

Cotton Parish Plan 2009-2012

"Good community spirit,
quiet village, nice walks"



"A friendly village with plenty going on
for anyone to join in"



"Local residents like their quiet,
safe, rural surroundings"

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COTTON PARISH PLAN



A Parish Plan - Why Bother?

Quote: "Community Strategies must give local people a powerful voice in planning local approaches to economic, social and environmental well-being and in holding core public services and local politicians to account." (DETR Guidance – 2001)

The Parish Plan idea is to make sure that every village/parish has the opportunity, if it chooses, to identify issues of local importance and to seek to have those issues recognised in the relevant Community Strategy.

So, does producing a Parish Plan guarantee that all issues raised will be actioned? In all reality, no. But what is equally certain is that, if a parish chooses not to put its issues forward in a systematic way, and backed by verifiable data, those issues are even less likely to be satisfactorily addressed!

The intention of the Plan Steering Committee and the Cotton Parish Council is to have this Plan formally adopted by Mid Suffolk District Council as a **Supplementary Planning Guidance** document.

But this is only one part of the objective of the Plan – important though it is. The process by which this Plan was put together enabled all residents in Cotton to express interest, for example, in establishing or reinforcing activities in the village for people of all ages. By bringing together those people who have so far identified themselves with particular activities it is hoped that new groups, clubs and such-like will blossom.

It is also expected that a number of 'issues' that came up are well within the capabilities of people in Cotton to address themselves, without recourse to local government or other agencies.

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Introduction to the Parish of Cotton

Cotton is a relatively small village immediately adjacent the B1113, some six miles north of Stowmarket. This mid-Suffolk market town is located just off the A14 trunk route connecting, to the east, Felixstowe (33 miles) and Ipswich (19 miles) with, to the west, Bury St Edmunds (22 miles). Stowmarket currently provides two large supermarkets (TESCO and ASDA), two smaller general stores (ALDI and LIDL) and a variety of traditional shops. Stowmarket railway station is a scheduled stop on the mainline connection between Norwich and London Liverpool Street, as well as branch lines into Cambridgeshire. The town is experiencing a very significant rate of housing expansion. The effect of this on trade within Stowmarket and its surrounding areas is being watched with anxious expectation.

The village of Cotton is bounded to the north by the village of Finningham, to the west by Bacton, to the south by Old Newton and to the east by Mendlesham. The mainline Norwich to Liverpool Street railway cuts through the north west corner of the village, but there has been no station stop for many years.



In common with many small rural villages, Cotton no longer has a shop or post office within the village. Current business activity in the village is predominantly farming, both dairy and arable. A long established pub (Trowel and Hammer) continues to attract visitors from a wide catchment

A family run garage and dealership (Jeffries) remains a valued resource on the edge of the village, as does Finbow's Yard – a collection of specialist as well as general stores and a hardware/builders' merchant. The village hosts a Mechanical Music Museum which is open to the public on Sundays during each summer.

There is also a range of 'cottage industries' in the village.

The parish church of St Andrew's is generally acknowledged as being of significant historical interest, although its primary value to the community is both as a place of worship and as a base for more secular activities such as concerts and art festivals. Further places of worship include a Methodist chapel and Finningham Gospel Hall. Times of services are posted in the Parish Magazine and on noticeboards.

“... the over-riding feeling is one of pride and pleasure in being able to enjoy the benefits of a lovely, small, rural village.”

Cotton comprises 220 households with some 480 people. This figure has grown, albeit modestly, over the last decade with small housing developments and several 'in-fill' dwellings. Of particular note is the establishment of four affordable homes in 2007/08.

Mid Suffolk District Council updated its Local Development Framework shortly after work commenced on this Plan. In that document it defined Cotton as a 'Countryside Village', where any future developments will be restricted to supporting the rural economy and, by exception only, for rural housing e.g. for 'agricultural worker

Introduction to the Parish of Cotton

Whilst this decision provides some comfort to those who are anxious about over-expansion, there is clearly a balance to be struck that recognises the need for some developments – particularly affordable homes – and the universally held desire to maintain the rural charm, peace and quiet which so many respondents quoted as being what they treasured most about living in Cotton.

The two villages of Bacton and Mendlesham (to the west and east respectively) are identified in the Local Development Framework as suitable for significant expansion. This should bring benefits to Cotton in terms of potential additional support services but will also risk exacerbating the issue of speeding traffic between Mendlesham and Bacton.



Notwithstanding all the ideas for improvement that have been put forward by residents of Cotton, the over-riding feeling is one of pride and pleasure in being able to enjoy the benefits of a lovely, small, rural village. To maintain these huge positive attributes, whilst necessarily trying to meet the changing needs of the community, will provide a significant challenge for Cotton and its residents.

Whilst important that the Plan becomes formally adopted, as mentioned above, it is equally important that the residents of Cotton feel 'ownership' of the Plan and committed to making it happen.

The age profile in Cotton is not remarkably different to that of East of England Region (2001 census). The challenge comes particularly because the relatively small number of young people (less than 50 under the age of 18) has not created a 'critical mass' that would normally have supported specific activities and resources in the village.

All education, for example, is provided through schools and colleges away from the village. It is hoped that the process of asking all young people (8 to 17 years of age) for their specific thoughts and concerns, as an integral part of development of this Plan, will provide clear opportunities to put in place relevant activities and resources.

“Whilst important that the Plan becomes formally accepted by Mid Suffolk District Council, it is equally important that the residents of Cotton feel ‘ownership’ of the Plan and committed to making it happen.”

Aims and Objectives

Plan Objectives

- To provide an evidence-based statement of what the people of Cotton want to sustain and protect about their village and what changes they wish to see to further enhance quality of life.
- To lay out a clear and practicable action plan to enable the Parish Council, the residents themselves and other key stakeholders to know what needs to be tackled, when and by whom.
- To generate renewed interest within the Cotton community to 'own their village' and increase the level of participation in all aspects of village life.
- To inform Parish, District and County Councils – and other key stakeholders providing important services to Cotton – of the identified and evidence-based needs of the village.
- To have the Plan adopted as **Supplementary Planning Guidance** in the context of the Local Strategic Partnership.

Having discussed and agreed the concept of having a Parish Plan for Cotton, the Parish Council called a public meeting on 2nd April 2008 in Cotton Village Hall. This well attended meeting overwhelmingly supported the idea of developing a Parish Plan. Subsequently a Steering Committee of volunteers was appointed by the Parish Council.

The Steering Committee was charged with the job of seeking adequate funding for the project and of producing a Plan, following the guidelines and advice available from Suffolk ACRE.

We are indebted to Suffolk ACRE for their very helpful model processes, interactive software, general advice and workshops. And also to the Parish Council for their encouragement, involvement and funding grant, as also to Suffolk County Council for their funding grant. The major part of our funding was obtained from Awards for All, part of the Big Lottery Fund

Timescale

- 02 April 2008 – Public Meeting agreeing the concept of a Parish Plan.
- 29 April 2008 – Steering Committee confirmed at inaugural meeting.
- May to September 2008 – Consultation with residents and businesses to identify key issues of concern, perceived needs and aspirations.
Funding grants received from Parish Council and Suffolk County Council.
- June to December 2008 – Application submitted to Awards for All for bulk of project funding, detailed discussions and negotiations resulting in grant confirmation on 16 December 2008.
- November 2008 to March 2009 – Development and piloting of questionnaires.
- April/May 2009 – Distribution and collection of completed questionnaires, door to door.
- May/June 2009 – Data input from questionnaires by Suffolk ACRE.
- June/July 2009 – Analysis of data by Steering Committee.
- 01 July 2009 – Public Meeting in village hall to feed back key outcomes and discuss priorities for the action plan.
- July/August 2009 – Writing the Plan.
- September 2009 – Discussions of draft Plan with key stakeholders.
- October 2009 – Printing and distribution of the Plan to all households in the village, to Parish Council and other key stakeholders.

