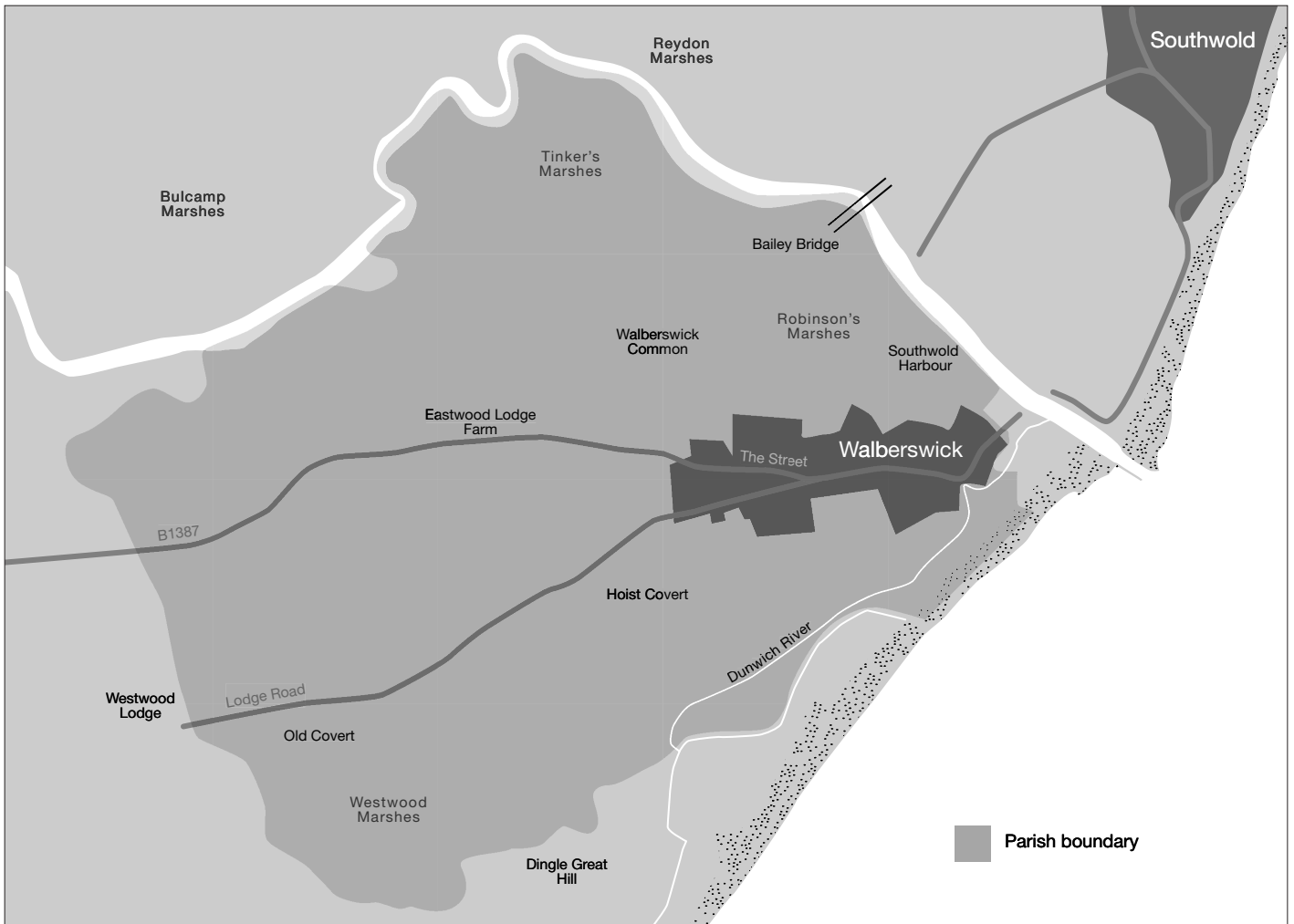


Walberswick Parish Plan

Stage 2: Report and Action Plan





Walberswick village
and the parish boundary

Walberswick Parish Plan

Stage 2: Report and Action Plan

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Introduction

This report marks the conclusion of the second stage in the development of the Walberswick Parish Plan with the publication of more than 50 recommendations for action.

The recommendations are based on the data collected in the survey carried out by the Parish Plan Steering Group in 2010 under the chairmanship of Bill Ungless and published in 2011 as the *Walberswick Parish Plan Stage 1: Survey Report*. The *Survey Report* identified a range of issues of concern to residents and recommended the establishment of focus groups, under the aegis of the Steering Group, to examine these matters in more detail and prepare a plan of action. The proposal was endorsed by the village at the public meeting held to introduce the *Survey Report*.

Since the autumn of 2011, the focus groups have been responsible for analysing the survey data, considering the practical implications of the research, widening the scope of the enquiry where appropriate and, most importantly, producing this report which transforms the findings of the survey into a series of proposals with the potential to play a practical and significant role in determining the future of the village. Taken together with the *Survey Report*, these two documents comprise the Walberswick Parish Plan.

The process of developing the Parish Plan, and in particular the form of the survey, has made use of the methodology devised for the purpose by Suffolk Acre, a long established charity promoting the interests of the County. Suffolk Acre has encouraged the preparation of parish plans, following a Government initiative in favour of increased local decision making.

Why Walberswick needs a plan

The survey and the preparation of the Plan have brought into sharp focus three features that have made, and will continue to make, Walberswick such a special place.

Geographically – almost an Island:

- The many benefits of close proximity to the sea
- The vulnerability of the village to the unpredictable actions of both river and sea
- The importance of the River Blyth both as a means of access to the North Sea and as a barrier to vehicular access to Southwold
- The unusually sharply defined and constrained boundaries of the village
- The condition, relatively rare in the British Isles, of the absence of a road parallel and adjacent to the coast – Walberswick, an isolated settlement 4 miles from the A12, has only one vehicular access and no through traffic
- Even greater isolation caused by the extensive marshes and reed beds that lie to the south of the Parish

Introduction

- All combined with and contributing to easy pedestrian and bicycle access to a wide variety of interesting and beautiful natural environments.

The Ordnance Survey map of the Parish of Walberswick and its surroundings, reproduced on the front and back covers of the *Survey Report*, clearly displays the privileged and, to some extent and in various ways, the highly vulnerable location of the village. Less visible, but equally important in the longer term, is the vulnerability of Walberswick as a coherent and prosperous community.

Historically – a long history of commercial decline and a shorter history of artistic achievement:

- A similar economic fate to Dunwich, also a prosperous port in the Middle Ages
- The reduced status of today's Walberswick compared with what had been a prosperous port and a centre for boat and ship building in the Middle Ages is evident in the magnificent ruins of the very large and important church built to serve a busy and prosperous settlement
- The declining commercial role of Walberswick as a fishing village, throughout the twentieth century
- Nevertheless the parallel flowering of Walberswick, towards the end of the nineteenth, through the twentieth, and continuing into this century, as both a favoured holiday resort and also an artistic community of some significance – including Philip Wilson Steer, the architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and the talented Jennings family.

Sociologically, economically and culturally – a special place:

- New roles throughout the twentieth century as a retirement village and a seasonal holiday resort for discriminating visitors
- One consequence of which has been an ageing population
- Some evidence of a shift towards 'hollowing out', i.e. the danger of too much of the social and commercial life of the village being dominated by the seasonal demands of temporary visitors.

Nevertheless, from the later decades of the nineteenth century until today, Walberswick continues, (for many people, young and old, rich and not so well off, and still including many artists and writers), to be a highly attractive place in which to live and work as well as to visit.

Taking a wider, longer and optimistic view, Walberswick in the early twenty-first century is very well placed, socially and geographically, to take advantage of contemporary technological and social changes such as (i) the increasing power, availability and reliability of electronic communications, (ii) leading to the increased practicality of distributed and home working, (iii) the potential for people to extend their careers through part time working into what would have been considered 50 years ago to be 'old age', and (iv) the present Government's

policy of encouraging 'Localism' – decentralising government through devolving decision making to local communities.

Stimulated by Suffolk Acre and the availability of their survey tools and methodology, the Parish Council and people of Walberswick have recognised the value of creating a Parish Plan to take stock of where we are and where we ought to be and to be more assertive in taking control of the village's destiny.

Developing the Plan

The Parish Plan is a direct expression by the people of Walberswick of the issues that affect them as a community and how they might be addressed. It has no statutory function nor is it enforceable in any legal or bureaucratic sense. Nevertheless, those that do have power (for example local and national authorities) must show that in taking decisions relating to Walberswick they have given consideration to the findings of the survey and to the recommendations of the Plan.

The Parish Plan has been developed to this point independently of the Parish Council. The next phase, involving the preparation and implementation of specific proposals, will require liaison and collaboration with the Council.

The Parish Plan takes each of the 12 subject matters researched by the focus groups, summarises the findings of the *Survey Report* and comments on the issues raised. It then makes recommendations for further action and assigns responsibilities, priorities and an indicative timescale to each activity.

Following the presentation of the Plan to the village, the Steering Group, in liaison with the Parish Council, will establish working parties for each study area. The working parties will be responsible for the development of specific proposals in accordance with the recommendations, taking account also of comments raised at the public meeting and subsequently. Where a number of bodies are identified as having a role in progressing a recommendation, the working party will be responsible for their coordination.

The membership of the working parties will be drawn from the focus groups and other volunteers as necessary. In the case of sea and river defences and traffic and parking, it is proposed to reactivate the Sea Defence Group and the Visitor Management Group to take forward the work of the focus groups.

The tasks required of the working parties will vary according to the topic under consideration. In some cases the major recommendations have already been, or are about to be, put into effect. For example, the Walberswick Toddlers' Group has been successfully operating since March this year and the Community First Responders Group was established in November 2010. In other more complex proposals, such as the provision of affordable housing, a much longer timescale will be required to achieve results. Some matters, for example those relating to sea and river defences, are ongoing. Here, the Sea Defence Group would

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become a standing committee, monitoring the situation into the future and reporting regularly to the village.

Where research required for the development of the Parish Plan is likely to incur cost, working parties should apply to the Steering Group for funding.

