



WILTON
MELCOMBE HORSEY
PARISH PLAN

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Introduction

The Parishes of Hilton and Melcombe Horsey

The two parishes are set in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty just to the south of Bulbarrow Hill in the centre of the county. They are about ten miles from the local towns of Sturminster Newton and Blandford, and the county town Dorchester. Twenty-five miles south-east is the Poole and Bournemouth conurbation. Minor roads, bridleways and footpaths serve the parishes well, but there is a journey of at least five miles to the nearest major road.

The communities are active in promoting local jobs, with about a quarter of the population working within the parishes, and there are numerous social activities. Nevertheless, the community is too small to fully support all its social and economic needs, and effective and affordable transport links are required to the towns that provide them. The boundary between the parishes is also that of the North and West Dorset Districts, as well as the parliamentary constituency boundary. This boundary, together with being located centrally between the country towns, means that the parishes find themselves in a 'dead zone'.

This 'dead zone' applies to the transport links and to communications. The two parishes not only have different MPs, district and county councillors, but different postal areas too. Mobile telephones are almost useless and television signals are poor. Almost all facilities not within the parishes are a minimum of ten miles distant.



The parishes consist of four main settlements with several smaller outlying ones. There are churches in Hilton and at Bingham's Melcombe, but all the other facilities, the old Brewery Hall, the Post Office and shop, and the Fox Inn, are in Ansty. The largest settlement is formed by Ansty, Melcombe Bingham and Cross Lanes. For all practical purposes these form one village, few people from outside being aware that half of Melcombe Bingham is in Hilton Parish and the other in Melcombe Horsey. It is because of this that the two parishes have agreed to work together to form a Parish Plan.

The Parish Plan

In 2000 the Government proposed that all rural communities should identify key facilities and services, set out the problems that need to be tackled, and indicate how they would like their village to develop in the form of a Parish Plan. These Parish Plans are initiated by Parish Councils, but it is essential to demonstrate the support and involvement of the whole community, with everyone having an opportunity to take part in its preparation.

This Parish Plan was initiated by Hilton Parish Council, and Melcombe Horsey Parish Meeting was invited to join. The two parishes, having agreed to work together, have been surveyed by questionnaire to each dwelling, producing a remarkable response of 78% replies. As far as possible, all sectors of the community have also been consulted. The results are being used to highlight what is important to us, to identify areas of concern, those that need to be addressed if possible, and areas that need to be considered. The Plan should provide a blueprint for the future, and will be a powerful tool with which to lobby local, regional and central government.



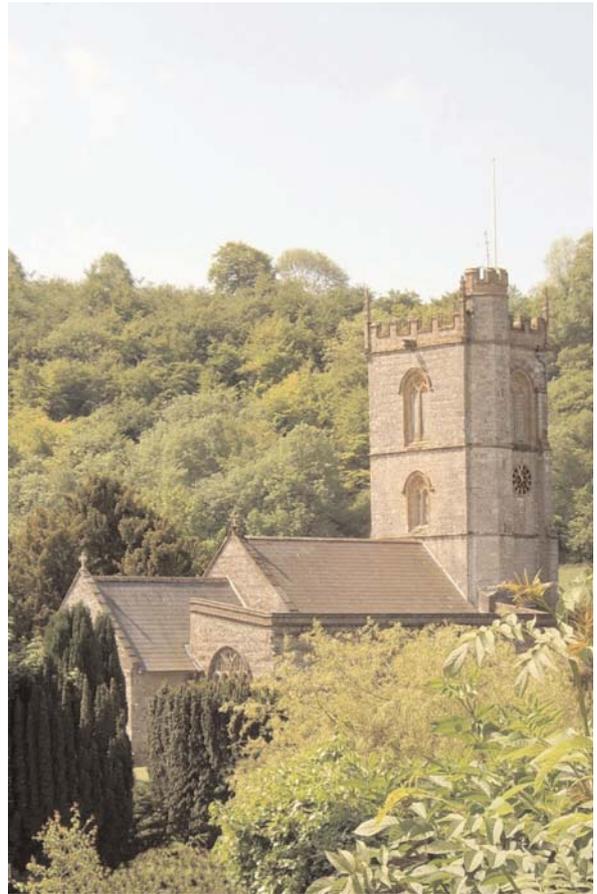
The Environment

We live in a high quality environment and it is very important to us. Both parishes lie entirely within the Dorset Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The AONB Management Plan promotes a number of initiatives relevant to the parishes such as rural road safety and signage, the safeguarding of biodiversity and local distinctiveness.

We're quite 'green' - we'd like more information on renewable energy and the opportunity to recycle more materials. We value the tranquillity of the area, and have a particular problem with low-flying aircraft. Environment services - water and electricity supply and refuse collection - are generally thought to be reasonable or good but there are some localized sewage disposal and litter problems.

The built heritage of the parishes is very rich with many Listed Buildings. The village of Hilton and its immediate surroundings are protected as a Conservation Area and the grounds of Bingham's Melcombe House are designated as a Historic Park and Garden.

Although there was little enthusiasm for encouraging tourism developments or attractions, the following visitor activities were considered suited to this area: walking, horse riding, nature study, photography, painting, sightseeing and farm visits or 'trails'. Initial consultation on the plan suggested that local wildlife information should be displayed in the shop and/or pub and a village/countryside trail and leaflet was proposed.



The churchyard and most of Hilton House gardens are also safeguarded from development as 'Important Open or Wooded Areas' as are the Green in Melcombe Bingham, part of Hartfoot gardens, woodland between the Fox and Aller Lane and an area of the field opposite Higher Ansty House. There are many Tree Preservation Orders and the 'Settlement Boundary' has been drawn tightly around the main settlements in the Proposals Maps for Local Plans to maintain the strong rural character of the area (see Settlement Maps). Priority species for nature conservation using the settlements include barn owls and all types of bat.



Air quality is presumably very good in the parishes owing to the low levels of traffic and negligible industry. The many sensitive lichens, including nationally scarce species found in the churchyards, are long-term indicators of good air quality.

Soil conservation including management to prevent the silting up of roads and streams is becoming a prominent issue in Dorset.

Caring for our Countryside

Wildlife and countryside features are important to almost everyone in the two parishes and we are prepared to help look after these assets. The quality of the countryside around us is important to almost every one of us in the two Parishes with very few saying it is 'not very important'.

Although the questionnaire showed countryside features appreciated throughout the Parishes there was a significant difference in attitude between age groups. Less than half of under 25s said the listed countryside features were important to them. More than a quarter of us came to live in the Parishes 'seeking country life' while not many (13%) live here because they were born here. A similar number cited agriculture or horticulture as the main business of their employer.

