

HETHERSGILL PARISH PLAN

INTRODUCTION

This Parish Plan was commissioned by Hethersgill Parish Council with the aim of taking stock of the parish, identifying what is needed locally and ensuring local people had a voice in future local improvements. A group of residents volunteered to form a working group and decided to gather local views and opinions via a questionnaire. This exercise was carried out in April 2006 with working group members hand delivering the questionnaires to the households in the parish. 74 completed questionnaires were returned which represents slightly less than 50% of the households in the parish.

Parish Profile

Hethersgill is predominantly a rural parish situated in North Cumbria, between the line of Hadrian's Wall and the Scottish Border. The Parish comprises the hamlet of Hethersgill itself together with a number of smaller settlements such as Uppertown, Bolton Fell End and Nether Onset. Within the wider area there are a large number of farm steadings and country cottages.

Demographic Profile

The parish had a population of 382 in 2001 according to the census of population taken in that year.

More than three quarters of the residents of the parish indicated that their general health was good.

Table 1 examines the age structure of the parish population in 2001 and shows that all age ranges were well represented. The larger numbers in the 25 to 64 year olds gives a mean age of parish residents from the 2001 census of 40.1 years.

Table 1: 2001 Age Structure

Age	Number	Parish %	Cumbria %
0-4	15	3.9	5.2
5-15	63	16.5	13.7
16-24	33	8.6	9.1
25-44	99	25.9	27.2
45-64	113	29.8	26.5
65-74	34	8.9	9.8
75+	25	6.5	8.5
	382	100	100

The pre-school age group was slightly under-represented compared with the county average as was the retirement groups.

Within the parish there were 152 occupied dwellings in 2001, with a further eleven which were vacant and three which were either second or holiday homes. The average household size in Hethersgill was 2.5 people.

The composition of the family groups living in these households reflected that of the county as a whole in general terms, although there was a lower proportion of people living alone (both pensioners and non-pensioners) and a higher proportion of families with non-dependant children.

The vast majority of dwellings were detached properties - 110 or 66% of the total compared with only 25.4% within Cumbria as a whole. A further 53 were classified as semi-detached or terraced. These represented 31.9% of the parish total whereas in the county as a whole semis and terraced housing represented 63.3% of the housing stock. The high percentage of detached properties reflects the large number of farm steadings and country cottages located in the parish.

Table 2 shows a massive 85.5% (130) of the dwellings in Hethersgill were owner-occupied in 2001. Social rented dwellings (provided by housing associations or councils) were extremely low compared to the county average, while private renting was only slightly lower than the norm for Cumbria.

Table2: Household Tenure

	Number	Parish %	Cumbria %
Owner Occupied	130	85.5	72.3
Social Renting	8	5.3	16
Private Renting	14	9.2	11.7

As part of the 2006 questionnaire , residents were asked how long they had lived in their present homes. Of the respondents 27% had lived there for five years or less (and had therefore moved in since the 2001 Census of Population), 17% had lived there between five and 10 years and 56% had lived there more than 10 years. It would appear therefore that those residents of Hethersgill who responded to the questionnaire are relatively mobile and possibly not indigenous to the area. This is reinforced by the response to the question "How did you come to be living in this neighbourhood?" Only 10% were born here, whereas 8% moved here to be close to family and friends, 13% to be close to work and a large 58% because they liked the house and/or area.

Less than 10% of the households in the parish did not have a car or van in 2001 while 55% of households had two cars or more. This is not surprising in a rural area with very limited alternative means of transport available.

Social and Community Facilities

There are limited facilities within Hethersgill parish. The village of Hethersgill itself has a parish hall. This is run by a committee of volunteers and is available for hire for both community and private functions and activities. A programme of refurbishment and improvement is ongoing.

Outside the parish there are community centres in Brampton and Longtown which offer facilities and services to residents in the wider area. The results of the 2006 questionnaire indicated that these centres are used equally by residents of Hethersgill parish.

St Mary's Church in Hethersgill village and St Cuthbert's Church in Kirklington (both Church of England) are part of a group of four churches. There are services at these churches almost every week. The other churches in the group are at Stapleton and Bewcastle. There are no places of worship of any other denomination in the parish.

The Black Lion at Hethersgill is the only public house in the Parish. There are no shops in the village. A mobile post office visits Hethersgill every Tuesday morning and provides a service from the village hall car park. In addition a mobile community police station is located in the centre of Hethersgill every month.

