



WIVELSFIELD PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2014

INFRASTRUCTURE, FACILITIES & LOCAL ECONOMY FOCUS GROUP

CLOSING REPORT FOR THE FOCUS GROUP

Authors: Craig Bowden, John Wigzell,
Andrew Leen, Ian Dawson & Jason Humphrey
June 2014

Introduction

The objective of the group is to assess the current community assets in terms of infrastructure, services and leisure facilities, and to analyse business and employment opportunities, so that the future needs for the parish can be identified and built into the Neighbourhood Plan as policies where appropriate.

Executive Summary

Feedback has drawn out a range of issues and opportunities, but with a large number of respondents wishing the village to remain unchanged as much as possible.

“The very essence of this village is the green and the woods and any change to this would ruin the village.”

There is no demand for large scale development but an acceptable level of agreement that small scale development will be necessary if the village is to remain vibrant.

There is concern, however, that the current infrastructure can support only a relatively minor level of growth.

Whilst many people wish to retain the existing character of the village, it is arguable that any further development comprising upmarket houses of the Band F,G and H type would not be consistent with a younger and more dynamic profile, might not help engender an active contribution to village life, and might further exacerbate the existing traffic and parking issues.

Based on the evidence collected, the Focus Group recommends:

1. We should focus on areas that are deliverable and achievable. There is opportunity to:
 - a. Deliver high speed broadband and improved mobile network coverage
 - b. Improve provision of re-cycling drop boxes
 - c. Build upon the existing leisure facilities at the village green, such as providing an improved sports pavilion that includes better changing rooms & gym and additional outdoor activities e.g. tennis courts
 - d. Provide a broader choice of children’s / youths organised clubs and events
 - e. Improve the provision of shops that offer basic groceries outside the eastern part of Wivelsfield Green
 - f. Open a tea room / coffee shop
2. Work with local transport companies to explore the possibility of improved service. We need to do as much as we can to minimise the impact of traffic on the village and neighbouring parishes.
3. Keep pressure on ESCC to implement the agreed reduction in speed limits to 30 mph through the village and 20 mph around the primary school.

4. Liaise with local authority partners to investigate the introduction of cycle paths: what are costs, timescales etc.
5. Try to ensure that improvements are made to infrastructure and facilities whilst retaining the village “feel” to the area, and keeping the spirit of community cohesion and ‘togetherness’.
6. Above all, try to retain the pleasant rural character of the village and the parish which is so much prized by those who live here, and is the principle reason for many of them being here in the first place. The overwhelming majority of survey respondents (nearly 90%) thought that the preservation of openly accessible green space should have the highest priority in the Neighbourhood Plan; two thirds wanted the protection and enhancement of local wildlife to have highest priority in the plan.

Background Information

The population profile of the parish is heavily weighted to the over 45 age group, and there is a relative weakness in the 25 to 40 year age group. This is obviously correlated with the type of housing which predominates in the village.

There was a slight upward shift in the local population from 2005 to 2006 (of about 3.5%), and a corresponding fall from 2010 to 2011, but broadly speaking the population is stable.

The median price of detached homes in the village was £490,000 in 2009 (Source: Land Registry), and is almost certainly now well over £½million.

From the Census data, 30% of households are in Council Tax Bands F, G or H. The equivalent national figure is 9%, and even in South East England it is only 15%. At the other end of the scale, 3.5% of households in the parish are in Bands A and B, compared to a national figure of 44%. There is a massive imbalance in detached homes (53% vs 22% nationally); and very few terraced houses (14% vs 25%)

Summary of Evidence & feedback

Employment

Employment within the Parish is currently very limited with individuals travelling to Hayward’s Heath, Burgess Hill, and Brighton to work as well as commuting to London. There are no local vacancies registered with Job Centre plus.

The General Survey indicates that 24% of respondents run a business from or work from home. Of those that do, the comments mainly covered the need for faster broadband.

Local Economy

The local survey indicated that most people felt that the infrastructure could not support more businesses in the village, and most respondents felt that they were not required.

Feedback in the General Survey shows that 75% of respondents felt current infrastructure could not support business growth in the Parish. The comments explain that High speed internet, road access, off-road parking and public transport are all inadequate to support new businesses. Whilst broadband and public transport could be improved to an adequate standard significant upgrades to our roads and off-road parking is unrealistic.

Of those that would welcome more businesses locally the comments mainly covered the wishes for a café/tea room, a doctor's surgery, more convenience shops and a pharmacy. Whilst there is probably not enough market demand for a doctor's surgery and pharmacy a weekly doctor's sessions in a "health room" and working with a local pharmacy to offer deliveries to the area are more feasible ways to provide these services.

Leisure, Social, Sport & Entertainment

The village has a strong sense of community, much of it centred on the village hall, village green, church, pub, shop and school. These facilities and businesses are vital local infrastructure to retain as people want to retain this sense community as far as possible.

