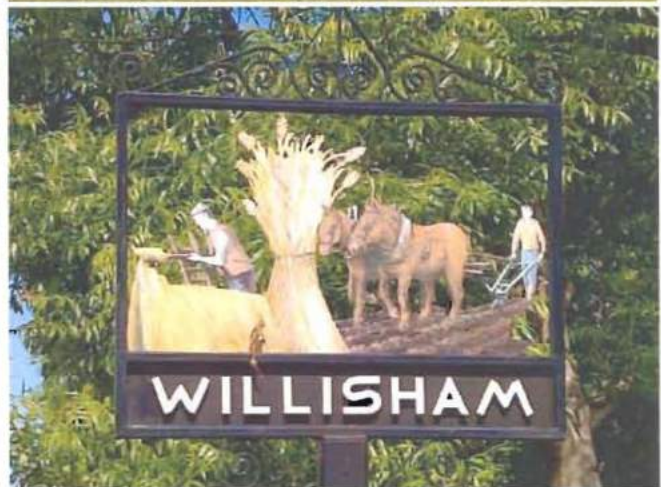


Offton & Willisham

Parish Plan



Note from the Chairman of the Parish Council

Much hard work has been carried out on the Parish Plan since the public meeting in October 2008 agreed the villages of Offton and Willisham should have a joint Parish Plan. The Parish Plan will inform and guide the Parish Council, Mid Suffolk District Council and Suffolk County Council on matters concerning Offton and Willisham.

I would like to thank the members of the Parish Plan Steering Group who have worked hard and enthusiastically in devising the questionnaires, analysing the data collected, preparing the exhibits for the Exhibition and now the Plan itself.

Completing the Plan has been a remarkable achievement. There is now much work to be done by the Parish Council and those who will assist us in making our Parish a better place to live.

Keith Earl

Chairman

Note from the Chairman of the Steering Group

Well here it is at last, a Parish Plan for Offton and Willisham. When we began this task we did not think that it would take 3 years to come to fruition. Before we could start work on the preparation of the Parish Plan we had to ensure that we had sufficient funding to complete the project. We spent some considerable time in seeking funding from various bodies. Eventually with grants from Mid Suffolk District Council, Suffolk County Council and Offton and Willisham Parish Council we were able to proceed with the project.

The Plan is in two parts - the first part is the Report which gives details of your views on what you think of our Parish, its environment, services and facilities. The second part, the Action Plan lists those issues which you have identified as the most important for action within the community.

I would like to thank those people who delivered the questionnaires, those who completed the questionnaires and those who attended the Exhibition in July. I should also mention Annette Gray from Suffolk ACRE who has guided us through this process. I particularly want to thank Julia Truelove our Suffolk County Councillor for her support and her offer of financial assistance which came at a time when we had insufficient funding to proceed.

The Action Plan needs your continuing support and involvement if we are to succeed in delivering it for the benefit of us all. So please, get involved.

Nigel Coleman

Introduction to the Parish of Offton and Willisham

The Parish is nestled between the A12 and the A14 major trunk roads. These two roads are probably the busiest in Suffolk and provide links to the historic town of Bury St Edmunds to the west, to the south lies Colchester the oldest recorded town in England. To the east the coastal town of Felixstowe and to the southeast is Ipswich the County town of Suffolk which provides a range of services including main line rail links to Peterborough, Cambridge and London. Apart from the two main villages there are small clusters of houses, together with a number of farm houses and a large number of homes at Marshmoor Park.

Today our Parish is mainly arable farm land with strong links to the farming community. That said, it should be mentioned, that with the relentless forward march of technology and the computing world, plus the ever growing culture of working from home, more professional services are appearing within our midst.

Historically, in 1872 John Marius Wilson's *Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales* described our villages as follows.

Willisham, a parish of Bosmere district, Suffolk. The village covered 927 acres with a population of 186. The Manor belonged to the Rev E B Sparke and the Hall to W Boby. Willisham has a small church providing extensive views over the valley.

Offton, a village and parish in Bosmere district, Suffolk. Land covered 1561 acres, had a population of 394 occupying 83 houses. Tollemache Hall belongs to the ancient family of Tollemache. There are some remains left at the site of Offton Castle. The church is a small building with a tower and was partially restored in 1861.



With the advent of the 20th century it became evident that more leadership and control of the



everyday running of the two villages was necessary, and at a meeting of the East Suffolk County Council (ESCC) on the 3rd October 1950 the Common Seal Of the ESCC was affixed to an order grouping the parishes of Offton and Willisham under a Common Parish Council.