How We Went About It

Two key aspects were felt important to the Steering Committee. We wanted to know what the village regarded as the key issues so that the subsequent questionnaires could focus on those and obtain relevant detailed information. Secondly, although we knew that there were relatively few young people in the village, we wanted to make sure we listened directly to their voices and not be swayed by 'adults' perceptions' of what young people needed/wanted.

So we held three consultation events. The first was held at the village's annual cricket match and the remaining two events at the village hall. These were held in the afternoon/evening on one occasion and Saturday morning on the other. We tried to encourage all age groups to attend – with a reasonable degree of success.

The questionnaire replies were anonymous, apart from a separate reply slip for those wanting to indicate their interest in supporting specific new activities for the village (40 replies). We chose Suffolk ACRE to do the data input itself, as they represented value for money, and we liked the interactive software package they offered to enable us to do detailed analysis of the data.

After identifying the key issues and messages from this data analysis we wanted to check that we were interpreting the information correctly. We also wanted to keep the village informed on progress, although we did keep a page going on the village website www.onesuffolk.co.uk/cottonpc

A public meeting was held on 1 July 2009 and these 'top line' views and issues were presented and discussed. Those attending, some 40 people, were asked to indicate their top three priority issues, which enabled the committee to ensure the Action Plan gave due recognition to these specific needs/concerns.

The main part of this report summarises the issues raised under five categories:

- Councils, Housing and Economics
- Traffic and Transport
- Village Activities
- Community Services and Communication.
- Environmental Issues

In addition, we present the key outputs from the questionnaire provided to the village's young people.

The full data from the questionnaires will remain available for viewing on Suffolk ACRE's website by application to the chair of the Steering Committee (Bert Bertoloni, 01449 780035) for the relevant passwords and URL. These may prove of value to Council staff and major stakeholders if they wish to explore in more detail the evidence underlying the issues reported and the Action Plan itself.

The results of these consultations enabled us to develop three questionnaires. A Household Questionnaire (8 questions) to be completed by one person in each household and providing basic demographic data. A Personal Questionnaire (55 questions) enabled everyone living in the village to make their views known, and a Young People's Questionnaire (16 questions) was targeted specifically at those in the age range 8 to 17 inclusive. These questionnaires were developed using Suffolk ACRE's new on-line software.

Of the 220 dwellings in Cotton, we estimated that five were unoccupied at the time of distributing the questionnaires. We received 186 household questionnaires, representing a return rate of over 86%. 330 people completed the Personal Questionnaire (c75%) and 39 young people (c100%) completed their specific questionnaire. We are pleased with this level of response and believe this adds enormous weight and credibility to the issues raised and the Action Plan itself.

"We would like to thank Cotton Parish Council, Suffolk ACRE, Awards for All and Suffolk County Council for their support and all those who have helped in any way, especially the stalwarts who distributed and collected the Questionnaires."

Parish Plan Steering Committee

Population Profile and Education

The population, including children, is currently just under 500, living in 220 dwellings.

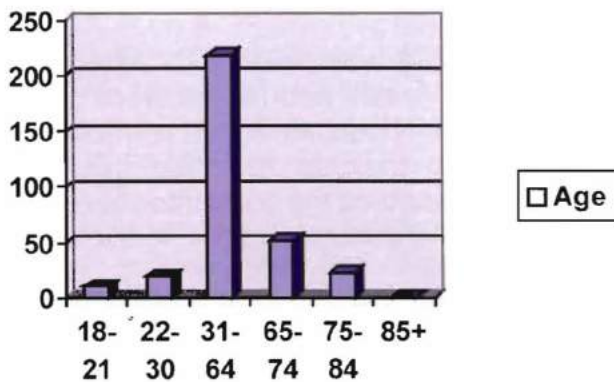
Gender split is 50% male and 50% female.

This chart shows the age distribution relevant to questionnaire responses. It is not dissimilar to the profile recorded in the 2001 census for East of England.

Cotton has no school or college, so all children and young people under 18 have to commute to outlying villages and to Stowmarket.

Given the relatively small number of individuals involved there cannot be a business case for establishing a school in Cotton itself. But the challenges our young people face are dealt with in a separate section of this Report.

Age Distribution



Of the 326 people who answered the question on age, 249 were under 65 and 77 were 65 or over. Only 11 were in the age range 18 to 21.

39 young people between 8 and 17 completed the Young People's Questionnaire.

Whilst the percentage represented by young people is not remarkably different from other villages of similar size, the real challenge is that their numbers are so small that their voice can easily go unheard.

Just over 4% of people have lived in Cotton for less than 1 year, whilst almost 35% have lived here for between 1 and 10 years. Over 28% have lived in Cotton for more than 21 years.

Whilst this suggests that Cotton has retained many of its longstanding residents, it does also show an appreciable 'turnover' of residents. More importantly, it lends weight to the assertion (dealt with later in this Report) that affordable housing is an important element of sustainability for the village community.

Asked what aspects of Cotton were most important to them,

83% quoted

"the countryside/environment"

55% quoted

"being a village"

and 47% quoted

"the location"



Housing Profile and Recycling

The replies received suggest over 91% of homes are owner occupied, with around 5% rented from Council or Housing Association.

The village comprises a fairly even balance of bungalows and two storey homes. Apart from a block of four affordable homes (Garden Meadow View, off Mill Road) which opened in 2007/08, most recent buildings are in-fill.

Recycling Habits

We decided to include questions about recycling in the Household Questionnaire.

Of the 185 household responses, between 141 and 174 answered questions on recycling specific materials.

The overall results were illuminating.

We asked about glass, clothing, garden waste, kitchen waste, paper/cardboard, plastic, aluminium and tin.

If we exclude clothing and kitchen waste, an average of over 89% of respondents claim to recycle the remaining materials. We then asked whether having an additional recycling bank/container in the village or a separate collection would encourage them to recycle more.

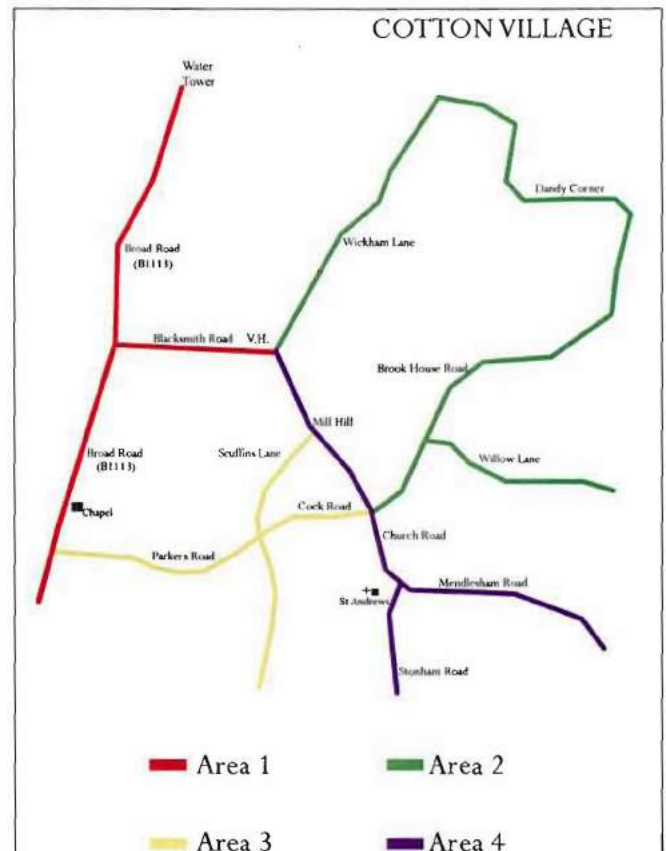
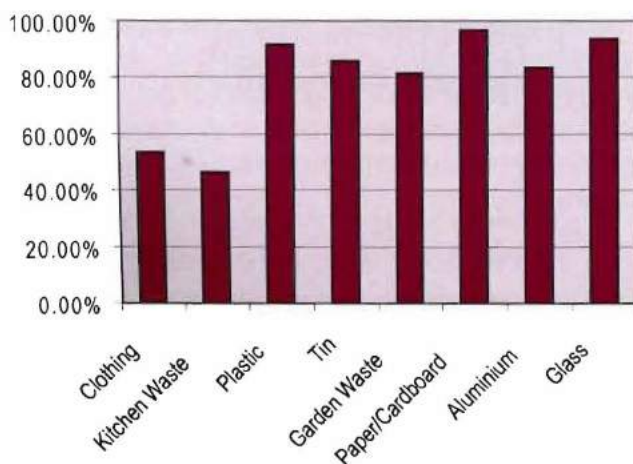
Whilst these options showed increased interest from those who currently don't recycle, the greatest impact was simply to switch from one method to another.