Farms and Stewardship

'Working farms' are important features of the countryside to most of us (85%). However, one commentator thought working farms were normally eyesores with very poor and ugly modern buildings. Another supported them not necessarily for their own sake but to preserve many of the other countryside features, and some initial comments on the plan said that a healthy, economically viable agriculture ensures a healthy environment. Although views vary, our farmers have the support of the majority of residents.

Working farms are currently subjected to the greatest changes for the last fifty years with the shift to Single Farm payments moving from production support to area-based payments. The implications for farms and our farmed landscape are difficult to predict, but diversification and the production and marketing of quality food will remain important, and there are a number of initiatives supporting locally grown and/or conservation grade products.



Natural Heritage

Almost everyone in the parishes cited wildlife as important to them while 'established woodland', ponds and streams, old hedges and trees and flower-rich grassland are important to almost as many. Many initial comments on the plan supported nature conservation with special mention for restoring lost wildlife habitats, replacing lost trees, leaving long grass where barn owls can feed and preventing too early hedge cutting which destroys the berry crop.

Not only do we care about these countryside features - we're prepared to help maintain them. Over a hundred respondents of all ages are prepared to contribute to footpath, bridleway and pond maintenance, as well as work on countryside features. Initial suggestions included maintenance work on the pond at Hilton.

Cultural Heritage

As countryside features, attractive old buildings, churches and churchyards, and ancient hillforts, barrows and field systems are important to almost all of us. However, less than half included 'attractive new buildings' as important.

Footpaths and Bridleways

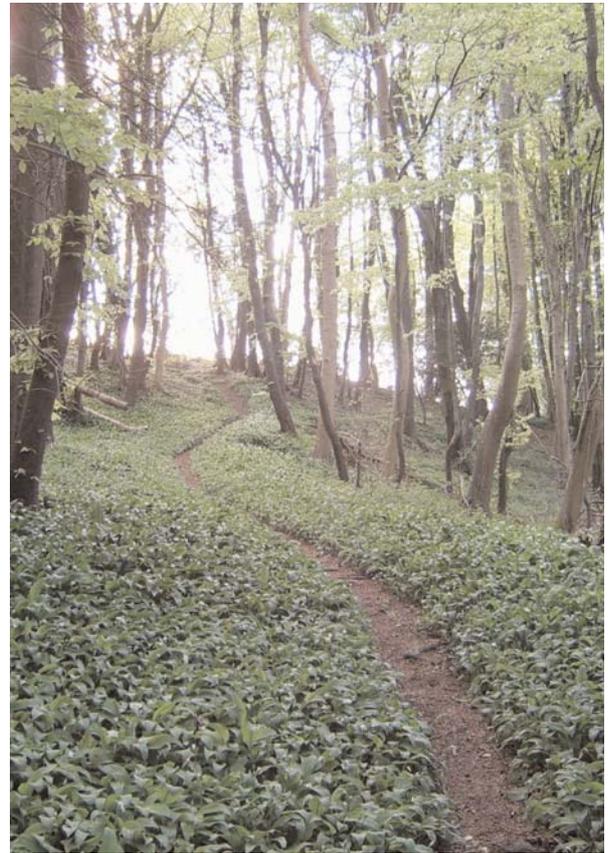
The parishes have interlinked footpaths, bridleways and minor roads. Only one square kilometer has no public access (Melcombe Park and Hill Wood area). However, access can be limited by the dangers of fast traffic on narrow rural roads, the unsuitability of some surfaces, and barriers for certain types of access. For example: wet muddy bridleways for cycling, stiles for pushchairs or the less able-bodied, and lack of maintenance.

"Keep country footpaths open/clear and well signed - many of the local ones are in a very bad state and almost impossible to walk with small kids."

The Wessex Ridgeway crosses the parishes as a bridleway via Bulbarrow Hill, Crockers Farm, Melcombe Park Farm and the Dorset Gap. Funding is available to improve the Ridgeway and link it to arts, sustainable tourism and local food projects. The North Dorset Cycleway also comes over Bulbarrow but turns back east from Ansty Cross through Hilton.

"Could we link the villages with safe accessible off road routes for cyclists and pedestrians only?"

Most people know where the local paths are. Two thirds said they could use them without difficulty and that they were well signposted, but one third had encountered difficulties with bushes/nettles, and one fifth with crops across the path, mud/water or no signposts. High stiles, farm animals, barbed wire and locked gates were also cited, and the question attracted a number of comments including several remarks on gates being poorly maintained, badly hung or difficult to open. Electric fencing and difficulties getting large dogs through/over access points were also mentioned. A couple of comments robustly pointed out that ramblers should expect mud and farm animals in the countryside.



Open Country

Since December 2004 additional land has been open for access on foot (dogs must be kept under strict control). Downland mapped as 'open country' for access includes slopes either side of Hilton Bottom, north of Coombe Bottom, west of Henning Hill, Nettlecombe, and the chalk grassland around Higher Melcombe. The small triangle of woodland behind the Higher Ansty war memorial bench is our only Common Land and so is also mapped as 'open country'.



Tranquillity

"We love this little village for the beautiful views and the peace and quiet."

The parishes lie in the tranquil heart of Dorset, about as far as you can get from an 'A' road in the county and mapped by the CPRE as one of the most tranquil areas east of Dartmoor. Tranquillity is an elusive quality, only recently recognised as a conservation issue and linked to the rising issues of noise pollution, light pollution and disturbance.

By far the most generally noted type of disturbance was low-flying aircraft - mentioned by almost three-quarters of those filling in the questionnaire. Helicopters were especially cited as a source of disturbance in the comments.

Other types of disturbance were much less significant. One quarter included hunting as disturbance but some commentators objected to the inclusion of hunting in the potential list and one added hunting as 'an important countryside feature' - indicating some of the current controversy surrounding this issue. Military exercises were viewed as a source of disturbance by 14% but all other sources of disturbance were minor issues such as noisy neighbours, barking dogs, bird scarers, boy and girl racers, oil flue noise and smell, and bonfires, especially on Sundays.

"We feel very strongly that at least in the Ansty, Melcombe Bingham and Hilton areas there should be no street lighting. There is no need & it would simply add to the already unacceptable light pollution in the country."

Keeping tranquillity, that is a lack of noise and light pollution, was strongly supported in the initial consultation on the plan.



Conclusions

- 1 The environment group should undertake further consultation on footpath or bridleway links between the villages to find out whether changes are required (eg upgrading of status or surface) and/or new routes. This may also link to providing safe cycling/skateboarding/roller-blading areas to stop kids playing on the busier roads.
- 2 The Parish Councils should lobby the M.O.D. to reduce the high level of disturbance experienced in the parishes due to low-flying aircraft.
- 3 Establish an environmental group to promote renewable energy, better recycling, sewage disposal improvements. Seek ways to improve animal hygiene, and litter problems.
- 4 Establish a countryside task force in the parishes to help maintain countryside features including ponds and water-courses and footpaths and bridleways.
- 5 Both groups to foster care and interest in our cultural heritage and assist in maintaining these countryside features.

