

# **Reports from the Parish Plan Working Parties**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The reports which follow record the progress of the Working Parties set up after the publication of the Stage 2 Action Plan in October 2012. Much of the work noted here was to have been carried out in collaboration with the Parish Council but that was no longer possible following the resignation of the councillors a few days before publication. Now, with new councillors elected, the research and recommendations can be taken forward in partnership, as originally envisaged. The Steering Group is in contact with the Parish Council to see how best this can be achieved.

### **1. Sea and River Defences**

Last December's storm surge brought massive volumes of water into the Blyth, breaching the river banks, flooding Robinson's Marsh and threatening houses in The Lea. Further damage was prevented by the rapid response of the Environment Agency in repairing the banks.

Within the next fifteen years, the Environment Agency will withdraw maintenance of the flood defences in the river and the assistance provided on this occasion will no longer be available. The Lea will be protected by a new secondary wall but breaches in the river bank will remain unrepaired, the footpath lost and Robinson's Marsh will flood with the tide, slowly transforming itself into salt marsh.

The Walberswick Common Lands Charity (WCLC), which owns the land, is determined to see Robinson's Bank and its footpath preserved as essential features of Walberswick. With that aim, the Trustees, in conjunction with the Blyth Estuary Group, are now examining the self help scheme proposed by BEG in 2009 to strengthen and raise the bank between the Bailey Bridge and the Ferry crossing. This would retain the footpath and provide for ongoing maintenance. This process should receive the active support of the Parish Council.

The surge also caused significant erosion of the beach. Urgent action is needed to replace the protective fencing surrounding the dunes before the next holiday season and to replant areas of marram grass stripped by the storm.

The shingle bank between Walberswick and Dunwich was overtopped and breached by the surge, flooding the marshes behind. However, as a result of improvements to the sluices and a major pumping exercise by Natural England, the floodwaters were cleared before the ecology of the marshes could be seriously harmed. Breaches in the shingle bank repaired themselves naturally.

The Steering Group will recommend the following objectives to the Parish Council:

- The long term preservation of Robinson's Marsh, its bank and footpath after the Environment Agency withdraws maintenance of the river banks.
- The ongoing protection of The Lea.
- Active participation in the Blyth Estuary Group, in conjunction with WCLC.
- Implementation of measures to protect the dunes in conjunction with the Environment Agency.

## **2. Planning and Development Control**

As recommended in the Phase 2 Report, the Planning Working Party (PWP) submitted a comprehensive response to the draft appraisal of the Walberswick Conservation Area, published for consultation last summer by Suffolk Coastal District Council (SCDC). A public meeting was held in the Village Hall in August to give residents the opportunity to hear the Conservation Officer explain the purpose and content of the review and to answer questions. It also enabled the PWP to explain to the village the general terms of its comments. The PWP's response, published on the Parish Plan website, was well received by SCDC and the majority of its recommendations have been incorporated in the final document, approved by SCDC on the 3rd December 2013.

Other recommendations of the Phase 2 Report to be followed up include:

- Conservation Area Boundary Review
- The feasibility of implementing an Article 4 Directive within the Conservation Area
- A survey of significant trees in the village
- The establishment of a Planning Advisory Group

## **3. Affordable and Sheltered Housing**

The Working Party had written to the Walberswick Common Lands Charity (WCLC) asking if the Trustees would support the provision of affordable housing in the village. The WCLC replied that it would be willing to support an initiative in Walberswick if it favoured local people.

It appears that the only land available for development inside the village envelope, is in private ownership. Various pieces of land under private ownership have been discussed and will be researched further. It is agreed that a meeting with the Chairman of the Fox Trust in Southwold to acquire information on their sheltered housing programme will be beneficial.

It is apparent that some younger families require larger houses than are currently available. A discussion on extending existing houses has taken place and is under further consideration.

It was also agreed to approach SCDC's Enabling Officer to discuss his views on affordable and sheltered housing in Walberswick.

Next steps:

- A meeting with the SCDC Area Enabling Officer – a series of questions have been drawn up (meeting arranged 14<sup>th</sup> Feb, 2014)
- A meeting with the Chairman of the Fox Trust at Southwold

## **4. Traffic, Parking and Public Transport**

The principal recommendations of the phase 2 Report include:

- Speed indicators at the entrance to the village and the junction with Lodge Road
- Signs highlighting the shared use of The Street by pedestrians, cyclists and vehicle drivers

- 20mph limit in the entire length of The Street
- Enforcement of parking regulations
- Develop and publicise footpaths providing off road routes to the beach, the harbour etc
- Coastal Link – possible transport link from Walberswick to Southwold

These and other recommendations will be taken forward with the Parish Council

## 5. Environmental Issues

The overall target of the Working Party (WP) was to consider “How can the village be improved and managed to become an even more pleasant place in which to live”.

