



Whichford & Ascott

Parish Plan

Whichford and Ascott Parish Plan

Foreword

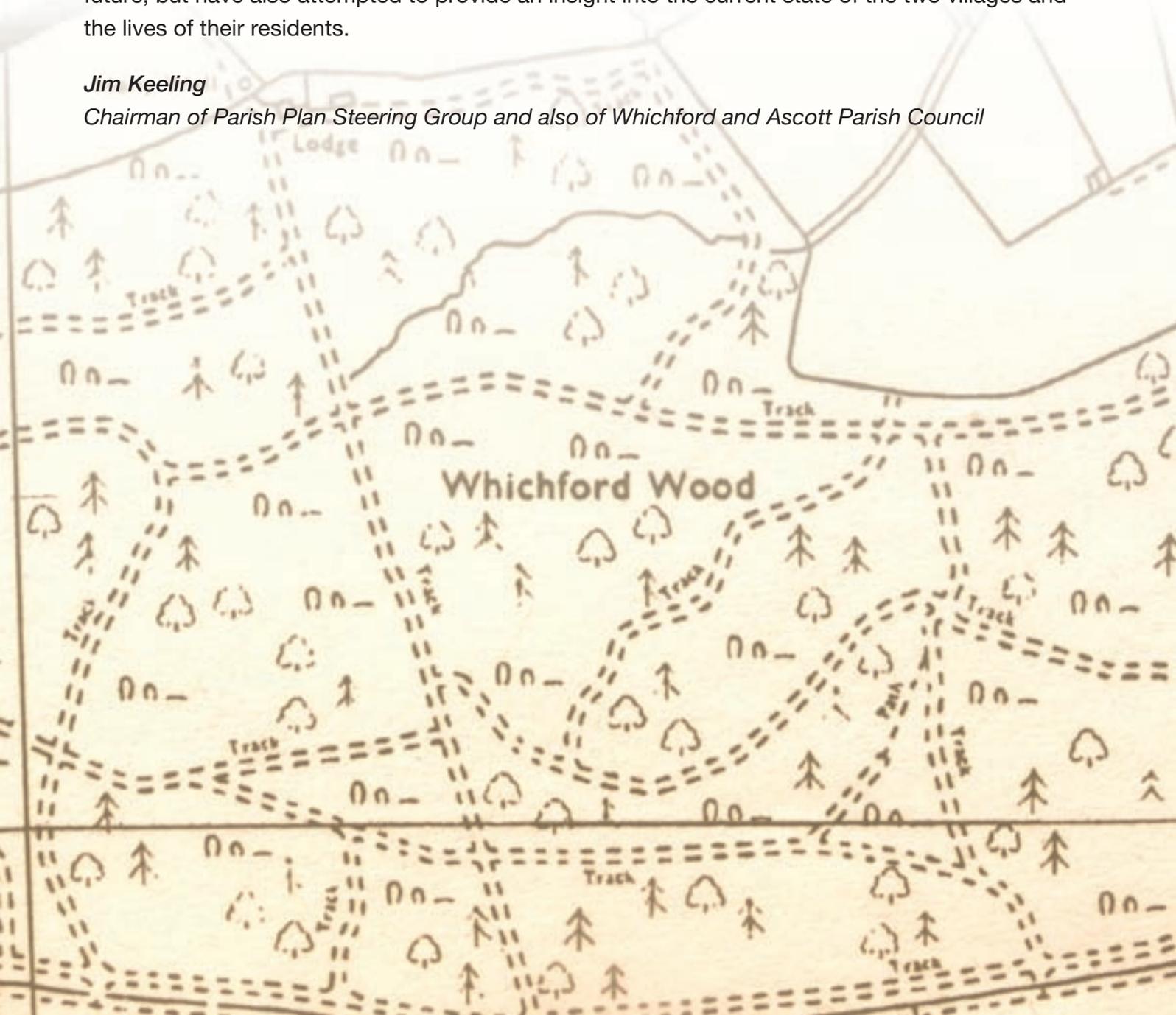
The Whichford & Ascott Parish Plan has been over four years in the preparation, and gives us a fascinating snapshot of the life, activities and views of our two beautiful villages.

What at first seemed a dry exercise in consultation politics has become an impressive testimony to the strong commitment that our community feels to the very particular place in which we live. A large group of people have been directly involved in helping prepare this plan, getting to know each other much better on the way, and almost the whole village took part in the survey that underpins this report (with an outstanding response rate of 94% of residents of all ages, indicating their high level of commitment to the village). The main picture this plan presents is one of a community that feels blessed to live in such a lovely valley with good neighbours, and that is quietly determined to hand this heritage intact to the next generation.

In this report, we not only summarise the findings of our Parish Plan, with action points for the future, but have also attempted to provide an insight into the current state of the two villages and the lives of their residents.

Jim Keeling

Chairman of Parish Plan Steering Group and also of Whichford and Ascott Parish Council



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Part 1: Whichford and Ascott

Past and present

Whichford, with the associated hamlet of Ascott, is a village in the North Cotswolds, just inside the southern boundary of Warwickshire: Oxfordshire starts at the top of Whichford Hill, from which it is possible to see in one direction the Chilterns and in the other the Clent Hills south-west of Birmingham. The boundary of Gloucestershire is also very close. The nearest market towns are Chipping Norton (in Oxfordshire) to the south and Shipston on Stour to the north-west. More extended shopping and other facilities are provided by Banbury



(about 20 minutes by car) and Stratford upon Avon (about 35). The nearest rail stations are Banbury to the east, Moreton in Marsh to the west and Kingham to the south, all about 20-25 minutes away.

The majority of Whichford lies within a Conservation Area designated in 1970 and revised in 1994. Ascott is not in the Conservation Area. Both are within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. They are separated by fields. The presence of substantial open spaces within the two villages is an important, and highly valued, part of their character.

In 1838 the Rev. Francis Witts, whose son was about to become a curate at Whichford, commented: “The character of the country, especially the steepness of the hills, and the general seclusion of the village in a valley out of a high road, must preclude much society with neighbouring families.” In 2008, Whichford still retains the quiet rural character given to it by its location in an enclosed valley very much off the beaten track. The hilly landscape is very beautiful, with alternating patches of arable land and pasture and, overlooking the village, the ancient woodland of Whichford Wood. The surrounding hills have up to now mostly been free of development, and these stretches of unspoiled high open countryside form an essential element in the character of the village.



The size of the population seems not to have changed much over the centuries. The first census, in 1801, showed the population to be 397. Since then it has fluctuated, with a high point of 506 in 1851 and a low point of about 230 in 1961. In 2001 it was 318. The comparative stability of the village's population in the last 200 years can be contrasted with a sixfold increase in the total population of England in the same period.

The size of Whichford's population, and the rural tranquillity of its surroundings, may have remained substantially unchanged, but in important respects the Whichford of today is of course radically different from the Whichford that Francis Witts visited in 1838. One big difference is in the "localness" of the population. Out of the 506 people living here in 1851, two-thirds had been born in the village, but in our survey in 2007, the comparable figure was only 7%. All the same, our survey showed that many current residents were of long standing: more than a third of households had lived in the village for 20 or more years. In 1851 the people living here were largely those who had happened to be born here, but nowadays residents are much more likely to have chosen the village as a place to live, no doubt attracted in many cases by its apparent remoteness from the bustle of urban life. So the "traditional" model of a rural village, with a continuing population and each new generation in their turn living and working in the village, does not fit very well today. This needs to be taken into account in considering the important issue of affordable housing for local people.

A second big difference is in employment patterns. In the mid nineteenth century agriculture was by far the dominant activity. In 1851, of the 289 adults aged 16 and over, 169 were recorded as having an occupation. 100 of these were in jobs related to agriculture (13 farmers and 87 agricultural labourers). Other occupations covered a wide range. They included a tailor, two milliners, four dressmakers, five shoemakers, two glove-makers, a saddler, a miller, two bakers, a grocer who doubled as a carrier, two other carriers, three maltsters, a milkman, a grinder, a master wheelwright, a master blacksmith with an apprentice, a master joiner, three carpenters, a bricklayer, four road labourers, an innkeeper (at The Horseshoe Inn) and a gamekeeper (with an under-keeper). And the rector, two school teachers and parish clerk. There were also 21 servants and three nurses. Self-sufficiency at this level is of course unattainable by a village today.

