



Beckingham Community Plan 2011



Report of the Beckingham Community Planning Group

Introduction and General Description

The civil parish of Beckingham lies on the western edge of Lincolnshire, within the District of North Kesteven. Newark-upon-Trent is 5 miles to the west and Sleaford 12 miles to the east.

The parish comprises the village of Beckingham and the hamlet of Sutton-cum-Beckingham to the south as well as outlying farms and other dwellings . The A17 runs through the parish immediately to the north of the village, a bypass having been built in the 1970s. Beckingham army camp and firing range lie immediately to the north of the road.

The village is almost exclusively residential. There are fewer than 150 homes. There is no shop, Post Office or school. Within the village, there are now a pub (The Pack Horse), an award-winning restaurant (The Black Swan) and a service garage - no petrol (G.W. Webb and Sons). Several villagers operate local businesses which either have premises elsewhere or can be run from home (e.g. over the internet).

We are highlighting our recommendations by printing them in boxes like this one.

The Community Led Plan

The concept of a Parish Plan or Community Led Plan has been raised at the Parish Council a number of times but received a new impetus following the election of Karen Ashworth as a Parish Councillor at a by-election in 2009. An initial public meeting was held in November of that year and a working group soon established.



The picture shows some of the many people who came to the initial meeting

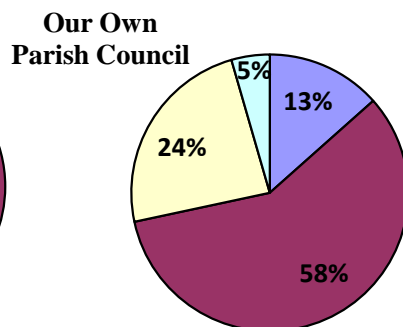
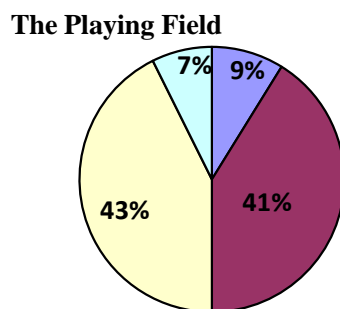
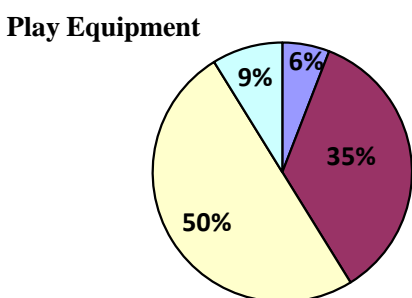
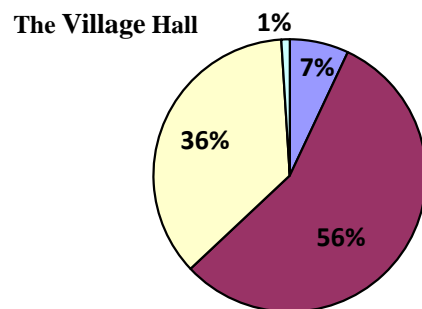
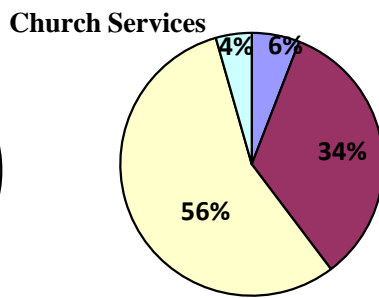
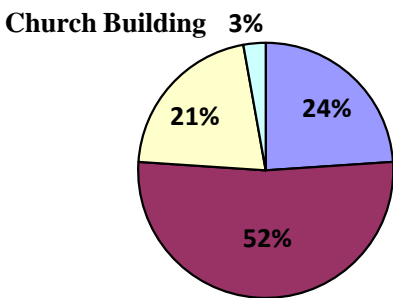
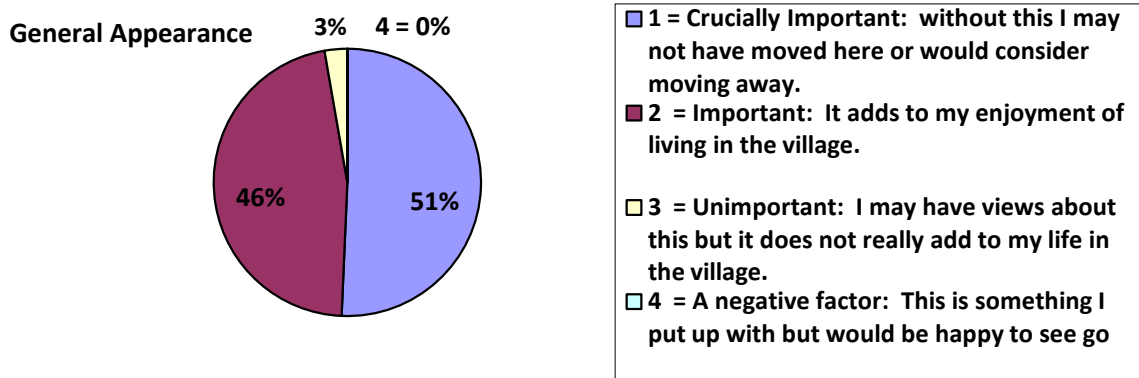
The Working Group undertook various ways of collecting villagers' views. Many interesting ideas were contributed at the initial meeting. The Group was active at the Village Fête in June 2010. Members ran a display where villagers contributed comments and they also prepared a giant aerial photograph of the village where children were invited to add ideas. These efforts culminated in a questionnaire delivered to every household in February 2011. 76 completed questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of over 55%. We understand this to be a good return for an exercise of this sort. There is a more detailed report on the preparation of the questionnaire and the analysis of its results on the village web site.

