

The West Meon Parish Plan



May 2007

The Steering Group

The following people were elected at a public meeting on Wednesday, January 11th 2006 in the Village Hall, West Meon to form the steering group to manage the production of a Parish Plan for West Meon.

Michael Major (Chairman)
Gareth Higgs (Secretary)
Neil Cunningham
Virginia de Cosson
Rosemary Morrish
Godfrey Rhimes
Barney Town
Chris Waller
Emily Waller
Mark Wills

John Claisse was subsequently co-opted to the committee to manage the capture of information from the completed questionnaires. Unfortunately Neil Cunningham was unable to take an active role due to other commitments.

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1. Introduction

In November 2000, the Government published a Rural White Paper 'Our Countryside-The Future'. This initiated the concept of Parish plans the purpose of which is to: -

'Identify key facilities and services, set out problems that need to be tackled and demonstrate how the distinctive character and features of the parish can be maintained and preserved. It was also hoped that this would encourage parishioners to play a greater part in the management of their parish.

2. Background to the West Meon Parish Plan

In 2000 a study group undertook a major survey of the Parish of West Meon that studied in detail the history, natural environment, infrastructure and buildings. The results of that study were published in the Village Design Statement (VDS). As a major principle the VDS sought to ensure that the essential character of the parish should always be paramount and taken into account whenever any changes, such as new developments or single buildings, were contemplated. It was adopted as a supplementary Planning Guideline in October 2002.

Subsequently West Meon Parish Council decided to move to the next stage and initiate the production of a Parish Plan. In January 2006, at an open meeting a steering group of nine volunteers was elected to carry out the task from inception to publication. The steering group has received financial support from West Meon Parish Council and DEFRA. It has also received guidance and support from Community Action Hampshire.

In order to obtain as full a picture as possible of the views and wishes of the parishioners a questionnaire was designed, which embraced many aspects and factors, which affect the life of the community. This was distributed to every household in the Parish in early June 2006. There was a 63% return. The steering group regards this as a sufficient mandate to continue towards the production of the Parish Plan. A presentation of the findings of the questionnaire was made at an open meeting in West Meon Church on 7th November 2006. Copies of the presentation slides were displayed on the Parish council notice board in the centre of the village and the West Meon village website.

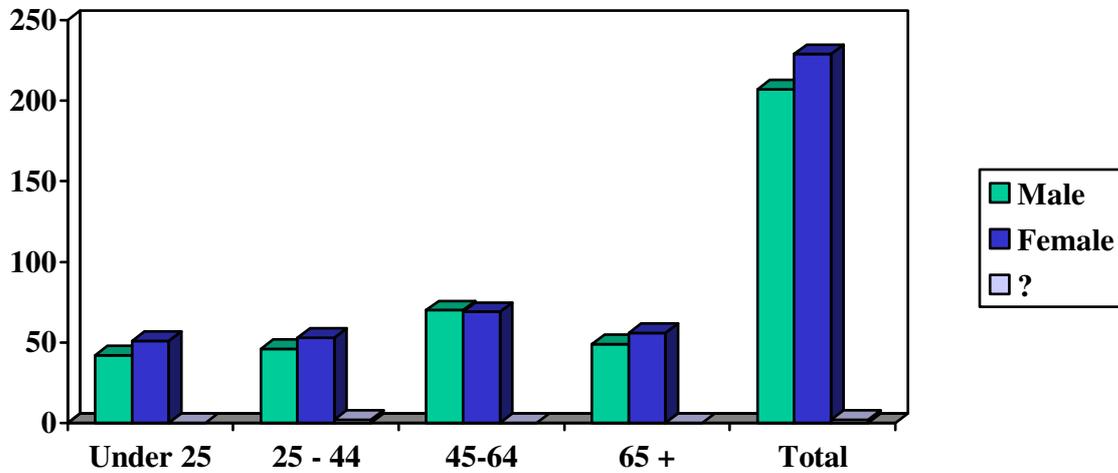
The respondents to the questionnaire reflected a good balance of age and gender across the community and most had been living in the village for more than fifteen years. The overwhelming majority said that they enjoyed living in the parish generally regarding it as a lovely rural setting with friendly people and a strong sense of community. There were few dislikes but one in particular, related to the A32, featured prominently above all others.