Although agriculture today provides far fewer jobs than in the past, it remains the dominant influence on the appearance of the area.

For villages of their size, Whichford and Ascott, have a surprisingly active and lively social life, supported by the enthusiasm and dedication of the many people who are involved in a wide variety of activities within the village (underlined by our survey's information about levels of volunteer activity.)





Public transport services from Whichford (there are none from Ascott) are limited. There are four relevant bus services, but the only daily service (Monday to Saturday) is the 23/23A to Stratford, which runs about half a dozen buses a day. The other three offer a single service on one weekday only. Service 5 to Banbury runs only on Thursdays, and Service 7, also to Banbury, on Saturdays. The Link bus to Shipston on Stour runs only on Fridays. There are no services to Hook Norton or Chipping Norton, both close to Whichford and Ascott but over the county boundary in Oxfordshire (as is Banbury). These two locations offer a variety of facilities and services, and a transport link to them would be useful.

Reading Room

Whichford and Ascott do not have a Village Hall, but some years ago a local resident generously donated to the church a large room, adjacent to the church, which formed part of a former barn belonging to the Rectory. The Reading Room, as it was named, largely fills the gap left by the absence of a purpose-built village hall. A volunteer Committee is responsible for its management. The Reading Room has not in the past been eligible for improvement grants for various reasons, including the toilet facilities which it was considered could not be modified to meet disabled access requirements, but this issue is now being revisited.



The Reading Room is a well-used and well-loved community building. It serves as a venue for Parish Council meetings, Parochial Church Council meetings, Sunday School meetings, craft workshops, Parish Plan Steering Committee meetings, and meetings of the Women's Institute. Recently it has become the venue for the film shows that Whichford, in common with many other villages, has now started providing for local residents.

St Michael's Church

It is no longer possible for a village church to have the undivided attention of one incumbent, and St Michael's Whichford is part of a "Benefice" – a group of seven south Warwickshire parishes (sometimes called SW7) between which our Rector, assisted by part-time clergy, commutes to take services.

The Benefice has a monthly magazine, the Parish Link, which is taken by around 115 households in Whichford and Ascott. It usually runs to about 50 pages, and carries a wide variety of material such as times of church services, news of forthcoming events, news reports from each village, regular articles such as the highly rated and long-running series Nature Notes, and occasional articles, as well as a modest correspondence. It is funded partly from sales, partly from advertising revenue. The magazine is produced entirely by volunteers, with an editor supported by a small committee and by local editors for each of the seven parishes.

Although in the 21st century the number of believers is far lower than in the past, and only a minority of Whichford and Ascott residents regularly attend church services, most of us, believers or non-believers, regard the church as central to village life. It has been there – though modified from time to time – for the best part of a millennium, symbolising the continuity of past and present. It brings residents together at events such as christenings, marriages and funerals, and at major festivals, when attendance can be in excess of 100 worshippers.

The church is a beautiful building, light and elegant and with notable tombs. It is well described by Eric Beresford in “St Michael’s Church Whichford” (2003) and in an associated CD ROM. The church forms part of a distinguished ensemble, being flanked by Whichford House (the former Rectory) on the east and by the picturesque thatched Old House on the west. As is to be expected of a building dating back to Norman times, there is a constant need for fund-raising events to pay for maintenance.

The tower has a good set of bells that, to quote the Warwickshire bells website, “go well and sound likewise”. There were six until 1998, when the ring of eight was completed. One of the bells is ancient, dating back to about 1700. The inscriptions on the two new bells “Robert Harvey gave me 1998” and “The parish gave me 1998” commemorate generous donations, topped up by the Millennium Fund. The bell ringing group practise every other



Tuesday evening at Whichford, and the bells of St Michael's Whichford ring out as they have done for centuries. The group also rings at Long Compton on alternate Tuesdays. Rob Harvey, Whichford born and bred, has been ringing the Whichford bells since Guy Fawkes Night in 1932.

In common with many other rural churches, St Michael's hosts many secular as well as religious functions. When the Reading Room proves not to be large enough for a particular village function, the church provides very useful back-up. The first meeting of the Parish Plan was held here, and we also note below that it provides a splendid setting for the magnificent displays of flowers and fruit that accompany the Flower Show (the annual village fete).



The Flower Show

An exceptionally large amount of voluntary work is undertaken by the Whichford and Ascott Allotment Holders Society, which works behind the scenes all the year round towards the highlight of the Village's social calendar (and principal fund-raising event). The annual Whichford and Ascott Flower Show and Fete takes place on the village Green on August Bank Holiday. It is a wonderful opportunity for the people of Ascott and Whichford to get together and celebrate around an imaginative theme proposed each year by the committee.

The original allotments disappeared a long time ago, but the spirit of growing and showing the produce of the Parish is still very much alive. In response to the parish plan survey, a number of people expressed interest in the possibility of having an allotment. One of the outcomes of the parish plan has thus been the establishment of a substantial number of allotments in a field lying between Whichford and Ascott.

During the Flower Show the Reading Room and church are filled with wonderful displays demonstrating the talents, both horticultural and artistic, of the people of Whichford and Ascott. When blessed with good weather, the Flower Show is a perfect example of a traditional English village fete, with stalls and sideshows and tea and cakes. It attracts visitors from a wide area, with a typical attendance of 1500 or more (in a village with only 300 residents). In some recent years, the Flower Show has been a three-day event, starting on Saturday with the Gig on the Green, with music and dancing into the night.

A series of craft workshops for children and young people in the Reading Room run concurrently with the fete. Over two days with the help of volunteers the children create masks, models and banners, all themed around the fete.



The pub and the Green

There are no shops or Post Office in Whichford or Ascott (they disappeared a couple of decades ago), but we are very fortunate to have retained our pub (the Norman Knight), which has remained very much a “local”, though it attracts custom from outside the village. Although it provides a high standard of cooking, it has resisted the temptation to which so many Cotswold pubs have succumbed – to become a gastro-pub catering less for locals than for gourmets from further afield. In winter the pub is relatively quiet, but remains an important informal meeting place for villagers.

Our survey shows that residents attach great importance to the presence of the pub in the village, and are very anxious for it to continue playing its role as one of the village’s focal points. The pub is an important resource whose future cannot be taken for granted, and it needs continuing support to survive.

The pub is located beside the Green, which forms the centre of the village, though the church, the Rectory (now Whichford House) and the Norman Castle are a few hundred yards to the west. The pub and the Green provide a focal point for the summer visitors who, like the migrating swifts, visit year after year. Walkers stop and rest on the Green or take refreshments in the pub. Holidaymakers stay in holiday cottages and B&Bs nearby, or park their caravans behind the pub. All add to the relaxed holiday ambience, and the Green becomes a focal point for impromptu picnics and games of football and cricket. Organised live music and vintage car meets have been regular events. The Green hosts many events in addition to the annual Flower Show, and is a popular recreation and play area for villagers and visitors alike.

A few years ago, on November 5, the then manager of the Norman Knight provided a magnificent and much appreciated display of fireworks, seen to advantage from the pub across the Green (they were set off behind the houses on the opposite side of the Green). This proved enormously popular and has been repeated each year, funded partly by collections taken at the previous year’s display and partly by a donation from the Flower Show.



Local employment

The main local employer is Whichford Pottery. The fact that about 25 employees (half of them resident in the village) come to the Pottery every day ensures that Whichford is a hive of activity all year round. Workers eat lunch together, celebrate birthdays, and hold Christmas parties. The Pottery itself attracts visitors from far and wide and continues to thrive. The recently completed Octagon provides an ideal venue not only for exhibiting and selling the Pottery's products (and those of distinguished potters from elsewhere in the country) but also for promoting village activities and projects. The Pottery does of course supply the village, but sells the bulk of its output to far away places. A third of it goes to Japan, a remarkable success story in view of that country's distinguished achievement in pottery.

