

THE HELMDON PARISH PLAN
A FOOTPATH TO HELMDON'S FUTURE

Parish Plan Refresh Report & Action Plan

MAY 2011



Helmdon Parish Plan

What is it?

The Helmdon Parish Plan was published in 2004; it summarised the thoughts, opinions and ideas of the people of the parish.

The Parish Plan gave rise to four groups that are enriching our village life:

- **HAFWEG** provides a focus for continuing efforts to protect the natural environment.
- **Helmdon Presents** organises varied theatrical and musical shows and runs the Film Club.
- **The Footpaths Group** has improved access to the parish's 20 miles of footpaths. Working parties clear vegetation from paths, a coloured footpaths map was produced in 2006 and has been followed by three leaflets detailing routes for circular walks.
- **Gardening Club** didn't get going until 2008 but is now thriving with regular well-supported meetings and visits.

Other points raised by the 2004 survey have been addressed:

- Broadband is now available in Helmdon
- Bus services have improved and are publicised
- Church heating has been upgraded
- Refurbishment of the Reading Room
- More litterbins have been provided and recycling encouraged
- Crime figures are published regularly
- Wine Club formed, meeting at Weston Chapel

Some of the ideas raised in 2004 did not attract sufficient support, or were not feasible without qualified leadership (e.g. form a junior rugby team). Considerable work was done on:

Village Meeting Place

A hall to augment the existing facilities provided by the Reading Room, the church and the school. Could it be achieved by extending the Sports Club's plans to develop their pavilion to comply with current legislation and to provide better changing and recreational facilities? Meetings and consultations on detailed plans threw up lots of difficulties: a report was issued.

Road Safety

The Parish Plan called for a Road Safety Group to monitor the roads and pavements, identify problems and to liaise with the Highways Authority regarding solutions. No one was willing to lead it, but we do have a Parish Highways Representative, appointed by the Parish Council, to whom problems can be reported.

A Cycle Route to Brackley

There was a lot of support for this idea, which might have made use of the old Great Central railway line. Plans were developed and a realistic option proposed but some landowners were not able to assist at the time.

Bonfire/Fireworks Display & Pancake Day Races

Health & Safety and insurance implications scuppered proposals for these village entertainments.

The Refresh

In 2010/11 the Helmdon Parish plan Group (HPPG) undertook a refresh of the Parish Plan to gather new evidence and identify current needs.

How was it done?

The HPPG refresh project was launched at Helmdon's Annual Parish Meeting on 28 April 2010, including an appeal for new people to join the HPPG. The group held its first meeting on 20 May 2010 to discuss the purpose and scope of the refresh and what methods would be used to gather evidence.

Six topic areas were established:

Transport: highways, footpaths, cycleways, buses, trains, potholes, bridges

Youth: 0 - 5, 5 - 11, 11 - 18, youth club, play facilities, events, groups, activities

Housing & Development: affordable housing, rental properties, employment opportunities, village design statement

Amenities: shop, pub, reading room, post office, internet, healthcare, school, other public places

Culture: arts, sports, heritage, history, education, social & leisure facilities, religion, other

Environment: conservation, green areas, community safety, crime, natural history

A Future Needs Day was held on 11 September 2010 in the school hall. The event attracted more than 120 people who gave their views on the current and future needs of the community. This event also helped raise awareness of the project among members of the community.

Based on the findings of the Future Needs Day, the Topic Groups put together questions to go into a questionnaire that was circulated to every household in the parish in January 2011. More than 230 completed questionnaires were collected with many families and households submitting a composite reply.

How much did it cost?

In 2010 Helmdon Parish Council applied to Northamptonshire ACRE for a parish plan grant. £2,000 was awarded and Helmdon Parish Council also allocated £100 from council funds towards the cost of the plan. The grant covered such things as production and analysis of the questionnaire, the holding of meetings and events and the production and distribution of the final plan.

The main "cost" however was volunteer time – given freely by members of the working group, many additional volunteers, and of course the people of Helmdon in attending parish plan events and taking part in the questionnaire.

Topic Group Conclusions

Transport

The need that gained greatest support in the refresh was the creation of a cycleway to Brackley. More than 85% of the respondents supported the idea in principle and many felt that the route should if possible also cater for walkers and horse riders. The benefits of the cycleway could be wide-ranging.

Public transport was identified as an issue, particularly the inconvenient times of the bus service. A need was identified to explore alternatives.

Parking issues were identified by almost 60% of respondents. There is a clear need to map the known problems and to identify the nature and cause of the inappropriate or illegal parking.

Youth

The youth topic area focused on two connectivity issues; broadband and mobile phones. It was encouraging that no youth issues were identified during the parish plan refresh, either in terms of lack of facilities/activities for younger people, or in terms of antisocial behaviour.

Respondents identified a need for increased broadband speeds, with some households struggling to obtain even 1Mbps. Younger people said faster broadband would be better for gaming and watching video online. Note that a significant number (60) of businesses operating from the village (including people that work regularly from home) also identified the limited broadband speed as an issue.

Mobile phone coverage in the village is patchy and respondents identified a clear need for better coverage and network resilience. A majority (61%) would support erecting a new telecoms mast, subject to an appropriate site being agreed.

Amenities

Some facilities and services are well used by respondents (Reading Room, Pub, Post Office, and Mumfords van) whilst others are used much less frequently (Mobile library, newspaper delivery and fish van). The majority (68%) said that the current facilities and services met their needs. Respondents saying that the current amenities did not meet their needs identified a shop/post office, more sports facilities, and a larger village meeting place as their top priorities.

Many respondents lamented the closure in September 2010 of the last village shop, particularly as a loss for older people and children. However, some said that having a village shop was not important to them as they had cars and could choose where to shop. No one volunteered to work on how a new shop might be organised.