The responses to the questionnaire generally provided clear majorities and unambiguous views on the topics covered. This enabled the comments and recommendations employed in the framing of the Parish Plan to flow naturally from the key points without the necessity for further consultation.

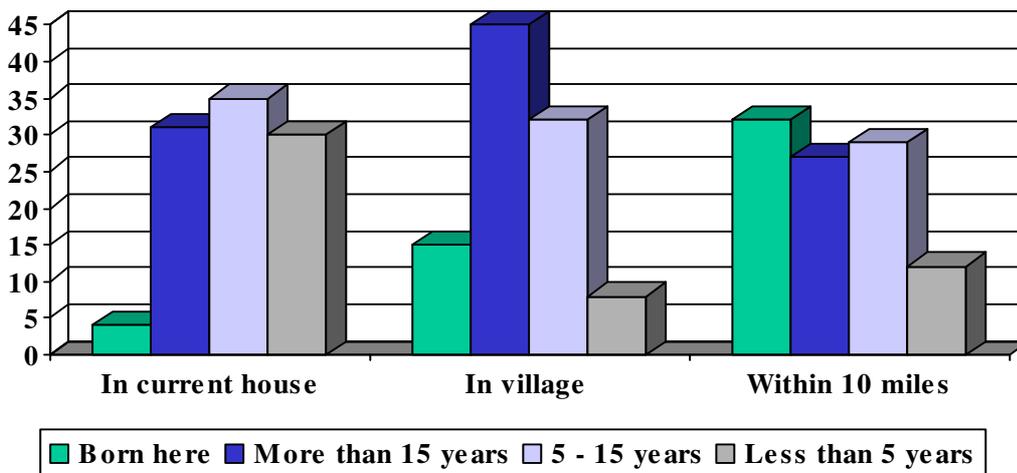
The Parish Plan follows the topics in the order of the questionnaire with brief commentary only. Where appropriate the VDS, which is endorsed by the Parish Plan steering group, will be referred to.

3. General Background Questions

Who responded?



How long have you lived here?



What do people like most about West Meon?

The friendly rural community.

What are the main dislikes and concerns about West Meon?

The noise, speed and volume of traffic on the A32!

The potential loss of shops and post office was seen as a major concern.

4. Community

This section examined needs regarding the community and asked about West Meon facilities and amenities. Results showed that good use was made of all the social facilities in West Meon. There were no redundant social facilities or amenities. Answers to the question about club activities showed that the wide range of activities was well supported. There were calls for additional clubs to be organised. The question about use of local services showed that all local services were well used, excepting the mobile library. It was noteworthy that at the time of the questionnaire, both Budgens and the Valley Stores had the same percentage use and Question 2.5 revealed that there was an overwhelming support for wanting the Valley Stores to remain open.



Recommendations:

- *Concern was expressed at the health risks that dog fouling creates near the play areas on the recreation ground. The West Meon Parish Council should provide fencing to keep the children's play equipment, including the swings and roundabout safe from dogs.*
- *There were calls for new clubs and societies including bowls and yoga. Individuals who have expressed an interest in the formation of new clubs and societies should now make contact with each other via the West Meon website or through the parish news.*

5. The Church

The questions in this section were designed to help the Rector and the Parochial Church Council to make better provision for the spiritual needs of the community. "The Parish News", which is the Church magazine, is covered in the communications section.



A quarter of respondents claim to attend a place of worship at least once a month but not necessarily here. People go to most of the surrounding towns and villages either because of their faith or a preference of type of Church of England service. A quarter of respondents never attend religious worship and the remaining half attend infrequently or on special occasions only. There was little interest in additional mid week services.

It was interesting to note that there was some support for after school activities for both primary school age children and teenagers. 33 households supported the primary school activities with the favoured day being Wednesday (23 households). 20 households supported activities for teenagers.