Although, as noted above, villages cannot be self-sustaining to the extent that they were in the nineteenth century, there is still a considerable diversity of employment, including not only traditional activities like farming but also various kinds of homeworking, some of which are of course based on the remote access facilities offered by computers. Our survey showed that of those in work, 7% worked in the village and 21% worked from home.

Other village amenities and activities

Holycombe Healing Centre, a large house whose grounds include the remains of the Norman castle, provides weekday classes such as yoga and pilates, with weekend courses on a wide variety of topics, together with holistic therapies. It attracts people from outside the village as well as many local people all year round.

There is a flourishing branch of the Women's Institute in Whichford and Ascott. It meets once a month in the Reading Room and has around 25 members. As well as monthly talks, regular outings are organised and space is usually found for others in the village who would like to join the outing. In the last few years the WI has added another attraction to Whichford by organising a walk in Whichford Wood at bluebell time. Residents of neighbouring villages as well as our own are welcomed to this popular event.

Whichford and Ascott participate in the National Gardens Scheme, with an Open Day each June when many visitors enjoy seeing gardens in both villages and strolling along the tree-lined road that links them.



Whichford and Ascott are fortunate to have a milk delivery by a local farmer.

Two Whichford residents, Eric Beresford and Barry Hedges, have transcribed the parish registers, of which Whichford is fortunate to have a full set back to 1540. The originals are held at the Warwick County Record office.

Eric Beresford, Whichford's local historian, has researched the church and its monuments, the history of the castle and the impact of the Civil War. He has also written brief biographies of the various Rectors. Much of this material was incorporated into a handsome illustrated book produced by Richard van Rees in a limited edition of 25 copies.

Whichford and Ascott web-site was set up in October 2007 by villagers for villagers. This includes news and information about local businesses, the Parish Council, local government and amenities, St. Michael's Church, the Women's Institute, village activities, The Flower Show and arts and crafts, with a page for children and young people. There is a link to the register transcripts on the church page and it is hoped to incorporate historical material from Eric Beresford shortly.

The above paragraphs by no means exhaust the activities of the village. One household has organised a classical music concert. Whichford House hosted a performance by Bampton Opera in the summer of 2008. There are keen tennis and bridge players who meet regularly. Volunteers organise events for children, such as Easter Egg hunts.

Enterprisingly, in 2005 a group of residents published their favourite recipes in the Whichford and Ascott Cookery Book. A booklet describing local walks was also produced.

As people from outside the village often comment, it is extraordinary that so much goes on in such a small place. All these varied activities help to create the unique and distinctive character of Whichford and Ascott, making them friendly and lively places to live. In the last analysis it is the people living here who make up Whichford's and Ascott's life and soul and hold their social fabric together. The healthy mix of fun and ritual follows a long tradition, as archive photographs illustrate. At the beginning of the 21st century there is still a strong community spirit: may it long continue.



PART 2: THE PARISH PLAN PROCESS AND CONSULTATION

The genesis of the Plan

The idea of a Parish Plan for Whichford and Ascott was initially promoted by the Parish Council, whose chairman, Jim Keeling, convened and chaired a public meeting of about 60 residents in the church on October 15 2005, following a leaflet drop to every household. We were very pleased that Ken Treadaway of Long Compton was present, as he was able to tell us about his experience of the recently completed Long Compton Parish Plan. More than 60 residents attended, and the general feeling was strongly in favour of having a Parish Plan for Whichford and Ascott. An overall Steering Committee was formed from volunteers from among those attending the church meeting. In addition four sub-committees were formed to look at particular groups of issues:

Built Environment Group (convenor John Melvin)

Green Issues Group, including transport issues (convenor Ian Corrall)

Amenities Group (convenor Annabelle Webb)

Children and Young People Group (convenor Frances Lee & Kelsey Walker)

The first meeting of the Steering Group was held on October 19, a few days after the church meeting. Jim Keeling acted as temporary chair at the beginning of the meeting, during which officers were duly elected. Meetings were held thereafter at intervals of about eight weeks. The Rural Housing enabler for the Warwickshire Rural Community Council gave a talk at one meeting.

The membership of the Steering Committee was as follows:

Jim Keeling, chair

Annabelle Webb (vice chair)

Colin Corlett (treasurer)

Kelsey Walker (secretary)

Terry Brain

Geoff Bromage

Ian Corrall

Barry Hedges

Trish Hedges (responsible for Parish Plan Survey)

Alan Kinch

Frances Lee

John Melvin

Tony Worsley

It is with the greatest sadness that we have to record the death of Ian Corrall early in 2008: he played a very active part on the Steering Committee, and was an able and enthusiastic chair of the Green Issues Group. He is greatly missed.

Involving the village and reporting back

The four Groups held village open meetings in 2006, each chaired by its convenor (a member of the Steering Committee), who gave a brief presentation of the ground to be covered by that particular Group. Residents then discussed the issues raised, adding any others they considered important. Some Groups undertook ancillary exercises: notably, the Children and Young Persons group sent a questionnaire to parents and grandparents of young children.

The convenors reported residents' views back to the Steering Committee, and this feedback made a vital contribution to the development of the questionnaire for the Parish Plan Survey of all residents of the village that was carried out in 2007. This survey is the subject of Part 3 of this document.

At the 2006 annual Flower Show (August Bank Holiday) the Steering Group gave an exhibition of the work being done and invited comments. These too were fed into the questionnaire development process. This exhibition was very well received.

A further exhibition at the 2007 Flower Show provided an update of progress, including a brief summary of the initial results of the questionnaire survey which had by then been completed.

On 7th October 2007 an open meeting was held to build on some of the results of the questionnaire, where there had been requests for certain actions within the village, including bulk buying of heating oil, a walking group and improved recycling. It is hoped these initiatives will continue to enhance the local environment and the community in which we live.

In January 2009 the draft report with action points was put on the village website and copies made available for inspection. This was followed by an open meeting on 7th February 2009 at which Committee Members presented the results of the previous consultations, summarised the various action points and asked those attending for feedback on each point. Comments made were taken into account when finalising the report.

Funding the Parish Plan

A grant of £1500 was obtained from Defra via the Warwickshire Rural Community Council. The Parish Plan has also been supported by the Parish Council, which gave £750. A further £500 was given by the Whichford & Ascott Allotment Holders Society, who host the annual Flower Show.

Village Design Statement

John Melvin, an architect and planner, a resident of Ascott and a member of the Steering Group and convenor of the Environment Group, carried out a study of the architectural and landscape character of the two villages. The outcome of his work was a book "Whichford and Ascott Observed", published in 2008, which uses John's own drawings to illustrate the points he makes. He also drafted a Village Design Statement which forms Part 5 of the present document. It is designed to be read in association with "Whichford and Ascott Observed", on which it draws. The draft Design Statement was subsequently amended following comments made at the open meeting on 7th February 2009 (see above).

PART 3: THE PARISH PLAN HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

The survey

A questionnaire survey was carried out in Whichford and Ascott in June 2007. A questionnaire was delivered to each household. The questionnaire collected information about the household as a whole and asked for the views of each household member separately. The findings of this survey are summarised below. A full set of results can be found on the village website or can be inspected in a ring binder in the church.

At the time of the survey there were 152 residential dwellings, excluding holiday lets, in the two villages (32 in Ascott and 120 in Whichford). Six were vacant, leaving 146. The Parish Plan questionnaire was completed at 137 of these 146 households, a 94% response. With one exception, all 324 people in these 146 households answered the individual questions.

The questionnaire for the survey drew on a wide range of sources, including comments at the initial church meeting, many discussions within the Steering Committee, the feedback obtained from residents attending meetings of the four Groups, further feedback from comments posted in a box provided or sent to an email address specially set up for the purpose, and comments made at the August 2006 Flower Show marquee display. Examples of questionnaires used by other parishes were also examined.