Today with very limited development in the past decade, the population has remained fairly static. However there have been people living in the area for hundreds of years and both villages are mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Within the parish there are two churches, a public house with adjoining fish and chip shop and a recently completed village hall, which will act as a centre for a number of social activities, entertainments and groups meeting.

A number of farms are located within the parish boundary as are several small businesses providing a wide range of services.

Like many other Parishes the parishioners of Offton and Willisham have to contend with a number of challenges – challenges best faced as a community, working together alongside neighbouring parishes and with the support of local government organisations.

Why a Parish Plan?

This Parish Plan describes the nature, needs and wishes of our community, based on information gathered by means of questionnaires completed by parishioners, young people and businesses. It will be used by the Parish Council as a guide when making decisions on behalf of the community. Mid Suffolk District Council and Suffolk County Council are also obliged to consider the wishes of the community recorded in this document in their own decision making.



How did we go about it?

At a public meeting in October 2008 it was agreed to produce a Parish Plan. Following this meeting a Steering Group was formed and charged with producing a Parish Plan after consultation with people and businesses in the parish. 4 questionnaires were distributed – Household, Individual, Youth and Business. Around 300 questionnaires were personally delivered and collected by a team of volunteers. 218 were completed which is an excellent return rate of 73%.

Data recording and analysis was undertaken by Suffolk ACRE. Further analysis of the data output was carried out by the Steering Group members to get it into a form which could be presented to parishioners. The results of the questionnaires were presented to parishioners at an Exhibition on Saturday 14 July 2012. 15 issues were identified as being the most important to those who had completed the questionnaires. 42 people attended the Exhibition and they were asked to give their opinion as to which issues should be given priority.

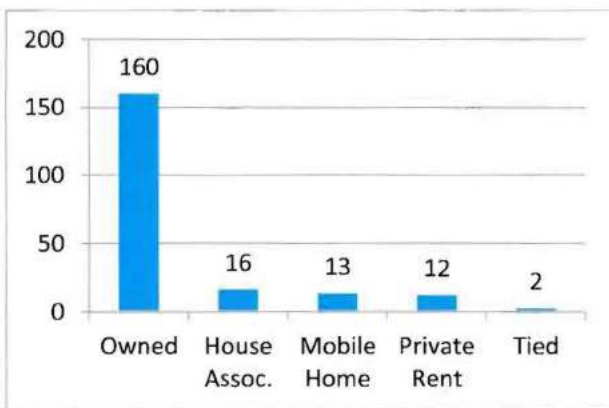
The results and their interpretation form the main part of this report. The Steering Group collectively identified the issues that are of greatest importance to parishioners and have assembled them into an Action Plan which you will find at the end of this report.

Housing

An objective of the Parish Plan was to stimulate discussion and seek the views of all the residents within the Parish boundary on a variety of subjects.

We began by asking about the type of housing you occupy and there were 203 households who answered this question.

Not surprisingly the range and type of housing throughout the Parish is varied and wide ranging from the very old to brand new with most of the housing stock having been built since the Second World War.



As can be seen owner occupiers are in the majority with 160 the rented sector is almost evenly divided between Housing Association 16 and privately rented with 12. There were 13 Others being a mixture of Local Authority, Mobile and Park homes either owned or rented and 2 were tied homes.

Housing Development

The question was "What does the Parish need in the future for housing?"

There were 460 responses to this multiple choice question. 160 ticked "we do not need extra housing". However, there was considerable support (227) for low cost housing and houses for single and young

people. 57 suggested infill development and executive homes.

Comments on this important issue included:

"We need rented housing association properties that young families can afford to rent"

"The whole reason we chose to live here was because it is rural and in the countryside, more housing would ruin it, housing should be built where facilities exist".

Other types of development

There was little support for tourism development and small scale industry. Some support for small business development and conversion of farm buildings but most support was for craft workshops.

Buying Group

Residents were asked to indicate if they would be interested in joining a Parish Buying Group 202 households responded to this single selection question of which 110 said Yes.

Individual

What do you like/don't like about living in the parish?

One of the early questions asked people what they liked or didn't like about living in our parish. There was a very positive response to this question with the majority stating that they like living here primarily because of the 'countryside environment', and secondly 'the community'.

However, 'the social life' was only given a lukewarm response by 32.33%. Hopefully the new village hall will be a catalyst for new social activities.

“Support of neighbours. Contact with surrounding villages”

“Feel secure”

“Speed at which traffic passes through and into the village, a large proportion is travelling much too fast and this includes some residents”

“Lack of public transport and lack of play area”

Community

This question listed 13 items for comment.