The committee is also aware that recycling bins for garden waste have only recently been the subject of a further promotion by the Council (since the questionnaires were distributed) and we are confident this aspect of recycling will increase in the coming months.

Our conclusion is that the village recognises the importance of recycling, no doubt reflecting in particular the efforts of a very dedicated District Councillor (now also County Councillor) living in the village. No doubt further initiatives will be introduced by the Council. Based on these findings, it does not appear that extending recycling banks and/or separate collections will significantly improve Cotton's recycling habits at this time. The exception is food waste, where there does appear to be an opportunity for significant improvement.

For ease of understanding we divided the village into four areas as shown on the map below. These are referred to from time to time in the main text of this Report.

Current Recycling by Product



Councils, Housing and Economics

Views about Cotton Parish Council and Accessibility of Elected Representatives

Two thirds of respondents know how to contact at least one Parish Councillor, with just under half of all respondents knowing how to contact the Parish Clerk. Of the 276 people who gave their views on the effectiveness of the Parish Council, 37% believe it publicises its activities and decisions well and nearly 45% believe it is open and accessible.

Just over 56% know how to contact their District Councillor and roughly a third know how to contact their County Councillor and their MP.

Some 46% of respondents believe the Parish Council does a good job.

In all questions concerning the Parish Council, a large number of respondents (between 47% and 69%) gave the answer, 'Don't Know' or 'No Opinion'.

We believe all this needs to be dovetailed into a broader strategy of improving communications in the village and is commented upon elsewhere in this Report.

Housing Needs

Cotton has a relatively high level of owner-occupied homes (91.7%) and only 15 out of the 181 households replying who rent in one form or another.

37 people (c15%) stated that they were in need of alternative accommodation now or within the next ten years, 16 of these needing something within the next three years.

Many of these respondents will be looking to purchase or rent a house or bungalow in the village, if they can afford it. There are also eight people who say they require residential care or sheltered accommodation now or in the relatively near future.

Whilst these results are valuable in that they indicate there is a housing issue growing in the village, we believe a formal Housing Survey is now warranted to identify more detailed and specific information

The numbers are small, but significant for the people involved and so this forms one of the recommendations in our Action Plan.

In the context of Housing provision, we need also to note that, when asked what was really important to residents about living in Cotton, 83% quoted "countryside/environment", over 55% quoted "being a village" and 47% "the location".

We feel it important, therefore, to ensure that the Action Plan, forming an integral part of this document, should strive to ensure that we retain these benefits of environment/countryside/location.

Key Actions

- Improved access and information about vital work of the local Parish, District and County Councillors is needed to keep residents informed of the work of their elected representatives.
- A formal housing needs survey is now warranted to predict the needs of residents in the future.
- With rising fuel costs access to reliable and affordable transport to and from the village will become a priority.

Councils, Housing and Economics

The Business Community

There is only a very small number of employers in Cotton. We spoke to each one to gain their views and insights into running a business within such a small community. The over-riding view was that businesses felt they were generally accepted and often appreciated. Aside from infrequent, isolated complaints, there is a positive relationship between business and the village community.

Businesses felt more concerned about the hurdles they face daily in terms of growing bureaucracy and, given the specific timing of this report, of the impact of the current recession. All were interested in providing jobs for local people, although the total numbers involved are very modest and Cotton residents of working age will predominantly need to travel elsewhere for employment.



Residents' views, based on 321 respondents on this issue, were that just under half felt the range of businesses in Cotton was adequate, given the village's size, and the same number felt businesses fit well into the ambience of the village. Over 40% felt businesses were a positive aspect of the village, with almost 20% saying more business should be attracted to the village. Less than 1% expressed negative views about businesses in Cotton.

The number who feel that more small business premises should be established in Cotton (66 respondents) was similar to the number wanting no further business development (74).

We conclude that the small business community is a positive aspect of Cotton and should be helped to sustain its activities, both as a modest employer

Nevertheless, opportunities for business expansion are modest and Cotton is far from able to sustain its own population in terms of employment. Therefore access to reliable and affordable transport from the village remains an important challenge.

Key Actions

- Forward concerns expressed about growing bureaucracy for businesses, to DEFRA and CBI

We wanted to test reaction to the idea of a mobile grocer visiting the village on a routine basis, as we were aware that this appears to have proved successful in some villages.

More than half of the 319 respondents didn't think they would ever make use of this and, whilst 95 (just under 30%) felt they might use this occasionally, only 51 (16%) felt they would use this at least weekly. (One such mobile grocer already advertises in the parish magazine). This level of likely support seemed to us insufficient to support a business case for establishing a mobile grocer.

"Local residents like their quiet, safe, rural surroundings."



Traffic and Transport

Traffic related issues raised considerable interest both within the Parish Survey and the Public Consultation events. It is acknowledged that Cotton is a rural village but vehicle road users are sometimes causing residents to fear for their safety, and the roadside environment also needs regular monitoring to reduce accident risks.

The road route that drew the most attention was the 'rat run' from the A140 to the A14, through our village; the most affected roads are Mendlesham Road, Church Road, Cock Road, Parkers Road, and Broad Road. It is generally felt that this route suffers from regular speeding by motorists causing potential danger to other motorists and particularly to pedestrians and cyclists. There are 39 people who regularly cycle in the village. Residents feel that young road users are particularly at risk bearing in mind the scarcity of footpaths. Blacksmith Road and Station Road were also mentioned by residents as speed offence areas.

It is worthy of note that traffic entering the village from Mendlesham already has to reduce speed to about 30mph at Double Corner but then often accelerates to a much higher speed to travel through the village. We feel the historic reliance on occasional speed enforcement by the Police has had little impact on driving habits in the longer term. Therefore we recommend some novel approaches to the issue be explored by the responsible agencies, particularly emphasising engineering and educational solutions. We have seen in other areas of Suffolk the perceived reduction of road widths by the careful use of white lines to give drivers the feeling of a narrower road.

We would welcome this approach generally and specifically to simulate a footpath refuge on the north side of Mendlesham Road to enable safer pedestrian access to Carters Meadow from the middle of the village and to act as a cycle path. With regard to educating drivers we would welcome greater use of the electronic 'smiley face' to remind drivers of their misdemeanours. This could be linked to number plate recognition software to record the registration numbers of errant drivers with a view to warning letters being sent by the Police.

