

Whitchurch-on-Thames Village Plan

Report of Community Study Group

The Community Study Group was made up of village members namely Mary Mattimoe, Sally Trinder, Harriet Mulrooney, Anna Scheponek with Audrey Kingham chairing the group. The group had seven meetings.

Introduction/Starting Point

The main purpose of the Community Study Group was to make recommendations as to improving community life for all age groups within the village. The group needed to assess the needs/wants of the various age groups through discussion and understanding to both compliment and enhance the Village Plan questionnaire and previous feedback from both the Arts & Crafts exhibition and the Village Party aiming for a more 'inclusive community.' This study looked at what was currently available to village residents and what is possible to provide taking into account what facilities are close by.

Where we are at

In order to provide information to assist with the decision making process and the way forward the report will have more detail in certain areas as dictated by residents' feedback.

Societies/Groups/ Clubs already in Whitchurch

The questionnaire responses highlighted some thriving groups and societies within the village but also highlighted almost 60% of respondents not involved with what is currently on offer. There were lots of ideas on activities for consideration for all age groups and in this context appropriate facilities need to be considered. A Mothers and Toddlers Group does not exist in the village despite the increase in number of young families. The feeling is that the siting of the Village Hall is ideal (easy to access) but the hall is 'too dirty and unappealing.' The younger residents (8-15) expressed the need for 'to do' places. There were a high number of young people belonging to clubs outside the village and it was acknowledged that this may be attributed to almost 35% of this age group being educated at Independent/private schools. It is also worth noting that the gender mix in this age group is fairly evenly spread i.e. males 52%, females 48%. The questionnaire response indicates that the Young Riparians have 7 members from this age group.

Church

St.Mary the Virgin Parish Church is the church within the village boundary and therefore the questionnaire referred specifically to St.Mary's.

What was of personal importance to residents who responded to the questionnaire ranged from the majority (66%) favouring historic preservation followed by (57%) help for those

in need locally. Opportunities for worship were on a much lower level (29%) with Christian teaching (19%). The church as a venue for other activities was discussed but currently this would be very limited due to no toilet or parking facilities.

School

Almost 46% of respondents would be interested in using the school facilities for evening classes. 62 parents felt that the school was an appropriate venue for a holiday play scheme. Other residents favoured the school to host activities for teenagers, a venue for a film club, activities such as yoga or to be used for meetings, whilst other residents pointed out that parking for evening activities may be a problem.

Sport

The question related to sport included indoor and outdoor facilities. Almost 84% of respondents considered the acquisition of the cricket field by the village to be desirable with 78% in favour of extended use for other recreational pursuits. In general there was a high response to both indoor and outdoor sporting activities. It is worth noting that in the short term a partially refurbished village hall could accommodate some of the exercise/sporting activities for all age groups. Another possible suitable venue was the village school with almost 25% of respondents being interested in using the school facilities.

Playground Facilities

Overall there was a very positive response to the current facilities in Manor Road. Almost 33% of respondents felt picnic tables would be an asset followed by 25% in favour of a play house. 50% of the 8-15 age groups use the play ground and in addition to picnic tables the majority favoured a basket ball net.

Crime

Although recorded crime is very low in Whitchurch (under 2%) according to police statistics, the questionnaire revealed 80 residents having experienced a burglary, 54 residents car crime, 31 residents criminal damage and 7 experienced physical assault. Needless to say this surprised us all. 66% of respondents would support a neighbourhood watch scheme in their area and would display a window sticker. Some residents are already involved and 33 respondents would act as road co-ordinators.

Community Activities

There was a huge response to activities residents would take part in on a regular basis. Top of the list is yoga/pilates followed by evening classes, exercise classes, film club, art & craft classes, quiz nights, IT Classes and book club. Many people in the village miss the village shop. This was the main 'hub' for meeting neighbours and villagers. The return of a village shop is not a feasible option but the

study group have been looking at the possibility of a Saturday morning market once per month. This may be a venue to pick up the morning papers, buy fresh bread, vegetables, flowers etc and have a cup of tea/coffee.

An 'Open Day' for villagers has also been proposed giving groups and societies an opportunity to advertise themselves and possibly gain new members. Another suggestion is a 'One O'clock Club' for mums to meet up before the school run.

An interesting suggestion which links the older members of the community with the younger ones is that of 'days gone by.' The older members can recall childhood memories and other memories to the younger members of the village.

Information/Communication

The Bulletin and the Parish Magazine are currently our main sources of information. The Bulletin has a readership of almost 75% of respondents with the Parish Magazine having 50%. Interestingly 'word of mouth' came in at just over 42%. There has been much discussion on developing information channels including the village website and e-mail for those with internet facilities. For those respondents with e-mail facilities surprisingly just over 50% would like to receive information through this channel.

The response as to why residents didn't use the village website varied from 'too busy' to 'too static – no regular additions.' In the main villagers felt that it wasn't kept up to date and needed more input. The majority of the younger members of the village didn't know there was one and to make it more interesting for them means more information for young people, more articles by young people and with more facilities i.e. chat room/games.

Other areas related to information included a welcome pack for newcomers to the village. (A welcome pack relating to the church already exists). This would provide basic information relating to rubbish collection, recycling, facilities, Clubs/Groups/Societies and Schools etc.

The study group discussed and did some initial research into a newsletter/magazine to include information on things like 'what's on' in surrounding villages, travel news, 'what's on' in the cinema etc. and looked at other village publications but all agreed that this is a project on it's own and needs much more research and input.

The question relating to the upgrade of Broadband facilities at the Pangbourne exchange for those with computers and internet access came in at a resounding 87%.

Bus Service

The use of the 142 bus service to Reading indicates a low usage. However, with the new free bus passes for the senior citizens this will probably increase. It was acknowledged that Whitchurch is only one village along this popular route. The 8-15 year old group commented that fares need to be cheaper and more services available.

Proposed recommendations

- Spend some money on refurbishing the hall to an acceptable level for appropriate activities
- Liaise with the school to look at the possibility of evening classes and other activities bearing in mind the parking situation
- Review the current usage of the hall and look at the possibility of a village market and coffee morning once per month and activities relating to appropriate age groups such as 'Mothers and Toddlers.'
- Set up a project group to research what additional information would be useful for residents including looking at other village publications with a view to complimenting or enhancing what already is on offer
- Find out if any resident/s, who have journalistic talents, would be interested in providing information and working within a small group to update and make more use of the website for all age groups
- Pursue the upgrade of Broadband facilities at the Pangbourne exchange
- Introduce a 'welcome pack' to all new village residents
- Add to playground facilities with the wishes of the village users in mind
- Review sporting facilities keeping in mind what is available close by and what is possible now and in the future
- Have a village 'Open Day'
- Enhance the neighbourhood watch scheme with help from the local police
- Look at 'To do' places with our teenagers and younger people in mind. Review what leisure and sporting activities are available with a view to enhancing these in line with the questionnaire responses
- Liaise with current societies, clubs and groups to encourage a more cohesive and inclusive village community

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