There was an excellent response from 339 people. A significant number indicating there was an important need for all the activities listed which could roughly be grouped into three categories.

- 1 Mother’s/Toddlers, Playgroup, After School Club and Adult Evening Classes.
- 2 Allotments, Composting, Wildflower Garden and Sports Field.
- 3 Parking, Traffic Management / Calming Measures, Bus Shelter, Village Shop and Others.

Of those who expressed an opinion, in the first group 64 people responding indicated an important need for Mother/Toddlers and 58 for a Playgroup

At present the nearest Playgroup/Nursery schools are located in Barking and Somersham approximately two miles from Offton / Willisham.

There was also strong support for the After-School Club (88) and the Adult education evening classes (108) from those responding.

Responses for the second group showed an important requirement for Allotments with 130, Composting Scheme with 131, a Wildflower Garden with 112 and Sports Field with 117 people respectively.

The Issues

1. Somewhere to meet in Willisham
2. Provision of children’s play areas
3. Internet Sessions.
4. Provision of Allotments and Composting Scheme
5. Sports Field
6. Bus Shelter
7. Village Shop
8. Parking/ Traffic Management
9. Another post box in Willisham.

Of the final group 70 people indicated a need for more or better Parking and 160 felt there was an important requirement for some form of Traffic Management/Calming Measures.

The Village Shop attracted a strong response with 181 indicating that this was an important need (however, this only received 2 votes in the action plan). The need for a Bus Shelter also attracted strong support of 143 people. In neither case however was a location specified.

The Future

1. Consideration of meeting place in Willisham.
2. Provision of children’s play facility and picnic areas.
3. Possibility of Allotments and Composting Schemes.
4. Better Broadband.
5. Determine the site for and consider requesting a Bus Shelter.

The final element of this group 'Others' produced a small response from 22 residents who did however bring forward a wide selection of topics amongst which were Broadband, Replacing telephone box with a red one, Park or open space for somewhere to picnic, Meeting place in Willisham, Children's play area, Public transport, another Post box in Willisham.

The Limeburners Public House

Residents were asked to indicate how they felt about our local Pub 'The Limeburners' in relation to the community. Some 304 people expressed an opinion of which 245 thought that The Limeburners is an important asset to the community.

"Attend the pub! It's really a hub of this community"

Communications and Information.

We asked you about local communications, how important were they and did you use them. 338 people provided answers to this question.

From those who expressed an opinion, it is clear that more needs to be done to ensure information is available to the Parishioners. The parish website should provide a very useful way of reaching residents but 220 out of the 300 people responding rated it poor. By comparison 243 rated The Link as good.

The Issues

1. More needs to be done to ensure Residents are well informed.

There was a split decision on Village

Noticeboards where 147 people rated them highly, whilst 137 thought they were poor.

Health and Welfare Facilities

At present, there are no Doctors Surgeries situated within the boundary of the Parish. Residents have the choice of using those available in the Bildeston or Needham Market who also provide a Tuesday morning Surgery held in the village hall in Somersham.

The Future

1. Raise awareness of village website and provide a link to the Link magazine.
2. Ensure that notice boards in the main locations are kept up to date.

There were some seventeen health/welfare organisations listed in this question and residents were asked to rate the quality of service received from those they had used in the past six months. From the total of 309 responses, it was noticeable that apart from Doctors (294) Dispensary (274) and Dentists (225) very few respondents had cause to use the other services. There were however some residents who had made use of the other organisations listed and although the numbers were quite small the majority rated the service received from average to excellent.

Faith and Religious Buildings

In response to the question "is a place of faith important to you" 142 of the 334 replies said yes for worship and 187 for baptism, weddings and funerals.

Also 130 indicated that the buildings were important for the community and 189 for their historical value.

Community Involvement

One of the objectives of the Parish Plan is to gather ideas on what can be done, both now and in the future to improve community spirit and encourage people to become involved in making the Parish a better place to live.

The questions posed were:

A) Would you be interested in attending new clubs/activities in Offton/Willisham?

Question 'A' was a multiple selection question and 186 people responded to the eight items that were listed and there were a good number of other suggestions such as Quiz, Coffee Mornings, Radio Club, Dancing, Photography, History Group, Yoga, Internet Cafe, and Lunch Club to list just few.



B) If community events were planned, which of the following would you be prepared to do?



There were 146 responses to question 'B' another multiple question which indicated that there are a good number of people who are prepared to help with various functions.

Residents who wanted to become involved and help in any way were requested to append their contact details on a separate sheet. The hope being that a core of willing helpers might be formed to help out with a range of activities before the publication of the Parish Plan.