Communications

Television and Radio

The two parishes lie abreast of the escarpment of which Bulbarrow is the most prominent feature. This means that the area is a transition zone between the two major television and radio transmitters. The village of Hilton receives its transmissions from the Rowridge transmitter on the Isle of Wight while the other parts of the area receive their transmissions from the Mendip and Stockland Hill transmitter groups. The result is that the village of Hilton is in the BBC South and Meridian television areas and the remainder of the area is in the transition zone between BBC West and ITV West and West Country areas. This can lead to some interesting conversations when trying to discuss the programmes watched on particular channels! Due to the weakness of the signals television reception can be disrupted by interference in adverse weather conditions. This problem is exacerbated when the analogue television signal is attenuated at night for the benefit of digital viewers.

The broadcasting authorities do not guarantee digital terrestrial reception in the postcodes that cover the parishes. However, some residents have obtained digiboxes and receive an adequate signal for viewing but it is unreliable. These difficulties are reflected in the survey results which show that half of respondents claim to have difficulties with the television reception.

Radio reception suffers from much the same problems as television reception but to a lesser degree. A quarter of respondents say they have difficulties with radio reception. Unfortunately the survey did not disclose if this is a problem with reception of national broadcasts or of local radio transmissions.



“There is a lot of really good stuff that goes on in this parish. Perhaps we need to find a way of communicating it better.”

Newspapers and Magazines

There is no longer a local newspaper delivery service covering the area of the two parishes. Papers may be ordered and collected from Ansty Post Office and Hilton Church.

There are two local newspapers; the Dorset Echo, a daily evening paper, and the Western Gazette, a weekly paper. The Dorset Echo is delivered to delivery points in the community and delivered locally whilst the Western Gazette is delivered by the same delivery round as the national papers. The Western Gazette is published in a number of editions two of which are pertinent to these parishes. One is centred on Blandford and Sturminster Newton, the other on Dorchester.

In addition to the two local papers mentioned there are two free newspapers which cover the area. The Blackmore Vale Magazine is published weekly and collected free from the Ansty Shop. The Scarecrow is published monthly it is delivered by a team of local deliverers.

A magazine called the Village News is published monthly and covers the parishes of Milton Abbas, Hilton, Melcombe Horsey, Cheselbourne and Dewlish. This is a subscription magazine with a total circulation of around 750 copies. It is delivered by volunteers.



Telephones and Internet Services

“Mobile telephone signals desperately needed”

The static or fixed telephone service is provided by a telephone exchange located in Milton Abbas. This is some considerable distance from the remoter parts of the parishes and whilst this has not caused difficulties with speech communications it has affected the quality and speed of Internet connections. These are not improving with the upgrade of Milton Abbas exchange to provide broadband service. It should be noted that over 26% of the people replying to the question “Do you have any reception difficulties with Internet Access?” replied that they had difficulties.

There are public telephones in each of the communities but these are vulnerable to closure due to under use.

Mobile phone service in the area is extremely patchy and unreliable. Over 86% of respondents claimed difficulties with mobile phone reception.

“Access to community broadband facilities and computers for those that would like to use them - perhaps an internet café at the village hall.”

Most telephone lines in the area are provided by overhead cables which are vulnerable to damage in stormy conditions. The natural alternative to the loss of the landlines would be to use the mobile phone technology. However as the mobile phone service is unreliable there is no reliable means of communication within the two parishes in event of a major emergency except the one operator on the RAYNET scheme.



Postal Services

Daily postal deliveries are made to all areas within the two parishes and there are daily collections on most weekdays and Saturdays from post boxes in the two parishes. Each post box gives details of collection times and of the nearest Post Office and latest collection time. This information is misleading and invariably directs the sender of the letter or package to either Blandford or Dorchester, some ten miles away with no convenient public transport. An analysis of collection times from the Post Office at Ansty and the other post boxes in the parishes shows that there are other ones closer in most cases.



Information Flow within the Parishes

“Word of mouth and Telegraph poles”

As the additional comments quoted in this section indicate, there are a lot of very good activities that go on in the community, but the information flow is not very good. The monthly magazines do publicise events that are well planned in advance but cannot cope with the more spontaneous events due to their lead times.

Word of mouth and the use of notice boards and telegraph poles is clearly not very efficient in this relatively widespread community. Most people travel round the area by car and hence do not see the smaller notices. The 3 Churches fete, the annual village fete held in rotation in one of the villages is well publicised by large signs visible from cars but a plethora of such sized notices through out the year would be regarded as pollution.

“Do not usually find out what's happening”

The minutes of the Hilton Parish Council, (Melcombe Horsey has an Annual Parish Meeting) are published in the Village News and the minutes are published in full at www.villagenews.org.uk. However the annual statements of the accounts are not published and hence the 36% of the respondents who have no idea how their local taxes are spent.



Conclusions

- 1 Event organisers should be encouraged to publicise their events in the Village News and at www.villagenews.org.uk. This should include all village hall bookings.
- 2 In the run up to conversion to digital terrestrial television the BBC should be asked to provide a Freeview service in this area.
- 3 OFCOM should be lobbied to ensure adequate digital television coverage in this area.
- 4 British Telecom and other telephone service providers should be lobbied to ensure that a reliable public telephone service is maintained in the communities.
- 5 Communication service providers should be lobbied to improve the availability of broadband internet service in the area.
- 6 Consideration should be given to the establishment of a public internet access point within the community.
- 7 Royal Mail should be asked to revise the last posting times on the local collection boxes to more realistic options.
- 8 The Parish councils should consider publishing the audited accounts each year.

Water Waste and Fuel

Water Supply

"We use 30% of our consumption of drinking water for our lavatories. This is wasteful and unnecessary"

Almost two thirds of us viewed our mains water supply as 'good', with another quarter regarding it as 'reasonable'. Although overall, only 5% rated their supply as 'poor' this doubled outside the main settlements.

Electricity and other fuels

Half of us viewed our electricity supply as 'reasonable' and another third regarded it as 'good' although more than 10% thought it was 'poor' especially those living outside the main settlements.

Other fuels used in the parishes include oil, coal, bottled gas and wood. Mains gas is not available although a trunk main passes through the parishes. With bottled gas and oil being delivered by road a possible connection to this should be investigated

Renewable Energy

We want to source renewable energy here and want more information about this, with over three quarters in favour of solar energy. There are mixed feelings about wind turbines and large-scale wind farms would be likely to meet opposition.