There was no clear guidance on how the church could serve the community.

There was strong support to continue funding the maintenance of the church building through local fundraising activities, although 15% supported an additional charge on the council tax.

The question about making greater use of the church building for secular events generated a lot of response with the main suggestions being concerts, plays and recitals. However, there were comments about not over using the building and two non-attendees of religious services stated the need to keep it as a place of quiet contemplation.

Recommendations

- *The provision of activities for children should be explored either in isolation or in conjunction with other initiatives within the parish.*
- *Consideration should be given to arranging concerts, recitals, etc, to judge support for such events.*

6. Communication

The purpose of this section was to enable us to understand how much use is made of the existing communication streams and make recommendations about how the dissemination of information could be improved.



In general, information about what is going on in our parish was considered to be good although it was thought that more information should be displayed on the notice boards and included on the parish website. 20% of households claim to attend the annual parish assembly.

The church funded Parish News was deemed to be an important communication medium. A majority wished for extended news and information, which could be funded by local organisations.

Recommendations

- *The Parish Council to arrange for a list of Parish Councillors to be displayed on the notice board with contact details.*
- *The Parish Council to arrange for a list of contact names and telephone nos. for all Parish organisations to be displayed on the notice board and in the Parish News.*
- *Monthly Parish Council reports to be posted on the website.*

7. Environment

We are very fortunate to live within a special rural environment. This section was designed to help the understanding of any issues and enable representations to be made to our local councils and other organisations to both protect what we have and to make improvements where possible.



Wildlife

The major problems caused by wildlife were seen as being that of damage to gardens and potential health risks. There were a significant number of references to the increasing amount of damage being caused by badgers to lawns and the churchyard. Unfortunately, without instigating formal procedures through DEFRA, there is little that can be done to solve the problem. On the other side of the equation, it is perceived that problems are being caused for our wildlife by insensitive farming, traffic, new building, water abstraction and general loss of habitat.

Recommendation

- *Whenever proposals are submitted to the planning authorities for new buildings or the conversion of existing ones, due account must be taken of the Village Design Statement, with due regard to minimising the impact on wildlife.*

Landscape

There was concern for our environment from traffic pollution, litter, agricultural chemicals, air quality and aircraft noise.

Concerns raised about our landscape included inconsiderate use and lack of maintenance of paths and bridleways, safety issues, a lack of management of trees and hedges, and general care and maintenance of the river.

Recommendations

- *Landowners and councils must be encouraged to maintain their rights of way and to take action against horse riders using footpaths and motorcyclists using bridleways;*

- *Dog owners must clean up after their animals either using bins provided (not litter bins) or taking the waste home for disposal;*
- *The Parish Council and landowners should give consideration to the installation of “kissing” gates to make access easier for elderly or disabled users when stiles need to be replaced;*

Recycling

The majority of people use recycling facilities and there were calls for larger recycling bins, a bottle bank and a clothing bank. *These first two requests have already been addressed.*

South Downs National Park

The majority of people are aware that the parish falls within the proposed South Downs National Park. A significant number were not aware of implications for the Parish, its people and councils.

Recommendation

- *If the proposed South Downs National Park should go ahead, then the implications must be made more widely known to parishioners by local councils and Natural England.*

8. Employment and Business

The information gained from this section gives a picture of the employment pattern of parishioners and points to future needs.

There is a high proportion of retired people and very few people are looking for work. It is interesting to note that over 20% work from home and over half work within the parish or locally.

Businesses within the parish employ 37 people with 28 of those living in the parish. Twelve employers confirmed their businesses were likely to remain in parish and ten of these expect to increase their workforce in the next 5 years.

There are no recommendations from the section.

9. Housing

This section was designed to give guidance to the Parish Council and planning authorities about the scale, size and nature of any potential development within the Parish.

Three quarters of respondents were owner-occupiers although there was a significant percentage (22%) in rented accommodation. Fourteen percent of respondents had been looking to move into new accommodation either purchased or rented and 6% had some form of special accommodation need. Individuals in 8 households were on the Winchester City Council housing register.