The following abbreviations are used throughout this report:

BEG Blyth Estuary Group
CFR Community First Responders
DRT Demand Responsive Transport
EA Environment Agency
SCC Suffolk County Council
SCDC Suffolk Coastal District Council
SDC Sea Defence Group
SMP Shoreline Management Plan
WCPL Walberswick Car Parks Ltd
WCLC Walberswick Common Lands Charity
WPC Walberswick Parish Council
WVHMC Walberswick Village Hall Management Committee
WDC Waveney District Council

The Steering Group

The membership of the Steering Group for Stage 2 of the Plan was established in August 2011 and comprises John Nichols (Chairman), Alvin Hunt (Vice Chairman) Vivien Hunt (Secretary), Ben Cardwell (Treasurer), Peter Byrne, Frank Duffy, Alan Gomm and Chrissie Reeves.

Members of the Focus Groups

John Anderson, Paul Bradley, Robin Buncombe, Peter Byrne, Ben Cardwell, Jenny Cardwell, Nick Crocker, Frank Duffy, Pru Ford-Crush, Rosi Gerrell, Alan Gomm, Jane Gomm, Andrew Hill, Alvin Hunt, Pat Lancaster, Christine Mitchell, Brian Morton, Kevin Murphy, Neil Murray, Patsy Murray, John Nichols, Aubrey Pearson, Barbara Priestman, Chrissie Reeves, Marie Ruth, Julia Sowerbutts, Richard Steward and David Webb.

Financial support

The Steering Group wishes to thank the Walberswick Common Land Charity for its continuing financial support, without which this *Report and Action Plan* could not have been produced. Thanks also to Jessica and Frank Duffy for funding the design and copy editing of this report.

1 Sea and river defences

1.1 Summary of survey responses

The survey revealed widespread concern about the river and sea defences upon which the viability and sustainability of the village of Walberswick depend. Of the more than 450 responses on this subject in the Stage 1 Questionnaire (published in the *Survey Report* in June 2011) the majority expressed concern about the inadequacies and lack of maintenance of the existing defences. 47 householders considered their property to be at risk of flooding in the next 20 years.

High levels of support were recorded for the Shoreline Management Plan (75%), local funding of flood defences (74%) and the Blyth Estuary Group's (BEG) scheme to raise the river banks (90%). However, since only a bare majority of respondents (51%) said they felt properly informed of the issues, these figures may reflect more the widespread desire for action than endorsement of specific proposals. A number of the comments noted in the Appendix to the *Survey Report* referred to the need for more information on the subject.

Recommendation 1.3.10 (p10) proposes that twice-yearly progress reports should be issued to the village on the sea and river defences. The following commentary explains the current proposals in more detail.

1.2 Commentary

The Shoreline Management Plan

The Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) has been prepared by Suffolk Coastal District Council (SCDC), Waveney District Council (WDC) and the Environment Agency (EA) and provides the strategic framework for accommodating coastal change in accordance with DEFRA's policy of managed retreat. The current edition of the Plan (SMP2) proposes the following objectives for our local coastline:

Southwold Harbour and river mouth: *Hold the line*

Walberswick Village: *Hold the line*

Walberswick Dunes: *Managed realignment*

Walberswick to Dunwich (shingle bank and marshes): *Managed realignment*

'Hold the line' means maintaining the existing line of sea defence structures. The reference to Walberswick village relates to the sea wall surrounding the houses to the east of the The Green and Ferry Road.

'Managed realignment', previously termed 'managed retreat', refers to the process of rolling back defence lines as the sea advances inland.

SMP2 does not of itself initiate any actions nor commit funds to the pursuit of these aims.

Proposed action – Southwold Harbour and the river mouth

In March 2012, Waveney District Council, the authority currently responsible for the harbour, commenced the repair of the north dock wall, then at risk of collapse.

The works are now scheduled to be completed in the autumn of 2012. The intention of Waveney District Council is, at some time in the future, to transfer ownership of the 'Harbour Lands' (the harbour and adjoining caravan site) to a charity, the Southwold Harbour Trust, which will become responsible for their maintenance and development. The Trust's business plan includes provision for the maintenance of the south dock wall and the south training arm on the Walberswick side. Together these measures would help secure the river mouth.

The River Blyth

SMP2 also endorses the Environment Agency's strategy for the Blyth Estuary, which is to progressively abandon the maintenance of the river banks over the next 20 years, eventually allowing the marshes to flood with each tide. The resultant increase in the flow rate of the river will accelerate erosion of the banks and risk undermining the harbour walls. The EA would allow the mouth of the river to open to the south to accommodate the additional flow, thus putting at risk and eventually destroying the dunes in the vicinity. The EA has argued in the SMP that Walberswick does not meet Government criteria for the level of expenditure claimed as necessary to rebuild the banks.

The EA's strategy provoked widespread opposition when first published, and in 2006 the Blyth Estuary Group (BEG), comprising representatives of local councils, river users and adjoining landowners, was established to coordinate this response and challenge the proposals. Despite a long and hard struggle, BEG was not successful in forcing a change of plan. Nevertheless, the EA has agreed that 'self help' action can be employed to maintain the river's defensive banks. As a result BEG has devised a scheme, which was granted planning consent in 2009, to import waste soil from construction sites to fill the old soak dyke and, by levying a tipping charge, fund the excavation of new dykes to provide the material required to build up and strengthen the banks.

The intention is to proceed downstream from Tinker's Marsh, raising and strengthening the banks on both sides of the river to the ferry crossing. Progress will depend on the availability of fill but it is envisaged that the project will take at least five years to complete. Work started in 2011 on the first section from Tinker's Marsh to the Bailey Bridge (see Figure 1 overleaf).

1 Sea and river defences

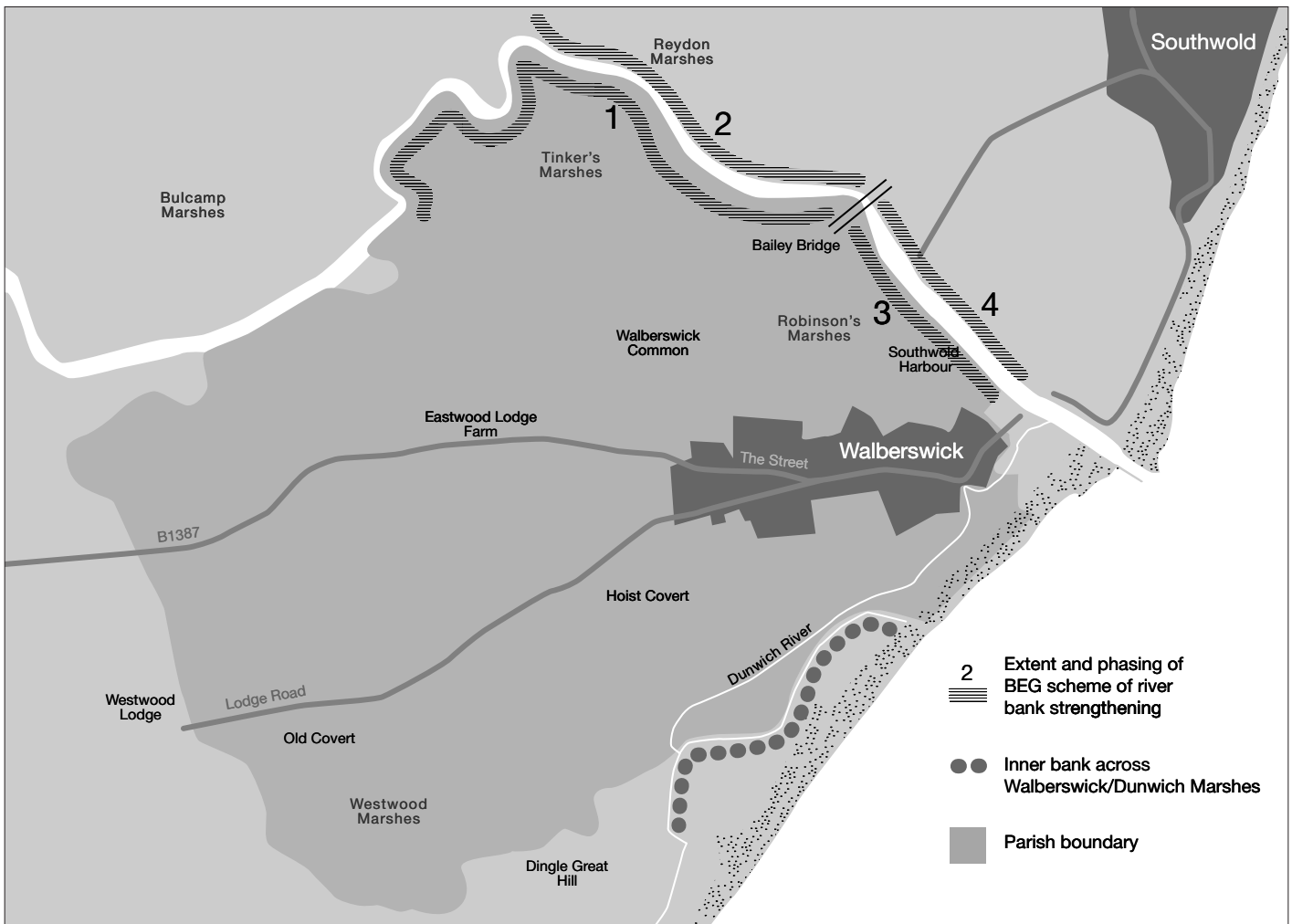


Figure 1
Land defences
Parish boundary

Walberswick to Dunwich frontage and marshes

The EA's strategy for this section of coast is 'managed realignment' (defined above in 1.2). The practice of building up the shingle bank with a bulldozer has been abandoned, allowing the bank to react naturally to wave attack to form a lower but more stable profile. This will result in more frequent 'overtopping' by the sea but should help to prevent major breaches in the shingle ridge. This policy has been endorsed by an independent consultant employed to advise the Walberswick Sea Defence Group (SDG). To minimise the increase in the salinity of the marshes resulting from more frequent incursions of seawater, the EA plans to enlarge the sluice capacity of the Dunwich River to allow water to be drained off more rapidly. At present, no budget has been allocated for these works.