Respondents welcomed the reopening of the visiting post office but some seemed unaware of this service. Also some seemed not to know about what the pub offers! Thus more advertising of what amenities the village has is needed.

Environment

A total of 183 respondents identified some aspect of the environment as important to them. The most frequent points were the rural feel (74), countryside access (71), wildlife (47) and peace and quiet (33). Many respondents said that they would like to join an environmental group and 27 people put their names down to be contacted. There is a clear need to re-establish a practical, local wildlife group, particularly including activities for young children.

The parish plan refresh deliberately avoided addressing directly the issues of the proposed wind farm (Spring Farm Ridge) and the high speed rail link (HS2). Those issues could have drowned out everything else. However some respondents did highlight their concerns about the potential environmental impact of those two developments.

Culture

Respondents identified several groups as being very active (Gardening Club, Helmdon Presents, Church, WEA, Fellowship, Women's Club, Bridge Players and HYHO). When asked what would help you become more involved in community activities the highest response was "having more time..." (35).

Respondents sometimes identified organisations or activities that they thought were needed but which actually already exist (e.g. craft activities, reading group) so the parish plan refresh has raised a need for more publicity of what Helmdon already offers to residents.

Housing & Development

24% of respondents were against any sort of development at all but 30% supported infill or small scale developments (e.g. up to 4 houses). 6% argued for more houses in order to increase the availability and viability of village services and facilities. 26% identified the availability of affordable housing as an issue. The majority of people are against large scale housing development and think that newly built homes should be within the current village boundaries.

This reaffirms the information gathered in 2004 and helps to provide up to date guidance for the planning committee of Helmdon Parish Council.

52% of respondents said that the development pressure in South Northamptonshire has made/will make Helmdon a less desirable place to live, 41% of these citing the proposed wind farm (Spring Farm Ridge) and the high speed rail link (HS2) as threats to the desirability of living in Helmdon.

What happens now?

The HPPG has discussed the findings of the Future Needs Day and the survey results; nine action points have been identified (see Appendix 1).

The action plan is not an end in itself. To implement any of the ideas in the plan will require time, money and effort. Some action points can be achieved with very little resources; others may take thousands of pounds and many years to realise.

One action that stands out is the need for a regular village newsletter to publicise events and give key information on the many amenities that are available in Helmdon.

Further information is available from:

www.helmdon.com/parishplan or parishplan@helmdon.com

Helmdon Parish Plan – Action List

Transport				
Why this action was chosen	The Action	How it will be tackled	Effort required to achieve action and time needed to get a result	Lead Responsibility
86% responded that they support in principle the idea of a cycleway to Brackley	Set up a group to investigate the possibility of creating a cycleway to Brackley	Parish Council to facilitate and support the group and appoint at least two members of the parish council to the group, who would provide regular reports at meetings of the parish council	High effort – would probably take several years to see any results	Parish Council
Not many people use public transport but it is important to those that do. More people might use it if it met their needs	Research possible alternatives to the traditional bus service	Helmdon Parish Plan Group to investigate	Medium effort - would take at least a year to see any results	Helmdon Parish Plan Group
60% of respondents identified parking as an issue. With more infill development the issue may worsen	Map parking issues	Map parking issues using Parish Online and identify nature of parking issues.	Medium effort - would take at least a year to see any results.	Parish Council
Youth				
Why this action was chosen	The Action	How it will be tackled	Effort required to achieve action and time needed to get a result	Lead Responsibility
120 respondents want faster broadband (including 60 businesses)	Obtain faster broadband	Helmdon Parish Plan Group to research possible solutions (e.g. BT Infinity, fibre redistribution), determine technical issues and cost	Medium effort - would take at least a year to see any results	Helmdon Parish Plan Group
58% of respondents identified the need for better mobile phone coverage	Investigate better network coverage	Helmdon Parish Plan Group to look at different solutions and work with Helmdon Parish Council to identify planning issues associated with any new infrastructure requirements	High effort – would probably take several years to see any results	Helmdon Parish Plan Group

Amenities / Culture				
Why this action was chosen	The Action	How it will be tackled	Effort required to achieve action and time needed to get a result	Lead Responsibility
A number of respondents identified services or facilities that they said were needed but that actually already exist.	Produce a new-format quarterly village newsletter	The Talkabout magazine is published twice a year, which means it tends to report on past activity rather than promote future activity. Parish Council to set up and support a new quarterly newsletter in a much more punchy and shorter format	Low effort - could be achieved quickly	Parish Council
Environment				
Why this action was chosen	The Action	How it will be tackled	Effort required to achieve action and time needed to get a result	Lead Responsibility
183 people identified some aspect of the environment as very important to them	Re-establish an environment group	Using the contact details gathered in the survey organise a meeting to establish a practical, local wildlife group, particularly including activities provided for young children.	Low effort - could be achieved quickly	Helmdon Parish Plan Group
Housing & Development				
Why this action was chosen	The Action	How it will be tackled	Effort required to achieve action and time needed to get a result	Lead Responsibility
More than 80% of respondents are against any large scale development	Use information to help reaffirm the Parish Council's current policy on housing.	Parish Council to use results of parish plan refresh to show support for current planning policy and as a basis for developing a Neighbourhood Plan in the future	Low effort - could be achieved quickly.	Parish Council
52% of respondents said that development pressure has/will make Helmdon a less desirable place to live	Analyse data gathered further to identify concerns	Helmdon Parish Plan Group to "drill down" in to the data to understand what people are concerned about and identify the nature of the concerns	Medium effort - would take at least a year to see any results	Helmdon Parish Plan Group

**Imagine what you would try
if you knew you couldn't fail**