This report and its recommendations, draw on all the work of the Group and the experience of its members. The Group thanks everyone who offered ideas, whether at the inaugural meeting, at the Fête, by completing the Questionnaire, or otherwise.

Priorities for the Community

It is natural to want to have everything and to pay for nothing. This is always unrealistic but in the present economic climate grant funding is likely to be difficult and local authorities will be unwilling or unable to raise taxes. The Group was therefore very anxious to discover what villagers' real priorities are. The questionnaire included several questions directed to this.

One question asked villagers to rank various factors on a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 was “crucially important - without this I may not have moved here or would consider moving away” and 4 was “A negative factor - something I put up with but would be happy to see go”. The results are shown below.



Another question allowed villagers to write in their own two top priorities.

From this exercise, we conclude the strongest priority is to preserve or enhance the general pleasant appearance of the village and its setting. “General appearance” received by far the strongest rating of the listed factors - over 50% of households who responded placing in the “1” category. The Group believes this is both illustrated and reinforced by the importance attached to the church building (currently undergoing long term restoration), which occupies a prominent position in the middle of the village. The church building received the second highest “1” rating - very much ahead of the mark given for the church services.

The attachment to appearance and visual amenity may also lie behind the very strong opposition to the recent proposal to build wind turbines near the village. This was overwhelmingly expressed in our Questionnaire and also in the actively supported opposition campaign in the village.

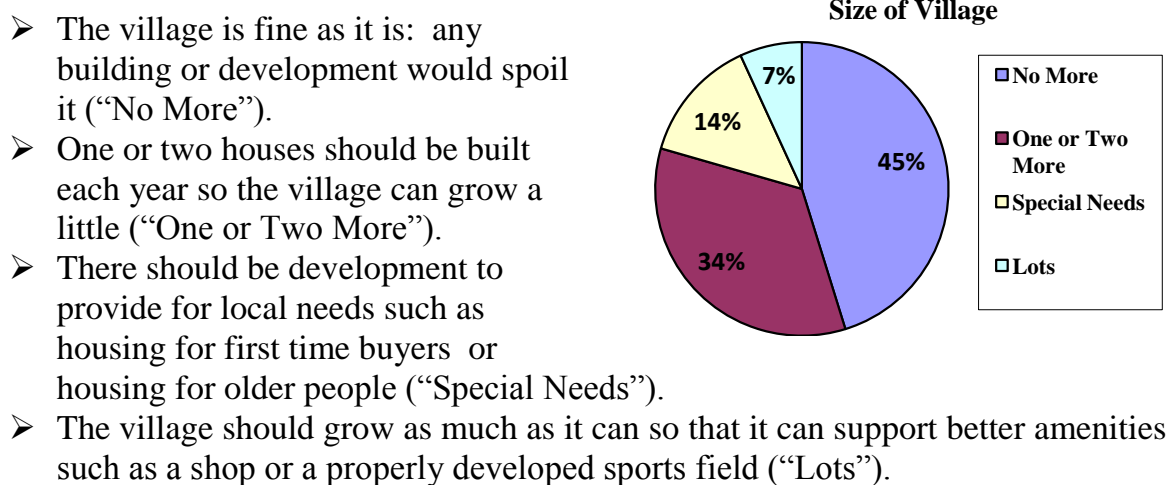
We believe the second priority is to improve the current children’s play equipment and play activities. This comes out from the written responses to the Questionnaire and also from other recent village activity, including a petition presented to the Parish Council - who referred it to this Group.

Recommendation

We believe the findings on priorities are the most important results of our work but they do not lend themselves to specific recommendations. We have taken account of them in our other recommendations and we urge all relevant bodies to seek to implement them in all decisions.