A couple of comments supported small scale sustainable energy production projects through composting, bio-fuel crops or wood waste, and there was a proposal for a local group to be set up to promote renewable energy.



Refuse Collection and Recycling

Almost everyone viewed the refuse collection services as good or reasonable, although litter and fly-tipping caused comment during initial consultations for the Plan. Inevitably dog-mess, particularly in the churchyard, also gave rise to complaint.

"I think the level of rubbish in verges and hedges is offensive and unacceptable"

More than half of us viewed the recycling services as 'good' and almost another third as 'reasonable'. However, more than 10% of Hilton Parish residents regarded them as 'poor'. Several comments were received both from the questionnaire and initial plan consultations with regard to improvements residents would like to see in the recycling facilities, mainly concerning collecting a wider variety of waste from their homes. West Dorset provides more recycling than North Dorset.

Sewage

Neither of the parishes are connected to mains sewerage. Sewage is disposed of mainly through septic tanks with soakaways (not allowed in new developments), sealed cess pits or small private or collective sewage works. More than a quarter of us viewed the standard of services as 'good' and almost another quarter as 'reasonable' although 10% regarded them as 'poor'. Localised problems arise through overflows, when surface water flooding gets into sewage or when high ground water levels disrupt soakaways.

One idea received during the initial consultation suggested sharing the collection of septic tank waste to save money. This type of collective arrangement could also be applied to oil and other deliveries.

The Economy

Employment

Almost half the population responding to the questionnaire are currently working (either as employees or self-employed) with only 1.2% regarding themselves as unemployed. This reflects the fact that NDDC has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the region - 2% in September 2002. The next highest category is the retired, who form 26% of respondents (Dorset has a higher proportion of older people than any other County - 2001 Census) although only 139 people replied that they were employees, 153 went on to answer the next question as to the nature of the business of their employers.

The largest group, (58 respondents or 38%) are working in the Public Sector or Local Government. In the heart of the countryside, less than 15% are actively engaged in Agriculture, only just outnumbering those working in the Retail sector, while statistics indicate that the economy of our area is not dependent on tourism.

It is good to see that 50 people work within the two parishes, which together with 11 working in Milton Abbas, makes over 28% finding employment within a few miles of home, an indication of a locally lively economy. 19 people are actively seeking work, and the principle obstacle appears to be largely the difficulty with child care locally, suggesting that these are mothers hoping to return to work. A further 22% feel they lacked qualifications and experience.



Local Services

"If we wanted more amenities we would choose to live nearer to town. If you choose to live in the countryside you should expect a less commercial situation as that is what it is all about."

The local Farm Shop, Post Office and Garden Centre, appears to be well used, with half claiming to use it weekly, a sixth daily, and 11 respondents, never. Nearly half avail themselves of the regular milk delivery. Internet shopping is well patronised, with a total of 93 respondents - a quarter - making use of it, of these however, only one tenth use it on a regular basis. The Post Office visits Hilton and other outlying locations to provide a service for those who are unable to get to Ansty. The Fox Inn is a significant source of full and part time employment in our area, as well as a vital social centre.

Amongst the additional comments was a feeling that the villages should become more self-sufficient, particularly in view of the distance from emergency services, for example: the community should have access to fire hydrants because the nearest fire station is 20 minutes away, and there should be more trained first-aiders. Also small scale sustainability projects, such as energy production and composting, and examination of the possibility of combining postal services with other forms of transport, presumably on the lines of Scottish postal buses.



Economic Development

"Narrow lanes cannot carry any more commercial traffic"

The only real support for economic development in our area is for small businesses; there is considerable opposition to the promotion of tourist attractions, small scale industrial workshops and any other form of development although an average of 21% have no strong feelings either way.

Concern was expressed in several additional comments about the impact on the roads of any increase in local commerce. There were many complaints of excessive speeding by commercial traffic, and consequent fears that our narrow lanes cannot support any further development.



Tourism

Two small short term caravan sites have been established at Brewery Farm, and at Hawkesfield Farm, and there are currently four holiday let cottages and three B&Bs in the two parishes. The Fox Inn offers year-round residential accommodation. The Wessex Ridgeway and the North Dorset Cycle path run through our parish.

Structure plan policy is for tourism developments to be concentrated mainly in the coastal resorts. Development of Caravan sites in the AONB for example, will only be permitted after a rigorous examination. B&B statistics show an average annual occupation of 34% rising only to 63% in mid season.

The greatest public support is for low-impact visitor activities, such as walking, riding, painting, photography etc., while off-road cycling and shooting are not welcomed. Almost half the respondents favoured farm trails, though whether or not these were farmers is not clear!



Conclusions

- 1 Through the planning system, encourage small-scale low-impact business development which can provide local employment
- 2 Support existing local businesses by, for example, publishing Directory of Local businesses

Housing

"Homes for first time buyers. Small dwellings for local youngsters."

We asked if anybody, or any household, was looking for alternative accommodation, nine positive (and of course, anonymous) replies were received. The Parish Council therefore commissioned a more detailed Housing Survey, which shows that actually twenty-one households are looking for alternative accommodation, of whom two thirds are looking to buy, and one third to rent.

Only one quarter of replies to our Questionnaire consider that no housing development of any kind would be acceptable in our area, and there seems to be general agreement that accommodation is needed for young local people, in the form of small affordable family homes. While new build is not popular, there is a very high level of support for provision of affordable housing for local people in the parish (82% in the Survey) provided it is sympathetically designed. The June consultation highlighted the need for affordable rented housing for local agricultural workers leaving tied cottages on retirement. All new development should include adequate off-street parking to prevent road congestion. More than half support the conversion of redundant buildings, and many would accept limited controlled development for local people.

The 2001 census shows that Dorset has a higher proportion of older people than any other County, and this is borne out locally, as 33% of respondents are over 60. If we are to retain young people and build balanced communities that meet economic and social needs, all Local Authorities stress that it is important to tackle the affordability crisis in Dorset. The replies generated in our Questionnaire show that our residents share this concern.



Background

Housing Association property

Signpost Housing Association currently provides eight rentable properties in Higher Ansty and six in the village of Hilton. Similarly in the West Dorset area, Magna Housing owns eight in Melcombe Horsey and two in Melcombe Bingham. The Housing Associations now act as agents for the District Councils.

Recent New Build

In Melcombe Bingham alone some 23 new houses (25% of the current housing stock) have been built in the last 15 years. Extensions and alterations have considerably increased the size of five existing properties, taking them out of the reach of first-time buyers. In Lower Ansty, 18 dwellings have either been built or passed the planning stage. Only two new houses have been built in Hilton village itself, and Higher Ansty has had virtually no recent development, although plans for redevelopment of decayed farm buildings in Pleck Lane have been recently passed.