When accessing the first preferences for any new housing that may be built in the village, over half the responding households (54%) supported affordable housing for people with West Meon connections whilst support for affordable housing for those without a village connection was very low at just 3%. 15% of respondents thought that no further housing was needed, 11% felt there was a need for rented accommodation and 9% indicated a need for sheltered housing.

The quantity and density of housing generated further comment, 57% of respondents felt that any new housing should be built as single homes, 42.5% as small developments of up to 10 homes and only 0.5% as larger developments. Over the next five years 54% thought that the Parish successfully could absorb under 10 homes, 18% thought up to 20 and 7% thought greater numbers. 11% stated that only one new home per year was acceptable and 10% thought that no new homes should be built.

Opinions about where in the Parish any affordable housing should be built were very diverse with many comments indicating where it should not be built. There were over twenty single mentions of sites nominated for new building but the top five with multiple mentions were: Long Priors (12%), the old railway station (10%), Floud Lane (9%), Infill (9%) and nowhere (8%).

Comments made on housing development were even more eclectic and were read out verbatim at the Parish Plan briefing in the Church. These varied from the specific to the emotional. Location, recently built homes, architectural design and the government/councils and planning process drew comment.

Recommendations

- *That in considering any housing development within the parish of West Meon the Councils (Winchester and West Meon) must take due note of the findings of the Parish Plan and the Village Design Statement (VDS).*
- *That the Councils must adhere to the published definition of Affordable Housing and the published criteria which establishes a local (West Meon) connection against which any allocation shall be judged.*
- *That having established the criteria, the Councils must take this into account when determining if there is a genuine need for additional affordable housing within the Parish.*
- *That the Councils must take into account the concerns of the parishioners, as expressed through Parish Plan questionnaire with regard to the rate, type and quantity of housing development within the Parish.*

10. Transport and Roads

Transport issues within rural communities are common. This section sought to provide the information to lobby public transport providers to improve services and inform the Parish Council of more general concerns about road safety and other issues.



It would appear that the parish is very mobile with almost 90% of respondents having access to their own transport. By comparison public transport accounted for only 8% of return journeys.

Most respondents who used public transport felt that the service was either good or adequate although there was significant concern about disabled access.

Recommendation

- *It is recommended that Blue Line and Stagecoach be asked to examine the degree of difficulty of embarking and disembarking for disabled people at the bus stops within the parish boundaries.*

It was not surprising to receive strong comments and an overwhelming response to the request to list any particular areas that were considered particularly dangerous to motorists and other road users. Great concern was expressed at the continuing high speed of vehicles, especially motorbikes, on the A32, the High Street and on the 'rat run' through Woodlands.

Respondents also felt that the measures currently in place to assist crossing the A32 at the top of the High Street are unsatisfactory and that frequently people felt that they were taking their life in their hands. Crossing the A32 at the junction with Station Road was also considered to be very dangerous.

Some respondents felt that raising the profile of the village on the A32 by means of appropriate 'village' and 'Please drive carefully' signage at entry points might be of some assistance.

Recommendations

- *It is recommended that the Parish Council should as a matter of urgency pursue with Winchester City Council and Hampshire County Council efforts to introduce further traffic calming measures to effectively reduce speeds within the parish boundaries.*
- *It is also recommended that as a matter of urgency, efforts should be made to improve the safety of the crossings of the A32 at the junctions of the High Street and Station Road.*
- *It is recommended that the Parish Council should give consideration to raising the profile of the village on the A32 by the installation of appropriate signage.*

Car Parking

Car parking always generates comment and the response to the questionnaire did not disappoint. The greatest concern was with Church Lane, particularly at the times when parents are delivering or collecting children from the school. It was strongly felt that not only does this cause considerable congestion, it is highly dangerous, especially to the children.

There was considerable comment about parking in the High Street in particular at the top of the road at the junction with the A32 outside Harriots the butchers. This causes problems for vehicles both trying to turn off the A32 and traffic trying to access the A32 from the High Street. The butcher does have a polite notice requesting patrons not to park outside the premises, however it is consistently ignored.