66% say they have a sense of 'belonging to the neighbourhood'. 84% of Wivelsfield residents were 'satisfied with the local area as a place to live'. (Place survey 2008)

Wivelsfield has an active sporting community and the general survey shows the majority think there are enough sports facilities in the parish. The majority comments from those that think there could be more call for Tennis Courts and a few call for a gym or outdoor gym. Some comments indicate that a few facilities could be improved such as the cricket nets and pavilion.

Whilst 55% of the general survey respondents think there should be more for the young people in the Parish there were few suggestions in the comments for more physical facilities. Many of the comments centre on organised clubs for young people such as sports clubs, scouts / beavers / cubs / brownies, youth groups. A number of the comments relating to more groups would like to see structured activities to advance young people's skillsets and talents or generate new interests rather than just facilitating play.

From the survey results received (residential, school and youth group) the following facilities were put forward as being needed:

- Cinema, Tennis courts, Skateboard Park, Swimming pool
- Supermarket, McDonalds
- Development of cycle paths to nearby towns.
- Improved facilities for youth groups.
- Improved transport links to nearby towns.
- Doctor's surgery or some facility for local health care.

(It must be said that the call for a McDonalds is entirely from the primary school children, who also want a zip wire on the village green. Whilst these children's voices might be an entirely appropriate source when we are considering the 20 year development of the village, the older residents probably don't share their vision or their desire for a local fast food outlet).

The secondary school feedback demonstrated clearly that pupils appreciated the rural nature of Wivelsfield, and enjoyed that aspect of living here. On the downside they were concerned about fast moving traffic.

Transport

Distance to travel for services and employment, together with availability of public transport, is an important consideration.

It has been shown in the data on travel and transport in the Census that Wivelsfield Parish has an average of 1.8 cars per household. This is an extraordinarily high figure. (The comparative figures for Lewes, South East England and nationally are 1.2, 1.3, and 1.1). It stems largely from the fact that there is little or no public transport, few local facilities and therefore the need to travel for shopping or work, and also the fact the type of household typical of the parish tends to be larger and relatively well off. 59% of houses have 2 or more cars; 19% (nearly one home in 5) has 3 cars or more.

It is common ground that further development within the Parish will add to congestion in the neighbouring village of Ditchling.

There are a number of bus services that serve the village of Wivelsfield Green and the hamlet of Wivelsfield. There are issues with both the frequency, time of last bus and lack of Sunday service, whilst in the case of the number 40 (the Brighton service) the location of the nearest stop on the B2012 is far from convenient for the majority of the village residents.

Wivelsfield Train Station is about a 2.5 mile drive but is very short of parking spaces. The more comprehensive rail service at Haywards Heath is almost 4 miles by road and Burgess Hill Station is over 3 miles away.

Utilities

Gas, Electricity & Water

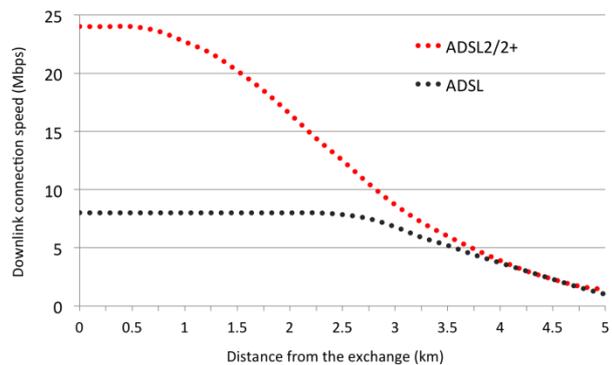
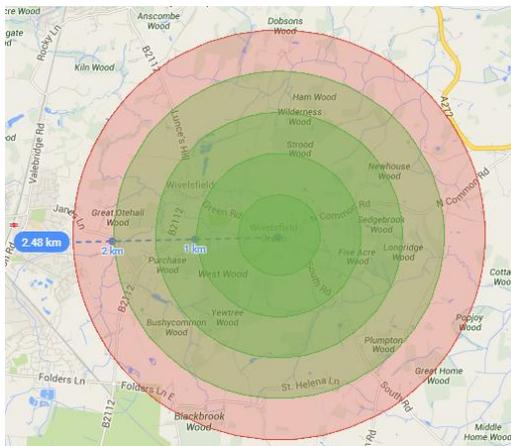
The majority of residents within the parish benefit from mains supply of all key utilities. The only area of feedback from the survey covers the reliability of the service, particularly electricity which is prone to failure following bad weather.

Broadband

Broadband has been identified in feedback in relation to business infrastructure and as a residential utility in the villages of Wivelsfield and Wivelsfield Green. The west of the Parish is connected to the Burgess Hill exchange and is provided with fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) however speeds,

whilst better than many areas in the rest of the Parish, are still lower than the UK average due to old cabling.