Organisations and Groups

There are a number of groups and organisations in the parish offering a range of services to people living in Hethersgill. Some of these are administrative type groups while others involve more community based activities. Hethersgill has a Parish Council which is the "grass roots" tier of local government, its powers and duties, and its role in acting on behalf of the community it represents are defined in statute. There is also a Parochial Church Council which is a joint committee with Kirklington and deals with ecclesiastical matters affecting the parish. The Parish Hall Committee administers and co-ordinates the activities taking place in the Parish Hall, while the Social Welfare Committee organises a party in the hall for the elderly and disabled of the parish in November/December each year.

The Hethersgill branch of the Women's Institute meets monthly in the village hall and there is weekly Parent and Toddler Group held during term time, again in the hall. The Walking Group organises long and short walks on a monthly basis for those wishing to get out and about in the local area or further afield. A Leek Club is run from the Black Lion public house. There are also darts and pool teams which represent the Black Lion in local leagues.

The Kirklington Young Farmers' Club, although it meets outside the area, does have members from within Hethersgill parish.

Events

Most, if not all, of the events held in the village are organised by the groups and organisations identified above. Events are held to provide a facility for residents and/or members, or to raise funds to maintain existing facilities and services. Events include monthly dances in the Hall, Christmas fair, Easter car boot sale and harvest lunch. There are also one-off events such as antiques evenings and fashion shows. The Black Lion Leek Club holds fundraising events throughout the year in the pub and the annual leek show is held on the first Saturday in September.

Communications

There is bus service to and from Carlisle (sometimes via Brampton) Monday to Friday only. There are no other forms of public transport available to residents of the parish. The local daily and weekly newspapers are available from the Black Lion public house. National newspapers are delivered by the local milkman.

There is a telephone kiosk and a post box in the centre of Hethersgill village and a post box at Hallfoot Mill. Broadband has recently been installed on the Kirklington telephone exchange. There are parish notice boards in Hethersgill village, at Hallfoot Mill, Bolton Fell End and Uppertown.

A church newsletter is hand-delivered to all homes in the parish. The newsletter covers Bewcastle, Stapleton and Kirklington as well as Hethersgill. In 2005 Hethersgill parish council launched its own newsletter which it is hoped will be posted to all homes three or four times a year.

Education

Hethersgill village school has been closed for some years and the majority of primary school age children of the parish go to Fir Ends School in Smithfield. This school also has a nursery facility. The local authority provide transport for children in Hethersgill parish to Fir Ends School. William Howard School in Brampton provides the secondary education for the majority of pupils from the parish aged 11 and over.

Business

Agriculture, specifically livestock farming, is the predominant economic activity in Hethersgill but there is a wide range of other businesses operating within the parish. The questionnaire survey showed 17.5% of respondents run their own business and these include a basket maker, builders, drainage contractor, export agency, furniture maker, artists, PR agency, photographers and running self catering holiday accommodation. In addition there is a small agricultural vehicle repair workshop, electricians, haulier and a race horse trainer.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The Community

The vast majority of respondents think that people around here are friendly and willing to help. The majority also believe there is a good community spirit although there is no consensus whatsoever on whether the area is changing for the better.

Almost half those who responded say that lack of public transport makes it difficult to visit friends or relatives but on the positive side the vast majority of people who live alone say they don't feel lonely or isolated.

Relatively few need help from a friend or neighbour but there is a good variety of help given to neighbours and friends ranging from assistance with animals, transport and children to household maintenance and meals.

The majority of people who completed the questionnaire ignored the question about serious problems in the area but of those who did reply, half felt that lack of community spirit was a serious issue. "People moving in and out of the area" was also remarked on in seven cases. Only three people felt that crime was a serious problem.

There was no consensus on the main social problem. The highest response (from four people) was isolation but no other category received more than two responses.

Again, there were a variety of comments made by people on what they liked most about the neighbourhood although the peace and tranquillity of the unspoilt countryside and the friendly people were the main items.

There were fewer responses to the things people liked least but issues connected with the roads - HGVs, mud on roads, lack of gritting and the state of the verges - were given the highest priority with several people commenting on the same issues. Lack of facilities such as a good pub, café, PO, deliveries, police station, shop were also mentioned but by fewer people.

Recommendations

The Parish Council should focus its attention on:

- **The HGV problem**
- **State of the verges**
- **The Parish Council should press the Post Office on delivery times.**

The Environment

This subject generated a lot of response and was the subject to get by far the most volunteers: around half of all respondents.

Footpaths

When asked to comment on footpaths, the most frequent responses included overgrown, inaccessible, stiles difficult, blocked and impassable, with further comments on a bridleway blocked by a fence. Although some people do not use them at all, there was plenty of indication that a lot of people were keen to use them if it were possible.