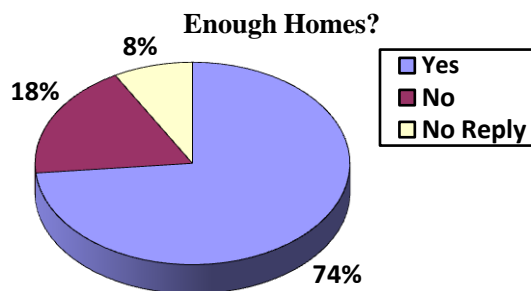
Size of the Village and Housing

Villagers were asked their views on the size of the village, being offered 4 alternatives as shown below.



The pie chart shows 45% of households wanted no development- so a small majority of households who responded want at least one or two houses to be built each year.

Answering a separate question, 74% of households thought there are already enough homes in the village.



Recommendation

Significant development would need a change in NKDC planning policies. There is no demand to press for such a change. However, there is support for the village continuing to grow by one or two houses a year - as it has done in the last decade by building on “infill” sites. Since the scope for “infill” is now fairly limited, the Parish Council may need to review the question in the future.

Local Government and the Parish Council

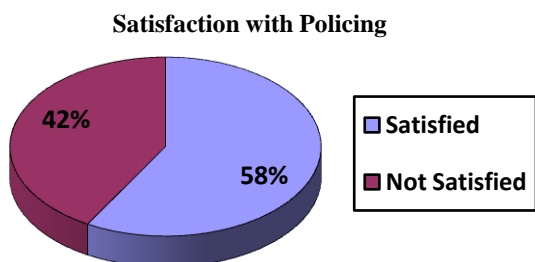
In the Questionnaire, villagers were asked whether they knew about the various local councillors and what they did. The answers to the simple “Yes or “No” questions suggest a majority think they know who the Parish Councillors are; and that the Parish Councillors are doing about the right amount of things in a generally satisfactory way. However, comments reveal significant errors in what is attributed to the Parish Council - from the village fête to the wind farm response. It was also clear that in some cases the claim to know who the Parish Councillors were meant the person concerned knew one of the 5. Comments also include numerous suggestions that the Parish Council needs to improve. Similar comments have come out of the Group’s earlier consultations. While this may only mean that those who are dissatisfied are also willing to express themselves strongly, it does seem to the Group that the Parish Council has had a problem of communication with villagers.

It should be noted that since the Questionnaire was conducted the Parish Council has 2 new councillors (of a total of 5), a new Chairman and a new Clerk. They have already taken several decisions to improve communication - including fixing a timetable of meeting dates in advance.

Recommendations

We recommend the Parish Council should review all the information and comments relating to it and make changes in practice where appropriate. Communicating with villagers should be a higher priority. It is not for this Group to offer detailed procedures to the elected Parish Councillors but it may help them to look at examples of actual and recommended “best practice” for comparable, small Councils. Many of the matters included in comments to us would be addressed by a combination of better notice of meetings, more detailed agendas (enough information that councillors can prepare and villagers can decide if they should attend) and publicity for decision made (e.g. by news releases to the “Beckingham Bugle”).

Policing



Satisfaction with policing is roughly evenly divided (58% happy to 42% not). See pie chart to left.

Individual concerns and perceptions varied widely. Some people complained of never seeing police patrolling while others commented they had. The police themselves are probably well aware that public perceptions can be very individual and do not always match the evidence.

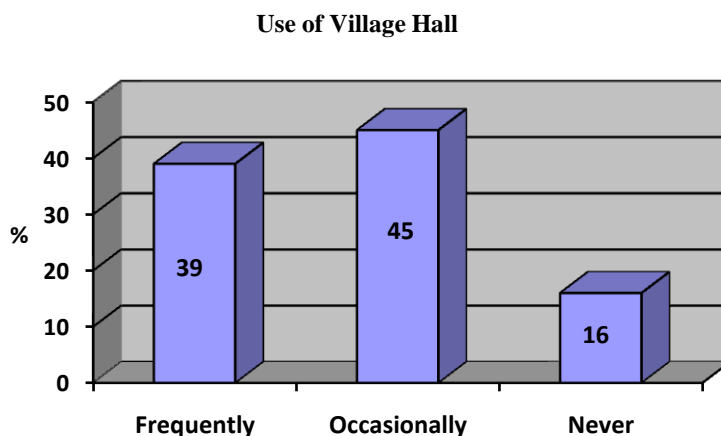
Beckingham's community policing has been subject to several changes in structure and personnel recently. Community representation through the Neighbourhood Panel has been affected by this. It is hoped things can settle but wider national trends and decisions suggest changes in policing generally may continue.

Recommendations

The Parish Council should clarify how villagers' concerns are communicated to the police, including the role of - and village representation on - the Neighbourhood Panel following the latest police reorganisation.

The Village Hall

84% of households use the Village Hall at least once a year. This result is likely to be higher than it would have been without the activity caused by the wind farm but that also illustrates the need for such a facility.