We would also welcome a more consistent approach to the speed limit zones; the de-restriction between Cock Road and the B1113 seems to make little sense to road users. We recommend a 30mph restriction all along this road. The 30mph

Lane and include the loop around Dandy Corner to Brookhouse Road. We also recommend this loop be marked in such a way to discourage furious driving, a matter of great concern to the residents. We suggest 'single track road with passing places' signs may also help.

Key Actions

- Deal with speeding motorists by exploring novel approaches involving education and engineering, not just occasional enforcement.
- Establish a more logical and consistent approach to speed limit zones.
- Undertake a thorough survey of trees and hedges near road boundaries to reduce traffic hazards.
- Publicise the existence of the footpath warden, and explain the role, to help keep easy access to footpaths.

Street lighting presented us with a conundrum. There is some support for street lighting in parts of the village, particularly by the newer residents, but overall there was a much larger majority, over 75%, who felt it unnecessary.

We gave this considerable thought, focusing on the reasons why people may feel that street lighting is a 'solution' – but to what problem?

The clue appeared in the overwhelming concerns about traffic and poor driving behaviour particularly

Traffic and Transport

We concluded that the most cost-effective way to improve people's feeling of safety and well-being was to press energetically for the practical measures already described to deal with speeding and poor driving behaviour. This should improve safety for ALL Cotton's residents, whilst acknowledging that the vast majority wish to maintain the environmental benefits of no street lighting.

"Another matter of widespread concern is the routine maintenance of trees and hedges particularly on bends and at road junctions; currently sightlines are often obscured, causing danger. We recommend a survey of the village is undertaken with a view to identifying the key areas where annual growth needs to be trimmed back and the responsible owners be chased up when this has not been done. It needs to be acknowledged this will be an annual task."

Many Cotton residents walk the Public Footpaths. 59 of them felt there needed to be better footpath signage, and few seemed to know there is a footpath warden in the village who keeps an eye on access and signs. Residents liked the three new village signs, including footpath routes, which had recently been erected – outside the Village Hall, next to St Andrew's Church and opposite Finbow's Yard - which should help walkers find their way around.

We recommend the existence of the footpath warden be better advertised in order that problems

The Household Survey revealed that 96% of Cotton residents are car users, some cycle but only 14 people regularly use the bus service - 2 students and 12 senior residents.

44 people said they would use the bus if the service was more regular and timetables were more easily available. 30 people said the buses should be made easier to use by disabled people. This information should be of interest to service providers. There was little interest in a car-share scheme for school runs, shopping and leisure but 17 people said they may car-share to get to work. With the development of the Parish Newsletter we recommend space being made available for interested parties to offer empty seats. Seven residents said they would be prepared to assist with transport for medical visits. We recommend this issue could be included in a Good Neighbour Scheme.

Further Recommendations

- Explore potential for improving disabled access on local buses.
- Facilitate car sharing, particularly for those travelling to common places of work.
- Explore a scheme to help individuals get to medical appointments/collect prescriptions.

Village Activities

The 'Big Issues'

From the feedback received we could see that one over-riding factor is a need for better communication within the village about existing services available to the residents of Cotton. The need for better communication must also be extended to the publicity of planned events and activities within the village. Whilst acknowledging that a lot of effort has gone in over recent years to improve communications, there are still too many people in Cotton who simply don't know what's happening or what facilities might be available to them.

In particular we acknowledge the quarterly newsletter which the Parish Council published for the first time earlier this year.

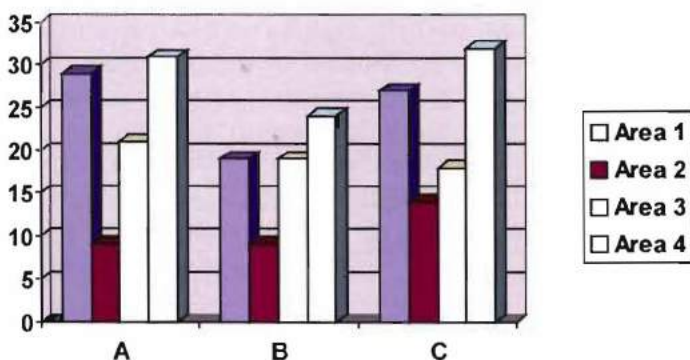
Support for Old and New

We found that a significant number (in excess of 160) are interested in forming new clubs and groups, but most of the interest is in reviving some of the old events that had been held in the village in previous years.

Environment

Of the 138 people answering the question on environment projects, the most popular answers were for the forming of a dedicated nature reserve somewhere within the village. The results can be seen on the chart below, this also shows that there is a good spread of interested residents from all parts of the village.

Support for Environmental Projects



A. Nature Reserve in Churchyard
B. Nature Reserve elsewhere in Cotton.
C. Carrying out a Garden Bird Survey

The village already has a dedicated piece of land that is being developed into a nature reserve and a focus for 'chilling out'. It's called Carters Meadow. We believe there is a communication issue that, whilst there appears strong support for a nature reserve, the level of practical support for Carters Meadow has, at times, been disappointing.

Key Actions

Encourage people to get together who share common interests - in particular:

- Creating a nature reserve in St Andrew's churchyard.
- Improving communication about, and participation in Carters Meadow.
- Undertaking a Garden Bird Survey.

The churchyard is also identified as a potential opportunity for further enhancement as a Nature Reserve. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) has decided that the area to the north of the church, which accommodates graves that are now largely unmarked, will be allowed to develop 'naturally' and to encourage wild flowers and wildlife.

The PCC will be invited to consider whether and how this might be taken further, in the context of something approaching a 'Nature Reserve', especially given the ease of access to the community. There are several bodies who can provide expertise in this area.

The Garden Bird Survey will be discussed with the RSPB to establish the best way to go about it.

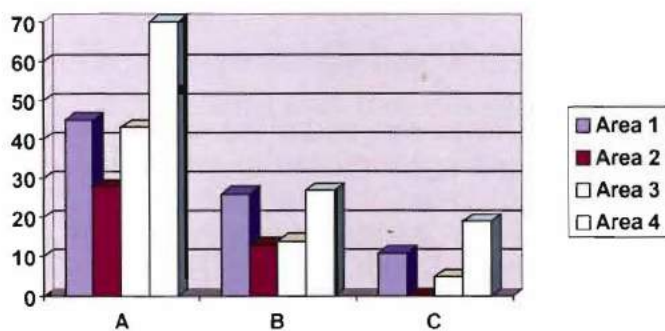
Village Activities

Community Events

We were struck by the level of interest in re-establishing a Village Fête in Cotton. Out of all the results for new activities this was the one which received the most votes from residents, and shows a high level of interest in reviving a traditional village activity in Cotton again. And enough interest was shown in a Bonfire Event and Children's Disco to research the feasibility of holding one or both of these events in the future.

To tackle the interest in reviving previous activities, such as the Village Fête, we have talked with previous organisers to encourage them to set out briefly the main reasons why these activities ceased. Our hope is that, from the level of interest generated in our survey, new people will be prepared to come forward, learn from previous experiences and re-generate one or two favourites.

