

# **WILLOUGHBY-ON-THE-WOLDS**

## **VILLAGE PLAN**

**2012**

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## **What is a village plan?**

A village plan is the community's vision for its future. Successive governments have encouraged communities like ours to produce a plan. Such a plan does not, in itself, provide any extra funding, but a well-researched plan with strong support is very valuable for the Parish Council. It can seek funding for projects in the knowledge that they will be welcomed by large sections of the community, whilst funding is more likely to be provided for projects that are supported by strong evidence of needs.

## How village opinions were sought

### **Initial meeting**

A large number of villagers gathered in Willoughby village hall in summer 2010 to discuss the possibility of developing a village plan. Examples of other village plans were presented, along with examples of how plans had supported developments in villages in the area. It was decided to form a Steering Group to guide the process of putting a plan together and the group has met frequently since then, with support from Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire.

### **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire was distributed to every house in the village. 127 replies were received. From these responses the Steering Group identified five main themes:

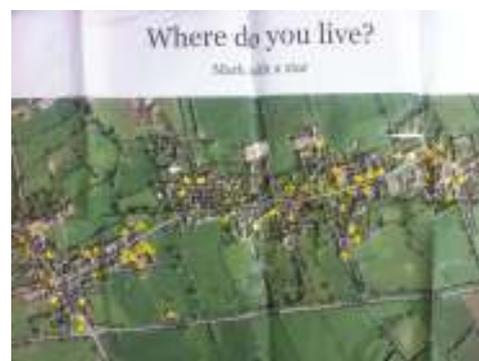
- Facilities
- Community
- Communications
- Environment
- Development

The group itself explored these themes in greater detail before sharing its findings with the village at an open afternoon in early March 2011.



### **Open Afternoon**

This event was attended by over 100 people. Stalls were set up to explain the themes and give the Steering Group an insight into the strength of feeling on some of the issues raised, including one stall canvassing specifically the views of young people. The event was a great success. A record of all households attending was kept and this showed coverage from all parts of the village.



Since then, the Steering Group has put its efforts into drawing together this Village Plan document.

### **Main Themes**

We set the scene with some notes on Willoughby today and a brief history. The remaining pages focus on each of the five main themes in turn. Under each heading, after a brief account of where things stand, we set out the issues which are currently of concern to the village. We also propose a plan of action, setting out goals to aim for and a range of more specific actions for achieving them.

*We wish to take steps to ensure the future vitality of the village and to see that Willoughby goes on being a safe, welcoming and caring community in which to live.*

## Willoughby-on-the-Wolds: our village today

Willoughby-on-the-Wolds is situated some 11 miles south-east of Nottingham, just inside the Nottinghamshire county boundary in the undulating open countryside on the border with Leicestershire. Main Street is the main artery of the village, running from West Thorpe, which was once a separate hamlet, for almost a mile to the eastern edge of the village. The cross-roads with London Lane and Widmerpool Lane would be regarded by most people as the centre of the village, though the church of St Mary and All Saints, dating back in parts to 1200, is the village's most distinctive landmark.

Until recent years, Willoughby was essentially a farming community and the pattern of life in the village was shaped by those employed on the land and in rural trades. Today, however, Willoughby has largely become a commuter village, with a majority of working residents travelling to the nearby towns and cities of Nottingham, Loughborough, Melton Mowbray, Leicester, Derby and further afield. The building of new houses, attracting buyers to a rural but convenient location, has fuelled the transformation.



Today there are approximately 230 houses in the parish of Willoughby, including a very small number of outlying properties, by comparison with 185 in the year 2000.

Ironically, facilities in the village have dwindled as the population has increased. The past 10 years have seen the demise of the post office, the village shop, and the only public house. A small family-run bakery has also been lost. The frequency of the bus service to Nottingham has been

greatly reduced and the service to Leicester has stopped altogether, although there is a service between local villages.

At the same time, there have been more welcome changes.

The primary school, which was threatened with closure in the 1980s because of its



small size, has survived with strong village support, and is flourishing with a full roll and an excellent reputation.