The majority of respondents feel that 'about the right number' of houses have been built over the last ten years, although these tended to be 'too big and expensive'. Where additional comments were made, they are in favour of starter homes for young local people, with some sheltered housing for our older parishioners.

Local government policy

"Further housing development in villages will be restricted to those areas..... where it can be demonstrated that it will help to maintain or improve existing community facilities (shops, schools) or where it is needed for affordable local housing". (Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole Structure Plan of July 2004).

Affordable Housing

It is defined as housing for local need and regarded as of great importance by both County and District Councils. 'Local need' must be demonstrable, and includes a range of situations, including both low-cost market and subsidised housing (irrespective of tenure, ownership or financial arrangements).

It should be provided for existing residents needing separate accommodation in the area; people whose work provides important services, and who need to live closer to the local community; people who are not necessarily resident locally but have long standing links with the local community; people with the offer of a job in the locality, who cannot take up the offer because of the lack of affordable housing.

All surveys indicate that the need for affordable housing has continued to rise, and that every effort should be made to increase the supply of smaller dwellings. NDDC's targets for provision of affordable dwellings are not being attained, and are declining, whereas open market development is running far ahead (by some 70%) of that planned. As development in rural areas is proceeding faster than anticipated, the majority of future development is to take place within the towns. (NDDC Annual Monitoring report 2003).



Re-use and Adaptation of Buildings in the Countryside

These will be approved if the buildings have not become totally derelict, if they are of substantial construction, and their design is in keeping with the surroundings. But permission for residential use will only be granted if redevelopment for business is not a practicable solution, and they are well located in regard to road networks and community facilities.

Sheltered Housing

The separate issue of sheltered housing has arisen recently with Signpost Housing Association's proposals to redevelop Chescombe Court, Winterborne Whitechurch, as family homes in preference to refurbishing the current sheltered flats. Although these are outside our area, several of the tenants have lived and worked locally, and many others from within our parishes may be considering a move there within the next few years. Signpost have promised to reconsider the matter.

Residential Care places

There are no residential care places within the parishes, and there is currently a great shortage of these places in the North Dorset area, leading to older people in need of care being placed out of the county and at considerable distances from their families, friends and communities (North Dorset Older Persons Housing Strategy 2004-2008). The authorities are currently hoping 'To improve the quality of life for older people in North Dorset through meeting their housing and housing related support requirements'. Assistance will be targeted on those in greatest need living in the poorest conditions. In the short term, Home Repair grants will be available to homeowners in receipt of benefit living in unfit properties. In the long term they hope to develop a range of housing options for older people currently in unsuitable housing who are thinking of 'moving on'.

Conclusions

- 1 Pursue the Housing Survey results with the appropriate authorities to seek a satisfactory outcome for those in need.
- 2 Investigate and pursue the provision of social housing by the authorities where need is established.
- 3 Monitor developments at Chescombe Court and press for continued provision of sheltered housing within our area so that elderly residents can continue to live locally.

Transport

The community is active in promoting local jobs and facilities resulting in about 25% working within the parishes and numerous social activities. Never the less, the community has too few households to fully support its social and economic needs, and effective and affordable transport links are required to the towns that provide them.

“Most people in rural areas have a car, or access to one, the buses are usually empty”

Few respondents experienced significant transport difficulties in getting out of the local area to other places. They were identified as predominately belonging to the younger age groups. A small number of respondents experienced restrictions on opportunities for work or training, and leisure or after school activities.

There are 380 roadworthy vehicles amongst the 203 respondent households. Almost all people rely on these vehicles as their major means of transport. Respondents needed to travel widely within and beyond the community to work, a quarter within the parishes, a further quarter to local country towns and the rest elsewhere.

Most people said that they would be prepared to take part in a scheme to share private vehicles, but of them only a minority would be prepared to ride as a passenger.

Approximately 80% of respondents never used any public transport services, and a little less than 10% used them daily. However, routes and timetables, and access for the disabled on the public bus were generally noted as concerns.

“Regular minibus to Dorchester Youth Club for teenagers”

Remarks included by respondents to the survey and made during consultation noted some common concerns: that there was a need for transport for youth organisations. There were complaints about the provision and standard of the school bus service, and the inadequacy of bus shelters.

“What community bus?”

There was a lack of awareness of, or complaint about, the community provided services, and it was also felt that there was a need for a greater number of application forms (passport, vehicle, bus pass, etc) to be available at the local post office reducing the need for two journeys to a nearby town: one to collect, and one to hand in the completed forms.



Road Safety and Environment

“Roads should be gritted in icy conditions” ... “Grit bins should be provided”

“Lane not suitable for 40 tonne transporters” ... “Speeding traffic”

“Clear hedge clippings off road” ... “4 new tyres in 6 weeks”

Responses to the survey questions and the included remarks indicated some general concerns. Considerable concern was expressed over the number, speed and size of the vehicles using the parishes' roads. This was seen to derive from increased rural development and an increase in vehicle size; buses, delivery and farm vehicles were noted in particular. Suggested solutions embraced traffic calming or speed and weight restrictions together with enforcement, whilst others expressed environmental concerns over excessive road signage and possible road lighting. Inconsiderate driving was also mentioned.

Further considerable concern was expressed over the lack of effective snow clearance, gritting and grit bins.

Some conflicting concerns were also expressed over the state of the roads, verges and hedgerows, and hedge clippings were generally seen as a nuisance.

“Promote a beautiful and protected Dorset, and a safe and healthy Dorset”

DCC Local Transport Plan

“Everyone in Dorset should have adequate access to all parts of the community and beyond, by means of an affordable, sustainable freight and passenger transport system”

Dorset in the 21st Century. An Agenda for Action



Conclusions

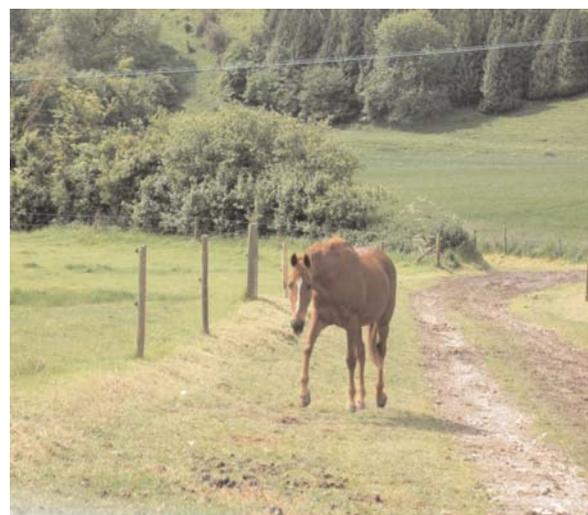
- 1 Publicise its responsibilities in relation to transport services and road safety and the environment to enable the parishioners to forward appropriate concerns in future in a timely manner.
- 2 Provide grit bins, and request Dorset County Council to improve snow clearance, gritting of roads and fill grit bins.
- 3 Request the local Post Office to provide additional 'counter services' or, where this is not possible, hold additional forms.
- 4 Request Dorset County Council ensure all schools and parents with an interest in local primary/first school education and transport are involved in the consultation concerning the closure of the Milton Abbas School Base not only the parents of children at the base.
- 5 A Parish Transport Project Group should be formed to assist the Parish Council to:
Disseminate information about the transport services including their customer service procedures. This information should be passed to the community as a whole, with emphasis placed on informing and assisting those involved in running the various social organisations.
- 6 Reduce number, speed and size of vehicles, and improve state of roads, verges and hedgerows, including clippings. Consideration should be given to the environmental aspects.

