



Wisborough Green Past, Present & Future

- A Case study in Community Engagement



Introduction

“In April 2012, Wisborough Green Parish Council undertook a community consultation event. The event was a huge success, and potentially could be replicated by communities for a range of different needs. Subsequently, Wisborough Green Parish Council were asked to compile this case study to share their experiences with others.”



At the beginning of 2011, Wisborough Green Parish Council decided that it needed to update the Parish Plan that it had created in 2004. The objective was to engage the community in discussions about the future of the Parish and to publish a new Community Led Plan in 2012. The community engagement had two main elements.

Firstly there was a need to develop a better understanding of how people viewed living in Wisborough Green; what is good about it and what could be improved. At this stage we wanted to identify the issues that were impacting upon people's lives and better understand what they thought about those issues. This was achieved by undertaking an extensive questionnaire based survey using both hard copy and online techniques. Box 1 (*right*) shows the range of issues identified in this survey.

In the second element of the community engagement we wanted to explore these issues in more depth and try to move peoples' perspectives from 'problem identification' to 'problem solving'.

We wanted to identify the actions that would be needed to make Wisborough Green a better place to live over the next 10 years. In order to achieve this aim a two day community consultation event was run in the Village Hall on the 19th/20th April 2012.

Key issues emerging from the Parish Survey were:

1. Future CLP consultation needs to reach a broader age range.
2. The 'Traditional Village Setting' is the best thing about living in Wisborough Green.
3. Speeding and parking are the worst things.
4. Fuel poverty or fuel vulnerability is a problem for a significant number of residents
5. The shop/ PO is a key facility which, although most people do not depend upon, they use and value highly.
6. The Green is another key facility, well cared for in the majorities opinion but perhaps its use is over dominated by special interest groups namely sport.
7. Strong agreement on the need for some more housing of a particular kind over the next 10-15 years.
8. Support for small developments, phased delivery and the need to maintain the strategic gap.
9. Only a fifth of respondents regularly use public transport but for those who do it is a poor service.
10. The Parish Council is seen as doing an adequate job but could communicate better.
11. Village communication style, changes required.



Event Planning

A Community Led Plan organising group had been established by the Parish Council, consisting of Council members and the Parish Clerk. This group took on responsibility for the consultation event.

The decision to run a consultation event as opposed to any other sort of engagement activity was largely based on the fact that we had done something similar when creating the Parish Plan in 2004; it had been a big success and people still remembered it. The Community Led Plan Group were very keen to **create something that was interactive and attracted as wide a range of people** from the Parish as possible and thus as diverse a set of views as possible.

Designing an interactive event

The group began by identifying key organisations to invite who would need to be present and/ or contribute. This included staff from Chichester District Council.

There was really only one venue in the village where we could hold such an event; the village hall. This is a key focus point for village activities and has enough space to accommodate displays and large numbers of people.

The idea of 'Past, Present & Future' was developed because we felt that the event needed a theme that

would be of interest to the widest possible audience. It also provided us with a high level structure for the engagement process:

- **Past** – pictures and stories to show how things were different in the past, to give a feel for where the community had come from and to get across the idea that communities are always changing.
- **Present** – sharing the results of the survey; “this is what you told us it is like to live here now”.
- **Future** – asking people at the event what they would like see and how things could be different in the future.

Using this structure the event was designed to elicit ideas and information on three topics:

- Issues emerging out of the **community survey**.
- **Housing** – where a number of potential development sites had been identified.
- The **Village Design Statement** – a component of a community led plan and where we needed more information from people.

For issues emerging from the **community survey** we used display boards to provide the elements of past, present and future as illustrated below. People were invited to add comments using post it notes and volunteers were on hand to encourage people to think about ‘ideas for the future’ and ‘solutions to issues’.

The **Housing topic** was covered using large scale maps showing the potential sites for development and asking people to comment on what they saw as the ‘Pros and Cons’ of each site. Again these comments were written on post-it notes and posted on boards along side the maps, as shown below. Volunteers with knowledge of local housing and planning issues were on hand to answer questions and encourage participation. We were also well supported by CDC staff that were on hand to answer more technical questions.

