

BLUNDESTON AND FLIXTON

PARISH PLAN

2005



Blundeston and Flixton Parish Plan

In March 2004, a community meeting in Blundeston Village Hall agreed to develop a **Parish Plan** for the villages of Blundeston and Flixton, and the opportunity was taken to identify those issues that we felt most strongly about. However, it was recognised that it was unlikely that the views of the whole community had been represented at this meeting and a Steering Group was set up that successfully applied for funds to carry out a survey of every household. We then designed a survey questionnaire which was distributed to all properties in Blundeston and Flixton in February 2005. A total of 369 households (~ 80% of the 470 households) replied, the data were entered onto a dedicated database, and a report summarising the results was prepared and circulated to all households. Everyone was invited to discuss and comment on the findings during the village festival week and at an open meeting in early July 2005, when representatives of Waveney District Council, Suffolk Acre and the Parish Council were present to answer questions. Some 947 people (including 30 children, who completed a Youth Questionnaire) responded to the survey, and 60 were present at the final meeting.

Through this process we gained an appreciation of the issues that the community thinks are important and a better understanding of the more urgent issues with which to build our Parish Plan. This Plan does not set out the results of our meetings and survey (these can be found on the village website www.blundeston.org.uk under Parish Plan), but provides a summary of the points of interest arising from this exercise and identifies actions that may be taken to deal with the issues that we have found to be of most concern to the community.



This is our Parish Plan. It will only happen if we drive it forward together. Volunteers are needed to get involved with lobbying, planning and organising. If you are interested in helping in any particular action area, please contact any member of the Parish Council

OUR COMMUNITY.

The Parishes of Blundeston and Flixton are situated 8 km from the centres of the towns of Lowestoft in northeast Suffolk and Great Yarmouth in eastern Norfolk and lie midway between the coast at Corton and Somerleyton in the Waveney valley. Flixton is 1 km to the southwest of Blundeston. There is an HM prison midway between the two villages, with an adjacent estate of houses, originally built for prison officers but now mainly in private ownership. The rest of the 470 properties are in small developments to the east of Blundeston Street, or spread out over 4 roads connecting with the adjacent villages of Lound (3 km), Corton (3 km), Somerleyton (3 km) and Oulton (3km). Parts of both Blundeston and Flixton are in the Broads environmentally sensitive area. This is mainly marshland running down to the river Waveney. The Parishes include a number of farms and some of the farmland is owned by Suffolk County Council. Blundeston has a 3.5 acre Millennium Green, children's' playground, bowls green, football pitch and an all-weather tennis court on which netball can also be played. The court is also used as a safe enclosed outside play area in the summer, for the children's' playgroups meeting in the village hall. The Church of St Mary is used by Anglicans and by Methodists under an amicable arrangement set up when the Methodist Church building in The Street closed in 2002. The Village hall was built in 1922 and recently renovated with help from the National Lottery. It is used by the Play Group, WI, Sunshine Club (over-60s), an arts class and half a dozen other groups, and for meetings and functions throughout the year. Details of the various village organisations can be found on the village website www.blundeston.org.uk. There is a VCP (C of E) primary school catering for 114 pupils mainly from Blundeston and Flixton but also from some of the adjacent villages. The school was re-developed in 1987 and has recently had a further extension for the reception class. The school runs an after-school club and is also used by the Brownies. There are two public houses. Though the village had all the expected amenities 30 years ago (post office, garage /petrol station, butcher, baker, fish and chip shop, hairdresser, market garden, general grocery store, and a taxi service), only the hairdresser and the garage (as a vehicle repair centre) have survived to the present. The nearest of most of these facilities is at a Tesco supermarket, some 2 km away, or in the neighbouring villages of Lound and Somerleyton (3-4 km). The village has some other small businesses including garden services, a garden centre which now has a farm shop attached, sub-aqua centre, piano repairs, electrical and plumbing services, child minders and a few surrounding farms. At least 36 people living in Blundeston are employed by local businesses... There is a frequent bus service to Lowestoft and Yarmouth with the Yarmouth service providing a direct link to the James Paget Hospital.