The village hall, venue for many of our community events and activities, was totally refurbished and extended in 1998, with funding from, amongst other sources, the National Lottery and Rushcliffe Borough Council. The year 2000 was marked by the planting of Willoughby Wood, under the partial oversight of the Woodland Trust, and provides a quiet and peaceful area in which to enjoy the natural environment. More recently, Willoughby Community Park has been created at the edge of the village on Widmerpool Lane. Formally opened in 2010, this has given Willoughby for the first time a superb public open space, with a well-equipped children's playground and a large grassed area for ball games and other recreational activities.

None of these amenities could be sustained without the enthusiasm and hard work of village residents, and their existence bears testimony to the strong community spirit present in Willoughby across all age groups.

## ...and a brief history

The earliest documentary evidence of a settlement at Willoughby-on-the-Wolds is found in the Domesday Book of 1086, where it is referred to as 'Wilgebi' or 'Willebi', a name which may derive from the numerous willow trees growing by the brook.

Every history of the village however harks back to earlier times and the Roman military staging post of Vernemetum, known to have been situated on the Fosse Way less than a mile to the east. Third century coins and pottery were excavated during road improvements in 1964. The Roman place name itself, interpreted as 'The Sacred Grove of Spring', possibly suggests an even earlier iron age sacred site in the vicinity. The name has been incorporated in the village sign created in 2010.

An Anglo-Saxon cemetery from around the 6<sup>th</sup> century was discovered close by the same site during the 1964 excavations.

After the Norman Conquest, King William I rewarded his own people with large grants of land, including one Roger de Busli who sublet his estates around Willoughby to a number of tenants. In 1233, some of these lands were acquired by a rich and ambitious Nottingham merchant, Ralph Bugge, who before long established his family home in Willoughby. During the lifetime of his grandson Richard, the Bugge family went so far as to change its name to Willoughby. Knighted members of the family are amongst those commemorated in stone effigies in the church. The family remained in Willoughby until the early 1600s when forced to sell their land and property to meet huge debts.

Willoughby Field was the site of one of the last battles in the English Civil War, in July 1648. Royalist soldiers on their way south from Yorkshire were halted and defeated by a force of Parliamentarian soldiers. Over 130 men died in the battle, including Colonel Michael Stanhope, buried in Willoughby church. Villagers were said to have watched the battle from the church steeple while the rector prevented Puritan soldiers from pulling down the village cross.

In medieval times, the common pasture and three great open fields surrounding the village formed the parish. The fields were owned in strips, and to even out the good and the poor

land, an owner's strips were widely scattered. This strip-farming system continued up to the end of the 1700s and is imprinted on today's landscape in the widespread evidence of ridge and furrow around the village. The Inclosure Acts of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century brought an end to the strip-farming system, and consolidated owners' land into larger independent blocks, enclosed in fields of very much the irregular shape and size in which they survive today, often hedged with hawthorn.



Not as perturbed by the social effects of the enclosures as many country parishes, Willoughby in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century appears to have been a close-knit and largely self-sufficient community of farmers, agricultural labourers and people employed in a variety of other rural trades. In 1841, the population reached 569 and, although the population declined again by the end of the century, as arable land was converted to pasture and the need for agricultural labour reduced, a pattern of rural life was established that continued well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Acknowledgement:* This history draws on notes compiled by Mr Brian Thornalley for the Willoughby website.

## Facilities

The local community has been deprived of the opportunity for impromptu social contact with the closure of the post office, the village shop and the pub.



It is perhaps not surprising therefore that, on our questionnaire, lack of facilities was the issue raised by the highest number of people; nor that, given the daily commuter exodus, we received many comments on the lack of people out and about.

Our nearest post office is in Wymeswold (open only 14 hours per week) or in Keyworth. There is access to small supermarkets in Keyworth and there are



deliveries for online shoppers. The nearest pub is in Wysall. For tradesmen working in the village, Wymeswold is the nearest place to buy a lunchtime sandwich.

There is no GP practice in the village and residents go to medical centres in Keyworth or East Leake, where there are also pharmacies and dentists. The local state secondary school for Willoughby children is South Wolds in Keyworth, and villagers also look to Keyworth for facilities such as Library and Leisure Centre.

However close these various facilities, none unfortunately contributes to the cohesion or vitality of our village community and all depend on there being transport available.



Another facility lacking in Willoughby is a gas supply. Most villagers rely on deliveries of domestic heating oil for central heating and hot water, or otherwise solid fuel or calor gas.