"Lack of village shop and other essential services"

"No bus to Needham Market"

"Village Green/Social Area"

Utilities

Broadband speed and mobile reception were universally rated as being poor.

The Issues

1. Poor Mobile Reception.
2. Poor Broadband Speeds



The landline telephone service was generally thought to be satisfactory to good.

Street lighting and road sweeping were two areas most people felt were poor.

The Future

1. Lobby companies to try to improve mobile reception.
2. Lobby BT Open Reach and support other groups to improve Broadband speeds.

Traffic and Transport

The Issues.

1. Traffic speed.
2. Poor public bus service.
3. Poor car parking
4. Inadequate Road cleaning and winter weather service.
5. Overgrown verges.

Most residents have access to a car, but the youth of the Parish use a bus (30%) while the remainder used bicycles (38%) or walking (32%) as a means of getting to places outside the Parish.



Traffic and Roads

Of the households surveyed 34% experienced vehicles being parked poorly, while 35% noted overgrown or problem verges and 42% noted danger spots.



Some 23% of households felt that more or better parking was needed.

Unsafe Road Conditions

There were numerous comments regarding road safety and speeding. These came from all areas of the parish. The key areas are listed on the next page.



More than one resident was unhappy that the buses went to Bildeston rather than to Needham Market (which has far better and more onward connections).

"Better maintained footpaths".

"Safe roadside pavement to Willisham Church".

"Litter and Dog waste should be picked up".

"Cut hedge".

The Future

1. Lobby for Traffic calming measures.
2. Lobby for a change to bus service to include Offton and connect to Needham Market.
3. Press the County Council for speed calming and road improvement measures through the villages and where buses and Lorries often travel.
4. Cut verges and hedges to improve visibility at problem areas.
5. Lobby County Council to maintain existing pavements and provide paved or all weather walkway to Barking Tye and Willisham Church



Offton and Willisham Village Plan Youth Report

The questionnaire was completed by 51 young people between the ages of 8 to 17 years, 20 from Willisham, 24 from Offton and 6 from other areas.

53% are male and 47% are female.

The largest group is between 12-15 years being 48%, the other age groups 8-11 and 16-17 at 28% and 24% are fairly even.

Travelling to visit friends outside the villages.

49 young people answered the question about where their friends live, the majority being in Ipswich / Stowmarket, Somersham, Offton and Willisham. Among others listed were Wattisham, Felixstowe, Woodbridge and Colchester, to mention a few.

Mode of transport is a difficulty, 94% giving travelling as a passenger by car, presumably driven by parents, 38% also cycled, 32% walked and 30% used the bus. Other methods mentioned were train and community minibus.

7 young people specifically mentioned the bus service,

"the bus is too expensive and doesn't come often enough"

"there are not enough buses to town, they come at awkward times"

"it's hard to find out bus times (the website is wrong)"

"more regular buses because there aren't many"

Facilities for young people

The replies here highlight the fact that there are no facilities for young

people in either village, 36% of those replying to the question about possible facilities were interested in a youth club, and 32% in drama, art and music, which could be included in a youth club.

Other activities mentioned included skateboarding, and outdoor activities.

The most popular times for a club to be held, were 6-8pm for the younger age group, and 7-9pm for the older ones.

There was interest shown in all activities mentioned in the questionnaire, other interests specified include, arts and crafts, drum kit, and homework catch up!

The Issues

Many of the Issues voiced by young people were raised in response to the general questionnaire and are dealt with elsewhere.

Issues affecting young people especially are:

1. There are no facilities or activities specifically for young people.
2. It is difficult getting to visit friends and places outside the villages or just into Ipswich.
3. There is nowhere to meet or hang out.
4. No play areas in either village.



Safety in the Villages

Only a few young people had concerns about safety in the villages. 7% felt unsafe, “when the road is icy and slippery” or “On the road outside Middlewood cottages” (this seems to be related to traffic conditions).

Things young people like about living here

Top of the list is the countryside, and the quiet and peacefulness, the people are friendly, the wild life is interesting, it is good for walking, and it is safe.

Things young people dislike about living here

The Issues

1. Lack of post office.
2. Better Broadband.
3. Better bus service.
4. Promote on Village website.

Poor bus service is the main complaint. Also,

“There is nothing to do” “No social activities”

“Nowhere to meet”

“People moan at you for playing football”

“Some adults do not like children playing in the village. They need to accept that it is our village too”

How things could be improved

Provide a better bus service, have a local shop, provide more social activities e.g. youth club and play area and somewhere for young people to meet.