Support for Village Activities/Events



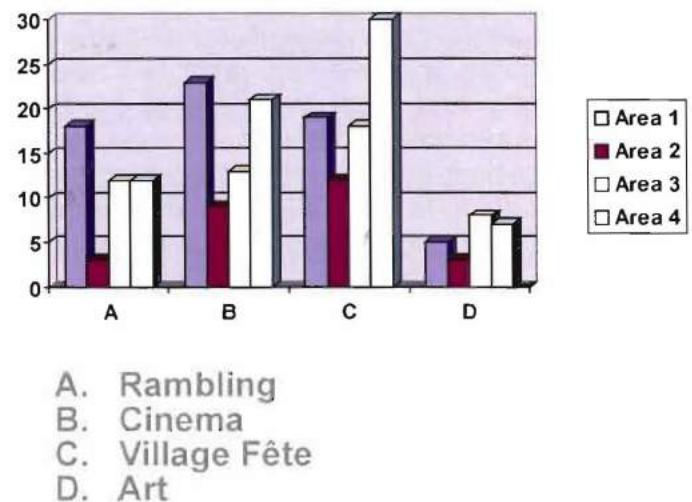
- A. Village Fête
- B. Bonfire Event
- C. Children's Disco

New Activities in Cotton

The range of suggested ideas for new activities/clubs in the village was vast; everything from Yoga to Bee Keeping. Those who expressed specific interest in new activities have been contacted to invite them to get together to try and establish these by choosing from amongst themselves suitable 'leaders/volunteers'. Our hope is that, where there is enough interest in a particular activity, a simple feasibility study will be carried out to see if there is enough commitment to make the idea viable.

Below you can see the four most popular new clubs that local residents would like to see formed, and as there were over 40 willing volunteers to help organize these activities it shouldn't be too long before we see some benefit from this aspect of the Plan.

Further Ideas

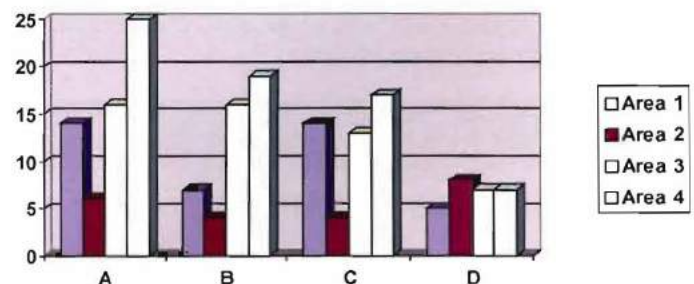


- A. Rambling
- B. Cinema
- C. Village Fête
- D. Art

New Sports Clubs

There was a lot of interest in the need for more sports and keep-fit activities locally within the village. If these activities can be made available within the village it will be a more environmentally friendly way for the residents of Cotton to take part in their favourite sporting activities without having to travel to other towns or villages. The range of activities was surprisingly diverse. Below you can see some of the more popular ideas.

Health and Fitness



- A. Yoga
- B. Keep Fit
- C. Pilates
- D. Table Tennis

These will be taken forward in the same way as the suggestions for new events and activities. Success will depend on the practical level of interest and commitment as well as availability of facilities.

Community Services and Communication

Travelling to Work

94 people (30%) are in full-time employment, 42 (13%) work part-time, 59 (19%) are self-employed, and 91 (29%) are retired. Of those who travel to work, 37 people work within five miles of Cotton, 63 travel 5-14 miles, and 33 work 15-24 miles from Cotton.

Given the size of the village it is inevitable that the vast majority of those who work will need to travel regularly and reliably. General feedback on the bus service underlines its inadequacy, especially for time-critical, regular travel. But the profile of travelling to work suggests there may be opportunities for car sharing where destinations and working times coincide.

For those who are actively seeking work, the key barriers appear to be, inconvenient bus service (8%), disability (10%) and lack/cost of child care (14%).

Facilities

There seems to be a need for a mother and toddler group in the village (19 people), or a play group (17 people). 37 people wanted a summer play scheme, and 57 people would be interested in adult education evening classes. These ideas will be explored further in the context of developing more village activities.

Adult education itself is, potentially, a very significant topic with an enormous range of possible subject matter. The first step will be to establish what topics interest people most and then explore, with organisations including West Suffolk College and the Workers' Education Association, the feasibility of responding to these ideas.

Services

Doctors' Surgery

The residents of Cotton were asked a number of questions in relation to their experience with various services. There was overwhelming positive support for the facilities provided by the local doctors' surgery: 116 people rated it good (48%), 114 rated it excellent (47%).

Emergency Services

There was general satisfaction by residents with

the emergency services themselves have made a specific plea to householders to clearly mark their house numbers or house names near the roadside in order that valuable time is not wasted searching for the exact locations of incidents.

Water Supply and Drainage

Seven people in area 2 (Parkers Road/ Scuffins Lane) felt their mains water supply was poor, and similarly the same area had issues with their mains drainage (5 rated it very poor, 2 rated it poor).

Refuse Collection

Whilst 241 people rated the refuse service as good/excellent, 14 people in area 1 (Broad Road/ Blacksmith Road) rated it poor/very poor.

Postal

140 people (83%) rated their postal service as good/excellent.

Road Gritting

There were concerns about the winter weather service (eg gritting) provided in the village. 144 people (50%) rated it poor/very poor. These responses were particularly prevalent in area 4 (Mendlesham Road/Stonham Road). These concerns were also raised as a priority at the public consultation meeting held after the results of the questionnaire were received.

Discussions will be sought with the District and County Council to identify ways in which these services can be improved.

Internet Broadband

There appear to be some issues with internet broadband connection in the village with 20 people in area 4 (Mendlesham Road/Stonham Road) rating the service poor/very poor, and 27 people in area 1 (Broad Road/Blacksmith Road) rating the service poor/very poor. Further work will be undertaken to establish whether these problems rest with any specific service provider and what cost-effective solutions might prove feasible.

Community Services and Communication

Safety and Security

140 people (50%) want the police to use random speed checks in the village, and 115 people (41%) want police foot patrols. 121 people (43%) want the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme to be revived and 42 people (15%) want the scheme to be extended.

Speeding is covered in the section on Traffic and Transport and discussions will also be sought with the police and with existing Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators to explore ways in which people in the village can be helped to feel even more safe and secure.

Key Actions

- Improve gritting on busier roads during icy weather.
- Explore opportunities to enhance the role in the community of the village pub.
- Improve availability of information on village activities.
- Assist Emergency Services' response times by encouraging households to have their house names or numbers more visible.
- Explore ways to help those in need of support, eg with collection of prescriptions, through the introduction of a Good Neighbour Scheme

Oil Buying Group

Significant interest was shown at the outset for some form of oil buying syndicate to try to achieve savings based on bulk purchase. Cotton has no gas supply so the majority of homes rely on oil or bottled gas. Rather than wait for the Plan to be completed, a volunteer established the Oil Buying Group in early autumn 2008 with over 30 subscribers. It is hoped that this facility will be further supported as its existence and benefits become more widely known.

Good Neighbour Scheme

The Good Neighbour Scheme is an arrangement, well tried across the country, when a group of local residents come together to provide ad-hoc support for other people in their community. Support can be in the form of collecting prescriptions, helping with hospital visits for those without transport, to occasional help with gardening for those who are unwell. This could even be just popping in for a chat or changing a light bulb. Many schemes are now incorporating Neighbourhood Watch.

Use of Services

Nearby Shops

Whilst there is no village shop in Cotton, 51 people use the local shops in Mendlesham and Bacton on a daily basis, and 172 stated that they use them on a weekly basis.

The Pub

Well over half the residents (60%) told us that the Trowel and Hammer is important to the village. However, only 13% visited weekly, 28% monthly and 44% once or twice a year.

Some people, mostly within walking distance, support the idea that the pub might supply essential groceries, and many (50%) support a pub-based cash point. 64% support the idea of a Post Office service being provided. After an initial discussion, based on this data, the licensee will explore whether these opportunities for business development could prove of mutual benefit to both the pub and the village.