Action: Village Organisations to provide details of their organisations to the webmaster for inclusion on the village website either by email to webmaster@blundeston.org.uk or directly to John Nichols

HOUSING

Our survey was accompanied by a postal housing survey form, and the results of the 40% that were returned have been analysed by the Northern Housing Consortium and are included here. Of the 470 properties, nearly half are in Council Tax bands A and B, and less than 1% are second homes. An estimated 2.5% are in the social rented sector. In 2003, 19 owner-occupied homes were sold, none for less than £70,000. Two thirds of the dwellings are houses, the rest being bungalows with some sheltered housing or retirement housing, but there are no flats or maisonettes. Because 81% of properties have three or more bedrooms, there are relatively few smaller properties for those wishing to start on the property ladder or downsize from a larger house. In addition, over 90 % of properties are either owned outright or with a mortgage, and only 12 properties were rented at the time of the survey, (two more have since become available at the Barns development on Market Lane).

Our surveys indicate that more people thought that the number of houses been built in Blundeston over the last 10 years was about right rather than that there is too much new housing, though many said that housing was too expensive or that the new houses were often too big. Of those that felt

there was a need for new housing, the majority favoured low cost single dwellings in controlled locations, to improve the chances of local people being able to stay in the village. Very few respondents thought that expansion of the building zone (the village envelope) around Blundeston and Flixton would be acceptable.

A common theme was the poor availability of affordable housing for local people and, though all but four respondents indicated that they wished to buy on the open market, 28 households reported that at least one family member had moved outside the community as they were unable to find or afford a suitable property in the parish. The other main reason why more smaller and affordable properties are required is for elderly couples who need a cheaper more manageable property, or may need sheltered accommodation. All wish to buy, and very few people indicated that they were interested in renting.

Action: Investigate the possibility for a small development of joint ownership properties which would be aimed at first time buyers and those who cannot afford a full mortgage.

Action: Draw the attention of potential developers of new housing in the parish to the need for smaller properties.

The current Parish Council fully supports both these initiatives.

TRAVEL.

Most families (90%) in the villages own one or more cars that they use as their major means of transport. Though only two respondents used the train and one the bus as their main form of transport, roughly one quarter of us use the train and the bus at some time, whilst school buses and coaches are also used. The local bus service is used mainly for shopping, but also for social or leisure activities (38%), keeping medical or dental appointments (21%) and travelling to work or school (12% each). Note that people living in Market Lane are not served by the bus route, whilst those at Queensway have to change at Tesco to get into Lowestoft. There is now a very frequent bus service through the village to Yarmouth via Lound and the James Paget Hospital, the return route going through Oulton Village to Lowestoft and Carlton Colville.

Action: Examine options for more flexible bus service, such as smaller or “on-demand” vehicles.

Action: Provide a large print notice of the bus services available as well as their timetables

Transport to and from the connected middle and high schools (attended by half our children) is essential, and most of our children between the ages of 10 and 16 rely on family cars, though many use the school bus or cycle. This situation is also a source of irritation, either because the buses provided interfere with other travellers, or the difficulty of taking advantage of after-school activities. A common complaint from the children is that their friends often do not live in the village, so they have to rely on friends/family when travelling out of the village, though quite a few cycle or use the bus.

Train users also travel mainly for social or leisure activities (80%) and for (43%), travelling to work (14%) and for keeping medical or dental appointments (1%). Apparently, no-one travels by train to school from Blundeston at present.

The local taxi services is used by half of us around once per month, whilst almost all the rest never used taxis. Nobody takes a taxi ride every day

The vast majority of us considered that facilities for cyclists in Blundeston are no better than reasonable, and most were in favour of safe cycle paths, particularly to Lothingland Middle School.

Similarly, few think facilities for pedestrians in Blundeston are good, whilst more than a third of us consider the pavements not to be user-friendly for people with disabilities, pushchairs or wheelchairs. Unsurprisingly, 70% voted for more pavements and 51% for more footpaths.

THE PROBLEMS OF MOTORING.

Most people (~70%) think that street parking is a safety risk in Blundeston, particularly in Lakeside Rise, on The Street and in Church Road, and would like to see some form of parking control introduced.

Action: Lobby the Waveney District Council to reconsider putting yellow lines at particular hot-spots and also try to encourage drivers to park off the road.

At the other extreme of traffic activity, a similar majority think speeding traffic (especially motorbikes) and increasing numbers of heavy lorries are a problem (especially through Flixton, along The Street and Hall Road).