The countryside and its peace and tranquillity dominated the responses to "What do you like most about this neighbourhood?", whilst the damage to the verges and the litter problem on them were frequent responses to "What do you like least...?".

Asking residents "What could be done to improve the environment?" provoked an excellent response, within which uppermost were reducing HGV traffic, slowing traffic, reducing litter, managing the verges, cleaner roads and additional recycling for plastic.

Recommendations

- **The Parish Council should prioritise the environment especially in relation to reducing the HGV traffic, restoring the footpath network and improving the management of roadside verges.**
- **The Parish Council should actively involve the enthusiastic volunteers in specific projects.**

Housing

There were six questions in the questionnaire relating to housing and what the respondents felt about their own properties and why they lived in the area.

Over half live in two storey properties and the remainder in single storey properties.

Energy Efficiency

Of those questionnaires that were returned over a quarter felt that improved glazing of their homes would improve the energy efficiency. Nearly all respondents felt that their homes would benefit from some form of loft, cavity wall or water tank insulation. Very few respondents said they were satisfied with the energy efficiency state of their homes.

Affordability

Very few respondents had family living with them because they couldn't find suitable /affordable housing in the locality. Of those who did have household members living with them, and would prefer not to, price and lack of suitable properties in the area were the main reasons that they were unable to move on. Half of the people looking for alternate homes said they would be interested in low cost starter homes. Although according to the respondents very few people have move out of the area because of the inability to buy or rent locally .If cheaper housing were available only a third who had family living away said those family would want to move back.

Why do we live here?

More than half the respondents have chosen to live in the area because they liked the property they chose, and many simply because they liked the area. Very few moved to be near friends or family. Some chose to live in the parish to be nearer to their work

Recommendations

- **The Parish Council should link into Carlisle City Council's promotion on energy efficiency**

Highways And Pavements

Roads and Traffic

All of the area is served by rural roads and many of these are narrow. The survey results had many references to the unsatisfactory state of the roads and dangerous traffic.

The majority of the negative comments around the safety and condition of the roads concerned the speed (60%) and size (70%) of vehicles and mud on the roads (65%). Just over 30% of all respondents considered the areas roads to be poor. Potholes, standing water and poor road maintenance were identified as particular problems.

44 negative comments about the roads were made.

On road users 77 negative comments were made about HGVs and 19 about farm machinery. These were mainly about speed, danger to other road users, mud and damage to the roads and verges.

Although numerous danger spots were identified, Hethersgill crossroads was named by more respondents (26%) than any other part of our road system.

Interestingly the top 3 things least liked about the area were HGVs, mud on the roads and speeding traffic. And of the 87 suggestions on how to improve the areas' environment over a third of the suggestions related to the roads and transport.

Pavements

There are only short sections of pavement in Hethersgill village and near Ullermire Cottages.

Probably because of the very limited extent of the roadside pavements, nearly 40% of respondents thought there were no pavements in the Parish. 21 comments were made about the poor state of repair or access (damaged verges, parked cars) of the pavements with only 4 positive comments. 24% of respondents thought the lack of pavements a problem.

Recommendations:

- That local publicity is given to contact points for notifying the Highways Department of potholes and a register be kept (by the Parish Council?) of location and speed of repair to inform future prioritisation of road maintenance.
- The Parish Council collects information about standing water and road flooding and works with the Highways Department to prioritise remedial work.
- The Parish Council with Cumbria County Council continues to restrict the use of unsuitable local roads by HGVs and to publish a local contact point for reporting inappropriate HGV usage.
- The Parish Council with the Police look at the safety issues at Hethersgill crossroads and discuss possible solutions.
- The Parish Council contacts all local HGV operators, farming contractors and farmers seeking their help in resolving the issues raised by this survey.
- The Parish Council encourages local farmers and HGV operators to protect the local verges and have a contact point for reporting damage.
- That local publicity is given to the location of roadside pavements and the Parish Council ensures their proper maintenance.
- The Parish Council consider the feasibility of extending the pavements.

Transport

In common with many other small rural areas transport difficulties affected residents' ability to visit hospitals, doctors/health worker, friends and family to go shopping. A significant number of respondents identified lack of public transport as a problem (about 20%) but very few of the respondents had used the public transport that was available. A more frequent bus service and at more convenient times were considered the most necessary improvements.

Not surprisingly the vast majority (97%) of households who responded to the survey had drivers with only 2.8% of respondents saying there were no drivers in their households. Many respondents said they would be interested in a shared car scheme. 2 people said they would volunteer to drive a minibus, 4 would volunteer to drive a shared car and one would volunteer to be a dial-a-ride driver.