The Walberswick dunes and shingle ridge

The dunes and shingle ridge provide valuable protection to the village as well as supporting a rare and fragile ecology. However, unstable environments such as these are vulnerable to damage both by natural forces and the actions of humans. It is difficult to reduce the effect of the waves but potentially destructive human activities, such as camping, fire lighting, horse riding, cycling and quad and trail biking, could and should be prevented. The shingle ridge to the South of the beach huts has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is in particular need of protection.

It appears that the EA and others do not fully appreciate the impact of human activity on the dunes in particular but also on the shingle ridge. The EA has by-laws intended to protect sea defences but these are of little use unless they are better advertised and enforced. The EA provides fencing around sections of the dunes but other areas are unprotected and, having lost the vegetation that binds the shifting sands, have become badly worn. Even where fencing is provided it has often been vandalised or removed altogether. Discussions are required with the EA to address these matters.

Better education of the public would also assist in the protection of the dunes and the shingle bank. To this end, it is proposed that, during the summer season, the Parish Council should erect temporary notice boards at the entry points to the beach, drawing attention to the vulnerable character of the environment and listing the activities we wish to deter. Residents can contribute to the informal wardening of these areas by being aware of the purpose of the restrictions and advising visitors accordingly when their behaviour threatens to cause damage.

1.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
1.3.1 Monitor progress of the works being undertaken by Waveney District Council to repair the harbour wall and take whatever action is feasible to ensure they are completed satisfactorily.	BEG/WPC	High	Ongoing
1.3.2 Monitor progress of the works being undertaken by the Blois Estate as the first phase of the Blyth Estuary Group's plan to raise and strengthen the river walls from Tinker's Marsh to the ferry crossing. Take whatever action is feasible to ensure these works are completed satisfactorily.	BEG/WPC	High	Ongoing
1.3.3 Take whatever action is feasible to ensure the three succeeding phases of the BEG scheme are carried out.	BEG/WPC	High	Ongoing
1.3.4 Seek an explicit undertaking from the Environment Agency to construct a new bank to the rear of Robinson's Marsh to protect houses adjoining the marsh in the event of a collapse of the existing river bank – if necessary on the basis of shared funding. (See Figure 1)	WCLC/WPC/EA	High	Medium term
1.3.5 Together with the EA, continue to ensure that the dunes are properly protected by fencing to deter public access. Where necessary replant worn areas of marram grass within the fenced sections.	SDG/WPC/EA	High	Ongoing
1.3.6 Establish procedures with the EA for the effective enforcement of their by-laws (see also recommendation 5.3.7).	WPC/EA	High	Long term
1.3.7 Erect notice boards during the summer season, drawing attention to the fragile nature of both the dunes and the shingle ridge, listing activities to be discouraged.	SDG/WPC	High	Short term
1.3.8 Monitor the shingle bank between Walberswick and Dunwich to assess the rate of erosion.	SDG/WPC/ Residents	High	Ongoing
1.3.9 Consider means of enhancing the inner bank across the Walberswick/ Dunwich marshes to strengthen flood defences and protect the fresh water habitat beyond. (See Figure 1)	SDG/WPC/EA	High	Medium term
1.3.10 Regularly (twice yearly) inform the village of progress on these matters.	SDG/BEG/ WPC/Village Communications Group	Medium	Ongoing

2 Planning and development control

2.1 Summary of survey responses

How can the people of Walberswick ensure better standards of development in the village?

The survey included questions about the boundaries of the Village Envelope and the Conservation Area and the relative importance of certain criteria in assessing planning applications. It also invited comments generally about matters of concern which, for many people, were related to planning issues:

- 75% of respondents were in favour of retaining the existing boundary of the Village Envelope, as defined in the Local Plan, to prevent further expansion
- 64% of respondents were in favour of extending the boundary of the Conservation Area to include the whole village
- The majority of respondents also believed that SCDC, in considering planning applications, should give high priority to the following key criteria: (i) retaining and enhancing Walberswick's leafy character, (ii) resisting back land development and (iii) avoiding estate-like groups of similar houses. Other factors such as access and design also need to be considered.

Looking at the response to the final question of the survey 'are there other key issues you would like to raise', three factors were seen as combining to threaten the 'leafy character' of the village:

- the poor quality of planning applications and approvals
- insufficient attention being given by SCDC to the results of consultation
- 'garden grabbing', back land and infill development and consequent increase in housing densities.

Underlying these concerns is the question of how the village should strengthen its influence on and control over the development process, particularly in the wider context of the present Government's commitment to 'Localism', giving greater weight to local opinions and interests. The commentary that follows describes a number of measures which could lead to an improvement in the standard of development in the village.

2.2 Commentary

The Conservation Area

The protection of the physical environment of Walberswick is strengthened by the designation of part of the village as a Conservation Area (see Figure 2 opposite). This gives the planning authority, Suffolk Coastal District Council, additional powers when dealing with applications for developments within the area.

As reported above, an extension of the boundary of the Conservation Area to incorporate the whole village was widely supported in the survey findings.

An opportunity to review the extent of the Conservation Area will arise in the autumn of 2012 when the Village will be consulted on the outcome of SCDC's reappraisal of the Walberswick Conservation Area.

Article 4 Directions

The protection of the Conservation Area might be enhanced by the issue of an Article 4 Direction by SCDC. This would have the effect of removing specified development rights and instead making such works subject to planning control. Article 4 Directions can prove useful where closer control over development is required, for example to preserve the character of an area of acknowledged importance.

The Village Envelope

The responses published in the *Survey Report* demonstrate overwhelming support for the retention of the existing envelope as defined in SCDC's Local Plan (see Figure 1 on p8).

Consultation and Localism

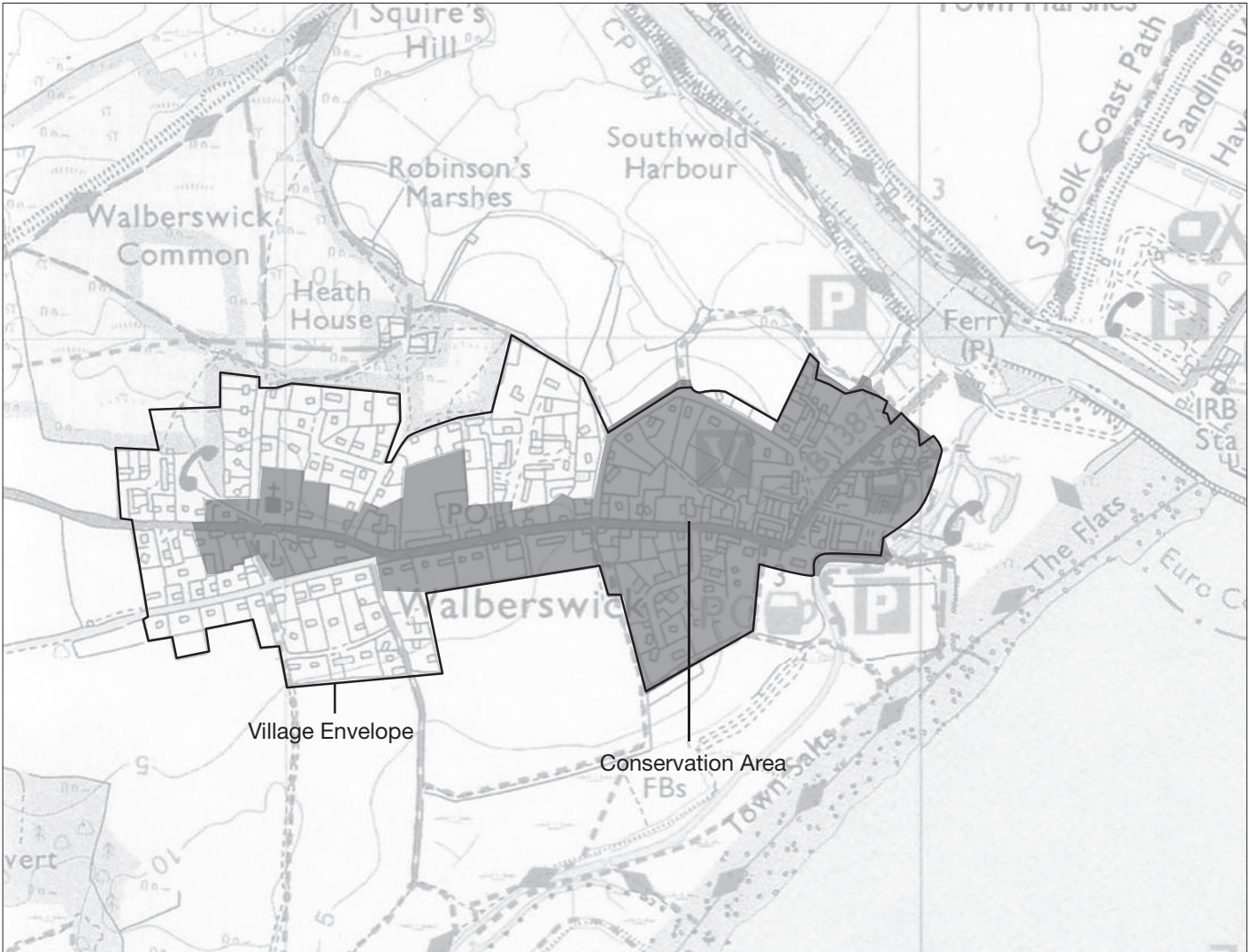
Careful consideration of the Localism Act 2011 will be necessary to understand the potential for local initiatives, such as a Neighbourhood Plan.

Controlling the density of development

A large majority of respondents are concerned to retain the 'leafy character' of the village, to resist back land development and infilling, and to avoid groups of similar houses. 'Garden grabbing' is a contentious issue particularly as there are many large gardens in the village that could attract property developers whose interventions could erode and ultimately destroy the village's character.

Improving the standard of planning submissions and approvals

The majority of respondents emphasised the need for good planning to maintain the character of the village. Planning applications should be checked to ensure the inclusion of adequate landscaping, for instance details of existing and proposed trees and hedging, and should also be expected to demonstrate inventive and sympathetic architecture. The construction of swimming pools should be better regulated: at present planning permission is not required for the building of pools.