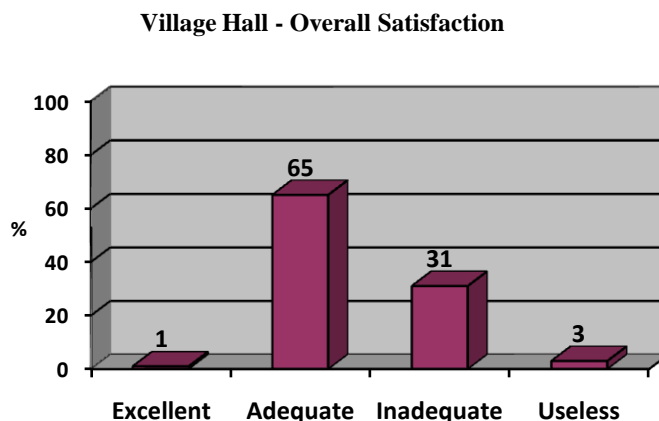


90% of respondents believe themselves to be adequately informed about events in the Village Hall. All but one respondent knew it was available for private events.

The Questionnaire included several detailed questions about specific facilities in the Village Hall and for suggestions for events. A large number of responses were received. Members of this Group have helped introduce new activities including a Pilates class and a Yoga class. These are not operating as originally set up at the date of publishing this report, but alternative arrangements are being looked at. Other suggestions have been referred to the Village Hall Management Committee.

The Questionnaire asked villagers for their overall impressions of the Village Hall on the following scale.

- Excellent - one of the best in the area (1%).
- Adequate - provides what this village needs (65%).
- Inadequate - Needs Improving (31%).
- Poor - So poor it is really useless and a waste of resources (3%).



The results are shown in the column chart to the right. Realistically, Beckingham Village Hall should not expect to be rated as one of the best in the area. Several villages in the area (e.g. Coddington and Leadenham) have recently built halls fully equipped with modern facilities. Beckingham’s hall can only hope to claim to provide adequate and cost-effective facilities within the village.

New Village Hall

A few years ago, plans were prepared for a new Village Hall, with expanded facilities, to be built on the Playing Field. This idea resurfaces from time to time and villagers were asked about it in the Questionnaire.

This Group believes such a project would require a long term commitment from a significant body of highly motivated individuals. Even so, finance could be difficult given the proximity of existing new halls and the overall financial outlook for the the next few years. In the survey, just 10% of households fully supported the idea of a new Village Hall. This Group believes that is not sufficient to justify making a new Village Hall a priority.

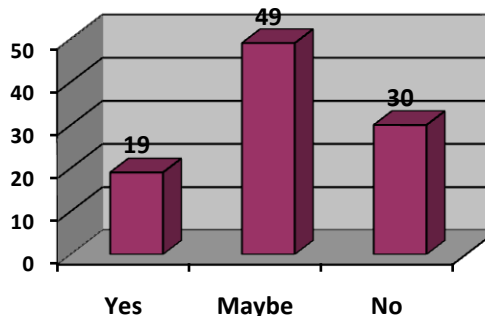
Improvements to the Village Hall

Assuming the existing Village Hall is retained, villagers were asked in the Questionnaire whether there were improvements that would make them use it more. The results are in the chart below.

With improvements up to 70% of households may use the Village Hall more.

There were many suggestions for what improvements there should be. The most popular - improvements to the kitchen, toilets and winter heat levels - are matters the Village Hall Management Committee is already looking at. They have a list of work

Village Hall - Use with Improvements (%)



which currently only requires finance.

Recommendations

All survey results relevant to the Village Hall have been referred to the Village Hall Management Committee for action. However, people asking for additional activities should remember that this depends on interested groups taking action themselves. The Parish Council, as owner of the Hall, may need to become more directly involved to prioritise repairs and improvements within available resources.

The Play Equipment and the Playing Field.