The **Village Design Statement** element was achieved with the help of a very large scale map. This map had been created for a similar consultation event when the Parish Plan was produced in 2004.

We wanted to know what people liked about the built and the natural





Wisborough Green' badge from the Parish Council.

Making it happen

This event took a lot of organisation. Critical was having a strong team not only of organisers but also of volunteers. The volunteer role was critical as we needed people who could encourage participation, who were happy to talk to people while ensuring at the same time their views were recorded on the displays. Volunteers were recruited from the different clubs and societies in the Parish. One of the displays was designed to feature the range of different activities that the community were engaged in and provided them with an opportunity to attract more members. In return many volunteered to help at the consultation event.

Volunteers were organised in a rota, doing two hour shifts. A briefing session was run the evening before and members of the organising team were on hand to provide support or answer any really tricky questions. There were always people on hand to meet and greet visitors and explain what was going on and members of the local church took care of the catering arrangements.

environment so we asked them to put flags on a map in answer to the following questions.

- Where do you live?
- Which is your favourite building in the Parish?
- Where is your favourite spot?
- Where is your favourite view?
- Where is your favourite footpath?

This proved a big success with people really engaging with the geography of the Parish and articulating very descriptively why they liked what they did.

Attracting a wide range of people

The Parish questionnaire had largely been filled in by more elderly residents so it was important that at this event we attracted a wider range of people and especially young people.

Key to achieving this was the involvement of the village primary school. Liaison with the headmistress showed that there was a real interest

in closer engagement with the community. Not only would the children like to attend the event but it was also agreed that the school would mount an art exhibition on the theme of 'Wisborough Green, Past, Present & Future'. This proved extremely popular and not only drew in Brothers and Sisters, Mums and Dads and Grannies and Granddads but also produced a challenging range of ideas for the future. All the children came to the event and contributed their thoughts to the interactive displays and received as a thank you an 'I am the future of

Other factors that helped draw in a wide range of people included:

- Running the event on a Friday and Saturday, and opening between 9am and 6pm
- Involving other organisations in the village. For example the History Group provided all the historical information and promoted it to its members. Other organisations were contacted for promotional information and many were involved as volunteers over the two days.
- Linking it to the Parish questionnaire; this was the place that you could come along to see the results.
- Publicity around the Parish and promotion via the local media.
- Promoting the fact that there was free homemade tea and cake.

They say an army marches on its stomach and the same can be said for a consultation event. Free refreshments were provided. Homemade cake was made by a local caterer, the chocolate brownies went down a storm with the children. We were also able to set aside one room in the village hall as a café where people could sit with their refreshments, chat and look at some of the more detailed information such as the full report from the Parish Questionnaire. This facility was very popular and meant that people probably stayed much longer than would have been the case, often returning to the displays after a tea break.

A key challenge was to source enough display boards to mount the number of displays we wanted to. Other organisations were generous in their help, particularly Horsham and Chichester District Councils.

Evaluation - What worked and what might we have gone better

About 260 adults and over 140 children attended the event and the feedback from those people was overwhelmingly positive and appreciative. Perhaps the most often heard comment was 'I didn't know there was so much going on!' We feel that by staging such an event we achieved the following:

- Enhanced community spirit.
- Residents who were better informed about the issues and challenges facing the community.
- A large quantity of quality information from our community to inform the next stage of the community led plan process.
- Greater support for that planning process.
- Great awareness and confidence in the Parish Council.