Crime

The parishes are on the boundary between West and East Dorset Police areas. A Community police vehicle is now paying regular visits to the area and is available once a month in Ansty (timetable posted on Notice boards) for public liaison. The assigned Beat Officer is based at Dorchester Police Station.

A list of crime and suspicious incidents for the last 12 months has been supplied by East Dorset. However, it omits one house burglary in Ansty which was notified on the Neighbourhood Watch network (Ringmaster). The remainder consist of forced entries in Hilton and Melcombe Bingham, (oil theft, garage and outbuilding break-ins, and three thefts from Cross Lanes telephone kiosk). Nothing was reported from Ansty.

The police comment that they are pleased by the frequency of reporting of suspicious incidents.



Health

Milton Abbas Surgery is a Personal Medical Service Practice in the North Dorset Primary Care Trust area, and has access to specially designated GP beds in Blandford Community Hospital, as well as referring patients to Dorchester and Southampton Hospitals. Almost all (over 90%) of households use the practice at Milton Abbas with most of the remainder using Sturminster Newton, Puddletown or Blandford surgeries.

All these practices are at present in the early months of changing to the new doctors' contract. This has meant some considerable changes to appointment systems and to out of hours cover. Teething problems inevitably still exist.

Milton Abbas Surgery has a same day appointment system accessed by telephone between 8.30 and 9.30am for morning appointments and 1.30 until 2.30pm for evening appointments. Each surgery has ten appointment slots but no patient who asks for an appointment is refused access to a medical practitioner on the same day. The target time requested in the new contract is access within 48 hours but the Milton Abbas Practice decided to see patients within the same day, so in fact their target is considerably less than 24 hours. Every weekday there is a phone-in session between 3.00 and 3.30pm. Each doctor also has a specific time in the week for his or her own phone-in. It is a dispensing practice, with its own Pharmacy.

Since the loss of Saturday surgeries, patients who leave for work before 8.30 am, find it difficult to make non-urgent appointments. They may take time off, but may still fail to get an appointment with the doctor of their choice. An evening surgery at the end of the working day would be welcomed.

There are clinics for patients with particular medical conditions as well as Health Promotion Clinics. The surgery is proactive in promoting and helping to provide exercise and fitness to help prevent coronary heart disease.

A Nurse Practitioner and a Primary Care Nurse Team is also part of the surgery provision. There is a duty nurse each weekday and until 4 pm at weekends, when the Dorset Emergency Care Service operates.

Emergency Services

Recent changes to new GP contracts have caused significant problems with out-of-hours emergency services which are no longer provided by the local practitioners, but are the responsibility of the Primary Care trust. Dorset Ambulance Service are contracted to run the Dorset Emergency Care Service (DECS) from St Leonards, near Ringwood. The service envisaged no doubt works well in conurbations. For a comparatively remote rural area such as ours, considerable problems arise.

Calls are taken by a member of staff, and the duty doctor will ring back later to give further advice; this will provide a problem for those without a telephone, using a call box. If it is decided that a doctor should be seen, patients will be invited to attend a local treatment centre, currently situated at Dorchester, Sherborne or Shaftesbury, involving a minimum



twenty, and possibly forty mile round trip from our parishes, for which transport may not be available. DECS advise that at night you may be asked to attend any treatment centre, not necessarily the nearest, and in particular, single patients living alone can be faced with major problems.

It should be noted that long periods are covered only by DECS - over Bank Holiday weekends for example, from 6pm Friday night to 8 am Tuesday morning.

Public Health

The Milton Abbas Surgery has no particular evidence of any significant disease caused by poor sanitation or unclean drinking water. They are part of continuous monitoring of the effects and control of the Blandford Fly. There are no current concerns about clusters of disease or environmental disease.

Friends of the Practice

There is an active Friends of the Practice which is a volunteer service, providing transport for patients to the surgery, support for carers and cared for, and a prescription delivery service to pick-up points in the villages. A volunteer Patient Participation Group raises money for medical equipment. This has included monitoring equipment such as 24 hour blood pressure cuff, 24 hour ECG monitor, defibrillators and an air mattress. Some of the equipment has been bought to help with emergency response and care as the practice is far from the emergency services. Two newsletters are published each year and are hand delivered to each patient household.

Surgeries are held mostly at either Milton Abbas or Milborne St Andrew. In addition surgeries are held at Winterbourne Whitechurch and Winterborne Stickland. There is no provision for a surgery to be held in either Hilton, Ansty or Melcombe Horsey.

Contact with the other surgeries used by members of the two parishes shows a similar profile to that at Milton Abbas.

The surgery welcomes comments, and endeavours to resolve any problems. Please use the boxes at the surgeries or phone the Practice Manager if you have cause for concern or wish to make a comment or suggestion.

Disability Concerns

There are problems with access for wheelchair users to some of the buildings in the parishes which have public access. These may be due to the difficulty of negotiating paths or steps into the building.