The first draft of the questionnaire was prepared in June and July of 2006, and was discussed by the Steering Committee in October. It was tested in April 2007 by four volunteer families in the village, and subsequently amended. An information leaflet was sent to all households, and the questionnaire was then delivered house-to-house in late May 2007. Wherever possible it was handed over personally by a member of the Steering Group so they could stress its importance, explain how to complete it, and answer any queries. This personal element was undoubtedly a major factor contributing to the remarkable 94% response rate. Another contributory factor was the undertaking that no-one in the village would see the replies, thus ensuring complete confidentiality. Residents were provided with envelopes in which to seal their questionnaires themselves before collection. In June 2007 the completed questionnaires in their sealed envelopes were sent direct to the independent company processing the data, Vibe Research. The envelopes were identified only by numbers, and Vibe were not told which numbers corresponded to which addresses. We would like to pay tribute to Vibe's professionalism and efficiency in handling the data and providing the requested tables on time, before the end of July 2007.

It should be remembered that some questions were answered by all the individual members of each household (referred to as "residents"), while others were answered by one person speaking for the household as a whole (referred to as "households"). Several questions were addressed only to residents aged 18 or over. We have used the term "adults" to refer to this age group. Where the question was addressed to a different age group, this is specified in the text. Please note that because percentages are "rounded" to the nearest whole percent, they may not add exactly to 100% (as for example in the table showing household size).

Characteristics of Whichford and Ascott residents in June 2007

Around a quarter of households (26%) contained one person only. The average household size was 2.4, compared to 2.2 in Stratford-upon-Avon district as a whole (2001 Census).

HOW MANY PEOPLE LIVE IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD?

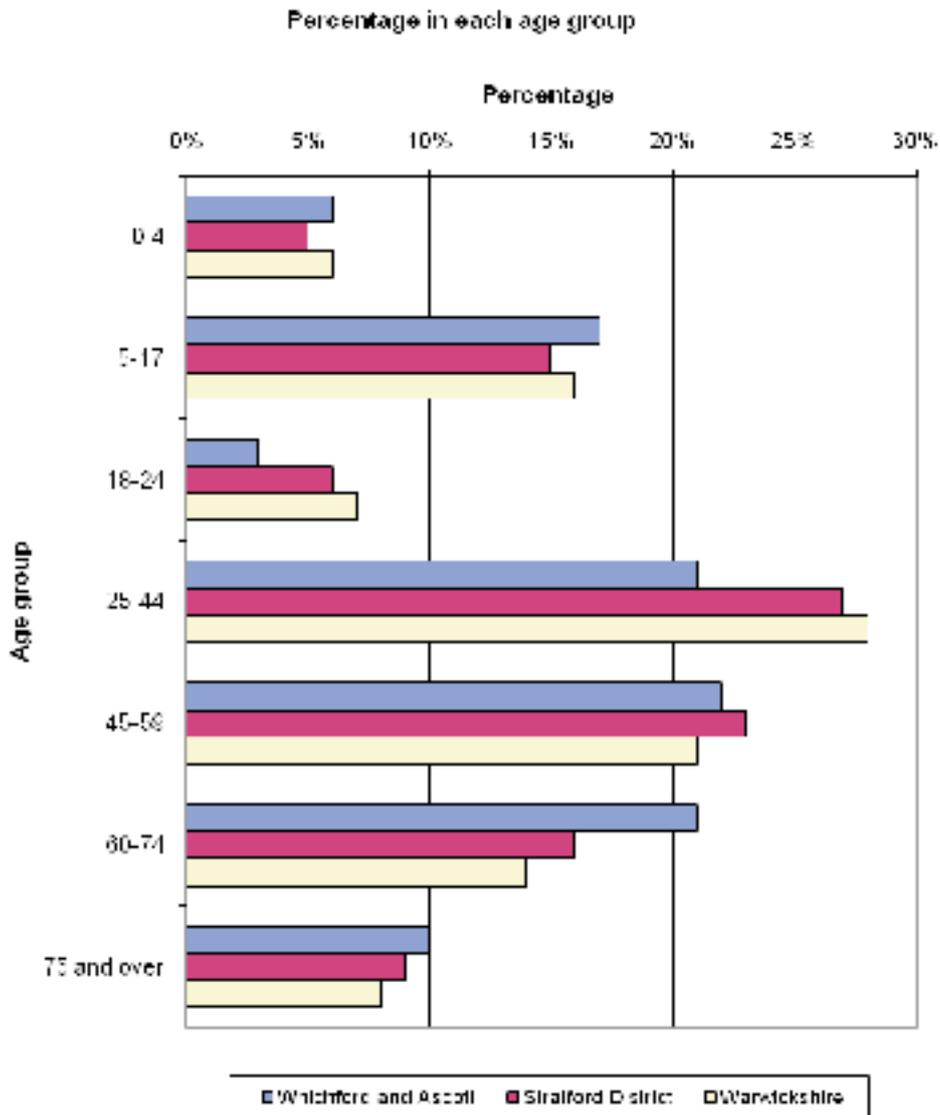
Number of people in household	Number	Percent
One	36	26%
Two	53	39%
Three	20	15%
Four	16	12%
Five or six	11	8%
Information not given	1	1%
TOTAL	137	100%
Average household size	2.4	

Around a quarter of all residents (23%) were children or young people under 18. Just under a third of residents (31%) were aged 60 or more.

AGE OF WHICHFORD AND ASCOTT RESIDENTS IN JUNE 2007

Age at last birthday	Number	Percent
0 - 4	19	6
5 - 10	27	8
11 - 17	27	8
18 - 24	10	3
25 - 44	66	20
45 - 59	70	22
60 - 74	67	21
75 and over	32	10
Information not given	6	2

The age profile of the village has changed significantly since the 2001 Census: there are now more young persons under 18 and fewer over 60. The chart below shows the age of the Whichford and Ascott population at the time of the 2007 Survey and compares it with that of Stratford District and of Warwickshire as whole at the time of the 2001 Census. Compared to these wider areas, the village had a higher proportion of older people (aged 60 and over) and a lower proportion of young adults (aged 18-44). But the proportion under 18 was about the same in the village as elsewhere.



Comparatively few residents (7%) were born within the Parish. Two-thirds were born more than 20 miles away. There were many long-standing residents (a third of households had lived in the parish for at least twenty years), but also many comparative newcomers, with almost a quarter of households having moved in during the past five years. Only 2% of households said that their home in the village was a weekend or holiday home. For 9 in 10 households it was their main home and the remainder said they divided their time between their home in the village and a home elsewhere.

Employment and education

Four in ten of residents were working full or part-time (three-quarters of those aged 18-59). Nearly 3 in 10 (27%) were retired and 2 in 10 were in full-time education. Around half of children aged under 5 attended a nursery or playgroup or were looked after by a childminder or someone else outside the household.

Of residents in work, 7% worked in the village and 21% worked from home. So for 28% of those in work their work is centred on the village.

There were divided opinions on the question of whether there should be more jobs in the village. Just under half of adults (46%) would like to see more jobs. About the same proportion were willing to see barns or garages converted to provide new jobs, but fewer (33%) were in favour of new jobs if this meant new building.

Housing

Most households own their home. However, just over 1 in 10 households rent their home from a housing association.

TENURE OF PROPERTY

Tenure of property:	Number	Percent
Own your home, include buy on a mortgage	108	79%
Rent it privately/from employer	11	8%
Rent it from a housing association	16	12%
No response	2	2%
TOTAL	137	100%

7% of households said there were adults in their household who would like a separate home but could not afford a home of their own either in the village or in the nearby area.

Just over half of adults (53%) thought that building a few low cost “affordable” homes in the village would be a good idea. The reason most frequently given was the need to keep young local people in the village. A quarter (26%) thought it would be a bad idea to build affordable housing. Of major concern to these people was the possibility that the need to keep costs down might result in housing out of keeping with the rest of the village. They also queried whether there were sufficient local facilities and jobs. Both supporters and opponents of affordable housing were concerned that it might not in fact be occupied by local people but by newcomers from elsewhere. Similarly, both groups were concerned about such housing really being affordable and remaining so for future generations.

“Because young people will not be able to afford to stay here.”

“Encourage more young people into the village.”

“Low incomes and young locals should be able to live in the village.”

“I think it unfair that ‘locals’ are forced out of the village due to property prices. But affordable has to mean affordable and probably rented rather than owned.”

“Good idea providing it really is ‘affordable housing’ and is regulated.”

“If and only if they remain ‘affordable’ indefinitely.”

“So long as there is proven need for local long-standing residents.”