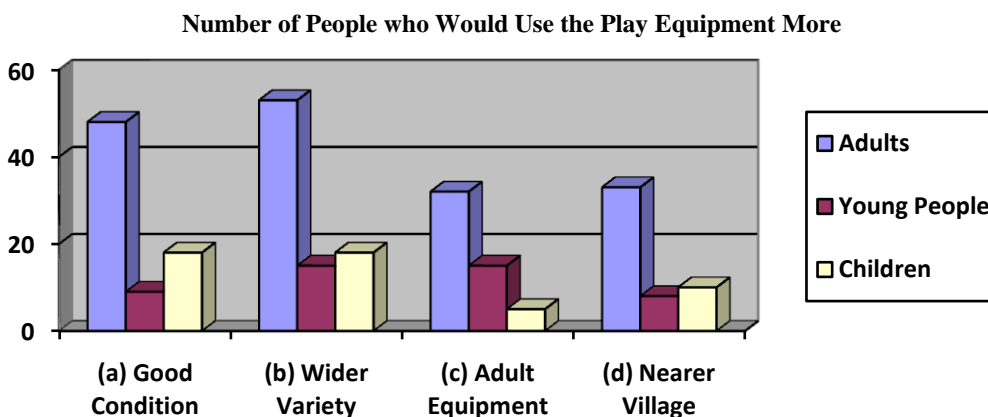
During the 1990s, the Parish Council successfully obtained play equipment for children. This is installed on the Playing Field in Sutton Road. It has faced problems including the general poor drainage of the site and theft/vandalism. The Parish Council has sometimes had to take some equipment out of use to discourage theft/vandalism. The Questionnaire revealed 20% of households and 26% of people currently use the play equipment. While this may not seem very impressive, there is undoubtedly demand for outdoor facilities and activities for children in the village. While this Group was working, a petition asking that the equipment be relocated closer to the centre of the village was presented to the Parish Council - who referred it to this Group. A new Play-Park Group has now been set up and it campaigns and raises funds for improvements. There are undoubted benefits to the community from keeping children healthy and actively occupied.



Play Equipment on Sutton Road

The Questionnaire listed various changes that might be considered and asked if any of these would make people use the play equipment more.

- (a) It was in better condition?
- (b) There was a wider variety of age-related equipment?
- (c) It included exercise equipment for adults.
- (d) It was closer to the centre of Beckingham village?

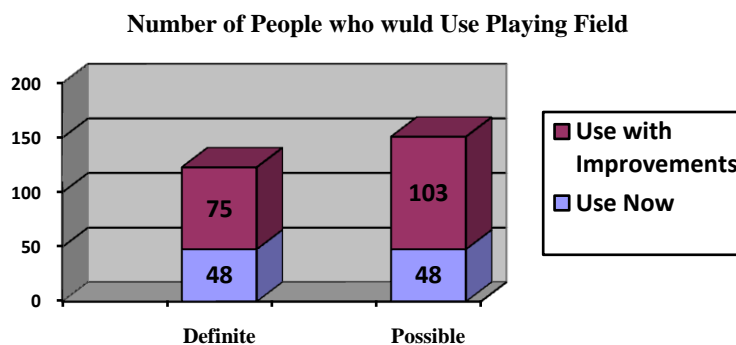


The chart illustrates the actual numbers of people who would (answer “yes”) use the play equipment more in each of the listed circumstances. This shows that moving the equipment closer to the centre of the village is not the change that has most support.

The Playing Field

The figures for those who use the Playing Field (other than the Play Equipment) at present are also unimpressive. Only 19% of households or 27% of individuals use it at least 4 times a year.

The column chart to the right shows the effect of taking the 48 people who say they use the field regularly now and adding the 75 who say they would use it with improvements - or adding both those 75 and the 28 who said they might. There is, of course, an element of speculation in such a calculation but it seems to show there is at least some potential for greater use if facilities were improved.



Allotments

The provision of allotments has been raised regularly in the village. 12 households from the village responded to the Questionnaire indicating an interest in allotments. This is several times the number who have responded to public appeals for expressions of interest in the past. However, there was much less interest in helping organise the allotments. There is sufficient space on the Playing Field for a number of allotments while still leaving space for many other activities.

Recommendations

An active Playpark Group now works in the village and all the results this Group has collected are available to them. Some members of our Group have played a part in creating that Group. They can be expected to take matters forward and to ensure the priority for improved play equipment is not forgotten.

The number of people expressing interest in allotments justifies another request for “open” expressions of interest. However, it does not in our view justify the Parish Council taking other action unless there are volunteers willing and able to take on the work and responsibilities involved.

Transport

The Questionnaire asked what was each household’s main means of transport. Not surprisingly, a massive majority (very nearly 95% of households) use a private car as their main form of transport.

This figure demonstrates the importance of good quality roads. This is also shown by those who mention road improvements as one of their “write in” Priorities.

There are undoubted problems for those who have to use the bus service. These have been made worse by reductions in the service since the survey was taken.

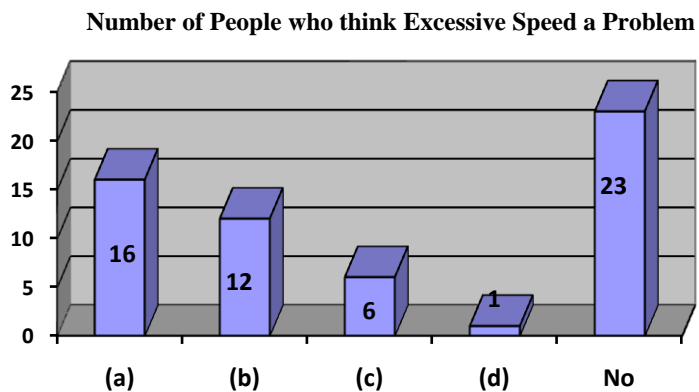
Recommendations
 We recommend the Parish Council monitors the bus timetable and suggest improvements where possible. They may need to conduct a further survey of those who use the bus to see what times they need it.

