

# Parish Plan Update

## Monitoring of activities between 2009 and 2011

In 2009 the West Bergholt Parish Plan was adopted by the Parish Council as a forward plan for projects and initiatives which represented the wishes of the community determined by extensive research and surveys of local opinion.

A number of activity areas were devised to encompass the wide range of projects put forward. These areas are summarised in the adjacent box, and in the three years that have elapsed a number of projects have been examined and a few introduced. This newsletter summarises the successes and challenges that

have taken place and acts as a launch pad for the refreshment of the plan both in terms of projects and in the context of the new moves towards neighbourhood planning, Big Society and localism.

The strap line adopted to promote the plan “moving forward together” is more relevant than ever!



Eight main areas of village life were targeted to enable the community to move forward together

- Social & Community
- Environment
- Village Amenities
- Shops & Facilities
- Housing & Planning
- Community Safety & Crime
- Transport
- Democracy

### Successes and challenges- a summary

The Parish Plan Steering Group has been both surprised and perhaps a little disappointed about the progress that has been made. The surprise has come from how easily some aspects have been to get moving, for instance the broadband initiative which initially looked daunting, and the formation of the BYG. Disappointing aspects have arisen on highway matters and some aspects of environment and amenity actions. The challenge as always is not simply to think of good ideas but to assemble willing helpers to get things moving! Clearly those aspects which are “market driven” or involve other larger organisations have to move at a different pace. A full listing of both successes and challenges appears on the village website.

### Planning for the future - a new approach or more of the same?

The Parish Plan stands at a crossroads. Much has been achieved but much remains. It would be relatively easy to refresh the plan and gradually whittle away at some of the more achievable actions which remain to be tackled. However a new wave of local planning legislation is finding its way on to the statute books. Under the Localism Act, it is now likely that power will be devolved down to smaller administrative units such as parishes or neighbourhoods, who will work with their larger counterparts, District and County Councils, with all bodies having a new duty to “collaborate”. The Parish Plan Steering Group will look at these possibilities and will itself collaborate on project or more serious planning activity as the case may be.



# Social and Community

This area of the plan examined how the community focus in the village could be enhanced and developed through a number of initiatives. A wide range of activities were identified in the plan and the following were short listed for development: the provision of a youth club; improved use of the tennis courts; promotion of the website and better use of notice boards and other sources of information. These areas are examined below.

## Formation of Bergholt Youth Group (BYG)

This initiative was requested frequently during the surveys which underpinned the Parish Plan's formulation. Now firmly established and operating out of the Orpen Hall, the group meets every fortnight, has a regular attendance of over 50 children generally aged between 10 and 15. The BYG has been assisted by securing grants to fund the provision of activity equipment and older members act as leaders to assist in the running of the Group.



## Improved use of the Web and Other Information Outlets

The Village Website has gone from strength to strength and attracts over 1000 users every month. Many clubs and societies advertise their activities on line and news and other information items are regularly updated to enable the site to have a "live" feel about. Use of social networking facilities such as Twitter and Facebook have been incorporated. More recently, and to act as a complement to the quarterly Village Bulletin, a monthly newsletter has been started in recognition of the fact that a range of news items need to be covered on a regular basis. Finally the village notice boards have been refreshed and replaced with quality display cases which enable a range of information to be displayed at popular locations such as outside the Co-op, Orpen Hall, tennis courts and allotments.

## Improved Use of the Tennis Courts

This facility was considered to be underused in the Parish Plan surveys and in order to enable its use by the BYG, increased use was encouraged by extending the times of operation and type of activities that could take place. This entailed submitting an application to the Borough Council to amend the coverage of the planning permission originally granted in 2000. The activities and times of use are now the remit of the Parish Council.



Environmental concerns were a frequent feature of the surveys and covered many items including reducing nuisances such as dog fouling and incidence of litter, as well as looking to promote the use of the open space in the village and conserving and enhancing the condition of the public rights of way network.

## Reducing nuisance of dog fouling and litter.

These aspects are perhaps not the most glamorous of activities to initiate, but considerable success has been achieved by introducing regular litter pick days principally by participating in the annual campaigns and by encouraging a range of ages to participate.

In addition both the village handymen have good knowledge of where litter tends to be dropped and target the worst areas regularly. They also deal promptly with any graffiti. The incidence of dog-fouling has been reduced by running campaigns, erecting notices and enforcing the areas where dogs are not permitted such as the Lorkin Daniel Field. Additionally, liaison takes place with the Dog Warden service at Colchester Borough Council.



## Looking after our Rights of Way

The village has excellent access to a number of adjacent areas of the countryside through the quite extensive public rights of way networks. This includes part of the 81 mile long Essex Way which passes through the village en route to Harwich or Epping



Maintaining these is very much a partnership matter and the parish has joined the P3s network or Parish Paths Partnership. The P3 is funded by Essex County Council and aims to give local people the resources and skills to enable them to be involved in maintaining and promoting their local Public Rights of Way. The Parish Council has designated a Parish Councillor as a footpaths officer to assist with liaison with the County Council.