OS base map: Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Licence no. 100050488

Figure 2
Village Envelope and
Conservation Area

Planning Advisory Group

To assist and support the Parish Council in assessing planning applications, it is recommended that an informal Planning Advisory Group be established. The group would comprise interested and experienced residents, nominated by the Parish Council in consultation with the Steering Group, who would make themselves available as required. The task of the group would be to examine applications, to gather data and to outline the implications of the proposals. The Planning Advisory Group would provide advice but the Council would not be bound in any way by their comments.

Undertaking an environmental appraisal of the village

The objective would be to define the qualities that make Walberswick a special place and provide a datum against which planning applications could be rigorously assessed.

The proposed environmental appraisal would extend beyond the boundary of the Conservation Area and the Village Envelope and would include an evaluation of the setting of the village and its open spaces. Particular attention should be given to significant individual trees and groups of trees and other prominent but potentially vulnerable landscape features. Other notable characteristics of the natural and built environment such as the coastal context adjacent to Southwold and Dunwich, the location of the village within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the historical context and outstanding architectural qualities of the village should also be emphasised. All of these characteristics combine to make Walberswick so attractive not only to residents but to our many visitors.

The environmental appraisal would provide a valuable guide for the Parish Council and the proposed Planning Advisory Group when considering planning applications.

2.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
2.3.1 The current boundary of the village envelope has been endorsed.	N/A	N/A	N/A
2.3.2 Commission an environmental appraisal of Walberswick to define more precisely the environmental, landscaping and architectural qualities of the village.	Planning Working Party/WPC	High	Medium
2.3.3 Review the Conservation Area and its boundary and consider whether it should be enlarged, for example by incorporating additional areas in the village. Prepare for SCDC's consultation exercise for Conservation Area reappraisal. Set a date for this exercise.	Planning Working Party/WPC	High	By autumn 2012
2.3.4 Explore with SCDC the potential use of Article 4 Directions to strengthen planning controls.	Planning Working Party/WPC	High	Long term
2.3.5 Establish a Planning Advisory Group of experienced residents.	WPC	High	Short term
2.3.6 Examine the provisions of the Localism Act (2011) to assess what new opportunities it may provide for planning initiatives by local communities.	Planning Working Party/WPC	High	Ongoing

3 Affordable and sheltered housing

3.1 Summary of survey responses

As in many other communities, there is a very strong support in Walberswick for the provision within the village of more affordable housing as well as for sheltered housing (refer also to Section 6.0, pp26–29). In answer to questions raised in the *Survey Report*, 79% of respondents supported the provision of more affordable housing and 85% are in favour of providing more sheltered housing. 7% thought they themselves would be likely to need affordable housing and 7% thought they would need sheltered housing within the next five years. Preliminary research indicates a number of ways in which these goals may be achieved. A priority is to devise a scheme that would ensure the control of nominations for such accommodation lies within the village. Whereas the development of affordable housing for younger people has many precedents in various schemes up and down the country, sheltered housing tends to be mostly in public or private sector hands rather than being individually owned. Other models for sheltered housing include schemes owned and managed cooperatively by residents (for example dividing a large existing house into flats) or as part of an affordable, 'new build', housing scheme, owned or part-owned by the community.

3.2 Commentary

- There is a small provision of affordable housing in Walberswick administered by two Housing Associations. There is no sheltered housing or care home provision in the village.
- The allocation of affordable housing in Walberswick is controlled by Suffolk Coastal District Council in conjunction with seven other local authorities. This means that people having strong local connections and wishing to live in the village may be overlooked. Whilst acknowledging the complexity of implementing any new policy, this report recommends that initiatives to provide sheltered or affordable housing in the village should in most cases be controlled by Walberswick residents.
- The legislative and policy framework for sheltered and affordable housing is confusing and also appears to be in a state of flux. There are, however, certain current Government objectives, such as the Localism Agenda and the newly articulated policy of streamlining planning applications, that should facilitate local initiatives for providing sheltered or affordable housing.
- The question of how affordable or sheltered housing schemes could be funded has also been investigated by the Focus Group but no sources of soft loans or grants were discovered, nor were arrangements found whereby labour or professional expertise could be contributed as a deposit. There is a bewildering array of relevant Government endeavours such as the First Time Buyers' Initiative or the National Affordable Housing Programme that may or may not turn out to be useful. The Focus Group has concluded there would be little

point in designing an affordable or sheltered housing scheme solely to meet the criteria of a particular funding scheme.

- Several possible structures for sheltered and affordable housing schemes in Walberswick were considered, including co-operatives, trusts and funding by private companies, but it was decided that any definitive decisions on financial structures must follow the particular requirements of specific schemes.
- The most important challenge for all such schemes will be to find suitable and available sites.
- Ultimately, the questions of funding and planning permissions are so significant that further consultation is required both within the village and with other organisations. It is therefore recommended that there should be another survey to ascertain in more detail the housing needs of current residents and of those with family or employment connections with the village and also, very importantly, to determine whether there is any support for trading an extension of the Village Envelope for the provision of affordable or sheltered housing.

3.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
3.3.1 Undertake feasibility studies of possible sites and buildings within the Village as the basis for consulting with the Planning Authority. Submit an outline proposal to the village for the potential location of affordable and sheltered housing.	Housing Working Party/WPC	Depends on survey results	Depends on survey results
3.3.2 Carry out a more detailed survey to ascertain the housing needs of all villagers who may wish to be considered for affordable or sheltered housing.	Housing Working Party/WPC	High	Short term
3.3.3 If the results are positive, develop a detailed scheme including financing and the establishment of an appropriate legal structure.	Housing Working Party/WPC	Depends on survey results	Depends on survey results

4 Traffic, parking and public transport

4.1 Summary of survey responses

All vehicular traffic into Walberswick must use The Street but so must all cyclists and pedestrians, including children and the elderly. Potential conflicts between these types of road users are greatly multiplied in the summer by the huge surge in tourist traffic, which brings, of course, problems of its own. Any plan must resolve these potentially conflicting needs without resorting to obtrusive or unwelcome measures.

Responses to the survey and the comments recorded in the *Survey Report* clearly show people's concerns:

- Excessive traffic speed, especially at the entrance to the village and along The Street
- Pedestrian safety, again especially along The Street
- Summer congestion and the capacity of car parks
- Inconsiderate, obstructive and illegal parking.

Question 23 of the survey asked what problems relating to traffic were experienced during the summer months: most respondents cited congestion and issues related to parking.

In answer to specific questions about parking (Q24–27), 32% of respondents said that there was insufficient residents' parking but 31% said the opposite. 84% of respondents believed that the village has sufficient parking for visitors and 57% were in favour of a summer-only car park at the entrance to the village. 75% were content with the landscaping of the two designated car parks.

The majority of spontaneous comments listed in the Appendix to the *Survey Report* cited inconsiderate or obstructive parking, failure to observe parking controls and parking by visitors in the upper reaches of The Street and elsewhere, perhaps to avoid the £3.00 charge levied at the designated car parks.

In answer to Question 31, asking how public transport could be improved, there were some 158 responses – an indication in itself of a frustrated demand for better services.

4.2 Commentary

Traffic speed

The problem of reducing traffic speed at the entrance to the village has been examined on a number of occasions but most proposals, including speed humps and chicanes, have been rejected by residents because of the obtrusive infrastructure required.

The Parish Council is planning to install a flashing sign near the 30mph roundel at the entrance to the village, warning traffic to slow because of the possible presence of children ahead. The effectiveness of the sign will be monitored

over the 12 months following installation. If the sign is shown not to be effective, the physical changes referred to above may need to be reconsidered. The concept of voluntary community monitoring of speed through the village did not receive strong support.

20mph speed limit

Some respondents to the survey requested a 20mph speed limit throughout the village, citing the experience of other communities similar to Walberswick where such a limit had been introduced. Current information indicates that under present legislation a blanket speed limit of 20mph would not be enforceable. It might be possible to impose a 20mph limit on the lower part of The Street, east of the junction with Leverett's Lane, but the benefit of this is questionable since traffic generally slows at this point because of the narrowing of the road and the presence of pedestrians.

Shared surface

The contemporary idea of a 'shared surface' – deliberately not segregating vehicular and pedestrian traffic – has become important, much discussed and is particularly relevant to Walberswick for two reasons (i) there is no practicable alternative and (ii) experience has shown that the mingling of vehicular and pedestrian traffic on The Street is practical and safe. Whilst there is very little room at peak times in the summer for both pedestrians and vehicles along the narrower section, the very presence of so many pedestrians does have the effect of restraining drivers and reducing traffic speed.

Well-located signage would encourage all users to be conscious of the fact that The Street is a shared zone and that there is a need to show respect for other users. The 'shared surface' concept could also be publicised on the village website and at the two beach car parks and visitor centre.

For visitors, especially those with children, who would nevertheless prefer to walk undisturbed by traffic, the Steering Group recommends that publicity and signage is used to advertise the existing footpaths off The Street and Leverett's Lane which provide alternative pedestrian routes to the beach, the harbour and elsewhere. A map of alternative footpaths and cycle routes should be published and made available to visitors.

Parking

The current arrangements at Cliff Field and Ferry Road car parks cope well with the demands of the summer peaks not least because they effectively limit the number of visitors to the village at those times. For this reason it is recommended there should be no increase in summer parking provision.

The idea of extra parking at the entrance to the village is also not recommended by the Steering Group on the basis that it would be unsightly, is almost certainly not feasible in terms of land acquisition, and would contradict the opinion expressed above and in the survey findings, that Walberswick already has sufficient parking for visitors.

The idea of reducing fees for short-term parking to entice those who would otherwise park on the road was initially rejected by Walberswick Car Parks Ltd because of the complexity of managing and enforcing a variable fee system. However, informal discussions between business representatives and WCPL regarding the issue are continuing.

Experience has shown that, even when parking is free (out of season), considerable congestion can still occur in the village during spells of fine weather, particularly at weekends. Free parking would deprive the village of the income required for the necessary management of the car parks by WCPL, the company set up for the purpose as part of the wider Visitor Management Policy adopted in 1996.

An extension of on-street parking controls would entail more signs and more yellow lines, something many residents find objectionable.