The Wivelsfield Exchange has an Ofcom Classification of “Market 1” as “This exchange has BT Wholesale as the sole provider of broadband services”. Due to the size of the market served by the exchange this is unlikely to change as it is not profitable for LLU providers such as BSKyB, Talktalk and Cable & Wireless to provide their own infrastructure at the exchange. This will leave the exchange outside of a competitive market for the foreseeable future leaving the exchange as low priority for future upgrades and improvements. Currently BT Wholesale provide ADSL Max services (speeds up to 8mbps) through the exchange and it will be covered by the e-Sussex project and upgraded in 2015 to at least ADSL2+ (speeds up to 24mbps). Due to the drop in speeds over the distance from the exchange only properties within 2.5km will see any real increase in broadband speeds after the exchange has been upgraded. Most ISP’s will leave properties outside of the 2.5km distance on the existing ADSL Max service as it will be more stable over longer distances. The map shows 2.5km from the exchange with 0.5km changes in colour to show the areas covered, the graph gives an indication of what speeds could be expected at a range of 0 to 5km from the exchange. This is only a rough guide as phone lines are not laid in straight lines to properties and line length can be considerably longer than the distance from the exchange.



The result of the upgrade will provide significantly better broadband to Wivelsfield Green from 5-8mbps to 14-24mbps however Wivelsfield will only see a small improvement and rural areas will be too far from the exchange to see any improvement and ISP’s will most likely leave these properties on the older ADSL Max or ADSL products leaving them with speeds of 1-3mbps.

FTTC would provide better speeds to almost all the properties served by the Wivelsfield Exchange as the drop in speeds is seen over the distance from the Green Cabinets distributed within the exchange area and not the exchange itself.

Mobile Coverage

According to the online mobile coverage checkers the west of the Parish is well served by all three main mobile infrastructure providers (EE, o2 and Vodafone). EE and O2 provide “OK” indoor & “Good” outdoor coverage for mobile calls to the majority of the villages of Wivelsfield and Wivelsfield Green however 3g internet coverage from both is weak and not suitable for mobile broadband.

Waste & Recycling

Waste collection provision is provided by ESCC with separate collections covering general household and recycling.

However, additional re-cycling drop boxes located around the parish would be welcomed.

Education

There is a relatively new Primary School catering for the 7 years of Primary Education. The Lewes D.C’s Rural Settlement Strategy (Jan 2013) indicates in paragraph 24.4 that the school roll was 142 and net capacity 140, with mixed age group classes. Further development within the parish will see demand on school places increase, and in turn require additional capacity to be created

The majority of secondary school-age children in the village go to Chailey School by school bus.

Sources of Information

- Questionnaire delivered to all residential properties within the parish. There was a 27% response rate to the survey.
- Census data (2011), Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) Rural evidence project, and other data sources recommended by AiRS.
- STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT OF OPTIONS FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENT TO 2030 Report - Richard Walker
- To date there have been 2 exhibitions. The first on 13th 2014 March in conjunction with the Annual Parish Meeting. In addition a Neighbourhood Plan open day was held at the village school on Saturday 7th June 2014. During the course of these exhibitions attendees had the opportunity of putting forward their views on the future for Wivelsfield Parish. There were approximately 90 and 150 attendees respectively.
- Informal consultations with residents and interested parties.
- Survey conducted with pupils of Wivelsfield primary school and the local youth group.

Appendix 1 – SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village Green <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Well utilised by local sports teams: football, cricket and stoolball. • Shop & sub-Post Office <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The only source for shopping locally, and posting mail • Village Hall <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An asset to the community: it is used for weddings, Village Cinema film nights, mother & toddler groups, blood donation, indoor bowls and various evening classes. • Local pub <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supportive of village life and informal communication centre • Church <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Centre for support and care of many local residents • Village Day (<i>An illustration of the level of community effort and cohesion</i>) 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited local transport <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limited bus service within the village ○ Increases use of cars • Limited local employment • Limited activities for 11-17 age group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identified in the youth survey • Infrastructure cannot cope should large scale development take place (ESCC confirms that any development of 80+ houses would have “unacceptable traffic impact”).
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School expansion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Further housing development already planned for the parish will see demand on school places increase, and will require additional capacity to be created • Development of sports teams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The village green is well used but the sports pavilion is in need of improvement. • Improved broadband speeds may enable more individuals to work from home, thereby reducing car use and traffic problems 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large housing developments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Opportunist developers taking advantage of the failure of LDC to establish a housing land supply for the local authority area, and attempting to pre-empt the creation of Neighbourhood Plans • Traffic increase within village and village roads used as “rat runs” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ As developments grow outside the parish the local roads become short cut routes between Lewes and Haywards Heath.