Action: Consider traffic calming measures, greater enforcement of speed restrictions and provision of more roadside footpaths. May need to carry out traffic survey to provide evidence. Parish Council are aware of the ongoing problems and are doing their best to address them and have had site meetings with WDC regarding parking restrictions near some road junctions.

EDUCATION.

It is very encouraging to know that nearly everyone is very happy with Blundeston Primary School, which is presently attended by a third of approximately 200 children under the age of 16 in the villages. Fourteen under 4s take part in the Toddlers Group and there are 19 children in preschool or nursery. Only one person considers that their special needs are not being catered for.

SECURITY.

Although Blundeston seems to have a low crime rate (see police reports), nearly everybody thinks that it should have a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. In fact, such a scheme has been in place since 1985, but it is no longer active because it lacks a coordinator. In addition, many consider that more activities for young people are needed and that a greater police presence is required, whilst rather fewer (35-40%) would like improved street lighting and better consultation between police and the community. A few people requested more drug/drink education/prevention.

Action: Volunteer(s) are needed to restart the Neighborhood watch scheme
Please note that the community Police officer attends most Parish Council meetings. He always presents a crime report for the area and is happy to answer questions at those meetings.

SERVICES AND FACILITIES.

Our survey also sought to find out how many people used care in the community services, and were they satisfied with the service. The most used services were connected with health and, though only 2 people were not satisfied with their health care, it was suggested that a nursing home, baby clinic and residential provision for people with disabilities were needed.

Whilst the facilities provided in the children's playground are considered to be at least reasonable, most people consider that social facilities are not satisfactory for children up to 16, or for people between 17 and 25, whilst most of those over 26 seem happy with what is provided. Despite this, our

children take part in an amazing variety of sports and activities (horse riding, swimming, dance, Guides, piano, drama, gymnastics, kickboxing and Judo, skateboarding, netball, hockey, football, pool, rugby, tennis and cricket), and have suggested other facilities in the village, many of which would be easy to arrange with a little help (see survey report).

On the sporting front, around half of the respondents think that they would attend new sports clubs/activities if they were provided locally, the most popular being keep-fit, followed by yoga, badminton, snooker, judo and darts.

When asked which new clubs/activities they would attend if provided in Blundeston, almost half voted for a gardening club, with a rambling club coming a close second and some form of music society, drama club, choir or band also popular. Creative arts for children and a drama group were favoured for the young people.

Action: Nearly all girls and boys seem to want more sport activities, and the use of County sports coaches and mobile skateboard park could be investigated. Finding leaders/co-coordinators who will cater for the youth and young adults must be a priority. For example, the Parish Council are prepared to allocate an area for a skateboard facility, as requested by a group of children, but the project does need a volunteer coordinator to seek the necessary funding. Do we have a volunteer to seek the necessary funding for a skateboard facility?

Action: Volunteers are needed to start adult clubs and interest groups.

At least two thirds of respondents say that we would use a post office, butcher and grocer if they were available in the village once more. The idea of opening and using a community shop in Blundeston was welcomed by most people. Just under half would also use a bank.

Walking, horse riding, painting and photography were favourite activities that visitors might use in Blundeston and Flixton, whilst farm visits or 'trails' seemed to be a good idea to half of us, whilst fishing, shooting and off-road cycling were also chosen. Neither sightseeing, road cycling nor nature study attracted much interest, though we are all aware that these already take place locally. Although fewer people seem to want to encourage more business, these included development of small businesses (63%), more jobs in the village (45%) and tourism (41%).

It is difficult to know how many people are aware that a mobile library visits the village, but only 10% of us use either it or the Home Library service.

Action: Publicise availability and timing of services on the village notice boards and on the village website.

PROVISION OF INFORMATION.

Most of us think the amount of information available about what's going on in Blundeston and Flixton is at least reasonable, thanks to the two notice boards in the centre of the village, one on the prison estate and one at Flixton, the Parish Magazine (The Hexagon), free paper or Lowestoft Journal and, of course, word of mouth. Particular complaints were the absence of a notice board at Queensway, and that the Advertiser is not delivered in Flixton.