The village hall, the excellent primary school, our popular community park, the well-used bowling green, the peaceful Millennium Wood and the attractive twelfth century church are our existing facilities.

## What people are concerned about

People regret the lack of facilities in the village.

There is a concern about the rising costs involved in travelling to the nearest shops and a recognition of its adverse impact on the environment.

Home deliveries may sound helpful, but it is not always convenient to stay home to receive them.

There are worries about the viability of a shop, were one to be opened, and people feel a fresh concept would be needed to stand any chance of success. Questions were also raised about its possible location.

Young people are keen to have somewhere safe to meet and socialise on a regular basis and perhaps obtain a drink or snack. There is little for them in the village.

## What we are aiming to achieve

- ❖ To make available some of the facilities for which it is currently necessary to travel elsewhere. This would contribute to the vitality of the village, help to prevent people feeling isolated and improve community cohesion.
- ❖ To keep down the travel costs associated with living in a rural environment.
- ❖ To encourage young people to spend more of their leisure time in the village.



## Actions proposed

Maintain and encourage full use of valued resources such as the village hall, the school, the church, and the community park.

Undertake a feasibility study into opening a community shop/post office.

Explore the possibility of the community entering into a partnership with a retailer to set up an e-buying facility/delivery point.

Form interest groups for young people in addition to the existing youth club, such as drama, music and local arts.

# Community

Villagers believe there is a good community spirit in Willoughby.



The village still has a number of valued community resources, including the village hall, school and bowling green, and has a new community park.



It has a thriving playgroup and a youth club that meets regularly, and many other interest groups and societies. Many individuals are willing to organise open social events or to invest their time on behalf of the community in other ways.



## What people are concerned about

People are concerned that the loss of facilities like the shop and the pub, which brought people out of their homes and into contact with others in the village, has impacted on the vitality and social cohesion of the community.

There is a sense there needs now to be more going on in the village to get people meeting together on an informal and impromptu basis.

Young people are keen for somewhere to meet and socialise on a regular basis beyond the youth club.

People believe it important we welcome new residents to the village.



There is concern whether sufficient help is given to elderly people in the village: many are dependent on family and a few good neighbours and friends.

Many people expect to have to move away from the village as they get older, largely to have easier access to facilities like health centre and shops.

People are concerned about the time it takes for emergency services to reach the village.

## What we are aiming to achieve

- ❖ To provide more opportunities for meeting people beyond one-off village events.
- ❖ To make the village a more welcoming and inclusive community.
- ❖ To provide better support for people without transport, especially for the elderly.
- ❖ To have potentially life-saving access to a defibrillator prior to arrival of the ambulance service in case of need.



## Actions proposed

Revive the village welcome pack for new residents.

Organise additional events on a drop-in basis to bring the village together more regularly, such as pub nights, film nights, or weekend breakfasts.

Investigate ways of providing transport for residents who have no other means of making necessary journeys.

Set up a good neighbour scheme with particular attention to the needs of elderly residents.

Install a public access defibrillator and provide first aid training to willing volunteers.



## Communications

Willoughby is a linear village with no focal point. How we communicate and transmit information in a modern world is an important issue for the village. There are a significant number of people working from home who require good, fast and reliable internet and phone connections. Young people rely on the internet for study as well as social interaction and smart phones are increasingly the mode of communication.



The day to day contact we have with each other through our social interests is most important. To help us stay in touch with village events and other news, the '3Ws' parish magazine is produced six times a year and delivered by hand to each household in Willoughby. Space in the magazine is shared with the neighbouring parishes of Wysall and Widmerpool.



In addition we use posters and leaflet drops to advertise events. These are posted on notice boards and telegraph poles, and posted through letterboxes.

In the last few years there has been an increased use of email between various groups active in the village.

Four years ago the village website was set up by the Parish Council and it has just been renewed with better updating and more information:

<http://www.parish-council.com/willoughbypc>



Willoughby sometimes feels like it is at the end of the line, perhaps because of its location against the county boundary. We are in the odd position of having a Leicestershire postal address though we are administratively in Nottinghamshire. We also have Loughborough telephone numbers and although we have broadband and internet connection via the Wymeswold sub-exchange, it is slow and unreliable.



When it comes to mobile phones, we fall between several local transmitters and as a result the signal is generally poor and without any 3G service.