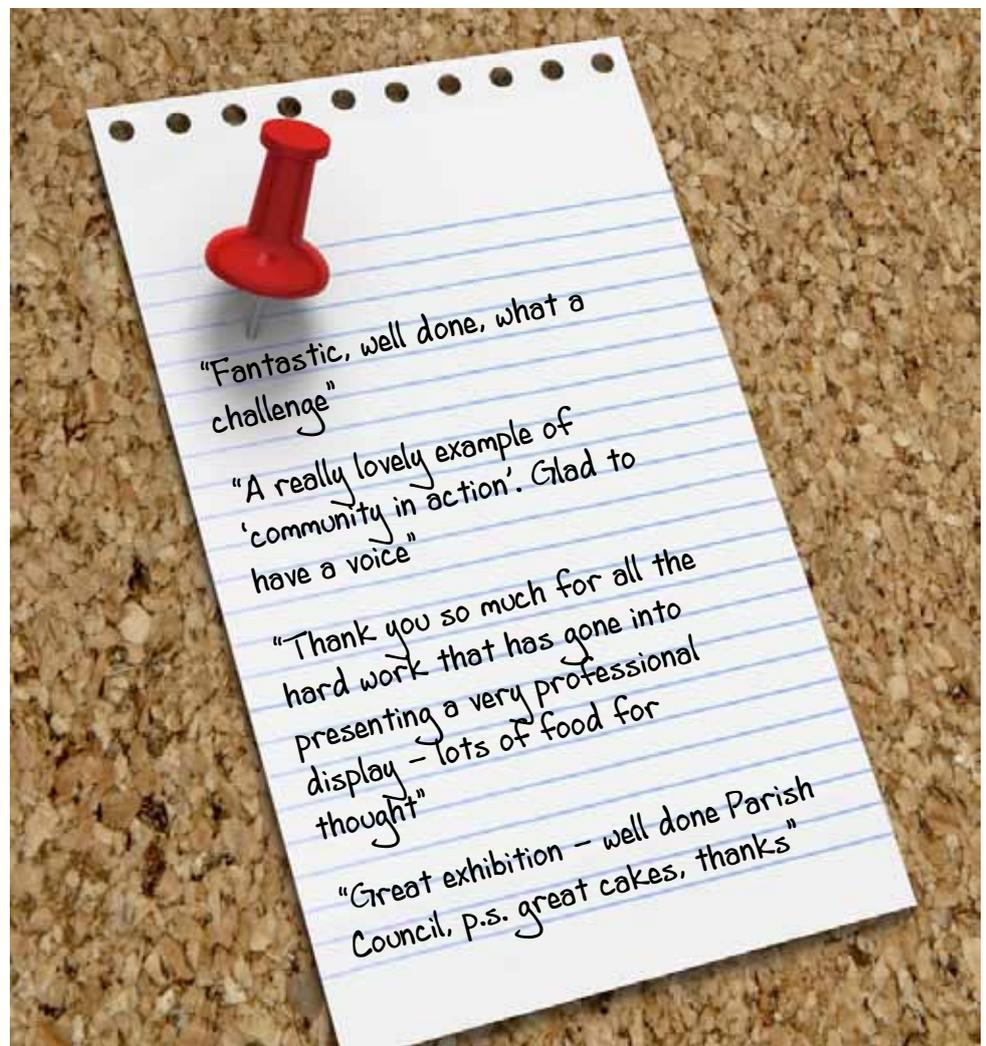
A key factor in the success of the event was the availability of volunteers to meet and greet people, not only to make them feel welcome and explain how they could best engage with the event, but also to develop the conversation around particular issues. People who came along really felt that they were being listened to and that they were part of a large debate.

In respect of what might have gone better the large scale map was a victim of its own success. As an engagement tool it worked really well as people loved putting flags on the map to mark what they really liked. However, there were so many flags that it was difficult to see who was saying what and therefore its full impact was lost. A more controlled process with volunteers taking notes as people identified their favourite places might have overcome this.

We were a bit disappointed by the relatively few ideas for the future. People appreciated the opportunity to comment on the current situation but seemed reluctant to think about the future. This may have as much to say about human nature as it does the design of the event.

Postscript

In July 2012 Wisborough Green Parish Council applied to Chichester District Council to become a Neighbourhood Plan area. This more formal planning process requires extensive community engagement so the results of the Wisborough Green Past, Present and Future become more rather than less important. We feel that because of the event the Parish Council is now better placed to lead such a process having gained the support and confidence of our community.



**With grateful thanks to
Wisborough Green Parish Council**



**For more information contact:
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