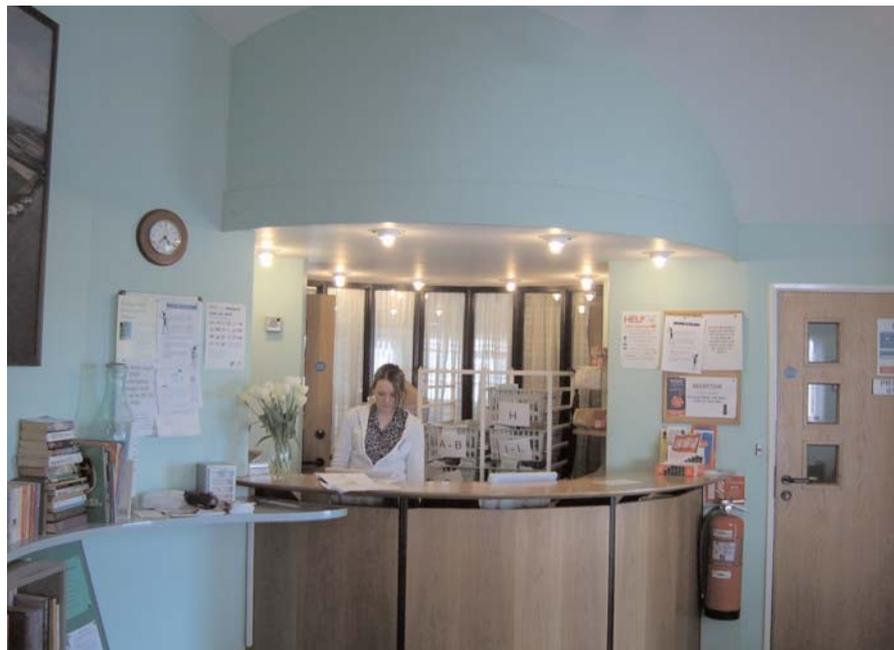
Safe negotiable off-road parking for disabled, and less able, people should be designated at Brewery Hall, as wider space is often required by physically disabled drivers or passengers and the village road is narrow. A loop system in public buildings is very helpful for anyone using a hearing aid. It is hoped that wherever possible these problems can be addressed.

Differences in the provision of housing adaptations for individual requirements occur between service providers in North and West Dorset. It is particularly clear that children with disabilities are in need of a safe play area especially where a suitable garden is not available for the child. In general however, children with special needs are well catered for by the services available in the County.

It is felt that most people in the two parishes are considerate and helpful to those who experience difficulties due to health problems.

The Motability Scheme is a nation-wide service set up by the government in 1978. Its main aim is to help disabled people and their families to become mobile more cost effectively. It provides cars, powered wheelchairs and scooters through contract hire and hire purchase. This service is useful to disabled people in the villages.

Information on Motability is available by calling:
0845 456 4566, or at website www.motability.co.uk



Conclusions

- 1 Lobby Primary Care Trust and DECS to provide a more accessible emergency service for rural areas.
- 2 Ask Milton Abbas Surgery if provision for a weekly early evening surgery could be considered.
- 3 Provide designated disabled parking at Brewery Hall.

Education and Training

School-age Education

The children of the Parish attend a wide spread of schools. The majority (15) of first school-age children attend Cheselbourne First School. Since the changes to the Blandford Pyramid were announced the number of children attending the Dunbury School has dropped to 3 with the attendance at Milborne St Andrew First School rising to 8. Children from the village of Hilton and slightly beyond, although living in the Dorchester school catchment area, have been attending the Dunbury School in Milton Abbas for about 15 years. Following attendance at the Dunbury School the children have then joined the Dorchester school system at Middle School stage, breaking away from their friendship group at age 9 or 10.

All the middle school children travel to Puddletown School and then to Upper School at The Thomas Hardy School in Dorchester, both approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour away by public bus. This distance between home and school is cited as the main reason why children under the age of 16 are unable to take part in after school activities, with lack of transport home coming a close second.

In relation to educational facilities the results from the questionnaire strongly tell us that there is a need for After School Clubs (39% of respondents) and Holiday Play Schemes (43.3% of respondents).

The data above show that provision needs to be made for the young people in the parish to have access to organised play and educational activities, within the parish, out of school hours.

Non-age Specific Education

Internet: Although the majority of people within the Parish do have access to the Internet at home (71%), of those that did not have access to the Internet the questionnaire highlighted slow and unreliable Internet access as the main reason why people did not use it. The need for training to use the internet was cited by almost a fifth of those who said that they did not have access at home, as being the reason why they did not use the internet.



Post School-age Education

Adult Education ranked very highly in the responses to the questionnaire with 58.5% of respondents saying that Adult Education evening classes were needed. Particular areas of educational interest were not specified, and will require further consultation.

Further, figures in excess of 33% showed that a lack of affordable childcare locally presented a barrier to those actively seeking work from taking up employment, training or study opportunities. These results were unable to be broken down into the precise figures specifically for barriers to training or study opportunities.

Conclusions

- 1 Lobby DCC to move the catchment boundary to include the whole of the Parish into the Dorchester pyramid at First school level. This will mean that the travel arrangements to and from Milborne School could be via a school bus rather than independent transport arrangements.
- 2 Provide list of adult education opportunities that are already available.
- 3 Look at what training can be brought here to the Parish on either a temporary or permanent basis.
- 4 Computer based learning packages and/or other non computer based training packages could be bought by the Parish for loan to people within the Parish, either free or at preferential rates.
- 5 Get grant funding for someone to help us with our education. Look at case study of the Sherborne Community Learning experiment.
- 6 Become a 'Learning Parish'.

Sport and Leisure

Although one fifth of our population are under the age of 18, facilities for them are regarded as poor. Two thirds of respondents want a children's play area to allow them to play safely off the roads, ideally in each village, because of access problems. However, the majority choice is for a single play area in Ansty, which is central to the villages, and has a greater proportion of children. Ideally this would be accessed by use of footpaths rather than roads.

The current Youth Club (ages 6 to 12) only has six members from these parishes, the rest coming from neighbouring parishes. There are no facilities for over-twelves within our area. Boys in particular would welcome a Computer Gaming Club.

Adult facilities are much more widely available, but not greatly used over four-fifths of respondents do not patronise them. The Milton Abbey School swimming pool is popular with a small group of parishioners, who would like it to be available more often, and there are requests for the use of the school's tennis courts and all-weather pitch. Shortmat bowls takes place in the Village Hall and is well supported, as does Badminton. Generally however, sport is accessed further afield. With 500 respondents having access to cars, Dorchester and Blandford leisure centres and other facilities are within reach of most of the parishioners



The Fox provides a social centre, with restaurant and bar meals, and quiz evenings, and there are a variety of other pubs in the general area, particularly in the Piddle Valley.

There are church services in both churches every Sunday (despite the recent closure of the rectory in Ansty) and both churches are always open for 'rites of passage', the churchyards being open for both burials and interment of ashes.

The travelling cinema Moviola currently has performances in the Village Hall, but attendance is declining, and unless numbers increase this facility may well be withdrawn, leaving the nearest cinemas in Dorchester and multi-screens much further afield in Weymouth, Poole etc.

Services should perhaps be reviewed in case the lack of uptake is due to inappropriate provision. Specific requests for language classes, keepfit and dance have been made.

Information about activities is available in the Village News, but recreational facilities in neighbouring parishes, such as art classes, yoga and circuit training available in Milborne St Andrew need to be more widely publicised.