Better enforcement of existing parking controls and other traffic management measures might be achieved by the employment of a community warden (Police Community Support Officer). Any such initiative would depend on a county-wide adoption by the appropriate authorities. Various pilot schemes are being tried locally and the village should be aware of their progress.

Public transport

A large number of respondents (158) wanted improved public transport. However there are already various means of accessing transport from the village to local areas that could be more widely publicised. Suffolk Links, which is a subsidised Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) service providing connections to bus and train links in rural areas, operates from Monday to Saturday and covers travel to Saxmundham, Leiston, Darsham and any village within the Blyth service area. Concessionary Passes can be used for this service. The WCLC provides a Wednesday bus to Halesworth three times a month and to Lowestoft on the fourth Wednesday. WCLC also runs a bus to Norwich, one Thursday per month. The twice weekly public transport to Beccles had to be withdrawn due to lack of uptake. Unfortunately there is no bus service to Southwold nor does the Suffolk Links service extend to Southwold; this inconvenience needs to be rectified.

Residents can also call on the Voluntary Help Service for trips to hospitals, doctor's appointments etc.

Darsham Station is served by trains to and from Ipswich and Lowestoft, generally at two hourly intervals. At certain times of the day there is an hourly service from Saxmundham to Ipswich. On completion of the Beccles loop later this year, the hourly service from Ipswich will be extended to Darsham and Lowestoft.

4.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
4.3.1 Evaluate the utility of speed indicators. Use notices and other forms of publicity to persuade people that the road is a shared surface for the benefit of all users, pedestrians and cyclists as much as for motor traffic.	Visitor Management Group/WPC	High	Medium term
4.3.2 Further examine the feasibility of imposing a 20mph speed limit.	Visitor Management Group/WPC	High	Medium term
4.3.3 Identify affordable mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing parking regulations.	Visitor Management Group/WPC	High	Short term
4.3.4 Carry out a public transport needs survey to evaluate and, if possible, improve the existing Suffolk Links service and other public transport arrangements. Publicise timetables more widely and promote public transport and car sharing.	Visitor Management Group/WPC/WCLC	Medium	Short term
4.3.5 Develop and publicise footpaths and cycle ways to encourage visitors to take alternative routes to the beach, the harbour and other destinations.	Visitor Management Group/ WPC	High	Ongoing
4.3.6 Produce a map of the village showing footpaths, tracks and points of interest.	Visitor Management Group/WPC	Medium	12 months

5 Environmental issues

5.1 Summary of survey responses

How can the village be made and managed to become an even more pleasant place in which to live?

The survey asked residents what forms of pollution or other environmental issues were affecting their enjoyment of life in Walberswick. People were also asked if they were satisfied with the maintenance of the marshes and heathland and the footpaths around the village.

In response, there were complaints of noise from traffic and people, light and dust pollution, nuisance caused by pig farming, dogs, wild animals, vermin, and problems of litter and waste, especially dog waste.

The survey showed considerable support for restricting activities on the popular section of the beach between the Harbour and Cliff Field during the summer months to enhance safety and amenity. 84% of respondents want a ban on jet skis and 46% would like to see dogs excluded during this period. Some also wanted a summer ban on wind surfing, flying big kites, barbecues and bonfires. Improved litter collection was requested as was better access to the beach for wheel chairs and mobility vehicles.

Most people were happy with the management of the marshes and heathland and the footpaths around the village, although some criticised poor maintenance.

Many respondents want the overhead service cabling of Walberswick to be buried.

Responses related to pollution from traffic are dealt with in Section 4.0 (pp18–21).

5.2 Commentary

Dust

Dust from the Cliff Field approach track is a particular problem for some. WCPL should be asked to investigate alternative surfaces which would minimise the generation of dust.

Other problems with dust, particularly at the western end of the village, result from the light soil which is typical of the coastal region of Suffolk, aggravated by pig farming. The siting of pig pens should be discussed with the farmer to minimise nuisance to householders. While there are no pigs close to the village at the moment (summer 2012), without any agreement with the farmer, past problems are likely to recur.

Nuisances caused by animals

The responses regarding dogs were mostly concerned with noise and excrement. Many respondents asked for extra dog bins – a solution that should be investigated. Walberswick is a dog-friendly village and attracts many tourists

as a result. A dog ban on part of the beach would be unpopular, certainly with dog owners (but see 'Beach management and safety' para below).

Rats, pigeons or muntjac are experienced by some as a nuisance. It is hard to see how this problem can be dealt with except by those individuals who are affected.

Noise

Swimming pools and trampolines in private gardens are experienced by many as a source of much unwanted noise. Householders with these facilities should be made aware of the nuisance noise can cause to neighbours and installing pools adjacent to neighbours' boundaries should be discouraged. Unfortunately no existing planning legislation covers the location or installation of swimming pools or trampolines. Letting agencies should also be requested to make their clients aware of the problems these facilities can cause.

The close proximity of farm animals to housing at the western end of the village is also felt by some to create a significant noise problem.

The landlords of the two pubs should be made aware of concerns about pub noise/disturbance, particularly when organising outdoor events. Patrons should be requested to respect the peace and quiet of neighbours.

The Village Hall Management Committee should be made aware of some residents' concerns about the noise and disturbance that can occur after private parties and public functions. Notice about such concerns could be written into letting agreements.

Light pollution

Many people reported that darkness in the village at night is a precious environmental commodity that should be protected. Domestic outside lighting, particularly in The Street, is not welcomed by many residents. Problems with unwanted and unnecessary external lighting could be addressed by requesting that automatic lights be made less sensitive to prevent them being triggered inadvertently by passing pedestrians or cars. Similarly, manually operated external lighting should be switched on only when necessary. High wattage floodlights on residential properties should be discouraged.

Light overspill from the pubs and shops could be addressed by discussing the problem with the owners/managers.

Excessive brightness from the harbour entrance lights was also mentioned. However, harbour navigation lights are a safety issue and therefore cannot be compromised.

Sewerage

The sewerage problems reported in the responses are related to work that Anglian Water has already started to address by updating and improving the drains, including jetting through twice a year. Since fat deposits have been found in some drains, the use of oil interceptors at offending premises could

be requested. It is hoped that the problem of sewage backing up will be solved but the situation must be monitored by those affected and the Parish Council.

Beach management and safety

The response to the idea of excluding jet skis, dogs and potentially disruptive or dangerous activities from a part of the beach during the summer holidays suggests that, subject to a poll of villagers, a restriction zone should be introduced on a trial basis for one season, to test its feasibility.

Jet skis are generally launched in Southwold Harbour from the north bank and fall under the jurisdiction of the Harbour Master who gives guidance and advice to skiers. Jet skis launched on the Walberswick side are not within her control. The Harbour Master should be requested to advise skiers to keep well away from Walberswick beach for reasons of safety and amenity. If possible, the frequency of launches from Southwold should be monitored by the Harbour Master.

To impose and enforce restrictions on the use of part of the beach, even for a temporary period, is likely to require amendment and extension of the by-laws. There are by-laws that prohibit camping fires and barbecues but these do not extend to the beach itself. The matter is complicated by the fact that different authorities are responsible for different sections of the shoreline (WDC, SCDC, EA and WPC). A thorough review of all by-laws and their enforcement is required in liaison with these authorities.

Concerns about litter on the beach are understandable but hard to tackle; litter and debris are constantly brought in on the tide and the great numbers of visitors inevitably generate litter. The Parish Council organises regular beach cleans by volunteers and some public spirited residents collect litter on an ad hoc basis. Litter bins nearer the beach are not feasible because of the difficulties of access for collection. More bins at the existing points would be helpful but a better approach would be to find ways of persuading visitors to take their litter home.

Although a proliferation of notice boards is objectionable to many, it may be helpful to the management of the beach if advisory notices were to be erected at the entrances to the beach, for the summer months only. These notices would inform visitors of the restriction zone, issues of safety, dog control and litter collection and the need to protect the vulnerable environment of the dunes referred to in Section 1.0 (pp6–10). The advice could be repeated and further guidance given by the car park attendants.

There is scope for beach access for the disabled to be improved by, for example, extending the timber walkway from the Cliff Field car park.

5.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
5.3.1 Subject to a poll of the village, introduce on an experimental basis an exclusion zone prohibiting certain activities (such as dogs, jet skis, big kites, wind surfing, barbecues and beach fires) from clearly designated areas of the beach between May and September.	Environmental Working Party/ WPC	Medium	Medium
5.3.2 Publish reminders, for instance in the <i>Village News</i> , about light pollution (both brightness and indiscriminate use) from houses with external lights. Review with pub landlords their use of floodlighting.	Environmental Working Party/ WPC	Medium	Short term
5.3.3 Encourage those who let property in the summer to advise their tenants about the need to restrain noisy behaviour and put out waste bins at appropriate times.	Environmental Working Party/ WPC	Medium	Medium
5.3.4 Examine the possibility of making the surface of the access road (owned by WCLC) to Cliff Field car park less dusty.	WCPL/WCLC	Medium	Short term
5.3.5 Review with the pig farmers and the Blois Estate the continuing problems of smell, noise, vermin and dust arising from pig farming.	Environmental Working Party/ WPC	Medium	Medium
5.3.6 Review the provision and management of litter bins and dog bins to establish whether there is a need for additional facilities.	Environmental Working Party /WPC/SCDC	Medium	Short term
5.3.7 Review the current by-laws relating to the shore and dunes, clarify responsibilities and update as necessary (see also recommendation 1.3.6).	WPC/WDC/SCDC /EA/Environmental Working Party	Medium	Long term

6 Sustainability and local energy generation

6.1 Summary of survey responses

Responses to the survey as a whole can be seen to be about the sustainability of Walberswick, both as a community and as a place of particular beauty. How to protect ourselves from the river and the sea, how to safeguard the quality of the village and its surrounding environment, how to provide housing for the young and the elderly, how to deal better with traffic and the demands of tourism – appropriate responses to these and other questions raised in this report will contribute to the future viability of the village.

This section of the Plan looks at three aspects of sustainability, (i) the demography of Walberswick and its implications for a balanced community, (ii) the potential for renewable local energy generation and (iii) the scope for recycling.