During one of our consultation exercises, we received a request for a bus service to Sutton-cum-Beckingham. From the Questionnaire results this would not be viable.

However, for the vast majority, improved roads are more important (see next section).

Highways

The Questionnaire asked if villagers thought excessive speed a problem - and if so, where. The column chart to the right shows some responses, including the most popular places and the “no” answer. The total for “yes” is not included because some people answered "Yes" and listed more than one location so a total for "Yes" could be misleading.

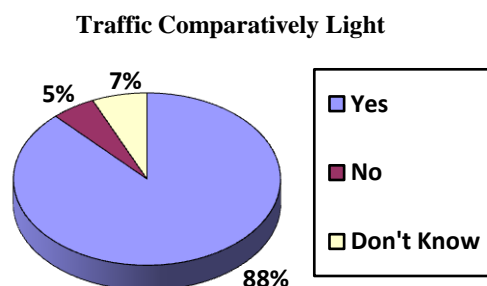


Sutton Road: 40 MPH past houses and Children's Play Equipment

- Key** (a) = “Yes” on Sutton Road
 (b) = “Yes” on Sleaford Road (including all or any part)
 (c) = “Yes” on Hillside
 (d) = “Yes” in the Whole Village

A small majority of respondents was against a survey of traffic speed. This is curious because without one claims of excessive speed will be difficult to

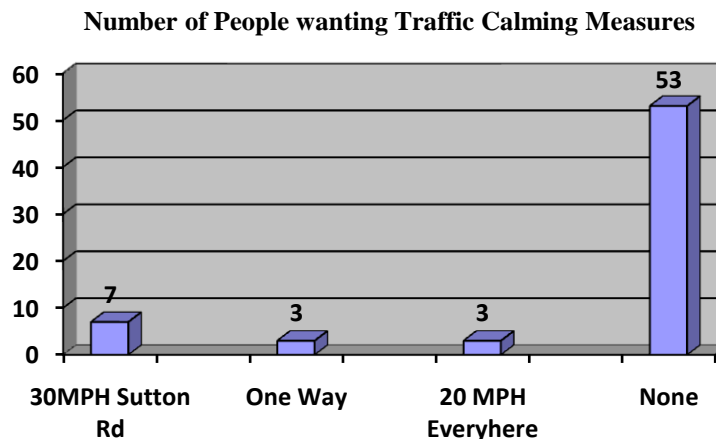
substantiate and additional measures unlikely. However, respondents appear to have been realistic in their views - acknowledging that traffic in the village is light compared to urban



areas or villages with through roads or “rat runs” (see pie chart on previous page).

Traffic Calming

Villagers were asked if they favoured various traffic calming measures such as speed humps or an extended 30mph zone. The chart shows some of the most favoured measures as well as the strong view that there is no need at all.

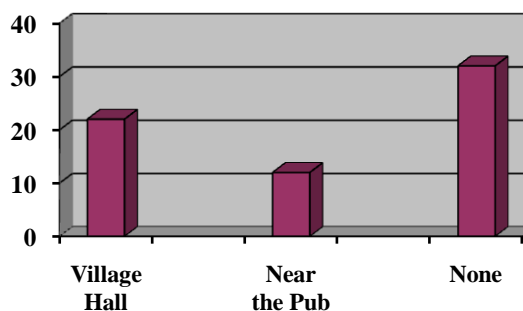


We think this is a very useful result because it reminds the authorities of the strong majority opinion. Those who argue for traffic calming can do so with a passion that gives more weight to their argument than there actually is.

Parking

The chart to the right shows the main places where parking is believed to be a problem. The most important one - reasonably obvious to a casual observer - is near the Village Hall. Apart from the hall itself, this area has several houses with no off-street parking.

Number of People identifying Places where Parking is a Problem



We offer no easy solution to this problem but it can be noted that the lack of parking is one of the problems facing any attempt to expand the use of the hall significantly.

Dangerous Parts of the Road

Villagers were asked to identify locations where they thought road conditions were dangerous. Nowhere secured an outright majority of replies but road safety is not necessarily a matter of popularity. 31 households agreed with the need for improvements in the A17 junction and 23 for improvements in the Chapel Street/Hillside/Sleaford Road junction. Of the suggestions made, two struck our Group as effective and inexpensive and are included in our recommendations below.