Recommendations:

- **Local publicity is given to the current dial-a-ride scheme and Rural Wheels.**
- **Further work to be undertaken on the feasibility and potential usage of formal and informal care share schemes.**
- **The Parish Council advises Cumbria County Council of the wish of local residents for enhanced access to public transport and undertakes a more in-depth study of residents needs and potential usage**

Younger members of the Parish

The results of the questionnaire indicate that there are too few childminders in the area and the limited care available is proving too costly.

The nurseries tend to be located in areas that are inconvenient and the opening and closing times appear to be awkward for some people.

It would appear that the majority of parishioners replying to "help with child care" did not feel that extra help was needed.

A play area, providing swings and slides would be welcomed by many of those with young children.

There were several requests for a Youth Club.

Before and after school clubs, sports clubs and teams, holiday play schemes followed by the Young Farmers Club are the activities most frequently enjoyed by the younger members of the community.

Recommendations

- **The Parish Council should consider supporting Youth club activities and any ideas for a play area.**

Education & Training

A quarter of respondents (19) were interested in pursuing training or education on a wide variety of subjects. For 20% of these the training interests were involving their career development or work.

Computing topped the list (45%) 9 responses.

Ecology and environmental issues with interest in the local area (15%) 3 responses

Arts and crafts (10%) 2 responses.

The interest in computing is sufficient to explore holding a class within Hethersgill.

With small numbers it may not be feasible to hold other classes locally but should be considered as the factors preventing people doing leisure/social/educational activities included "no local facilities" for almost a fifth of responses.

The other factors cited, child care needs, expense and transport difficulties are all important in our rural community. There may be opportunities to look at shared transport to alternative venues further afield , or request mobile educational facilities.

Importantly to have accessible information about other venues offering facilities would enable those who wish to pursue educational activities to do so.

Recommendations:

- **That consideration is given to holding a computing class or group within Hethersgill.**
- **That shared transport to alternative educational venues further afield is explored.**
- **That information about other local educational facilities is made available.**

This could be facilitated by a website for Hethersgill or a web page on the community website being developed for Brampton and District .

Leisure Activities

A significant number of respondents used local sports and leisure centres in Carlisle, Brampton and Longtown taking part in a wide variety of activities.

The biggest obstacle by far which prevents residents taking part in social/leisure and educational activities is time although almost a third also mention lack of local facilities.

Respondents play an active part in many different organisations and groups - the most popular being school linked organisations, the village hall/community centre, a place of worship and the walking group. Again 71 per cent cite lack of time as the main reason that prevents them being more involved but there is also a significant number who do not know what is going on in the area. A small number are not interested in community activities.

The recycling skips were very popular. Other facilities regularly used were the village hall and the Black Lion. The mobile post office was used by a significant minority.

A high proportion of respondents would be interested in a food co-operative/community shop. Other ideas, which attracted interest, were exercise classes, coffee/teashop and children's play area. There was some interest in a luncheon club and a youth group.

Many people expressed interest in possible groups - local history, natural history/wildlife and horticulture and gardening being the most popular (with offers of help to set up these groups) but there was a significant interest in film, art and reading clubs.

Recommendations

- **The Parish Council should continue its support of the Village Hall and consider how to support new community facilities and groups as suggested in the survey.**
- **The Gill could be used to ensure that those who do not currently know what is happening in the parish are kept informed of local activities.**
- **The Parish Council should continue to promote the recycling and consider how to do even more.**

The Relationship between the Parish Council and the Parishioners.

Two thirds of the respondents did not think that they were well enough informed about decisions made by the Parish Council and a vast majority felt that they had very little or no influence on decisions made by the Parish Council.

This emphasises the importance of "The Gill" to communicate between the Parish Council and parishioners.

Asking what information parishioners wanted on notice boards or published in "The Gill" generated much response including clear support for all the following:

- Local walks / footpaths
- Wildlife details
- Library bus times
- Cycle routes
- Bus and other transport timetables
- Neighbourhood / Farm Watch
- Police contacts

A majority of respondents said that they would use a parish website.

When asked, "How would you like to receive feedback from the questionnaire?", a newsletter was the most popular response.

There was significant interest for a public meeting to suggest there could be a worthwhile discussion of the findings of the questionnaire.

Recommendations

- **Parish Council should support the creation of a Parish website.**
- **Parish Council should ensure continued regular circulation of "The Gill".**
- **Parish Council should support a public meeting to discuss implementation of the plan.**