“We’d agree to more but only if local people were given priority.”

“Idea good, Roman Row was supposed to be affordable housing, and look what was built. Also there are no places for homes to be built.”

“Concern re: ownership passing after a short space of time to other than locals.”

“Entirely dependent on location and suitability of building materials.”

“Because it would be impossible to build affordable housing in keeping with the rest of the village.”

Traffic and parking

Nearly all households (95%) had the private use of a car, van or motorbike. Half (51%) had the use of more than one vehicle. 7% reported that someone in their household regularly used a bicycle as a means of non-recreational transport.

The main problem in the village with traffic was speeding: 46% reported this as a problem their household experienced. Few households experienced problems finding somewhere to park, or problems with vehicles blocking the entrance to their property, but 15% said that their visitors could have problems parking. Around 3 in 10 households had experienced problems caused by vehicles driving or parking on verges or footpaths near their home.

Two-thirds of adults thought that parking on the Green for special events was acceptable. Most of the remainder would prefer that there was never any parking on the Green.

Bus services

Residents aged 11 or over were asked which of the buses servicing the village they used and how often. The only people who used the bus service from Whichford to Stratford on a daily basis were school children. 88% of those aged 18 or over rarely or never used the service. The few who did use it at least once a week were all aged over 60.

The other bus services to Banbury and Shipston were used even less (over 9 in 10 rarely or never used the services).

A third of those aged 11 or over said they would use a bus service to Chipping Norton, with 1 in 10 (26) saying they thought they would use it at least once a week. The most common reason why a bus to Chipping Norton would be used was to go shopping.

Other local services

20 local services were listed in the questionnaire, and households were asked to rate each as good, reasonable or poor. Not every household had experience of, or an opinion about, every service. In reporting the results for each service, we have taken the number expressing a view about that particular service, not the total of 137 households, as the base for our percentages rating it as good, reasonable or poor. And to simplify, we quote these percentages only for the extremes, good and poor.

The great majority of households expressed a view about six of the services (electricity, telephone, water, road gritting, cutting the grass on the Green, and cutting grass elsewhere). There was general satisfaction with grass cutting on the Green (77% good, 3% poor), with the water supply (58% good, 3% poor) and with the telephone service (55% good, 9% poor). But residents were more critical of grass cutting elsewhere (36% good, 19% poor), with the electricity supply (38% good, 17% poor), and with road gritting (48% good, 21% poor). This critical view of road gritting reflects the fact that the road northward to Stourton, used by the school bus, and not all roads within the village are gritted.

The next most widely commented on issues were street cleaning (22% good, 23% poor), and street drains cleaning (9% good, 43% poor). Drains cleaning received the most unfavourable rating of any service in the list.

The other services were ones of which less than half of residents expressed a view. The mobile library received the best rating: all the 52 residents commenting rated it good. Ambulance services (44

views expressed) were also well rated (64% good, 5% poor). There were no significant complaints about the emptying of litter or dog bins (59% good, 3% poor).

The police featured in three of the listed services, and about 30 households expressed a view on each of these. Community police services were widely criticised (18% good, 58% poor, no doubt reflecting the comparative rarity of any community police presence in the village). Emergency police services received a better, but still not good, rating (30% good, 27% poor). Police response to burglar alarms was, however, rather better rated (32% good, 16% poor).

Relatively few households expressed a view about four health services. Of these, the District Nurse emerged most favourably (of the 17 expressing a view, 71% said good and 6% poor). There were more criticisms of the other three services, with views expressed by between 20 and 30 households. These were Health Visitor (52% good, 17% poor), hospital transport (48% good, 16% poor) and maternity care (41% good and 14% poor).

Only eight households expressed a view on Meals on Wheels, but all thought them good, and all but one of the eight commenting on Home Help services thought them good.

IEWS ON LOCAL SERVICES

Local Services	Number giving view	Percentage reporting service to be:	
		Good	Poor
Electricity supply	125	38%	17%
Telephone supply	121	55%	9%
Water supply	120	58%	3%
Road gritting	120	48%	21%
Village Green grass cutting	120	77%	3%
Grass cutting in other places	116	36%	19%
Street cleaning	92	22%	23%
Street drains cleaning	92	9%	43%
Mobile library	53	75%	-
Ambulance services	44	64%	5%
Litter/dog bin emptying	39	59%	3%
Community police services	33	18%	58%
Police services in response to burglar alarms	31	32%	16%
Police services in an emergency	30	30%	27%
Health Visitor	29	52%	17%
Hospital transport	25	48%	16%
Maternity care	22	41%	14%
District Nurse	17	71%	6%
Home help services	8	75%	13%
Meals on Wheels	8	88%	-

Computers and radio/television reception

Around 7 in 10 of households had a computer at home and nearly all used it for emails and/or the internet. The majority of internet users had signed up for Broadband (47% of all households). 2 in 10 of these users found it to be unreliable.

Over a third (36%) of households reported problems with radio reception on at least some occasions.

Reception problems (when not using a satellite dish) were reported with all the five main television channels – ranging from 27% reporting problems receiving BBC1 to 45% reporting problems with Channel 5.

Around 3 in 10 households had a satellite dish and 2 in 10 a set top box in order to receive additional TV channels. The majority of those with a set top box sometimes experienced difficulties receiving these channels. Those with a satellite dish reported no problems.

Green issues

(These results relate to services in operation at the time of the survey in 2007.)

90% of households used the black box recycling service (paper, bottles and cans) and 80% used the garden recycling service. 83% also used the Shipston tip for other waste. If plastic bottles were included in the home collection service, 8 in 10 households said they would use it once a month or more but if it meant taking the bottles to a village collection point, the proportion using would drop to 66%. Just over two-thirds would use a cardboard collection from home at least once a month but this would reduce to 56% if it meant taking cardboard to a village collection point.

Rainwater collected in butts was used by 57% of households.

Very few households had solar power but nearly half (47%) would be interested in installing it if they could be helped by a grant towards the cost. If a grant were available, 36% were also interested in small-scale wind power to provide part of their electricity.

Although the majority of households reported having loft insulation (88%), only a quarter said it was of the recommended thickness of 10”.

Use of the Village Green

The questionnaire listed five ways in which greater use could be made of the Green, and all residents aged 11 or over were asked to say if they agreed with each (agree, disagree, do not feel strongly either way). Around half of residents agreed that more use should be made of the Green for sports and for daytime events for local people. Almost as many thought that it would be alright to have more musical evening events, but a significant minority disagreed with this. The other two ideas suggested (attracting people from a wider area and providing more play facilities for younger children) were not widely supported. In the case of play facilities, the views expressed may reflect the fact that the Green already has a range of play equipment, but possibly also because such provision might bring in more outsiders.

Use of the Village Green:	% agree	% disagree
More use should be made for football, cricket and other sports	54	8
It would be alright to have more daytime events for local people	53	5
It would be alright to have more musical evening events	47	18
It would be alright to have more daytime events that attract people from a wider area	24	29
There should be more play facilities for young children	22	22

Local activities

Voluntary work

Around 2 in 10 of adults did voluntary work in or around the village. About half of these spent on average more than one hour a week.

115 adults (46%) said they would be willing to join village working parties to tackle things like clearing verges of brambles and repainting the Reading Room.

Attending local activities

The most well attended local activity was a visit to the pub (58% of adults). Church activities, excluding singing in the choir or bell ringing, were the next most frequent (17%). 1 in 10 said they made use of the resources at Holycombe. Very few attended the various activities available at Long Compton.

Although around half of adults said they would not be interested in joining in any kind of new local activity, 59 expressed interest in a local walking group and 43 said they would join a local conservation group.

The 14 parents of pre-school children were asked if they would attend informal get togethers if these were organised, say once a week, for parents of young children and babies. 6 thought they would attend regularly and a further 5 occasionally.

Village amenities

Village Hall facilities

Although only 3 in 10 of adults thought the Reading Room was big enough for the needs of the village and 4 in 10 felt it was too small, nearly two-thirds thought that there was no need for a separate village hall. The majority (56%) thought more use should be made of the Church for village hall activities.