‘Everyone seems friendly and a quiet place to live’

‘Good for walking’

‘Wildlife is interesting’

The way forward

1. Look into ways of providing transport for evening activities at other locations.
2. A youth club and more social activities but properly organised.
3. A better bus service.
4. Provision of playground and play areas (especially in Willisham).

Business

Thirty firms or individuals responded to the business questionnaire. Fourteen had six or more employees and the rest were individual operations. Temporary and subcontract employees were used by approximately one-third of the businesses.



Businesses were mostly run from home (68%), with agricultural holdings accounting for

(17%) with the balance being 'others' including the Limeburners Public House.

Businesses had varied opinions about the benefits and disadvantages of our Parish contributing to their success. Most were very self-sufficient, so they did not rely on Public Transport, or need access to a skilled workforce.

The landline telephone service was rated Satisfactory to Good by 95% of businesses whereas 57% rated the mobile telephone service as Bad to Unsatisfactory.

Business response was strongest concerning bad or unsatisfactory street cleaning (14%) and winter weather service (25%). Most businesses did not use on street parking and felt there was sufficient parking to operate effectively.

The Future

1. Improve mobile phone reception and Broadband speed.
2. Seek improvements to public transport.
3. Investigate how village businesses can be promoted on website.



Summary

Overall, we could look at the results and say that there were no great surprises. Before we started we already knew (from our own experience) about many of the problems we come across living in the Parish. But this isn't the point.

It is all very well for each of us individually, to complain about the lack of mobile service, poor bus schedule, non-existent children's facilities or traffic speeding through the villages, but with the Parish Plan, we have finally managed, with a common voice, to make these concerns clear and concrete, with actual numbers of people to whom these are concerns.

Of course some of the issues were more important than others, and that is why we asked you to vote on a priority for them. Thus some actions received 75% of votes (Traffic measures), whilst others, initially considered important like a Village shop, only received 2 votes.

In the final summary there were 5 main actions that were considered by you as high priority.

Traffic calming. This seemed to be a problem throughout the parish, both in terms of speed and danger spots. It should be noted that many of the people speeding are residents of our own villages.



Utilities. In today's society, it is not acceptable to have poor or non-existent mobile and broadband services.

Bus service. Buses are infrequent and the routes are poor. Access to Needham Market instead of Bildeston would provide locals with access to shops, health services and onward travel.



Linking Willisham to Barking Tye. This may seem a strange request, but by providing a safe way for children and parents to walk the 400m from Willisham to Barking will answer several problems highlighted in the plan such as providing a play area for children, an open space that is off-road and access to Barking Village Hall.

Evening classes in the Village hall. Currently the village hall is underutilised, and providing evening classes would be both an excellent use of the space and benefit to many in the community.

So, in going forward, the Village plan and Actions will be submitted to the Parish Council. It is their responsibility to champion these and to liaise with the partner organisations listed overleaf to try and bring about some of the actions listed.



Action Plan

Action	Partners	Priority
Traffic calming measures and lower speed limits together with visibility improvements at problem points.	Suffolk CC and MSDC	High
Lobby for improved broadband Improved mobile phone reception.	Suffolk CC / BT (broadband) Parish Council/Supplier (Mob)	High
Lobby for improved bus service/Community Transport	Suffolk CC	High
Provide a footpath from Willisham to Barking Tye.	Suffolk CC	High
Investigate the setting up of adult evening classes in the village hall	Village hall Committee	High
Request a footpath from Willisham to Willisham Church.	Suffolk CC	Medium
Provide an open space play area in Willisham.	Mid-Suffolk District Council	Medium
Consider how the following facilities might be provided:		Medium
composting scheme,	Mid-Suffolk District Council	"
allotments,	Mid-Suffolk District Council	"
wild flower garden,	Mid-Suffolk District Council	"
playing field,	Mid-Suffolk District Council	"
Play area.	Village hall Committee	"
Raise awareness of the parish website and ensure that the notice boards are kept up to date.	Parish Council	Medium
Establish clubs for young people in the new Offton and Willisham village hall	Village hall Committee	Medium
Organise verge clean up groups.	Parish Council	Low
Lobby for bus shelters at appropriate locations.	Suffolk CC	Low
Investigate and develop new social activities including a gardening club, rambling club and a book club.	Village hall Committee	Low
Investigate the setting up of mother & toddlers group and playgroup in the village hall	Village hall Committee	Low
Investigate whether there is sufficient support for a village shop.	Parish Council	Low

Acknowledgements

Parish Plan Steering Group

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The Steering Group are grateful to all those residents who contributed their opinions, views and ideas as well as their support for this Plan. Thank you all.