## Looking after our open spaces, trees and ponds

The Parish Plan set out a desire to maintain and monitor our precious open spaces to the best affect whether they be used for informal or formal use. Over the past three years all three ponds have been cleaned and cleared of debris and invasive reed. Additionally sympathetic maintenance regimes have been introduced to support our Heath and open spaces at Poors Field, the Allotment gardens and the Lorkin Danniell playing field. This is a constant process and the village is fortunate to be able to undertake these activities through its two dedicated handymen. Another successful piece of collaborative work has seen many of our important trees covered by a new and updated schedule of Tree Preservation Orders.

# Shops, Facilities & Village Amenities

A wide range of ideas emerged under the broad banner of improving facilities and amenities in the village. These ranged from the quality of refuse collection, range of shops, concern over the cleanliness of play areas, provision of recreational facilities and the then growing issue of poor broadband services. Whereas it is true that we have one welcome addition to the shops available in the village, it has been harder to influence this aspect of our community than many would have liked. Nevertheless two notable areas of success are highlighted below.

## Promotion of and supply of better broadband

Now high up on people's "must have" facilities when considering a house move, broadband is quickly becoming essential to enable a wide range of activities to take place whether it be home shopping or working from home.

Traditional suppliers of broadband are hampered by the poor quality telephone lines that connect the village to the outside world. Thanks to the involvement of the Parish Planners, Parish Council as well as many local people in the village, provision of fast wireless broadband (supplied by a local supplier County Broadband) has been secured. It is now available to the majority of the village at speeds between 2 and 8Mb/sec. Just under 100 households are already connected and it is hoped that this take up will increase over the coming year. This service is now set to really take off with speeds in excess of 25Mb/sec to be introduced in 2012.



## Promotion of improved sporting facilities

After ten years of operation under the auspices of the Millennium Sports Committee, the Lorkin Danniell games area has been given a boost by its incorporation as a Parish Council run facility and through the energetic promotion by a new management committee made up of users and Parish Councillors.

A revised booking system is now in operation complete with improved secure access arrangements and the facility is better promoted and marketed through a notice board and other initiatives. A partnership with the Co-op has been established so that ad hoc bookings can be made easily.

The decline in family membership has been arrested and more use is already being made of the ability to book occasional use. The club has been renamed as the West Bergholt Sports Club.

# Housing and Planning

In the village surveys the main areas of focus were concern over over-development and threat of new housing; concern over poor design and the provision of sheltered and affordable housing. Whereas the provision of affordable and sheltered accommodation requires the right set of circumstances to present themselves, good progress has been made on defining quality and appropriate developments. It has been a priority to contain as far as possible the amount of new development that will take place in the future.

## Ensuring our village does not become over-developed

A concerted effort was made during the adoption of a new Borough planning blueprint to ensure that the village did not become a focus for over-development. Only 50 new houses were allocated in the adopted plan and a number of speculative attempts by developers to get more areas of land designated for building were successfully defended by a mixture of community and Parish Council interventions.

## Promoting planning in the village through the Village Design Statement



Just because the number of houses proposed for the village is modest, it does not guarantee that all development will be of high quality, and underestimates the amount of day to day development in the form of extensions and re-building projects that will come forward.

Planning applications are made at a rate of around 50 per year. Although there are guidelines laid out at Borough level as to what constitutes acceptable design, such advice cannot hope to cover the local distinctiveness of each suburb or village area. In order to promote appropriate and compatible design in our village a Village Design Statement has been produced to help determine benchmarks for good quality design and development. Produced as a collaboration between the Parish Plan Group and the Parish Council, the guide has been adopted by Colchester Borough Council as official guidance that all planning applications will need to satisfy.

The guide covers a number of areas as well as design guidelines, and tries to illustrate what makes our village distinctive and full of character. The Parish Council Planning Committee will be using this guide to help determine its stance on all Planning Applications from now on. The committee welcomes pre-application discussions to assist with ensuring good quality comple-



# Community Safety

Feeling safe in our community featured strongly in the surveys as a real concern. It doesn't really matter whether this is due to the perceived road safety fear with so many young children in the village, the growing incidence of antisocial behaviour or simply because the community isn't sure how it is being protected. What matters is the provision of good information and initiatives to reinforce what we hope is a safe environment in our community.

## Reducing speeding traffic

Early on in the writing of the Parish Plan, the Parish Council was successful in attracting a grant to install a VAS (vehicle activated sign) in Lexden Road on the approach to the Orpen Hall and Heathlands school. This sign has now been in place for 3 years and has a "calming" effect on traffic passing through the village ensuring that motorists have every encouragement to slow down.