Many people felt that for the greater part of the High street, given the presence of the Village Shop/Post Office and Butchers the parking was a fact of life. There is no other available free space for additional parking. The Thomas Lord Public House car park is a private park that during opening hours is needed for patrons.

Recommendation

- *It is recommended that the Parish Council should in conjunction with the Governors of the School seriously consider the introduction of a 'walking bus' to the school in which parents would either use the Village Hall Car Park as a drop off or pick up point. Parking for pick up/drop off of children in Church Lane, except in emergency, should be strongly discouraged.*

Pavements

It was generally felt that there are not enough pavements and what exist are in some places too narrow. The A32 of course featured prominently, especially in relation to the area around Pansy Cottage and Station Road. The need to cross the road at this point where there is minimum visibility is felt to be especially dangerous. There was also comment about a somewhat similar situation at Shafts House on the East Meon Road and the lack of pavements on the stretch of this road from Vinnells lane to Coombe Lane.

There was comment about pavements being obstructed by vehicles parked on them, thereby forcing mothers with prams and older or disabled persons being forced to go onto the road to get round them.

Overhanging low branches of trees, untrimmed bushes and nettles at the sides of pavements brought out some especially strong comment.

Recommendations

- *It is recommended that the Parish council should undertake a study, jointly with Winchester City Council and Hampshire County Council into the practicality of making improvements to current pavements and the provision of additional pavements.*
- *It is also recommended that Highway Bye Laws should be invoked, with the possible assistance of the Hampshire Constabulary to prevent unauthorised parking on pavements. The Parish Council is also requested to take action when necessary to ensure that all trees, and hedgerows adjacent to pavements are kept properly trimmed and maintained at all times.*

11. Health

The majority of respondents were registered at the West Meon Surgery. Almost 82% rated the service as good and 13% rated it as adequate. The remaining 5% was split evenly in a poor rating and 'no experience'.



The great majority felt that any possibility of the surgery being relocated outside the parish would be a serious inconvenience.

There was also comment about the lack of a Saturday surgery and many considered the provision of emergency services to be poor. What was not entirely clear was whether this was criticism of the non-provision locally or the alternative provision at Royal Hampshire 'Out of Hours'

Recommendation

- *It is recommended that the Parish Council should request that the West Meon Practice re-examine the provision of a Saturday surgery.*

12. Emergency services

The Police

Although the great majority of respondents said that they felt safe in the Parish there was significant comment about the lack of police visibility in and around the parish. In the last 5 years 27 households said that a member had been a victim of criminal activity once, 9 twice or more times. Of these 37% felt that the police response was not good enough. There was considerable support for the reintroduction of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

Recommendation

- *It is recommended that the Parish Council should approach the Hampshire Constabulary advising them of these comments and seek to raise the level of visibility around the parish.*
- *It is recommended that the Parish Council seek people to set up a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.*

The Fire & Rescue Service

Of the 17 households who had need of this service in the last five years 14 said that the response and attitude was excellent and 3 said it was OK. Comments included "First Class and very professional".

There was some concern voiced about the seeming lack of fire hydrants in the Woodlands area.

Recommendation

- *It is recommended that the Hampshire Fire and Rescue service be requested to conduct a survey of Hydrant and other emergency water provision in the Woodlands area to ascertain if this is sufficient.*

The Ambulance Services

The majority of calls appeared to have been answered within 30minutes or less than an hour. Although there was little comment none was adverse.

13. Education



West Meon was seen as being well served by nursery and pre-school facilities. A significant number of children attend private education outside the Parish. Those children that attend the Church of England Primary School are regarded as being well served by a school that was classed by OFSTED as “ a very good school that serves its pupils and the community, of which it is a vital part, very well indeed”. When those children go on to secondary education they travel to schools in Petersfield, Alresford, Swanmore or Alton. Only 2.4% of children at the village school move to private education at that time.