## What people are concerned about

There is widespread demand for faster internet: of those responding to our survey, 80% found the internet too slow for their requirements. The majority of users record less than 1Mbps.

70% of respondents use the internet for business or home office and consider the speed needs to be improved.

Over 90% of respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of mobile phone signal.

It is a worry to some that increased use of email within the community meant sections of the community would be left out of sharing that information and that traditional methods of communication might be reduced as a consequence.

Whilst the village has had a website, our usage of it has been poor and many people expressed a lack of interest in it.

## What we are aiming to achieve

- ❖ To get a fast and reliable broadband internet service for Willoughby residents and businesses with sufficient speed and reliability for leisure, communication, educational and business opportunities.
- ❖ To obtain an improved mobile phone signal from one or more networks that gives consistent quality for voice calls and 3G services throughout Willoughby.
- ❖ To improve communications to all village residents and contribute to the greater sense of social cohesion and inclusion.



## Actions proposed

Set up an action group to pursue a faster broadband internet service, and work with the County Council and the Rural Development Programme, amongst others, to explore technical and funding routes for broadband upgrade.

Find out more from mobile phone networks about future improvement plans and campaign for an improved mobile phone signal.

Work with our Parish Council to promote the village website, contribute to content and increase usage, whilst ensuring traditional means of communication are not neglected.

## Environment

People find Willoughby a generally safe and peaceful place to live and would like to see the village retain its rural character.

Many residents as well as visiting ramblers enjoy using the footpaths around the village to access the countryside. There are several private stables round about and horse-riders use the roads on a regular basis.



People think the planting of Willoughby Wood was a good initiative and, to further enhance the environment, would support the idea of cultivating a wild flower meadow.



Every family in the village has to rely one way or another on the car. There is also a considerable and growing volume of through traffic, particularly on Back Lane and West Thorpe, and there is concern



that too many vehicles travel at excessive speed on our country lanes. The West Thorpe/Back Lane crossroads have seen several bad accidents. There are also safety issues associated with on-street parking at the eastern end of Main Street.



The level of crime is thankfully not a major issue, although a more present concern than in the past. We have an active Neighbourhood Watch scheme in place and villagers are generally vigilant and willing to look out for each other's property.

### What people are concerned about

Traffic is the number one concern and in particular: the speed of traffic on Back Lane and entering the village from Wysall and Widmerpool; the dangerous West Thorpe/Back Lane cross-roads; safety issues in relation to on-street parking towards the sharp bend at the eastern end of Main Street. There have been many different suggestions as to measures that could be taken.

People want more opportunities for circular walks away from traffic.

People have commented on a lack of signs within the village to meeting places like the village hall and church.

In terms of crime, the main concerns are fly-tipping, particularly in Occupation Lane, and rubbish left by travellers.

There is a demand amongst villagers for allotments.

## What we are aiming to achieve

- ❖ To improve significantly the safety of our roads.
- ❖ To have better signposting for visitors.
- ❖ To encourage people to spend leisure time outdoors, enjoy the local countryside, appreciate what is involved in its upkeep, and preserve our rural heritage.
- ❖ To enhance our natural environment and to ensure it is not spoilt by the inconsiderate actions of a few.



### Actions proposed

Consult residents on means of addressing the speed of traffic on roads in and around the village and of improving the car parking situation towards the top end of Main Street.

Maintain and actively promote use of public footpaths in the village and local countryside and pursue any opportunities for establishing more circular walks away from traffic.

Continue the use of traditional black and white rural fingerposts.

Install signs to the church and the village hall.

Investigate a possible location for the creation of a wildflower meadow.

Investigate the feasibility of establishing a site for allotments.

Report all instances of fly-tipping.

Campaign for a consistent inter-county policy on temporary travellers' encampments.



## Development

Recent changes in buildings and use of land include the demise of a number of working farms, the increased amount of private house-building that has taken place, especially in the last decade, and the loss of facilities like the shop and the pub. Notwithstanding the increase in population resulting from the new housing developments, some people feel that further development is required to vitalise the community and provide a viable basis to support the facilities that residents want to see.

There is a perceived need for affordable housing for young people. The majority of the new houses are large homes with four or more bedrooms. We received comments such as

*"We have lots of very expensive houses and very few affordable by people on lower incomes."*

There is also a wish to encourage the development of more rural businesses in the village.