Demography

The Stage 1 survey questionnaires were distributed to 329 dwellings and responses were received from 287 dwellings. Of these:

- 41% of respondents described their houses as second homes
- The majority of permanent households comprised one or two people, of whom more than 40% were over the age of 65
- 38% of householders lived in houses with four or more bedrooms
- 83% of householders owned their own homes and 36% had lived in Walberswick for more than 21 years
- Children under the age of 16 comprised less than 10% of the permanent population.

6.2 Commentary

The survey shows that, (i) the village is predominately occupied by elderly people, many of whom live alone, (ii) less than two thirds of the housing stock is occupied by permanent residents, (iii) many of the houses are large yet lived in by couples or single people, (iv) many residents live in Walberswick for the long term.

This picture has not changed greatly from that described by the 2001 Census. At that time, according to a comparative analysis of the census data commissioned by Suffolk Acre in 2007, Walberswick had less than half the number of children under the age of 15 than the average for the county of Suffolk and more than twice the number of retired people over the age of 65. The number of dwellings in the highest Council Tax Band was eight times the average for the county.

In this context, the high levels of support both for affordable housing and sheltered housing for the elderly noted in the *Survey Report*, and referred to in Section 3.0 of this report (pp16–17), are unsurprising. Housing for young

people and young families is seen as an essential step towards the development of a more balanced and sustainable population, as many comments recorded in the Appendix to the *Survey Report* make clear. Similarly, the lack of sheltered housing and other supported accommodation for the elderly means for some that they cannot expect to live out their lives in the village that has been their home.

The Steering Group has concluded that the provision of housing for both these groups should be a priority of the Parish Council and the District Council, as should the provision of Village based support services for the elderly.

Community balance and renewal

Concerns were expressed in the Appendix to the *Survey Report* about the increasing number of second homes and homes to let in the village. The unfortunate precedent of Southwold demonstrates the ‘hollowing out’ of a community that can result from this trend but it is not clear how the process could be halted or reversed. Indeed, it is argued by some that second homes bring an economic and a social benefit to the village. Moreover, second homing in Walberswick has a long tradition. One suggestion for imposing control over the conversion of homes to holiday lets is to lobby for a change in planning policy to make such conversions subject to a change of use order requiring planning consent.

Energy conservation and renewable energy generation

The need to reduce carbon emissions, concerns about the cost and security of conventional fuel supplies and developments in technology have all led to a growing interest in energy conservation and in the potential of renewable energy sources. Several respondents to the survey suggested schemes to harness wind and water power locally for the generation of electricity. 224 respondents wanted to see the promotion of renewable energy for the home. Interest in renewables has also been encouraged by the financial incentives now available as evidenced by the growing number of households in Walberswick installing photovoltaic and solar panels.

However, it is worth considering whether, in addition to individual initiatives, a greater financial and environmental benefit might be gained for the village by collective action, for example by entering into partnership with a national energy provider or, more ambitiously, by setting up a community ownership scheme for the local generation of electricity. Community ownership provides a means of creating diverse, sustainable, secure, locally controlled energy supplies, with profits returning to the local economy. The legislative framework for such projects now exists and there is a growing body of experience in their development.

An enterprise of this magnitude would entail hard work and considerable responsibility, but it may hold exciting possibilities for the village and should be explored in more detail using the sources of advice and assistance which are now available.

Renewable energy resources

Potential local sources of energy include:

- Tidal generation: The tidal power of the river offers the potential for a reliable and regular source of local energy, but to use it practically would require difficult financial, administrative and technical problems to be solved, not least the impact of a barrage on the tidal prism of the estuary. A more likely solution in the longer term could be provided by tidal stream devices specifically designed for small-scale installations. It may be possible to establish a joint venture with Southwold, were a utility company to become interested in such a scheme. A change in Government policy would probably be required to make such projects financially viable.
- Wind generation: There is no shortage of wind to drive turbines in Walberswick and there may be open spaces on which to site them. Two or three small machines would probably meet the energy demand of the whole village. However, wind turbines are visually intrusive and even offensive to some people, as well as posing a threat to birdlife. A positive consensus from the village would be necessary before developing a scheme involving their use.
- Solar energy: As mentioned above, subsidies exist to promote the installation of solar and photovoltaic panels. The installation of such devices should be encouraged in suitable locations where they will not interfere with the amenities of others or impinge on the Conservation Area.
- Community coppiced woodland: The increasing popularity of wood-burning stoves has put a premium on supplies of wood for fuel. By planting a 5–10 acre plot of currently unproductive land with suitable trees (such as sweet chestnut) and with proper management, a long-term, sustainable source of green energy could be provided for the village as well as creating a beneficial habitat for wildlife.

It is likely that in due course all these sources will be combined in different ways to enable the village to become self sufficient in the generation of electricity.

Recycling

A number of respondents asked for a village recycling point and some also raised the idea of a village composting scheme. In the past, consideration of these ideas has foundered on the difficulty of finding a suitable site. However, in recent years SCDC's collection service has improved to the extent that, in the opinion of the Steering Group, a village recycling point is now unnecessary: almost all household waste is regularly collected for recycling or composting. The one exception is the collection of glass which the Council does not include in the regular service. However, both village pubs have bottle banks, which are willingly made available to residents, and there are also recycling facilities at Blythburgh, Halesworth, Southwold and Leiston.

6.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
6.3.1 Consider the potential impacts that holiday homes in the village have on the wider community, including studying precedents in other comparable communities.	Environmental Working Party/ WPC	High	Long term
6.3.2 Individual energy conservation: A study of energy patterns in the village should be undertaken to inform residents of the benefits of greater efficiency in energy use.	Environmental Working Party/ WPC	High	Long term
6.3.3 Investigate the feasibility of local power generation (tidal, wind and solar energy). Learn from other communities and local authorities which have experience of such initiatives.	Environmental Working Party/ WPC	High	Long term
6.3.4 Investigate the emerging technologies for solar panels (solar water heating and photovoltaic) and the current permitted development rights.	Environmental Working Party/ WPC	High	Long term
6.3.5 Investigate the feasibility of installing solar panels on the village hall roof.	WVHMC	High	Medium/ long term
6.3.6 Investigate the possibility of a 5–10 acre site to be planted with suitable trees to provide a source of fuel for wood-burning stoves.	Energy Working Party/WPC	High	Long term

7 Health

7.1 Summary of survey responses

Questions 39, 40 and 41 of the survey gave a valuable insight into the level of use of the various health services available to and within the village, and highlighted a few areas of additional want or concern.

275 people answered Question 39, 76% of whom collect their prescriptions from the village shop, 60% use the Wednesday doctor's surgery in the village hall annexe, 59% use either the Southwold or Halesworth cottage hospitals, 3% have home care and 1% use a carer support group.

Question 40 asked about other medical services that might be needed in Walberswick. 268 people responded with 28% citing a need for a nursing care home. 86% cited a need for a Community First Responder Group which, at the time of the survey, was already being established.

Question 41 asked for respondents' views on the standard of a range of available emergency health services including ambulance, emergency at surgery, out-of-hours doctor and A&E at local hospitals. The ambulance service scored highly as either excellent or good with the three other medical categories scoring less well, probably due to their geographical location in relation to Walberswick.

7.2 Commentary

Community First Responders

The East of England Ambulance NHS Trust established the Blyth Valley Community First Responder (CFR) Group covering Walberswick, Blythburgh and Wenhaston in November 2010, with 15 emergency calls to Walberswick being attended during the year.

It must be remembered that a CFR can only be activated by calling 999, their task being to attend life-threatening emergencies and maintain life until a paramedic or ambulance crew arrive.

At the start in 2010 Walberswick had four qualified CFRs but by the end of August 2012 there were only two qualified CFRs and one new volunteer ready to take the training course.

The value of village-based CFRs has been demonstrated in rural villages such as Walberswick and therefore their ongoing sustainability is absolutely essential. However, without volunteers to train as CFRs or other volunteers to act in support roles (group coordinator, fund raisers etc), the sustainability of this valuable service is under threat.

Doctor's surgery

The Wednesday doctor's surgery held in the village hall annexe is another essential health service that needs to be sustained. The service is by appointment so, if there are no requests for appointments, the surgery is cancelled. However, the doctor will see patients who turn up without appointment if there have been appointments for which the surgery has been opened.

Nursing home care

A nursing home would be desirable in Walberswick. However the lack of suitable premises or land to build on, as well as cost and commercial viability, are difficulties which would be hard to overcome. Nonetheless, the possibility of nursing home care within the village should continue to be monitored.

7.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
7.3.1 Continue the recruitment of volunteers to train as Community First Responders (CFRs) as part of the Blyth Valley Community First Responder Group (covering Walberswick, Blythburgh and Wenhaston).	Blyth Valley CFR with the help of all other Agencies	High	Short term
7.3.2 Recruit volunteers to support Blyth Valley Community First Responder Group in roles such as rota secretary, coordinator or as fund raisers.	Blyth Valley CFR with the help of all other Agencies	High	Short term
7.3.3 Publicise the arrangements for the Wednesday doctor's surgery in the village hall.	Health Working Party	High	Short term
7.3.4 Keep as a long-term objective the establishment of a nursing home within the village should the opportunity arise.	Health Working Party/WPC	Medium	Long term

8 Youth

8.1 Summary of survey responses

Youth questionnaire

94 completed questionnaires were returned by children of residents and second home owners to provide some insight into the lives of young people in Walberswick and their views about living in the village. The responses are fully recorded in the *Survey Report*.

Youth club

60% of respondents to the youth questionnaire expressed interest in a youth club, to provide more organised sports and other activities, and a place for socialising.

Improvements to play facilities

Of 86 respondents to this question, 73% used the sports field, 63% its play equipment and 84% the play equipment on The Green. Various suggestions were made for improving the facilities of the sports field including the provision of more play equipment, especially for older children, and more sports equipment. Other ideas such as the provision of tennis courts, a hard surface for bikes and skateboards and dog proof fencing were recorded in the Appendix to the *Survey Report* (Question 17). Given the remote location of the sports field, several respondents remarked on the need for better publicity and signage to encourage its use.