Community Services and Communication

Visiting Library

Only one person claims to use the visiting library bus weekly, and three use it monthly. These figures clearly put the sustainability of this service into question. However, 64 people say they would like the opportunity to use a library bus service. This will be discussed with the Library Service to see how the service may be better advertised.

Further Recommendations

- Explore feasibility of a car sharing scheme.
- Explore whether a mother & toddler group, or similar play group can be established.
- Establish the practicality of a summer play scheme.
- Research opportunities & support for adult education classes.
- Improve feeling of security by giving additional support to Neighbourhood Watch throughout the village.
- Liaise with the library service to improve its profile.

Supportive Care

There is a small group of people who have difficulty in accessing services and require more care/support. 9 people have difficulty in getting their prescriptions, 3 people need someone to check on their welfare, and 3 would like help walking

Social Services will be made aware of these findings, but a more practical way for the village 'to help itself' may be to introduce a Good Neighbour Scheme. This will be explored.



Village Information and Communication

Most people (244) find out about village activities from the Parish Magazine, or flyers (142 people). The village notice boards are also consulted (97) and the local paper (83). Only 21 people currently use the village website.

Set alongside this is the recurring view that many people in the village are simply not aware of what already exists in terms of activities and services.

The Parish Magazine actually embraces the villages of Bacton, Cotton and Wyverstone. It contains a diverse range of information and is highly valued on that basis. But no magazine attempting to cover such a wide area can give prominence to specific activities, events and issues in Cotton.

We welcome the first edition of the Cotton Newsletter produced by the Parish Council for every household. We are particularly pleased to see, just prior to publication of this Plan, the second edition of that Newsletter and its much improved format and content. Whilst we were keen to see some form of communication to each household on a bi-monthly basis, we accept the practicalities of doing so and applaud the effort going into the

Community Services and Communication

work of the team involved, but also on how well the village itself takes 'ownership' of this dedicated publication, with regular contributions from a wide range of contributors. **Above all, we urge that at least someone in each household takes a few minutes to read each issue!**

Quality of Life

When asked about their quality of life now, compared to when they first moved to the village, 108 people (35%) stated it was better, 42 people (13%) felt it was the same, 148 (48%) felt it was worse, and 10 (3%) didn't express an opinion. We are pleased to see that over three quarters of the village believes their quality of life is at least the same or better. But the relatively significant number believing things have deteriorated (the majority of whom have lived here for over ten years) is a clear indicator of the need for this Plan to be turned into reality as far as possible.

When asked what they liked best about living in Cotton:

"A friendly village with plenty going on for anyone to join in"

"Good community spirit, relatively quiet village, nice walks"

"Low crime levels, village life and Suffolk countryside"

When asked about what they liked least about living in Cotton:

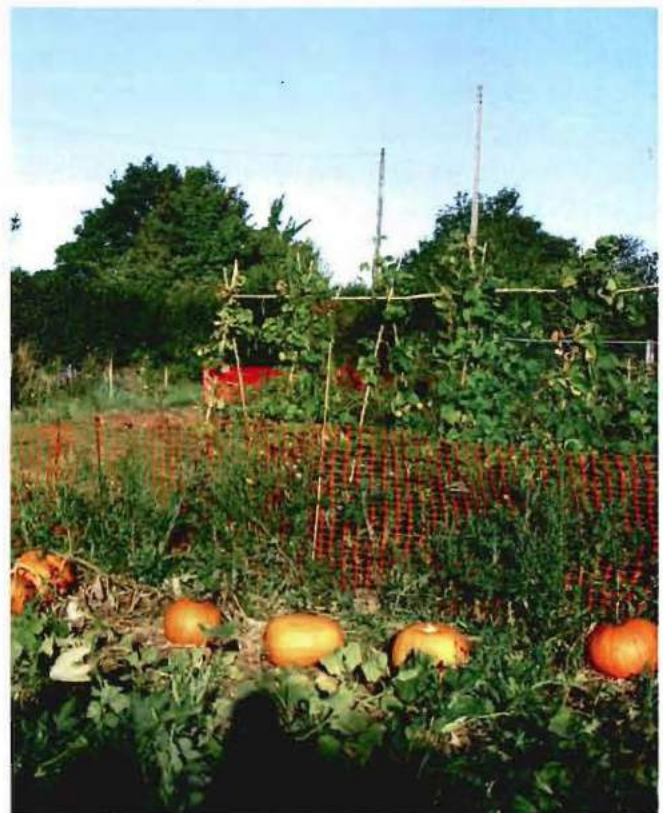
"Accessibility to public transport"

"No village shop"

"Speeding traffic, volume of traffic"

"Mud on road, no pavements"

"Having to leave it!"



The Views of Cotton's Young People

We were determined to establish directly from the young people in the village what their concerns and ideas might be. The Cotton Youth Questionnaire was targeted at youngsters aged 8 years – 17 years. We were not previously aware of the number of children in this age range in the village and we were delighted to receive 39 completed questionnaires.

Without a school in the village, the vast majority of children travel to school by either bus or car, and transport is an issue when children wish to visit locations outside the village. Several commented about the limited bus services and the difficulty in gaining access to shops and friends. These views resonate with the broader responses we received from adults and more information is included in the section, 'Traffic and Transport'.

There appears a strong wish for more activities to be available within the village. Questionnaire responses showed that 30% would like to be able to take part in badminton, 27% wanted basketball, and 21% wanted five-a-side teams. There was also interest in art events (27%) and drama events (30%) to be available locally. Each of these will be explored to see if small groups of volunteers can come together to get some of these off the ground. This links well with the wider issue of Cotton's residents wanting to get more activities running in the Village Hall (see the section 'Village Activities'). Progress is already underway with a drama group for young people, where a number of adults, as well as young people, have come together to get this off the ground.

Young people seem evenly split about their satisfaction with the current facilities in the play area around the Village Hall. Suggestions for improvements were a basketball hoop, a bigger climbing frame and skatepark facilities. The Cotton Village Hall Trust will be asked to explore costings and feasibility with a view to expanding the play area facilities.

The need for more youth activities and improved play equipment was also supported at the additional public consultation meeting, which was held following the analysis of the survey.

Key Actions

- Explore improvements in public transport facilities, especially for young people.
- Facilitate expansion of relevant village activities.
- Encourage greater use of Village Hall by young people.
- Examine feasibility of improving outdoor play facilities at Village Hall.

Other Recommendations

- Develop opportunities for communication between individuals, possibly via electronic media.



We recognise that communication is just as important for young people as for adults. When asked about their preferred means of keeping up to date, 52% of young people said they would

The Views of Cotton's Young People

the Parish Magazine, 28% would use the village website. There was also some interest in more modern means of communication, with 15% wanting to be informed by email, and 18% by social networking sites such as Facebook/Myspace.

We were delighted at the overwhelming feeling of safety amongst young people, with 94% stating they felt safe living in Cotton and the remainder answering 'don't know/no opinion'. Of those who answered that they had been a victim of crime, four had been victims of theft, and four had been bullied at school.

Our young people show plenty of public spirited potential, with 46% having taken part in a sponsored event in the last 2-3 years, 42% being involved in a school council, 14% taking part in a litter pick, and 35% being on a local sports team.

We asked what young people liked most about living in Cotton, and what they felt could be improved.

Positive comments included:

"All the nice scenery"

"I like the safety"

"It's peaceful, friendly, rural"

You Tube



Key room for improvement focused on:

"More sports facilities"

"The play park needs updating and refurbishing."

No bus service"

"More shops (fashion), public transport, hot boys, fun, shops, shops, shops!"