Adult education is widely available although lack of transport can limit access. Considerable interest was expressed in the idea of adult and continuing classes taking place in the village. Languages and computing being the most popular subjects.

Recommendation

- *That the Parish Council should advise the Local Authority of the potential demand for continuing education in West Meon and make them aware of the facilities available.*

14. Sports and Recreation

This section examined the provision of facilities for recreation and sports. Results for the questions about involvement in activities in West Meon showed that we are a physically active community. The largest percentage of involvement was in walking and cycling, followed by the activities of the West Meon and Warnford Sports Club. The question about use of open space showed that they are well used by West Meon residents and rated highly as a valuable asset. There were concerns about access by the disabled and elderly to the sports pavilion.



The question relating to improvements and additions to recreational activities brought forth a wide range of suggestions for additional activities including wider publicity of activities, a squash court, badminton court, a youth club, cricket nets, health club, skate park, floodlights for the tennis courts, swimming pool and bowling green. There was high interest in junior sports coaching in a number of activities including skateboarding, cricket nets and squash.

Regarding the play areas, there were calls for a bigger and better bark covered play area with larger climbing frames and a water fountain.

Recommendations

- *The West Meon and Warnford Sports Club should consider putting in ramp access to alleviate these concerns.*
- *The West Meon and Warnford Sports Club should consider developing junior coaching programmes in as many sports as possible.*
- *The Parish council and West Meon and Warnford Sports Club should jointly examine the feasibility of meeting some of the sporting and leisure “wish list” expressed through the questionnaire.*

15. Young Peoples section

In this section there was one main recommendation. This was supported by the information from the questions in the section. Young people had concerns about transport, local employment, access to housing in West Meon, evening entertainment and activities and somewhere to meet. Many of their concerns and responses mirrored those of adults. Significantly therefore, the recommendation is most pertinent.

The young people under the age of 18 who took part in the Parish Plan questionnaire raised issues of concern relevant to their age group.

Recommendation

- *It is recommended that the Parish Council examine how it can better consult with young people and respond to the views of young people relating to the findings in the Parish Plan.*

16. And finally - “If I had a magic wand!”

Whilst there were many varied comments and thoughts, there were two areas that had overwhelming support -

- Our shops and post office must remain – *we have to use them!*
- Steps must be taken to reduce the speed and volume of traffic through our village.

Other suggestions, not covered in other topics, included:

Mains drainage;
Swimming pool;
Skateboard park;
Pedestrian crossing on A32;
Local policeman;
Decorative planting and fencing to enhance approaches to village.

17. The Way Forward



The Parish Plan Steering Group, which has been strictly impartial, has disbanded with the publication of this document and the members will return to being “interested” parishioners.

It is our view that parishioners should now, as was originally intended at the inception of the Parish Plans by the Government, play their part in progressing the recommendations made by the steering group.

This will be effected via the Parish Council although not necessarily by the Parish Council. Copies of the plan and recommendations will be sent to those bodies it is believed to be responsible for the areas covered. This will include, of course, the various Councils (e.g. Hampshire County, Winchester City, and West Meon Parish) and village organisations,

Our request is that the Parish Council should, each year, before the annual Village Assembly, invite those organisations to which recommendations for action have been made, to either attend the meeting to make a report or submit a written response. Questions on progress on any of the recommendations may also be made via the Parish Council at their regular meetings, which are open to the public. They may also be raised at the Annual General meetings of those organisations, which are also open to any member of the public or, in the interim to the secretaries of those organisations.

For the Parish Plan to be meaningful it is up to Parishioners to become actively involved, as individuals or groups, to ensure that the recommendations of the Plan are duly noted and acted upon. Notices of AGMs, the Village Assembly and Parish Council meetings are well publicised on notice boards in the High Street, in the Parish News, or by flyer. There is ample opportunity for parishioners to show interest, ask questions, express views and check evidence of progress.

We believe that the Parish Plan provides a sound basis on which to build and the opportunity to use it should not be wasted. West Meon is a lovely village with a splendid community but there are areas of concern within it that can be improved. However that depends on everyone playing his or her part.