Blind corner at the top of Hillside

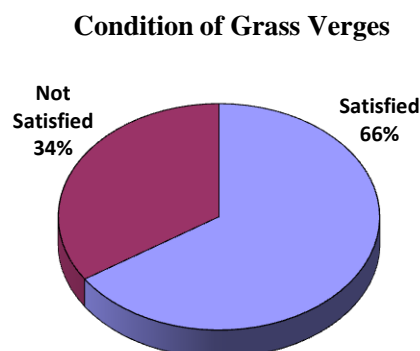
Road surfaces are poor throughout the village and there are some long running complaints, for example the springs on Hillside. In summer 2011, Hillside received a surface treatment. Group members have already heard several critical comments about this work.

Cycle Tracks

There was good support for cycling and several useful routes have been suggested. As one might expect, they all required action beyond, as well as within, the boundaries of the civil parish.

Verges

Villagers were asked if they were satisfied with the condition of the grass verges. The response is shown in the pie chart to the right. The Parish Council has received criticism for the condition of the verges so this answer is interesting.



Recommendations

The Parish Council is the body that deals with Lincolnshire County Council Highways Department.

Identified problems are speed on Sutton Road, the A17 junction and road priority at junction of Hillside/Chapel Street/Sleaford Road. The Parish Council should consider putting to LCC Highways Department two of the written suggestions we received. We think they would help and are not unduly costly.

- A sign on A17 westbound warning about a hidden entrance ahead;
- White lines changed at the junction of Hillside, Sleaford Road and Chapel Street so that the “Give Way” is on Sleaford Road instead of Hillside.

With the possible exception of an extension of the 30mph area on Sutton Road, there is support for keeping things as they are and not imposing lower speed limits or other traffic calming measures.

The Parish Council should continue to monitor the condition of the roads and ensure LCC Highways Department are reminded of problems.

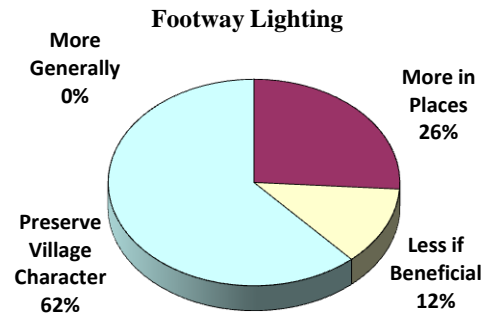
Ideas for cycle routes could be passed to Sustrans.

Concerning the verges, we suggest consultation on a “look” for the village. Should the verges be kept neat and well trimmed - or should they be more “natural” with wild flowers? This could be seen as part of the general priority to maintain and enhance the general appearance of the village.

Footway Lighting

Villagers were asked their opinions on footway lighting within the following 4 alternatives.

- (a) I would like much more lighting and am willing to pay increased council tax to pay for it (“More Generally”) - 0%.
- (b) The general level of lighting is adequate but there are a few dark spots that could be improved (please list where) (“More in Places”) - 26%.
- (c) I would accept reduced lighting if it saves money and helps the environment (“Less if Beneficial”) - 12%.
- (d) This is a country village and we should not expect lights everywhere (“Preserve Village Character”) - 62%.



This result - illustrated in the pie chart - is important because lighting is regularly offered and it is a natural response to accept anything that appears “free” in the sense that it is not out of your own budget.

We have sympathy for some people who have a sincere sense of grievance that they can not get lighting for their houses when they have a perception others have achieved this in the past. Conversely, there are other villagers with an equal sense of grievance that they are being asked to pay taxes for lights that principally benefit individual properties. The limits of “footway lighting” must be respected and the majority view in this case is clear.

Recommendation
 The Parish Council should not seek any further footway lighting.

 The Parish Council should consider investigating possible savings from altered timing, motion sensitive lights etc. Any changes should be cost effective.

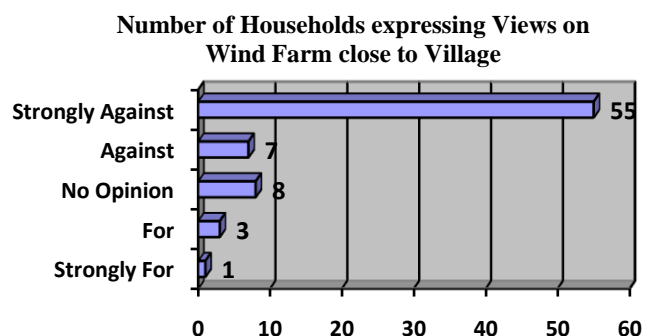
Environment and Appearance

Environmental Problems

Villagers were asked if they believed there were any of a list of potential environmental problems (such as rubbish or smells) or to write in their own thoughts. The responses do not seem to indicate any serious and persistent problem. The comments show some of the people who claimed problems are thinking of individual incidents where it is known something went wrong.