Two in five adults thought there were some ways in which the Reading Room was in need of improvement. Heating, insulation and damp/condensation (all very interrelated) were the items most frequently mentioned by those who had a view. Since the survey, significant improvement work has been undertaken.

The Pub

8 in 10 of adults considered it very important that Whichford has a pub. Very few thought it not at all important.

Village Website and The Parish Link

Half of adults thought a Village Website was needed – younger people were more likely to agree with the idea than those aged 60 or over (since the survey, a website has been set up - www.whichfordandascott.co.uk)

8 in 10 of adults read the Parish Link at least occasionally (6 in 10 read it monthly). No one aged under 25 read it monthly. There was relatively little interest in a separate village newsletter – the majority felt the Parish Link was the only newsletter that was needed.

Dog bins

Around three-quarters of adults considered that the number of dog bins in the village at the time of the survey was about the right or they had no views on the subject. 2 in 5 would prefer dog bins to be green but the majority either liked the current red ones or had no preference either way.

Allotments

Households were asked if they would be interested in an allotment if land was found for these. 17 thought they would be very likely to apply for one and a further 13 thought it quite likely. In consequence of this interest, the Parish Council negotiated land for allotments and summer 2009 saw the first harvests.

Bulk buying

At the time of the survey 64% of households used oil and 21% used electricity as their main form of heating. Those using oil were asked if they would be interested in joining a bulk-buying club to save on oil costs. 69 households expressed interest (50% of all households).

There was less interest in joining bulk-buying clubs for non-perishable foodstuffs and vegetables and fruit. Nevertheless the numbers interested appear to justify the setting up of such clubs – 34 for non-perishable foodstuffs and 31 for vegetables and fruit.

Local environment

Street signs

3 in 5 of adults thought the number of signs and street markings were about right for the village. Very few thought they were insufficient. The remainder thought that there were too many signs. All answering the question were asked to comment on their answer. By far the most frequently made comment (13) related to the signs about the Pottery: for example, “too many pottery signs”, “signs for commercial use should not be allowed”, “too many unofficial signs advertising Whichford Pottery when they already have tourist information signs”.

Overhead cables

Views were divided about overhead electric and telephone cables. 2 in 5 adults thought they spoiled the look of the village, but the majority were not bothered by them.

Street lighting

Most adults (4 in 5) did not want street lighting.

Higher quality pavements in village centre

Three quarters of adults did not want these.

More trees planted in and around village

51% of adults said they would like more trees planted.

Local footpaths and bridleways

75% of adults considered it very important that local paths and bridleways were protected from use by vehicles and 71% thought it very important that Rights of Way were properly looked after.

Protection of hedges and banks and rare plant conservation

74% of adults thought the protection of local hedges and banks to be very important and 65% thought the same about the conservation of rare plants locally.

Young people

73 young people aged 17 and under completed questionnaires, but because of their wide age range different questions were directed to different age groups. 90% of the young people answered at least some of the questions addressed to them.

Several facilities in Chipping Norton were used at least once a year by many young people – 20 went to the Lido, 26 to the Leisure Centre and 33 to the theatre. Over half attended activities in other locations, widely spread around the area. Nearly all of these locations would require a car journey as they were not on a bus route from Whichford or Ascott.

Young people were also asked about six activities that could be organised in the village. They were asked if they would join in and whether this would be in term time or school holidays. The table below shows the numbers saying they would take part in term time and in school holidays.

Twenty said there were other things they would like to see organised in the village for persons of their age group but there was no consensus in respect of the activities wished for.

	Number who would join in during term time	Number who would join in during school holidays
Youth club for those aged 13-17	7	6
Theatre/drama group	15	20
Art and craft workshops	15	35
Tennis groups	20	38
Cooking classes	14	28
Organised sports events	26	36

Residents' summing up

At the end of the survey all those aged 11 or over were asked how satisfied overall they were with Whichford and Ascott as a place to live, and how much change they would like to see in the village. Finally, they were given space to comment on anything they felt particularly strongly about, or that they felt had been missed out of the questionnaire.

¹ In the case of the very young, the questions were answered by a parent on the child's behalf.

4 in 5 were very satisfied with Whichford and Ascott as a place to live. Only 3 residents said they were not very satisfied and none said they were not at all satisfied. One resident summed up the general feeling by saying "we love living in Whichford and Ascott".

There was very little demand for significant change. 48% thought that Whichford and Ascott should stay much as they are. A further 43% thought the villages should stay more or less as they are but a few small changes would be fine. The 3% who believed there is a need for a lot of change were asked to say what changes there should be. The changes mentioned were nearly all things covered elsewhere in the questionnaire and there was little overlap in suggestions made. Controlling excessive driving speeds through the village was mentioned most frequently.

Below are some of the comments made at the end of the survey. They are used to illustrate the most common themes emerging from the comments made.

"Whichford is a lovely village and I am lucky to live here. I hope it doesn't change for the worse as a result of this. Street lighting etc. would be disastrous and make it feel suburban.

"Absolutely no street lighting".

"A lovely village to live in, but property is too expensive here for young couples to buy."

"One of the strengths of the village is that it is off the beaten track. This should remain as such. We don't want it to become suburban, with street lights and so on."

"Aesthetically, the village should stay much as it is but there is a real need for affordable accommodation for locals that is lacking at present....."

"I think that many people feel their environment is constantly threatened by building developments – what point is an Outstanding Conservation Area if not enforced? The chief conservation officer cites the church and former rectory as the finest architectural set-piece within South Warwickshire. This deserves protection from the field opposite being developed – why not plant (trees) within this field"

"The planners have allowed unsatisfactory development which they had adequate powers to stop. Unsatisfactory development has a knock-on effect which cannot be foreseen. Development control should be much better exercised. The Parish Council has a clear responsibility to be more active in this area and strong-willed."

"Very keen that any new build or larger extensions are in keeping with local building styles. Too many examples in village, past and recent, of buildings out of keeping with those around them."

"As residents of Ascott, we feel it is a great shame houses in the village have been turned into mansions!"

"Dog mess – why hasn't the Parish Plan Committee taken this contentious issue on board? It also raises the issue of dogs wandering unaccompanied."

"Car parking (or lack of it) is a problem to be addressed.

"The speeding through the village of Whichford is terrible"

".....something should be done about how fast the cars come down the hill into the village."

PART 4: ACTION AND MONITORING

This part of the document lists the actions that it is proposed to take as a result of the Parish Plan. These are presented in table form, with the first column indicating the basis for the action, the second column stating the action itself, and the third column noting prospective partners with whom the village and the Parish Council should work.

The actions will be progressively monitored over time by the Parish Council, on whose agenda Parish Plan implementation will be a standing item. Notices of progress will be posted on noticeboards and, if necessary distributed house to house. They will also be posted on the village website.

Action	Need for action	Proposed implementation	Responsibility for action and/or bodies to consult
Flooding and drains	Several areas of Ascott and Whichford experience recurrent flooding at times of heavy rain. Ascott lies at the bottom of a steep hill with many springs and on occasion the drains cannot cope with the amount of water coming off the hill. These problems are severely exacerbated by blocked gullies which are infrequently cleared. Of those expressing a view, 43% thought the drain cleaning was poor and 23% thought the same about street cleaning.	Representation to be made to the County Council to improve drainage and regularly to unblock and clean drains and gullies around the village.	Parish Council County Council
Gritting	1 in 5 residents were dissatisfied with the gritting service.	Recommend strongly to County Council that the gritting contract should be extended to the bus route (to Stourton) and to Ascott Hill. Lobby bus companies to lobby the County Council to ensure buses routes are gritted.	Parish Council County Council Bus Companies