Though most of the respondents have attended a **Parish Council** meeting within the last two years, and thought that the issues discussed reflected local concerns, more than half of us do not feel that our elected representatives in local government are sufficiently aware of local concerns and feelings. Despite this, the local council is considered to publicise its decisions and activities reasonably well, though insufficient publicity is given to planning applications that affect Blundeston and Flixton.

The Parish Council now gives at least fifteen minutes for input from parishioners at Council meetings and they are also allowed to express an opinion on any planning matter on the agenda, although they cannot vote on any issues.

The following chart shows the level of satisfaction within the community of services provided by –

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Electricity supply	319	3
Gas supply	216	2
Refuse collection	309	7
Radio reception	272	14
Mains water supply	314	20
TV reception	234	56
Mains drainage	228	65
Street lighting	157	92
Roadside care/street cleaning	157	102
Mobile phone reception	157	103
Winter weather service/snow clearance	74	191

Whilst there appears to be a good service for power, gas and water supply, and refuse collection, in particular the recycling facilities, we seem to be split over many other services (presumably depending whereabouts we live), but there is general dissatisfaction with the erratic gritting of roads before frost and snow.

Although neither village has houses built on a flood plain, more than a quarter of households have had problems with flooding due to poor surface water or storm drainage, particularly in Market Lane and Orchard Close/Lane.

Action: For everyone with a flooding problem to regularly lobby Anglian Water until they get satisfaction. This helps support the regular complaints from the Parish Council.

THE CHURCH.

Given that the average Sunday attendance at the church in Blundeston is some 20 – 30 people, it is encouraging to find that over 100 respondents (30%) thought that the church was important to them for worship, and to know that it is valued for weddings, baptisms and funerals. The church, nevertheless, is considered to be important as an historic building by three-quarters of us, and as a focal point for the community.

Action: Consider using the church more for concerts, meetings or other activities.

OUR ENVIRONMENT.

For those who live there, the most important attribute of Blundeston and Flixton seems to be the environment, though the community itself and the villages’ situation were also important. The surrounding countryside is clearly a positive feature, with its mixture of fields, small woods, hedges, and streams/ditches, and nearly everyone liked the Millennium Green and other recreational areas. A much repeated comment is that Blundeston and Flixton should remain rural villages, and that trees and hedges should be preserved and maintained. A clear majority were in favour of a campaign against litter (though relatively few people agreed with paying for a litter warden), creating local nature reserves, preserving marshes and wetlands, and generally reducing pollution.

Action: Investigate the idea of an annual 'Spring Clean Day', entering a “Village of the Year” competition or putting up notices. Seek volunteers for these and for grass/hedge cutting and general maintenance of the Millennium Green.

It was also strongly suggested that keeping roadside verges tidy and stopping vehicle damage to them, making paths accessible to those with disabilities (by trimming hedges and flattening slopes, for example), and repairing gates stiles and bridges would all help to make the countryside more attractive. Fly tipping is a problem in some areas, at the start of the marsh lane opposite Hall Road and at the back of Queensway. A plea for some arrangement to deal with dog fouling on pavements and footpaths has already been met by the PC, providing small bins and encouraging dog owners of to clear up after them.

Walking is a popular activity for both locals and visitors and, whilst most people claim to know the local footpaths and bridleways, many think that they are not well signposted and find difficulty in using them without either because of mud/water in winter, bushes/nettles and crops across the path in summer, and farm animals, locked gates and barbed wire in a few cases.

Action: Provide more and better signposted paths and bridleways, especially to help horse riders and those that come across them on the roads. Consider making available maps of local footpaths and leaflets of guided walks of the area to enable people to make better use of footpaths and bridleways.

To the children, the most important feature of Blundeston appears to be that it is quiet and safe to play or cycle, with good places to walk in the countryside and the Park and has a friendly atmosphere. The tennis court, park, football pitch, and Millennium Green were all considered to be attractions. The main things they did not like is that there is “nothing to do and it can be boring”, the lack of shops, that it can be difficult to find transport to (other than parents) to reach friends, that there are no street lights. When asked to name the one thing that would improve their life, girls opted for more sport facilities, more clubs, activities and organised games, having a shop, including a newsagent, and better transport, whilst boys additionally would like a skate & BMX park, and a basketball court. The vast majority said that they would be willing to help make Blundeston a better place.

Action: See section on ‘The Community’ above



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