*"Development is required to give the village a boost."*



## What people are concerned about

The current lack of facilities means that many residents feel they will be forced to leave the village when they get older.

There is a concern that people employed locally in low-paid jobs are unable to find housing in the village and that young people brought up in the village are often forced to look elsewhere to get on the housing ladder.

If further housing development were to take place, people feel it must be sensitive and compatible with the size and rural character of the village.

*"Change should be gradual, organic growth guided by a long-term plan."*

*"This is a small village, not Keyworth!"*

## What we are aiming to achieve

- ❖ To increase village diversity so that Willoughby becomes a thriving rural community rather than a commuter village which is largely empty during the working day. Rural business development and provision of affordable housing are complementary aims.
- ❖ To give the community the opportunity to influence the type, design, location and mix of any new development.



## Actions proposed

Encourage the development of small businesses that will invigorate Willoughby as a rural community.

Investigate the need for affordable housing.

Explore the feasibility of developing a 'Neighbourhood Plan' in the wake of the Localism Act, 2011.

Invite input to discussions from housing charities and investigate the availability of rural development grants.

## Action plan

The actions proposed by the Steering Group in the five themed sections of the village plan are summarised in the following table.

Many community plans put their actions in order of priority, as well as allocating lead responsibility for each action to a particular organisation or individual. The Steering Group wishes now to step back and allow the village as a whole to have a say in assigning priorities to the actions proposed. Some of the proposals will need to be referred to existing bodies, including the Parish Council, for further action, but many will require the active participation and support of individuals in

the village to make them happen. The Steering Group wishes as many people as possible to have the opportunity to become involved in bringing these plans to fruition and actively participate in those aspects of particular interest or concern to them personally.

It is proposed that a further open meeting be held on **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2012** when the village plan will be formally launched, when everyone will have a further opportunity to make their views known on the actions proposed and, most importantly, become involved in the next steps.

<b>Facilities</b>	
1	Maintain and encourage the use of valued resources such as the village hall, the school, the church, and the community park
2	Undertake a feasibility study into opening a community shop/post office
3	Explore the possibility of the community entering into a partnership with a retailer for an e-buying facility/delivery point
4	Form interest groups for young people in addition to the existing youth club, such as drama, music and local arts
<b>Community</b>	
5	Revive the village welcome pack for new residents
6	Organise additional events on a drop-in basis to bring the village together more regularly, such as pub nights, film nights or weekend breakfasts
7	Investigate ways of providing transport for residents who have no other means of making necessary journeys
8	Set up a good neighbour scheme with particular attention to the needs of elderly residents
9	Install a public access defibrillator and provide first aid training to willing volunteers

## Communications

10	Set up an action group to pursue a faster broadband internet service and work with the County Council and the Rural Development Programme, amongst others, to explore technical and funding routes for broadband upgrade
11	Find out more from mobile phone networks about future improvement plans and campaign for an improved mobile phone signal
12	Work with our Parish Council to promote the village website, contribute to content and increase usage, whilst ensuring traditional means of communication are not neglected

## Environment

13	Consult residents on means of addressing the speed of traffic on roads in and around the village and on ways of improving the car parking situation towards the top end of Main Street
14	Maintain and actively promote use of public footpaths in the village and local countryside and pursue any opportunities for establishing more circular walks away from traffic
15	Continue the use of traditional black and white rural fingerposts
16	Install signs to the church and village hall
17	Investigate a possible location for the cultivation of a wildflower meadow
18	Investigate the feasibility of establishing a site for allotments
19	Report all instances of fly-tipping
20	Campaign for a consistent inter-county policy on temporary travellers' encampments

## Development

21	Encourage the development of small businesses that will invigorate Willoughby as a rural community
22	Investigate the need for affordable housing
23	Explore the feasibility of developing a 'Neighbourhood Plan' in the wake the Localism Act, 2011
24	Invite input to discussions from housing charities and investigate the availability of rural development grants

## **Members of the Steering Group**

Adrian Bath

Pam Bath

Rob Bowyer

Nick Doylend

Chris Everard

Bethan Harris

Dave Harris

Lewis Hunt

Mike Jones

George Mann

Liz Merriman

Eric Smith

**In attendance, from Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire**

Carola Jones