Conclusions

- 1 Provision of a playing field (not necessarily structured) for off-road play, with safe access via footpaths.
- 2 More use of Milton Abbey School facilities with inter-parish cooperation.
- 3 Promote use of existing footpaths for communication; if necessary provide 'children crossing' signs on roads.
- 4 Register of drivers for transport to neighbouring facilities.
- 5 Afternoon children's cinema matinees.
- 6 Teenagers computer-gaming club.

The Specific needs of Young and Old

Pre-school Children

There are presently a total of 20 pre-school children, aged up to 4 years, living across the two parishes.

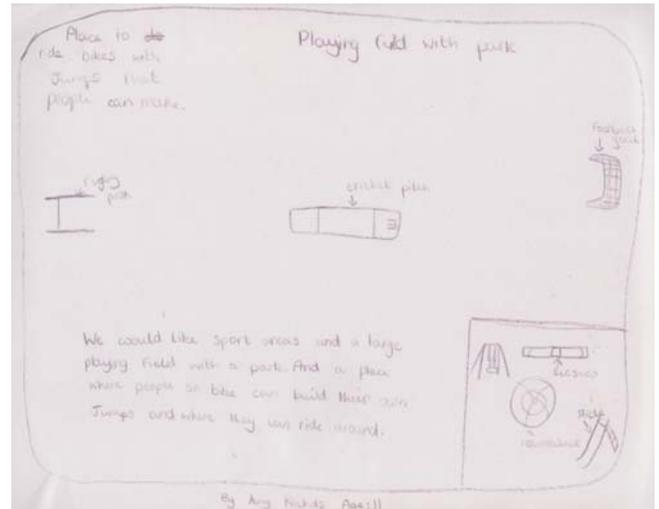
Historically groups have been run within the parish for this pre-school age.

The most recent group holding a session within the Parishes was "Bouncing Beans" a soft-play group. Unfortunately due to a combination of low attendance and hall hire costs, this group was suspended at the end of its first term.

Currently there are no groups or facilities available for pre-school age children within the parishes. This means that parents of this age group have to look at groups available in neighbouring villages and transport is essential to attend any such groups.

On the bright side, however, there are some excellent parent and toddler groups and Ofsted registered pre-school playgroups available beyond our parish boundaries. Just turn up at the appropriate time at the venue to receive more information.

It was also recognised that there is a need for more registered child minders within the parishes. Current information is available via "Dorset Children's Information Service" (www.dorsetcc.gov.uk/cis) or telephone 0845 352099 (local rate).



'The provision of a play area, with equipment aimed in part for toddlers would provide a focal point, where this vital age group could have year round fun and stimulation within the parishes.'

Consultation with children at Ansty Youth Club

The results of the consultation with members of Ansty Youth Club are very interesting. When asked what they would like to improve in their parish they produced a wide range of ideas, some of which may be in the realms of fantasy, but many are perfectly realisable.

The children, aged between 6-14 years old, were asked to split into two groups and think about facilities in which would improve the place in which they lived.

Girls:

- Play park
- Vending machine
- Tennis Court
- Football pitch
- Swimming pool
- 10-14 youth club
- Quiet Corner
- Craft club
- Environment club
- Cooking club
- Camping club

Boys:

- Mini-golf
- Football pitch
- Go-karting
- Cricket
- Baseball
- Cycle/running track
- BMX cycle track
- Play park
- Bowling
- Skatepark

Together:

- Safe walkway between villages
- Ski slope
- Making a newspaper solely by the children
- Safe cycle route between the villages
- Tree house club
- Maths club
- Childrens computer club

Youth Consultation

The results of the youth consultation clearly demonstrate a need for a safe place for children to play within the villages of Hilton, Ansty and Melcombe Bingham. Nearly two thirds of respondents to the Parish Plan household survey thought that there was a need for a childrens playground, and nearly half of these respondents feel that this should be situated in Ansty.

By creating a safe place for children to play there will be a reduction in the number of children playing in the road where they are at risk from cars and large vehicles such as tractors, milk tankers and lorries which frequently pass through our villages.

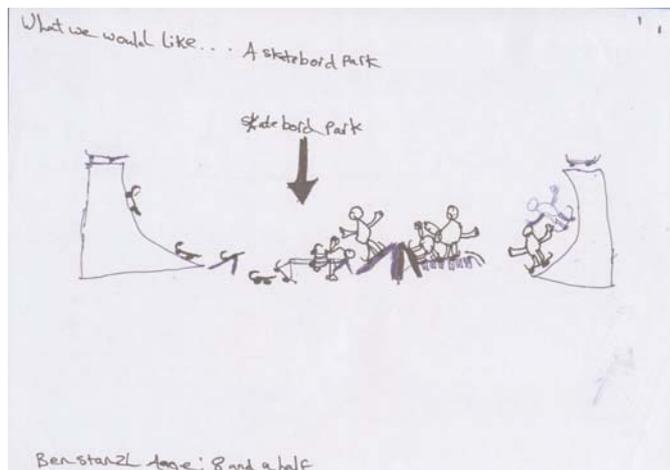
Through various consultations with the youth of the parish, a place to play is a high priority on their agenda, as well as a few somewhat unobtainable suggestions such as an ice-rink and a go-karting track! By working closely with the young people in the villages we have been able to collect some extremely interesting thoughts and suggestions, many of which would not have occurred to us.

Background

Research was undertaken to assess the needs of children aged 5-14 years in the parishes of Hilton and Melcombe Horsey. Views of the young people within the parishes were collected by means of a questionnaire, a 'Fun-Day', 'Flash into the Future' - photographic evidence, and by the researchers taking part in a youth club Christmas party.

By analysing the results of all of these consultations, it was clearly shown that there is a need for activities, places to go, and things to do which can interest all ages.

According to the survey there are 113 young people in the parishes of Hilton and Melcombe Horsey.



Conclusions

- 1 Play Area for children.
- 2 Formation of clubs available to children within the parish after school.
- 3 Formation of village newspaper, created by children of the parish.
- 4 Cycle route to join the parishes for children to use.
- 5 Formation of computer club for children in the parishes.

Older People Consultation

Within the parish of Hilton and Melcombe Horsey, there are 142 people over the age of 60 years old, catered for locally by the Ansty Club and the Mobile Library Service.

The Ansty Club were contacted and asked whether they would like to make any comments about the Parish Plan Household Survey 2004/5 or any other matters arising within their parish, however, members gave no response.

It is apparent that there are only a limited number of services and facilities available to older people in the parishes of Hilton and Melcombe Horsey, however, there are more services available in the wider community.

References and Acknowledgements

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Further Information

On the CD you will find all the reference material gathered, a copy of the questionnaire and all the original studies prepared by the team members. These will allow you to study in greater depth the subjects covered in this document.

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