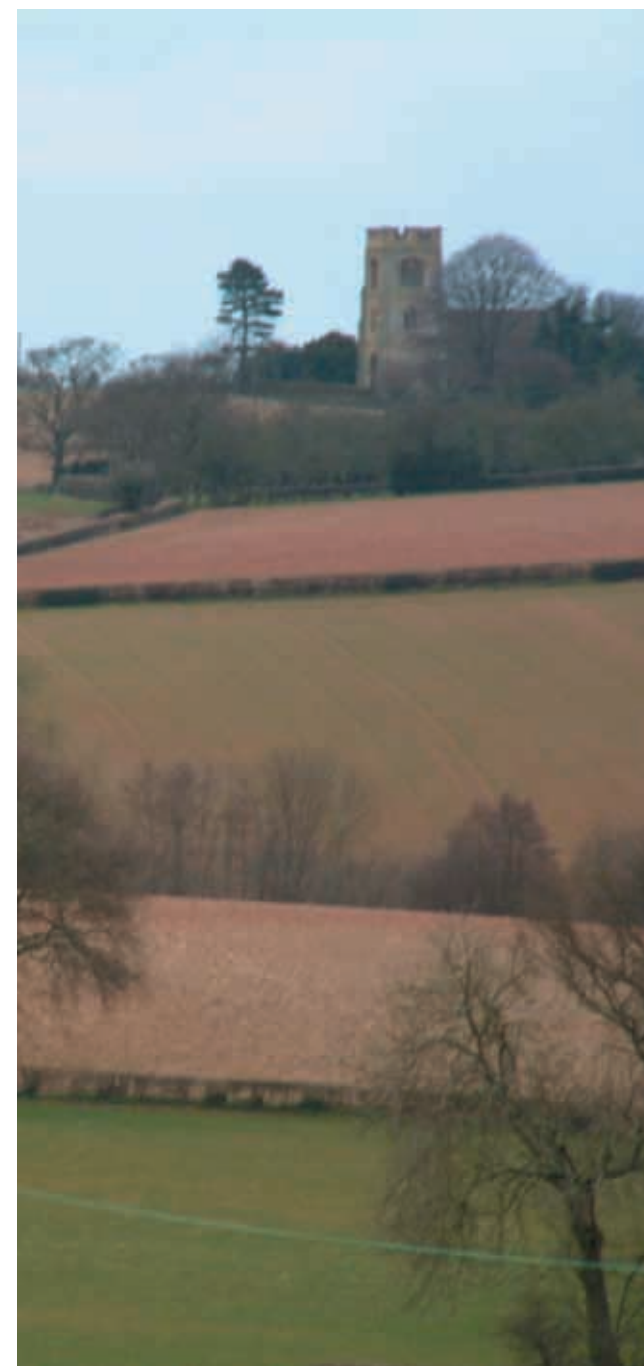
Investigate provision of computer courses	Course providers
Implement a Parish website	District Council
Advertise contact details for Parish Councillors	R & DN + Website
Explore ways to advertise local job vacancies	
Implement a regular Parish newsletter	
Seek to eliminate postcode problems	Post Office + Postwatch
Investigate notice board provision and produce a common policy for the Parish	

Environment

Expand the Lengthsman role	County Council + Highways
Reduce debris	Highways + DEFRA
Improve visual aspect of Parish	District/County Council + Voluntary organisations + Highways
Explore provision of recycling facilities	District Council + Environment Agency
Implement effective litter policy	District Council + Environment Agency
Promote use of local produce	DEFRA + Local Farmers/Growers

Leisure and Tourism

Develop and promote Parish 'image'	Tourist Organisations
Consider tie with Bewdley/Stourport to promote tourism	Bewdley/Stourport Town Councils + Opportunity Bewdley
Publish comprehensive footpath guide for Parish	Footpaths Association
Expand the display of footpath maps within the Parish	Footpaths Association
Further investigate the provision of a full facility sports hall	Far Forest Society
Coordinate and expand activities at village halls	Village hall committees
Exploit the existing facilities within the Parish	Organisations in Parish
Identify accommodation for Parish Council	
Liaise with existing groups to advertise and encourage membership	Organisations in Parish
Work with youth groups to ensure an effective policy for supporting their activities	Youth Groups
Work with all other groups to support their activities	Organisations in/outside Parish
Work with Wyre Forest District Council planners to review provision of holiday accommodation	District Council + Tourist Organisations



Summary of Actions (continued)

= by March 2007

= by March 2010

= by March 2013

Safety and Security

(ADDITIONAL TO PARISH COUNCIL)

Promote extension of Neighbourhood watch scheme	Police + Residents
Liaise with Police on Speeding and other Crime	Police
Put in place effective Crime monitoring regime	Police + Home Office

Services including Housing and Education

Develop a clear policy for the disabled	District/County Council +Highways+ Representative Organisations
Promote use of local services	District Council + Providers
Investigate the viability of a tradesperson co-operative	Providers + Trading Standards
To consider how to proceed with investigation of affordable housing for the Parish and its parishioners	District Council + Housing Association
Evaluate additional use of School and Village Halls for Education/Learning	Far Forest School + Dept. Education & Science
Consider provision of 'drop-in' facilities	

Transport

Liaise with other groups in and out of the Parish to meet long term public transport needs	District / County Council + Passenger Transport Group + Voluntary Organisations + Service providers
Investigate and improve traffic situation at Lea Memorial School	Far Forest School + Dept. Education & Science + Police + District / County Council

Remember much of the above will not happen without the proactive participation of Residents of the Parish

***“So if you want it to happen
get involved -
it's your Parish too!”***