Environmental Issues

Throughout the consultation events, and reinforced in the results from the questionnaires, it was found that residents live in Cotton because it is "quiet, peaceful, and rural with low levels of crime and little pollution". It is not surprising therefore that the questionnaire responses on environmental issues were very high and widespread across the parish although the through route from Mendlesham to Bacton brought up specific issues.

Keeping the Place Clean

Over half the respondents are keen to have a village 'spring clean day' each year. Acknowledging there is already a litter pick each spring, clearly there is support for a more comprehensive tidy up. We hope those who show interest in the clean up will be prepared to get their hands dirty! The through-route was specifically mentioned as a high litter area. Parishioners also support entry into the Village of the Year competition, an issue already in hand by the Parish Council for 2009. As a result, Cotton won the Philip Watson Cup for the most improved village in 2009.

Local Problems

When asked about any problems living in Cotton, a third of the 157 respondents reported traffic noise followed by smoke and smell from bonfires (20%) followed by inconsiderate neighbours (19%). If these latter categories are considered together it would seem a number of households in the village have their lives disturbed by other residents. We therefore recommend that in addition to exploring a type of Good Neighbour Scheme, further work should be done on whether some form of informal advice and mediation service might be feasible.

Improving the Environment

With the countryside and wildlife being an important factor for living in Cotton it was no surprise that residents wanted to improve things further. Planting more hedges and trees were popular solutions. But 74% of people wanted existing hedges and trees properly maintained, particularly in the context of sight lines on roads and particularly at junctions. We recommend, within the section on Traffic and Transport, that a comprehensive road survey is undertaken to establish danger areas and for land owners and the local authority to maintain road safety year on

Respondents to questionnaires identified many areas of derelict land in the village which could be used to enhance wildlife. It was acknowledged much of it is in private ownership but opportunities may appear for volunteers to assist in enhancing wildlife populations. Only the churchyard was identified as a public space which offers easy access for enhancement and a recommendation is included in the section, 'Village Activities'.

Anti-Social Behaviour

When asked about crime and anti-social behaviour it came as no surprise that speeding, especially along the through-route (61%) was head and shoulders above the other issues. To a much lesser degree this was followed by litter (30%), burglary (29%), and dog fouling (29%). We recommend (in the section, 'Traffic and Transport') that a sustained attack be made on the speeding issue in the village particularly along the through-route, with support from Mendlesham and Bacton, both of whom have a similar issue.



We recommend that the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme needs wider support to try to lower the fear of burglary, an offence very rarely experienced in the village; also to enhance residents' vigilance for their own property which is often left open to easy theft – a far more likely offence. With regard to dog fouling we recommend regular reminders in circulations to households in the village for dog owners to clear up mess, especially on other people's private property and along areas where

Environmental Issues

Key Actions

- Boost the annual litter-pick to a 'Spring Clean Day', including the churchyard.
- Introduce effective measures to reduce speeding in the village.
- Reduce traffic noise by better measures to control speeding.
- Help residents deal with smelly bonfires and inconsiderate neighbours, perhaps through a form of informal advice and mediation.
- Urge owners of hedges and trees on road margins to keep them regularly trimmed.
- Encourage simple actions that improve the feeling of safety and security.
- Encourage dog owners to reduce dog fouling.

Other Recommendations

- Encourage more planting of hedges and trees and consider developing the churchyard as a Nature Reserve.
- Encourage greater awareness of, and participation in, Carters Meadow.



"People live in Cotton because it is peaceful, rural and safe. Any actions as a result of this plan should strive to protect and enhance that."

COTTON ACTION PLAN

Category	Issue	Action	Key Player(s)	Partners	Priority	Progress
Access to Healthcare	Transport to medical visits/collection of prescriptions	In context of Good Neighbour Scheme set up a list of drivers/vehicles.	Good Neighbour Scheme coordinator	Primary Care Trust	Medium	
Affordable Housing	Availability of suitable housing over a 10 year period	Gather more definitive data through formal Housing Survey.	Parish Council	Suffolk ACRE; Housing Association	Medium	
Facilities for teenagers	Increase village based activities	Drama group is being formed, based in the village hall. For the other activities adult volunteers will be encouraged to come forward to support costings and funding sources. Highest rated 'new' activities were: badminton, basketball, 5-a-side football, art events, drama events, children's disco.	Young people themselves. Adult activity leaders/supporters. Village Hall Committee	Adult volunteers. Sports funding bodies	High	Drama group will commence at Village Hall in the autumn 2009
Facilities for young children	Increase play facilities.	Seek funding to improve play facilities at the village hall.	Village Hall Trust	Parents of young children	Medium	
Facilities for older people	Availability of local care home places	Ensure Social Services are fully aware of the level of need.	Suffolk County Council Social Services		Medium	

Category	Issue	Action	Key Player(s)	Partners	Priority	Progress
Cultural, Sporting & Recreational Facilities	Increase community events.	Bring together those expressing interest and encourage them to consult previous organisers, where appropriate, establish resource requirements and seek funding where necessary. Priority events:- re-establish Cotton Village Fête, bonfire event, keep fit. (See full report for other suggestions.)	Community groups	Parish Council. Funding bodies. Village Hall Trust	Medium	People who have notified interest are already being put in touch to judge interest in developing new activities.
Community Safety	Fear of burglary	To reduce the unrealistic fear of burglary.	Police Neighbourhood Watch		Medium	
Public Transport	Enhancement of local bus service for all ages and disability groups.	Share details in questionnaire of possible increased demand with service providers and current shortcomings.	Mid Suffolk DC	Bus service providers	Medium	
Traffic Management	Reduce speeding and increase Road Safety	Develop a consistent long-term plan to reduce speeding with particular emphasis on 'engineering' and 'education'. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the whole of Cotton a 30mph area. • Establish safe road margins for pedestrians/cyclists. • Improve signing near Dandy Corner. • Improve gritting service on busier roads during icy weather. 	Parish Council	Mendlesham PC Bacton PC. Police. Suffolk CC.	High	

Category	Issue	Action	Key Player(s)	Partners	Priority	Progress
Road & Footpath Maintenance	Improve sight lines at road junctions	Undertake a detailed road survey to prioritise regular trimming to reduce dangers.	Parish Council	Suffolk CC. Land owners.	High	The Parish Council are already asking owners to trim obstructions pending a full survey being undertaken.
Public Rights of Way	Improve public access to public rights of way	Publicise the role of the footpaths warden.	Parish Council	Mid Suffolk DC.	Medium	
Shopping & Services	Improve local services	Explore increasing the services provided by Trowel and Hammer Public House.	Parish Plan Steering Committee	Trowel and Hammer Public House.	Medium	Steering Committee met with Licensee to discuss report findings in September 2009.
Natural Environment	Acknowledge overriding wish of residents	Acknowledge that a quiet, safe environment are the most important reasons for people living in Cotton.	All decision makers.	Parish Council. Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Friends of Cotton Church. Mid Suffolk DC.	Medium	
	Increase/improve wildlife areas	Explore making the Churchyard an improved wildlife habitat. Undertake a garden bird survey.	Parochial Church Council Local volunteers			The PCC is designating an area for wildlife pending further advice from expert agencies.
	Reduce litter	Increase knowledge of Carters Meadow. Enhance annual litter pick to a 'village spring clean'.	Carters Meadow Trust Litter-pick organisers			A recent household leaflet has helped a little.