The Wind Farm Proposal

While the Questionnaire was being developed Noble Foods and Wind Direct gave notice of their intention to submit an application for permission to



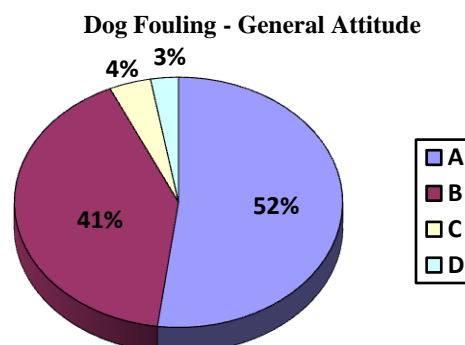
erect 3 wind turbines on land close to the village. The full application had not been submitted when the Questionnaire was completed and it has since been withdrawn.

The figures are so overwhelming that one must conclude any comparable application will be strongly opposed (chart on previous page).

Dog Fouling

Dog fouling is a subject of frequent complaints but we were anxious to know how representative these were. Villagers were offered four alternative views, as follows:-

- (a) I am seriously concerned about the health risks as well as the unpleasant sight of dog mess (52%).
- (b) I would rather there was not such mess but am not unduly bothered about it (41%).
- (c) It makes no difference to me: I do not walk in the areas affected (4%).
- (d) I think it is important that dogs should be allowed freedom to do what is natural for them (3%).



The responses are shown in the pie chart to the right. It is interesting that if only families with children are counted 100% of replies are in categories “a” or “b”.

There is a health issue here but appearance of the village may, again, be a factor.

Unfortunately, when asked about solutions (see below), a firm majority was against the only action that is likely to be effective - the hiring of a part time dog warden. We see this as an illustration of how the wording of the question can affect the answer: in this case the question included, “Would you support . . . paying for . . .”.

Village Improvements

Villagers were asked about a number of improvements to the village environment and appearance and it is interesting that several secured “yes” from a majority of respondents even though the question made clear villagers would have to pay for anything provided by the Parish Council. It may be that some items would be even more popular if the Parish Council could secure grants or sponsorship.

One proposal that received support was for more dog waste bins. Since the Questionnaire was completed, the Parish Council has decided to move one of the existing bins to what is thought to be a more suitable location.

Better signposts for footpaths were also supported. Apart from cost, this may be difficult where the path crosses private land.

Recommendations

The Parish Council should maintain opposition to developments that adversely affect the appearance of the village - such as a wind farm proposal comparable to the recent one.

The Parish Council should continue to look for ways to discourage dog fouling and to encourage reporting of offenders. A dog warden is not currently supported if the job had to be paid for from Parish Council funds.

The Parish Council should continue to look for ways to improve the appearance of the village but grants or other outside funding should be sought for significant expenses (e.g. tubs of flowering plants at the entrance to the village received little support but might be favoured more strongly if the cost was sponsored).

The Parish Council should erect a notice board for villagers use.

Communications

Internet Access

Good internet access is clearly important for villagers. Over 90% of households who answered the Questionnaire have broadband access. A majority also find their access (to a greater or lesser extent) unsatisfactory.

We could add that good internet connections has particular benefits for people living in a small rural community. Shopping and direct access to central and local government services are just a couple of examples. This is especially beneficial for people without their own transport - which includes many people with disabilities. There is also a crucial need for fast, reliable broadband connections for anyone wanting to run a business.

The Village Web Site and "The Beckingham Bugle"

There was general satisfaction with both the web site and the village newsletter ("The Bugle"). There was also widespread appreciation for the work of those who organise them. Both are privately run - by different individuals - for the community. Several suggestions were made and have been passed to the people concerned.

Recommendations

Poor internet access is a problem for some people but only likely to get more so as online services grow. There is probably not sufficient demand to justify local initiatives (such as a local network) but the Parish Council should maintain pressure on BT as provider of local links. The Parish Council should look into ways to co-operate with adjoining villages to strengthen the argument.

Local Businesses and Services

Beckingham is overwhelmingly a residential community but our surveys found interest in the local businesses there are and some ignorance about one or two. Since the survey, the “Beckingham Bugle” has run a feature on local businesses and continues to invite announcements from them.

Summary

The Group hopes that both our recommendations and the “raw data” we have collected will be helpful to the various official and other bodies (within or outside the village) who deal with the subject covered. Those bodies should be able to identify the aspects on which they can make progress within existing work and budgets.

Our recommendations relating to different aspects of village life are contained in the appropriate section of the report. They are highlighted in boxes like this. We draw special attention to the two general priorities we identified as the wishes of residents:-

- The maintenance and improvement of the visual appearance of the village; and
- The provision of improved play facilities.

Beckingham Community Planning Group thanks everyone who has helped throughout our work, both our members and others. We especially thank all villagers who offered views. We have treated every view as sincere and important even if we can not carry them all forward to a recommendation.

Principal regular Group members:	Julia Wallace	(Chairman)
	Andrew Young	(Secretary)
	Karen Ashworth	
	Andrea Thompson	
	Sue Dunne	
	James Keane	