Action	Need for action	Proposed implementation	Responsibility for action and/or bodies to consult
Police and Community Police Service	Although only 33 out of the 137 households expressed a view on police services, 19 of these felt that community policing services were poor and 8 felt police services in an emergency were poor.	Institute discussions with the Safer Neighbourhood Team of the Warwickshire police.	Parish Council Warwickshire Police Force
Broadband	Home working is a lifeline to the rural economy, and the ability to receive a full range of broadband services is vital. At the time of the survey 47% of households used broadband, but 22% of broadband users reported it as unreliable.	Check broadband speeds in the village, with a view to a joint approach to Ofcom and British Telecom to establish how broadband speeds in the area can be improved.	Parish Council British Telecom Ofcom
Village Website and Computer Facilities	At the time of our survey 51% of residents aged 18 or over thought a village website was needed. Encouraged by this, four residents designed and set up a website, which has been running since early 2008). It has proved to be a very valuable resource.	Make the Parish Plan available on the website. Offer support to the website and consider applying for funding for further development of the website and/or other computer-related facilities in the village.	Parish Council District Council Stratford District Parish Communications Scheme – Warwickshire County Council Awards for All
Telephone Directory for Village	In discussions on the production of the Parish Plan it was suggested that it would be useful to have a printed sheet giving the telephone numbers of all households.	Form small group to compile this. Ensure matters such as ex-directory, data protection regulations etc. are fully complied with.	Local Community organisation

Poor TV Reception	Over a third of households reported reception problems when not using a satellite dish with at least one of the five main television channels, (27% for BBC1 to 45% for Channel 5). The majority of those with a set top box reported that they had problems receiving additional channels.	Investigate the situation and report back to the community on the broadcasting changes planned for implementation by 2011.	Parish Council
Maintain General look and feel of Village	Questionnaire responses overwhelmingly showed that this Parish is regarded as a very special place to live and that it needs to be preserved for future generations.	Ensure that all planning applications affecting the village take full account of the Village Design Statement and of residents' expressed desire to preserve the essential characteristics of the village and the area. Investigate grants that help enhance appearance of village.	Parish Council Planning Department, District Council Stratford District Public Realm Grant Scheme – Warwickshire County Council
Advertising Signs	Concern was expressed about the number of commercial signs in the village.	Contact local employers and ask for signs to be removed from within Parish Boundary, except from commercial premises as allowed by District Council Planning Department.	Parish Council District Council
Environment	The survey showed that 17% of residents aged 18 or over would be interested in joining a conservation group; 51% wanted more trees planted in the village; 71% felt it was very important that local rights of way are properly looked after; 65% felt that conservation of rare plants in local fields was very important and 46% expressed interest in joining voluntary working parties to do regular tidying up of the village, including conservation work.	Appoint a co-ordinator to work with a group of volunteers to look into and organise tree planting, footpath maintenance etc. Investigate grants and awards available for conservation schemes.	Parish Council Tree Warden District Council Community Grants Scheme Information sources: Woodland Trust, Plantlife, Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and BTCV. Parish Council representative on the Parish Path Partnership Scheme.

Improvements to reading room	<p>Nearly 40% of those aged 18 or over considered some aspects of the Reading Room could be improved. The most frequently mentioned problems were heating, insulation, damp and condensation.</p> <p>(Since the survey and initial reporting, significant improvements have been made to the Reading Room in respect of insulation and related problems.)</p>	<p>Support the Reading Room Management Committee and offer help in drawing up proposals for any improvement. Assess costs and methods of raising funds both from within the village and from other sources. Also reconsider whether it is possible to provide disabled access to the toilet facilities.</p>	<p>Reading Room Management Committee Parish Council District Council Warwickshire Rural Community Council</p>
Using Church as a meeting place	<p>38% of those aged 18 and over thought the Reading Room was not large enough for some village and community purposes. Only 34% thought that it would be a good idea to have a Village Hall to meet this need, but 56% thought that if the Church were sensitively adapted more use could be made of it for community activities too large for the Reading Room to accommodate.</p>	<p>At all times work with Parochial Church Council. Consider the range of actual and potential village activities. Analyse and take soundings as to whether the church would be a suitable venue for any events too large to hold in the Reading Room. Assess whether any alterations would be needed to the existing layout of fittings or furnishings within the church. Consider costings, funding, grants etc. for any alterations. Take into account the preferences and sensitivities of worshippers.</p>	<p>Parochial Church Council Parish Council Warwickshire Rural Community Council Coventry Diocesan Advisory Committee English Heritage</p>
Allotments	<p>Our survey revealed that 17 households would apply for allotments within our parish if land was available. Land was subsequently found and several allotments are now flourishing.</p>	<p>Ongoing – investigate the feasibility of obtaining Local Food grants and other community grants.</p>	<p>Parish Council Local Food (Big Lottery Fund Changing Spaces Programme)</p>

Energy Conservation	<p>64% of households are dependent on oil for main heating. There was substantial interest in alternative forms of energy to meet the needs of the future: 47% of households would be interested in having solar power if grants were available towards installation costs and 36% would be interested in small-scale wind power to provide electricity, again if grants were available.</p> <p>Although 88% of households had loft insulation at the time of the survey only 25% had insulation of 10” thickness or more.</p>	<p>The Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Act of 2006 aims to promote renewable energy and make it easier and cheaper for people to generate their own energy. The act empowers Parish Councils to encourage or promote energy saving measures in their area.</p> <p>The Parish Council to circulate information regarding grants for loft and cavity wall insulation and for forms of renewable energy including heat pumps, biomass, solar and small-scale wind power.</p>	<p>Parish Council Warwickshire, Worcestershire & Coventry Energy Efficiency Advice Centre (WEEAC)</p> <p>Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC)</p>
Bulk buying of food	<p>Half of all households expressed an interest in joining a bulk buying club for oil. Over 30 households also expressed interest in a bulk buying club for food.</p>	<p>Encourage co-ordinators for bulk buying clubs to establish membership and systems for the operation of the clubs and investigate local sources.</p>	<p>Local Community organisation</p>
Transport	<p>Overall, very few residents used the bus services available at the time of the survey – none of these services visited Chipping Norton, the nearest town with substantial shopping and leisure facilities. However, when those aged 11 or over were asked how often they would realistically use a bus service if one were provided at convenient times to and from Chipping Norton, 1 in 10 of those aged 11 or over thought they would use it at least once a week.</p> <p>The village website currently offers a car sharing scheme contact.</p>	<p>Ascertain whether a bus service between Whichford and Chipping Norton is a viable economic alternative to individual car journeys. Consult local transport authorities.</p>	<p>Parish Council Warwickshire County Council Oxfordshire County Council</p>

Vehicle issues	The consultation process indicated two vehicle-related issues that were of concern to a significant number of residents – speeding and parking/driving on verges and on the Village Green.	Consider ways in which speeding might be reduced and consider contacting known regular offenders to request speed moderation. Clearer guidelines to residents in respect of driving on verges and/or parking on the Green and investigate display notices to this effect.	Parish Council Warwickshire Police Force
Walking groups	59 residents expressed interest in joining a local walking group.	Encourage someone to take on role of organiser of a group and arrange regular walks.	Local Community organisation
Young people and local activities	<p>When those aged 11 or over were asked if there should be more play facilities on the Green, 22% agreed. 54% also agreed that greater use of the Green should be made for football, cricket and other sports.</p> <p>Discussions with young people suggested that the play facilities could include a play structure (ship/castle) and climbing/balance activities. It was also felt that some playground amenities needed updating, and that the black tiles had become very slippery. The provision of cricket nets on the Green was also suggested.</p> <p>55% (40) of those aged under 18 thought they would join in organised sports events in the village and 53% (39) expressed interest in joining tennis groups if they were arranged. 39 and 31 also expressed interest in art and craft workshops and in cooking classes respectively.</p>	<p>Repair/replace the rubber surface and consider the purchase of additional play equipment and cricket nets. Seek funding help.</p> <p>[Approach owners of tennis courts within the village for possible use by young people and investigate issues of health and safety and insurance.</p> <p>Source funding for organised group tennis coaching.</p>	<p>Parish Council District Council Community Grant Scheme [Local Community organisation]</p>

<p>Mother and Toddler Group</p>	<p>Although numbers of babies and young children in the village will vary, there was some interest in informal get-togethers of parents/carers to consider forming a play group.</p>	<p>Encourage volunteer/s to co-ordinate playgroup and activities for babies and toddlers.</p>	<p>Local Community organisation</p>
<p>Affordable Housing</p>	<p>The issue of affordable housing for local people was raised early in the consultation process, given the high market value of local properties. It is worth noting however that 12% of households currently rent from a housing association. The survey indicated cautious support for new affordable housing. However, many caveats were raised, including among the 53% supporting the idea. The issues to be addressed include extent and type of need, criteria on which eligibility should be assessed, whether suitable sites can be found, whether good quality housing be provided, how much housing there should be (and how large), and whether it can be ensured that any housing provided remains “affordable”.</p>	<p>Parish Plan sub-committee to investigate the above issues and consult appropriate authorities in order to assess the viability of building affordable housing in the village. Sub-Committee to report back to Parish Council and village. If it is then agreed that the issue should be progressed, a Housing Needs survey should be carried out.</p>	<p>Parish Council Warwickshire Rural Community Council Warwickshire Rural Housing Association Stratford District Council Housing Corporation</p>

PART 5: Whichford & Ascott Village Design Statement

Arrival and experience

Whichford and Ascott are springline villages nestling against an escarpment which forms the watershed of England. There is a thrill of anticipation as the road snakes north from Oxfordshire steeply down through overgrown banks, and you arrive quite suddenly at the sloping village green, the houses thrown in a wide arc around it with Whichford Woods clearly visible over their roofs.