Whereas the VAS is an ever-present guardian against speeding, more transitory means are just as effective and a successful community speed-watch initiative was launched in 2010. Here trained villagers complete with signage, fluorescent jackets and the all important radar gun, help to encourage reduced speeds such as Colchester Road.

## Improving local policing and raising awareness of crime in the village

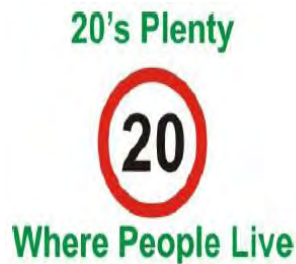
West Bergholt has historically had low crime levels but the lack of information about actual crime, and the lack of clarity about neighbourhood policing, combined to create uncertainty in the village. A concerted effort not just in our village but elsewhere, resulted in far more clarity about how many Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) patrol our village, what their role is, and how they can be contacted.



A number of high level meetings have been held with the Colchester Police and a variety of topics debated. These conversations have built up confidence in the current policing levels and where and how issues can be raised. We may not yet have our own dedicated "bobby on the beat" and may never get this type of provision, but we are now much better informed as a result of accurate and dedicated crime statistics for our village, a fortnightly police van stationed in New Church Road, an enthusiastically chaired Neighbourhood Action Panel and named neighbourhood officers charged with maintaining a frequent presence in the village.

Transport issues dominated the responses to the Parish Plan surveys, and made up many of the actions in the plan itself. It's fair to say that this area is difficult to influence by people in the village, either as individuals or those in organisations such as the Parish Council. Progress such as it appears below - suffice to say it is work in progress.

## Managing traffic in the village



The Parish Council has adopted a proactive approach to the issues raised in the surveys. A traffic working party has been assembled and a blueprint for the New Church Road, Chapel Road area of the village established. Measures discussed include a one way system, improved pedestrian facilities, restrictions on waiting and loading near the Co-op and a 20mph zone in this area. Proposals have been sent to Essex County Council for consideration, but due to cuts in highway budgets little

## Developing more sustainable travel patterns

A mixed response to suggestions for improving walking, cycling and passenger transport has been received. An idea to develop a community minibus scheme attracted little interest after a survey in the Village Bulletin and a grant application with Essex County Council for a community bus service foundered after government funding dried up. On the plus side, Heathlands school has produced its first travel plan and now participates regularly in Bikability Cycle Training. In addition cycling stands for pupils arriving by bike have been introduced.



## Promoting more information about bus services and cycling

Our two bus operators continue to provide an adequate service and the Parish Council has appointed a Parish Transport representative to enable our voice to be heard at meetings with bus operators.



Bus information now appears on the village web site which also contains a guide to a recreational cycle route on our doorstep.

## Winter snow clearing services

The past two winters have shown how disruptive heavy snowfall can be to day to day travel needs. The Parish Council has initiated a footway snow clearance scheme with volunteers from across the village to assist with snow clearance and the subsequent laying of salt. This scheme is operated in partnership with Essex and Colchester Councils who provide salt and snow clearing apparatus.

# Democracy

Many ideas were proposed for ways in which a greater awareness and participation in democratic processes could be achieved in the village. The Parish Council adopted the Parish Plan and has reinvigorated its committees to reflect the plan's aspirations. Some of these initiatives are outlined below.

## Improving awareness and linkages between the community and the Parish Council

Over the last three years the Parish Council has adopted a number of new working practices which all aim to get the village more involved with decision making and pursuing initiatives.

- Introduced a "have your say" 15 mins at the start of each PC meeting
- Reinvigorated the annual Parish Meeting
- Introduced more forward planning aspects to committee business
- Promoted the village in The Best Kept Village competition
- Joined forces with other groups such as the Parish Plan Group, Community Speedwatch and the Neighbourhood Action Panel



## Improving Communication

The main means of organised communication in the village are the Village Bulletin and Website. These contain general information covering village life and supplement other more specialised publications such as the Good News Church parish newsletter.

However although the website is the main means of providing up to date information not everyone uses this on a day to day basis and some will not use computers at all. To fill the gap between the quarterly bulletins a newsletter is being trialed and copies are made available around the village at convenient locations such as the Co-op, Ash's and other village outlets. A dedicated Parish Councillor compiles the newsletter.



## Why not help with the future of the parish planning?

If you have enjoyed reading about, or are intrigued by the work of the Parish Plan, or would like to help with Parish Council business, why not make contact to see how you could help? The Parish Council has vacancies presently, and the Parish Plan Steering Group welcomes members of the community whatever their interests. Please feel free to contact the Chairman of the Parish Plan Steering Group, Chris Stevenson at [chrisstevenson@orange.net](mailto:chrisstevenson@orange.net) or on 01206 241708.