**The Beach** - Recommendations 5.3.1 of the stage 2 report calls for an experimental restriction on dogs. It suggests the introduction of an exclusion zone prohibiting dogs, jet skis, wind surfing, big kite flying, fires and barbecues from a clearly designated area of the beach between May and September. The WP considered that the large dog lobby in the village would object to the ban on dogs and recommended that this be amended to the request for dogs on that section of the beach to be on a lead during that period. The WP recognised that the introduction of Bylaws to enforce these bans was too complicated and at this stage was inappropriate as it was to be for an experimental period. It was considered that a notice requesting the public to restrict the various activities would encourage a level of self regulation.

**Dog Bins** -The WP carried out a survey of the bins for dog excreta and concluded that they were more or less positioned sensibly. Some venues such as the car parks were used extensively for the deposit of waste bags and would benefit from additional provision.

**Light pollution, noise and rubbish** -The WP carried out a survey of light pollution in the village and concluded that there was not a problem. It recognised that commercial properties needed to be well lit.

The WP considered the problem of domestic rubbish. The main problem was that the fortnightly collection could not cope with holiday lets with a large number of occupants. Essentially the solution of the problem was the responsibility of owners or their agents, but it was thought that more frequent collection would help.

One of the worst sites for exposed rubbish was at the village hall where bins were full to overflowing during the season. Perhaps campers were responsible for the excess rubbish.

**Pig Farming** -The WP explored the problem of the extension of pig farming around the village. One member of the WP had extensively researched the problem and commented on the difficulty of dealing with it. The WCLC was in the process of negotiating with Blois Farms and the WP decided to suspend consideration of the problem until there was an outcome from these negotiations.

**Sustainability and Local Energy Generation** -This topic was still being investigated.

### Recommendations for discussion with the Parish Council

- Identify the most popularly used part of the beach and post a notice that Jet Skis, wind and kite surfing should not be practiced in this area.

- Provide more facilities for the disposal of dog waste at the exit from Cliff Field car park and at the entrance/exit to the common at the end of Church Lane.
- Post a notice at the Cliff Field car park concerning the disposal of dog waste.
- Monitor the disposal of rubbish by the village hall.
- Provide a notice for holiday property owners to display for holiday lets.
- Request a more frequent collection of rubbish.

## **6. Health**

- A defibrillator is now available for all to use at the village shop. Spoken instructions are given once the cabinet is open.
- There are currently no active Community First Responders in the village. Volunteers are urgently needed so that training can be given.

The Health WP will monitor the use of the defibrillator and progress in the recruitment of Community First Responders.

## **7. Youth Group**

Having successfully established itself over the past three years, the Youth Group is now an autonomous body, independent of the Steering Group, which will submit annual reports to the Annual Parish Meeting. However, the Steering Group will be there as a support if needed.

## **8. Village Hall**

The Village Hall is administered by an effective Management Committee, independent of the Steering Group, which submits a report to the Annual Parish Meeting.

## **9. Bulk Buying**

Community Action Suffolk (formerly Suffolk Acre) runs an effective scheme for the bulk buying of heating oil. To run a village wide scheme for the purchase of oil or any other commodity requires a disproportionate amount of volunteer time and will not be large enough to warrant the employment of a professional manager. No further action will be taken by the Steering Group

## **10. Business and the internet**

The latest information is that we do not have long to wait for high speed broadband as Suffolk County Council's 31<sup>st</sup> January 2014 response to our query advises:-

*"No - this is the real stuff - fibre broadband! It is due by June this year, and we are starting the survey work in the next couple of months. Premises close to the new green cabinets (which are generally set to be near the old existing ones), can expect 80Mbps. This does decrease with distance, but even so we expect the area to be very well served. Once progress is made on survey work, we will be in touch directly with promotional material, as we are keen to get as many people onto the service as possible".*

It is doubtful that anyone in Walberswick is currently getting Broadband speed better than 5Mbps so, notwithstanding degradation over distance from the green, we can now look forward to a broadband service worth paying for.  
Progress will be monitored in liaison with the Parish Council.

## **11. Communications**

The Steering Group will report progress on the various elements of the plan on the Walberswick website twice yearly. The next report will be at the Annual Parish Meeting in April.

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