The two villages are separated by a short distance. Ascott is little more than a hamlet at the head of the valley, with its own distinct character; a scattering of houses, some quite substantial, some hidden away, surrounded by undeveloped hills, with many small orchards. Both of these characteristics must be preserved.

Whichford itself is built upon a saddle of land formed between two streams, the one coming from Ascott and the other from Whichford Wood, which join at the northern edge of the village. At its centre is a large village green, formerly a field and bought for the village by the Parish Council in the 1950's. The willow and chestnut trees on the green are becoming an important ingredient and form an essential feature.

This green space is enclosed visually in part by buildings and in part by the surrounding hills and trees, as well as Whichford Wood in the distance (part of which has recently been designated a S.S.I). The traditional vernacular buildings around the green are flat fronted, and do not have projections at the front. As in other areas of Whichford, the views down the roads leading to the green and from it are obscured by gentle turns or changes in level. In other words, the spaces do not bleed away.

Whichford is, today, a 'non nucleated' village: the ancient Church lies beyond the Green. Many small green centres are, however, to be found between clutches of houses.

Throughout both villages boundary walls and hedges are important features, with many examples of fine old dry stone walls. Boundary walls between neighbours tend to be low, and this intimacy should be preserved in future development.

The envelope of both Whichford and Ascott should also be respected: key open spaces (for example: between the villages, opposite the Church, and on the hillsides behind the villages) must be maintained. The weakest area of containment in the village is at the approach of Whichford from Ascott and this may be an area of opportunity for strengthening the sense of containment which is such an important aspect of the village.

This valley has been inhabited for many thousands of years. Flint tools have been found on the hillside facing Whichford Pottery from the Mesolithic period and possibly even earlier. There have been several Roman finds of coins, pottery and turned alabaster, indicating an as yet undiscovered villa, probably in the fields to the West of the village beneath Whichford Wood. There have also been finds of Anglo Saxon jewellery. There is a prominent Norman motte and bailey at the West end of the village and the Church has a fine Norman doorway from the time that the village was given to the Norman de Mohun family. The Church was later enlarged, mainly from the 14th and 15th Century and contains many fine architectural features with good brasses. There are several late medieval buildings in the village including a fine example of a cruck house from the 15th Century. As in many

Cotswold villages, there was a great deal of building activity at the beginning of the 17th Century and many houses survive from this time. There are two quite grand houses from the 18th Century, one in Ascott and one in Whichford, both of which have recently been extensively restored. There are some charming examples of 19th Century workman's cottages, many built by the local Weston Estate. The more substantial houses in the village show repeated alterations over the generations but all the buildings are characterised by the use of local materials and a certain shared aesthetic which are discussed below.

To speak generally, although good examples of dwellings built by local councils and commercial developers can be found, the disadvantage of any large housing development is the tendency to dilute the local character and appearance of a village, with its charmingly chaotic mixture of styles, building orientation and roof lines. To best fit in with the village, any future new development should be of a modest scale and take particular note of its surroundings.

The Village Questionnaire of 2007 showed a community overwhelmingly caring of their beautiful village and keen to retain its rural character – no street lights, no more street furniture, no white lines.

Traditional materials of the valley in use before 1950

References to Whichford in what follows should be taken as applicable also to Ascott.

The key principles of any future development in this parish should be:

1. The design of new structure should harmonise with its immediate surroundings.
2. Extensions should be lower, and their mass should be smaller, than the part of the building onto which they are joining.
3. The norm should be to match the existing style and materials of adjoining buildings
4. Particular attention should be paid to boundary walls and hedges
5. Whichford and Ascott are very special places: any new work should be of best design
6. Modern design is 'sui generis', individual, not part of the whole. Any proposal to introduce 20th and 21st century materials and design should be aware of this profound difference from the existing appearance of this village
7. The use of non-traditional materials should be approached with discretion and by the use of careful and sympathetic design

Traditional Whichford is composed of a simple palette of materials consisting of stone, brick, thatch, blue slate and Cotswold stone slate with timber window casements.

Stone: Walls to the houses in Whichford are constructed in squared regular coursed rubble. These courses vary in height, but the stones in any one course are all of a similar depth. This is an important aspect of Whichford, and where houses have departed from this pattern, they often have a mechanical and unyielding appearance. This should be avoided. The variety of stone courses entertains the eye. The stone should always be pointed using a lime mortar.

Brick: Traditionally bricks were made locally. This is no longer the case, and great care must be taken in selecting a suitable brick for new work. Warwickshire brick is a warm rose-pink in colour. Common bricks or flettons are not suitable. Bricks should be laid with an interesting bond: e.g. a flemish bond, consisting of header and stretcher laid alternately. Stretcher bond, i.e. bricks laid end to end with the long face exposed, is not appropriate for traditional construction.

Thatch: This is a traditional material for these parts. It can give rise to decorative forms and has the advantage of providing very good thermal insulation. It is a green material. Many of the houses in Whichford were originally thatch covered, and there may be opportunities to reuse thatch in the future.

Blue slate: With the coming of the canals, and even more so with the railway, slate from Wales became a popular roofing material, often replacing thatch. Banbury, Aynho and Rousham were the nearby ports for the canal, and Hook Norton and Rollright Holt for the railway. Welsh slate can be laid at a lower pitch than Cotswold stone slate, and this brought with it a certain economy of use. However, slate roofs should not be laid at too low a pitch, otherwise this gives a weak appearance. The roof pitches in Whichford rarely fall below 30 degrees and should be laid at something around 40 degrees to give a robust appearance.

Cotswold Stone Slates: These are often referred to as Stonesfield slates. They were always expensive, and were confined to more important buildings. Today, there are several manufacturers of good reproduction Cotswold slates. Cotswold slates diminish in size as they go up the roof and they should be laid at a pitch of around 52 degrees.

Windows: Generally in Whichford windows are casement type, having a vertical proportion. Larger window openings are therefore made up of a series of vertical casements. This vertical appearance and proportion is a vital ingredient to the vernacular architecture of Whichford. Taller casements will have a horizontal glazing bar, and this helps to modulate the vertical proportions. These windows can be manufactured today with double glazing to meet current building regulations.

Agricultural buildings: Former agricultural buildings may be satisfactorily converted, provided that the character of the original is not compromised. Many of the agricultural buildings, although relatively tall, cannot accommodate modern machinery, and new uses for these buildings should be welcomed. However, the openings, whether for fenestration or doorways, should retain their original scale. They must also maintain their simplicity and directness of detailing. This is an opportunity for good modern design, provided this is carried out with care.

Render: render is not a material widely used in Whichford, and should generally be avoided, as an introduction of a style that is not local. Further into the Cotswolds render was often used to imitate ashlar stonework - i.e. regular cut stones, with a flat face. Ashlar is not widely used in Whichford, except on chimneys. Where render is used in vernacular buildings in the Cotswolds this is usually lime render, and it is used with medieval timber-framed buildings.

Conclusions

The architecture of Whichford is on the whole modest, but the visual experience of Whichford is quite considerable, and this is brought about by spatial containment. Nothing should be done to undermine this sense of containment. All new development should enhance this sense of enclosure.



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