Although most respondents to the survey were satisfied with the play facilities on The Green, the Appendix to the *Survey Report* (Question 16) also recorded requests for more equipment including a climbing frame, more swings, a bigger slide and the return of the roundabout and the see-saw for younger children. Some respondents expressed concern at the threat to the character of The Green which might result from an expansion of the play area.

8.2 Commentary

Youth club

The intention is to bring together the young people of Walberswick during 2012 to establish the level of support for a youth club or group within the village. It seems unlikely that there will be sufficient demand to sustain a club that meets regularly throughout the year. However, in the holiday periods, when the population of young people in the village naturally expands, organised activities would be viable and appreciated by youngsters and parents. Following an approach by the Youth Focus Group, the youth organisation Suffolk Sport has agreed to provide multi-sport activity days for young people in Walberswick during the summer holidays.

Toddlers' Group

The Walberswick Toddlers' Group was established in March 2012 with the help of a grant from Walberswick Common Lands Charity, and has attracted an enthusiastic response from local parents. Initially meeting every fortnight

in the village hall annexe, the Group now runs weekly sessions attended by 10 or more children from Walberswick and neighbouring communities. The Group is managed by an informal committee of five local mothers and is staffed by parents of participating children. Funding is being sought from the Adnams Charity and Suffolk County Council and the Group is now registered with SCDC.

Play equipment

The Youth Focus Group has considered the requests for more play equipment on The Green and concluded that any significant enlargement of the play area would undermine the character of The Green and the amenity of those who live around it. The equipment is currently being refurbished by the Parish Council so it would not be appropriate to consider its replacement at this time.

However, there is potential for providing more equipment at the Sports Field, particularly for older children, to enhance and complement the excellent facilities already provided. Proposals are in hand to install larger goals and nets, a basket ball hoop and a zip wire. Funding is available for this purpose from SCDC and an application has already been submitted by the Parish Council. In addition, the Parish Council has recently installed play equipment donated by a local family.

Dog-proof fencing has been erected around both the sports field and the play area.

Sports pavilion

If there is a positive response to the idea of establishing a youth club or a summer club, consideration should be given to the refurbishment of the sports pavilion. This would provide a useful indoor base for youngsters and might also encourage a revival of the Walberswick cricket and football teams.

8.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
8.3.1 Support in whatever way possible the Toddlers' Group.	Youth Working Party	High	Up and running
8.3.2 Provide more play and sports equipment for the sports field, whilst also having regard to the costs of future maintenance and insurance.	Youth Working Party/WPC	Medium	In progress
8.3.3 Establish a Youth Plan.	Youth Working Party	Medium	Short term

9 Village hall

9.1 Summary of survey responses

The survey prompted many criticisms of the village hall. Many suggestions were put forward for the improvement of the building, some more fanciful than others. In fact, the construction of the hall was a valuable community project in its day and the facilities it offers compare very favourably with those of other villages.

9.2 Commentary

The hall

The village hall is run as a registered charity managed by the Walberswick Village Hall Management Committee (WVHMC). The Committee has an ongoing programme of refurbishment and improvements to be implemented as funds allow. The next project, developed in conjunction with two architects from the village, is to insulate and clad in timber the west gable wall facing the car park. This will improve both the environmental performance of the building and its appearance – a matter of concern for many respondents to the survey. In time, the larch boarding will weather to a silvery grey. Exposed brickwork will be painted. A specially designed weather vane will be mounted on the wall together with the lettering ‘Walberswick Village Hall’. Similar but smaller lettering will also be installed above the front entrance. It is hoped that these improvements will be carried out later this year.

The Village Hall Management Committee

The Village Hall Management Committee is always interested to hear the opinions and suggestions of villagers and would welcome any suggestions for future improvements. One suggestion already received has been the landscaping of part of the grassed area on the south side of the hall to create a sunny terrace.

Energy conservation

The WVHMC could investigate the feasibility of installing photovoltaic panels on the roof of the hall following the recent example of the Woodbridge Community Hall. This would not only benefit the village hall in particular but the whole community (see also recommendation 6.3.5 on p29).

9.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
9.3.1 Investigate the feasibility of installing photovoltaic panels on the roof of the hall.	WVHMC	Medium	Medium term
9.3.2 Investigate the feasibility of a terraced area on the south side of the hall.	WVHMC	Medium	Long term

10 Bulk buying

10.1 Summary of survey responses

62% of respondents to the survey indicated an interest in a community buying group. The Bulk Buying Focus Group concluded that a purchasing group for domestic heating oil should be the first objective as the vast majority of our village properties are heated by oil, a commodity with a fluctuating price that is less expensive the more you buy.

10.2 Commentary

There is an existing small oil buying syndicate operating within Walberswick. However, extending the syndicate to include the whole village would be a significant administrative challenge and, therefore, consideration has been given to joining an existing community oil buying group that would bring greater benefits of scale.

Several possibilities have been looked at but they did not meet the criteria of clear evidence of savings for existing users, no discrimination on price for orders below 1,000 litres and no percentage charge add-on for management as opposed to a modest annual membership fee.

Suffolk Acre Community Buying Ltd (www.communitybuying.org.uk or call 01473 345000) started bulk ordering domestic heating at the beginning of 2012. They meet the criteria set out above and have displayed an ability to save their members oil heating costs. There is a fixed date each month by which members should confirm their oil order. Eventually, the organisation hopes to have a coordinator in each village. Domestic members currently pay a £20 per annum membership fee which, on an average 1,500 litre per annum oil usage, adds 1.3p per litre to the gross oil price (membership subscriptions are not liable for VAT). Community building and business membership fees are £30 and £100 per annum respectively.

Comparing prices achieved by Suffolk Acre Community Buying Ltd since the beginning of 2012 with the prices achieved by the existing village syndicate, shows that Suffolk Acre Community Buying Ltd provides benefits that justify the £20 annual subscription.

Questions remain about the extent to which the principle of bulk buying can be applied to other commodities. The complexity of the administration required and the potential negative impact on existing village businesses may limit the scope of such schemes.

10.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
10.3.1 Promote Suffolk Acre Community Buying Ltd within the village.	<i>Village News/Village Website/</i> Community Purchasing Working Party	High	In progress

11 Business and the internet

11.1 Summary of survey responses

The survey showed widespread dissatisfaction with current broadband capacity in the village. Investigation of the various issues raised is continuing, but it is not yet possible to make recommendations whilst clarification of policy and programme is awaited from Suffolk County Council.

The survey showed that many respondents were unhappy about the standard of mobile phone reception in the village.

Lower short-term parking charges for shoppers was the subject of several comments from the business questionnaire.

The feasibility of a Small Business Resource Centre in conjunction with an Enterprise Forum for Walberswick was also raised. The aim would be to encourage and develop the local business community and provide a focus for the sharing of ideas, skills and experience.

11.2 Commentary

Broadband

It is Suffolk County Council and Government policy to improve high-speed broadband in rural areas. To this end, SCC has set up an organisation called BB4S (Broadband for Suffolk) to enable local people to make their voices heard. They are calling on everyone locally, from all walks of life, to give support to the BB4S campaign by registering their support. This can be done by visiting BB4S website, www.suffolk.gov.uk/broadband.

BT's plans for the Southwold exchange, which covers Walberswick, is to upgrade broadband provision (to ADSL2+) later this year. This system will operate at up to twice the current speed.

However, the upgraded service will still have to be delivered to subscribers using the existing copper cable network with the same shortcomings, ie the further from the exchange you are, the slower the service.

Exchanges that are to be further upgraded to fibre optics are announced quarterly but it remains unlikely that the next tranche will include Southwold as BT's own commercial investment of £2.5bn will probably go to more densely populated areas. Rural areas, which include Walberswick, will require public sector finance. It is for this reason that BB4S should be fully supported.

Suffolk County Council is inviting tenders for the provision of these services from BT and Fujitsu. It is expected that SCC will include Southwold in their schedule of exchanges to be improved. The programme for installing the new system will be determined by SCC after the appointment of the successful tenderer, expected to be in the autumn of 2012.

The BT proposal under BB4S will be to introduce fibre optic cabling to the designated exchanges. From there it is hoped fibre optics will be run to the

junction boxes in the villages and towns selected. The existing copper network will still be used from the junction boxes to the subscriber, resulting in some local degradation in line speed. However, in Walberswick it will still provide a service of at least 30Mb compared to the current speed of about 1.7Mb.

Mobile phone and internet

An advantage of Fujitsu’s system is that it would provide better mobile phone reception as well as a greatly expanded range of applications such as IP telephony, gaming services, high-definition mobile TV, video conferencing and 3D television.

If BT’s proposal is the accepted BB4S bid, the wired delivery improves mobile applications only on the subscriber’s premises.

Need for low-cost short-term parking

This issue has been raised with WCPL (see ‘Parking’ para on p19).

Establishing an Enterprise Forum and Business Resource Centre

Informal discussions have been held with a number of people in the village engaged in commercial or professional activities. In principle there is support for the idea, but it is not possible to be certain whether this will translate into a positive demand for these facilities.

11.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
11.3.1 Monitor progress with the Suffolk CC, BT and Fujitsu plans and proposals to deliver improved broadband.	Business Working Party/ WPC	High	Short term
11.3.2 Monitor plans to improve mobile phone reception.	Business Working Party/ WPC	High	Short term
11.3.3 Encourage members of the public to sign up and register their support for improved broadband on the BB4S website: www.suffolk.gov.uk/broadband	Business Working Party/ WPC	High	Short term

12 Village communications

12.1 Summary of survey responses

This section of the Plan deals with the effectiveness of communications from the Parish Council, the Walberswick Common Lands Charity and other bodies and societies that represent the interests of the village. The present arrangements are summarised together with the responses to the survey and a brief account of the development of the official village website, www.walberswick.suffolk.gov.uk.

The Parish Council meets every month. Notices, agendas and minutes of meetings are posted on the parish notice boards at the village hall and Stocks Green, and on the Parish Council page of the village website. The web page now provides a record of agendas and minutes of meetings since 2009, including all notices, reports and appendices, resolutions and accounts. A brief summary of each meeting of the Parish Council is also carried in the *Village News*.