Category	Issue	Action	Key Player(s)	Partners	Priority	Progress
Environmental Health and Pollution	Reduce dog fouling	Educate dog owners about their responsibility to clear up mess.	Parish Council		Medium	
	Help to reduce and resolve neighbour disputes	Explore the opportunity to develop an informal advice and mediation service.	Mid Suffolk DC	Citizens Advice Bureau		
Recycling & Waste Management	Encourage residents to maintain the current high level of commitment to recycling	Regular articles in Parish Magazine and Newsletter.	Parish Council	Mid Suffolk DC. Suffolk CC.	Medium	
Access to Information	The need for better communication within the village	Support for the new, quarterly, Cotton Newsletter.	Parish Council	Any active Groups in Cotton. All residents in the village.	High	The Parish Council has introduced a quarterly Newsletter to focus specifically on Cotton and its wide range of activities and interests.
		Improve the provision of Broadband to 'weak spots' in village.	A volunteer to be sought via the Parish Council	BT.	Medium	New parish maps and notice boards have already been erected.

Category	Issue	Action	Key Player(s)	Partners	Priority	Progress
Local Democracy	Increase familiarity with work of local councils	The Newsletter mentioned above will be used to improve people's understanding of the work of the Parish, District and County Councils.	Parish Council	Mid Suffolk District Council and Suffolk County Council	High	
Emergency Planning	Help emergency services to get to clients quickly	Publicise the need for residents to clearly display house numbers/names at the roadside.	Parish Council		High	
Voluntary & Community Activity	Increase local social activities	Use information from Survey to put like-minded people together to organize new events (see specific examples elsewhere in this Action Plan).	Parish Plan Steering Committee. Volunteers.		Medium	The Steering Committee wrote to over 30 individuals who had volunteered to help with specific activities, encouraging them to form into groups and get their 'projects' off the ground. Some modest financial help was offered.

Key Contacts

Cotton Parish Plan Steering Committee

Jeannie Hutchinson (Parish Councillor)
Jane Gladwin
Paul Ryan
Peter Gibbs
Bert Bertoloni – (Chair) – (01449 780035)

Cotton Parish Council

Val Couldridge - (Chair)
Colin Hall – (Parish Clerk) – (01449 781400)

District Councillor

Andrew Stringer – (01449 780339)

County Councillor

Andrew Stringer – (as above)

Parochial Church Council

Mervyn Walker – (Secretary) – (01449 780272)

Cotton Village Hall Committee

John Doherty – (Chair) – (01449 781083)

Footpath Warden

Christopher Tester – (01449 782134)

Carters Meadow Trust

Christopher Tester – (Chair) – (as above)

Neighbourhood Watch Scheme Coordinator

Tony Craighill – (01449 781917)

Safer Neighbourhood Team (Police)

Sgt Nick Emerick – (01284 774100)

NB This information was current as at September 2009

Acknowledgments

The Steering Committee is grateful to the wide range of people and organisations that have supported the development and production of this Parish Plan. Whilst recognising the risk of 'offending by omission', we would like to draw attention particularly to the following:

Cotton Parish Council – for starting this initiative, providing regular input and encouragement and for supporting us with a grant.

Suffolk County Council – for its grant in support of our work.

Awards for All (part of the Big Lottery Fund) – for providing the major part of our funding.

Suffolk ACRE – for their advice and support throughout this process.

The team of volunteer distributors who took the questionnaires to every household in the village and, in some cases, returned several times to collect completed questionnaires. This same team also distributed the final Parish Plan to every household.

Over 85% of households who took the time and effort to complete the questionnaires, absolutely essential to our work, and the smaller, but important, number who attended our various consultation events.

All our young people, within the age range 8 to 17, for completing the Young Persons' Questionnaire and letting us know directly what matters most to them about Cotton.

To Finningham



Children's play area



St Andrew's Churchyard

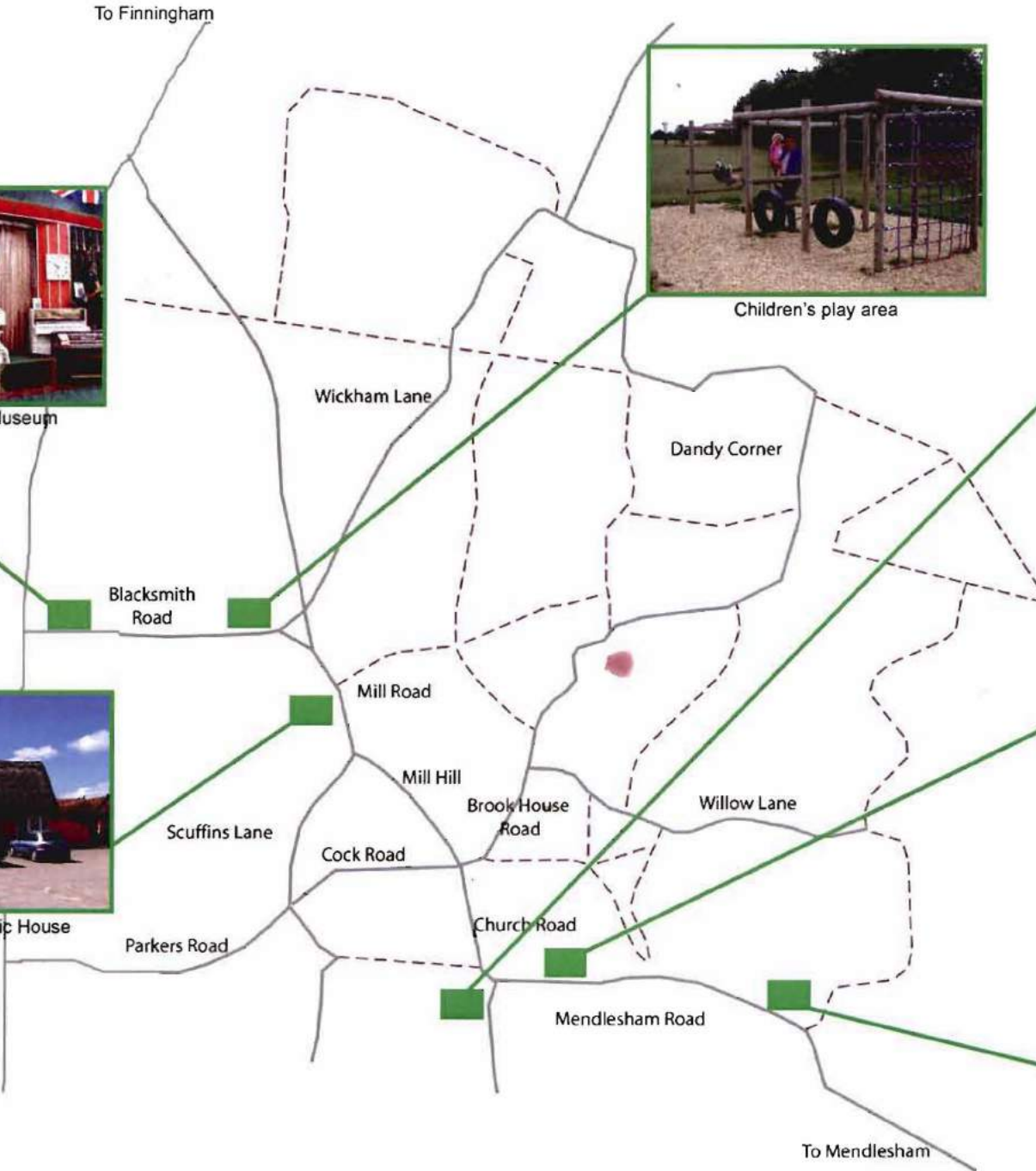


Parish Pump



Carters Meadow

To Mendlesham



Mechanical Music Museum

Broad Road B1113

Blacksmith Road

Wickham Lane

Dandy Corner

Mill Road

Mill Hill

Brook House Road

Willow Lane

Scuffins Lane

Cock Road

Church Road

Parkers Road

Mendlesham Road



Trowel & Hammer Public House