The Council presents the annual accounts and a report of its activities throughout the year at the Annual Parish Meeting, an open forum where residents can raise issues of concern with Councillors. The minutes of this meeting are published on the notice boards and the web page.

The survey showed that 90% of respondents obtained information about the Parish Council from the *Village News*, 49% read the notice boards, 37% relied on word of mouth and 7% used the internet. 72% of respondents who had attended meetings of the Parish Council felt that the issues discussed reflected local concerns.

The Walberswick Common Lands Charity meets every other month. A summary of each meeting is carried by the *Village News*, but otherwise the Charity does not publish notices, agendas or minutes of meetings. Annual accounts and the Chairman's report are submitted at the Annual Parish Meeting and are posted on the parish notice boards and the WCLC page of the village website. Comprehensive information about the history and purpose of the Charity, the policies for the maintenance of its lands and the distribution of grants from its income is also provided on the web page, all of which set an exemplary standard of communication.

Consideration is being given to the idea of holding an annual open session of the Charity to give residents an opportunity to meet and question the Trustees.

The survey showed that 87% of respondents gained information about the Charity from the *Village News*, 29% read the notice boards, 31% relied on word of mouth and 5% used the internet.

The Sea Defence Group and the Blyth Estuary Group both meet periodically. Occasional public meetings have been arranged and some information issued. Reports are submitted to the Annual Parish Meeting and posted on the village website. The Groups also have their own websites, but these have not been updated for some considerable time.

Responses from the survey to questions about communications from these groups are referred to in Section 1.1 of this report (p6). They show some dissatisfaction with the level of information currently available.

Other groups and organisations in Walberswick submit oral reports to the Annual Parish Meeting which are summarised in the minutes.

12.2 Commentary

The most striking evidence of these responses is the very small number of people who used the internet to gain information about the Parish Council or the Walberswick Common Lands Charity. A probable explanation is that, at the time of the survey in August 2010, the village website was in its infancy and the habit of using it as the first source of parish news had not developed.

The village website, originally known as the Walberswick Parish Council website, was given to the Parish Council in 2009 by Onesuffolk, a county-wide partnership of local authorities and the police, created to help parish councils and community groups publish information about themselves via the internet. In December 2011, the contents of the site were transferred to a new content management system with increased capacity, enabling the creation of a greatly expanded and more informative facility, to be known simply as the Walberswick website.

The Parish Council, the WCLC, the Village Hall and the Parish Plan now have their own web pages within the village website, the content of which is their individual responsibility. In addition, the website publishes news items, a diary of events in the village, a picture gallery, links to other useful websites such as local doctors' surgeries, train and bus timetables and local information about Walberswick. The site is continuously evolving: following the Jubilee celebrations, a blog has been attached to the news page.

The policy of the website is to be as informative as possible about Walberswick, to provide platforms for the Parish Council, the WCLC and the Parish Plan, to exclude advertising and to avoid publishing contentious material. The website does not provide a forum for letters or comment.

It is evident that the website is increasingly accessed by readers in Walberswick and further afield: in August 2012 the site received about 1,000 hits. Reports from the Parish Council, the WCLC and the other village groups provide a full and readily accessible record of their activities over the past three years. The fact that the Parish Council has been the subject of over 500 requests under the Freedom of Information Act during this period is not seen as a reflection upon the adequacy of its published information.

The Village News

The *Village News* is published monthly and distributed to every household in the village. It is also posted in the news section of the village website. The newsletter is self-funded and managed by a small editorial board. Contributions from

residents are welcome, but neither discussion of controversial or political issues nor the publication of material that could be considered defamatory is permitted.

From time to time, the *Village News* carries inserts advertising local events and other matters of interest to residents. In the same way, updates to the Parish Plan can be delivered with the *Village News* to every household.

Sea Defence Group and Blyth Estuary Group

There is a need for more frequent and regular information from these groups, given the importance of the issues involved: recommendation 1.3.10 referred to earlier calls for twice-yearly progress reports to the village. This would ensure the content of their web pages – kept up to date.

Monitoring the Parish Plan

The successful implementation of the Plan will depend upon regular, comprehensive and widely circulated reports by the various working parties. The objectives must be to keep the village involved in the process, to test and support developing proposals and to monitor progress. Since both the village website and the *Village News* will play a vital role in disseminating this information, it is proposed to establish a Communications Group comprising their own representatives and a representative of the Parish Plan Steering Group, to coordinate the preparation and publication of progress reports

12.3 Summary of recommendations

Issues and possible initiatives	By whom	Importance	Timescale
12.3.1 Establish a Communications Group to coordinate the preparation and publication of Parish Plan progress reports.	Steering Group/ Village Website/ <i>Village News</i>	High	In the process of being established
12.3.2 Encourage the WCLC to hold an annual open meeting to allow discussion of the annual report and other matters of interest.	Communications Group/WPC	Medium	Short term
12.3.3 Encourage the SDG and the BEG to maintain up-to-date websites and to consider transferring their sites to pages on the village website.	Communications Group/ WPC	Medium	Short term

Conclusions

One way of reviewing and ordering the 12 categories of initiatives set out in this report is to arrange and review them in terms of their potential contributions to the future of the village.

Defensive measures

These are defined by the urgency and importance of their potential contribution to the continuing existence of the village:

Sea and river defences (1.0)

Without these life in the village could become unsustainable in the next two or three decades while property values would be washed away, the appeal to tourists diminished and the quality of village life greatly reduced.

Planning and development control (2.0)

A more proactive, village-based approach to the conservation of the landscaping and the architectural value of the village would prevent the deterioration of the village's environmental quality for existing inhabitants while simultaneously enhancing Walberswick's attractiveness to visitors.

Ameliorative measures

These are defined by their potential contribution to quality of life in the village:

Traffic, parking and public transport (4.0)

Relatively simple and unobtrusive arrangements could make The Street safer and, by signposting the village's system of footpaths, could easily open up more opportunities for pedestrian movement for both villagers and visitors.

Environmental issues (5.0)

These fall into two categories – the unpleasant consequences of neighbouring agri-industry, and the somewhat more directly controllable patterns of behaviour such as intrusive and unnecessary noise from neighbouring properties and careless and unrestricted lighting. Ways of enhancing the safety and amenity of the beach must also be devised.

Health (7.0)

The recent introduction of the Community First Responders service provides an excellent precedent for making health services more accessible and comprehensive.

Youth (8.0)

The process of developing the Parish Plan has already stimulated a number of excellent initiatives for providing more facilities for village children and young holiday visitors.

Village hall (9.0)

The Parish Plan development process has already drawn welcome attention to the voluntary effort that keeps this vital institution in being and appropriately housed.

Conclusions

Business and the internet (10.0)

As information technology develops in capacity and reliability, Walberswick is becoming a place where various forms of distributed and home working could become attractive to incoming as well as existing inhabitants.

Bulk buying (11.0)

The process of bulk buying domestic fuel oil has drawn attention to the financial advantages that a relatively isolated and stable community could derive from purchasing collaboratively. However, the complexity of administration and the effect on local businesses may limit its application.

Village communications (12.0)

More direct, easily accessible and responsive communications technology would enhance the quality of village life.

More ambitious measures

Affordable and sheltered housing (3.0)

Ways need to be found to address the twin problems of the scarcity of affordable housing in the village and the relative paucity of small dwellings in the housing stock. Similarly, means of providing sheltered housing and other supported accommodation for the elderly are required.

Sustainability and local energy generation (6.0)

Walberswick's relative isolation and accessibility to potential sources of energy (such as wind, solar and tidal power as well as coppicing) mean that, while developing such initiatives is likely to be capital as well as labour intensive, it would be irresponsible to neglect them.

Next steps

Following the presentation of the Parish Plan to the village, the Steering Group, in liaison with the Parish Council, will establish a series of working parties whose task will be to translate the recommendations of the focus groups into specific, practical proposals. The personnel of the working parties will be drawn from those members of the focus groups who wish to continue in the role, and from new volunteers. It is envisaged that, once established with an agreed brief, working parties will become largely autonomous bodies, responsible directly to the village for the development of their ideas and their programme of work.

In considering the recommendations of the Plan, working parties will take account of comments received from residents at the introductory meeting and subsequently. They will be alert to changes of policy or circumstance that may warrant revision of the recommendations. In their research, working parties will be encouraged to look beyond the village to see how other communities are responding to similar problems and opportunities. Unique as it is, Walberswick faces many of the same issues that challenge small communities generally.

Each working party will submit a twice-yearly report to the village, which will be published on the Parish Plan web page and in the *Village News*. A summary of these reports will be presented at the Annual Parish Meeting. The Communications Group has been established to assist in the production and coordination of this information, which will enable the progress of the working parties to be monitored and evaluated.

The Steering Group will continue to provide overall coordination and will be responsible for liaison with the Parish Council, establishing and briefing the working parties, monitoring their progress and, where necessary, giving direction.

The Parish Plan contains many ideas which, if taken up with enthusiasm, could greatly benefit the village. Walberswick has a fine tradition of volunteering, and with the continued willingness of residents to contribute the time and effort required for its development and implementation, the Parish Plan can become a reality rather than remaining an aspiration.

Final thoughts

This report, which begins with the urgent threat to the village of the action of the sea and then goes on to cover such serious matters as the provision of affordable housing, the control of traffic, threats to the coastline and village environment, ends with an optimistic view of the future. Village life may, over the next decade, take on a quite different meaning. The Government is offering the opportunity for communities to take decisions that directly affect them at a much more local level.

As part of the present Government's 'Localism' agenda there are a number of opportunities for communities to have strong positive impacts on the local area. These include preparation of neighbourhood plans, a 'community right to build' and giving permission locally for new developments. Provisions include the need for local referenda to agree the details. Whilst these tools are different to a 'Parish Plan', much of the work proposed in this Plan could support future initiatives under the 'Localism' provisions if the parish wished to consider them.

In addition, it is surely not unrealistic for Walberswick to begin to explore how to take maximum advantage of emerging technology with the objective of becoming a more cooperative and prosperous community, more closely in touch with the world and with our neighbours, while still continuing to enjoy peace and quiet within this rare, remote and relatively untouched landscape of the sea and the marshes.

Cover image

Figures on the Beach, Walberswick, c.1888–9
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