

ALMELEY PARISH PLAN

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PREFACE

This is the first edition of the Parish Council's Plan for Almeley. Parish Plans were first announced in the Government's Rural White Paper in 2000 which invited local communities to take more control over their own lives.

The Plans are to set out a vision of how the community wants to develop over the years ahead and to identify the actions needed to achieve it. There is no set format for a Parish Plan and no limit to the topics that have to be included.

In Spring 2003 Almeley Parish Council decided to participate in the scheme and appointed a steering group to carry out the task. The Countryside Agency awarded a grant for most of the cost of the plan preparation, the balance coming from the Parish Council and voluntary labour. The steering group first met in May 2003.

The first step was to invite ideas from the whole population by means of suggestion boxes at key points and then to place these suggestions on display. 125 ideas emerged from perhaps a third of the households. The second step was to prepare a questionnaire based on these ideas. This was delivered to all 260 households and addressed individually to the 508 adult residents. The 335 responses (66%) received, collected by volunteer were analysed with the help of Herefordshire Council's Statistical Resources Team, and the results were presented to a well-attended public meeting on 19 March 2004. The steering group formulated a draft of the Plan from the results over the following five months and this was presented to an equally well-attended public meeting on 19 August 2004. After further consultation with Hereford Council and the Countryside Agency the final draft was approved by the Parish Council on 24 November 2004.

The Plan gives some description of the Parish as it is now and explains, in footnotes, a little of the long history that has brought it to its present stage. It sets out the hopes and concerns of the Parishioners as revealed by the consultation process, and makes proposals for meeting those concerns over the next ten years. These proposals will guide the policy of the Parish Council in its work for the residents and in its dealings with outside bodies and individuals.

Since times and circumstances will change, the Parish Plan will be reviewed annually and adjusted to meet those changes. The adjustments will be made, as this first edition has been made, by consensus among the people of the Parish.

J.W. Hope. Chairman of the Parish Council

THE PLACE

Almeley is in Northwest Herefordshire, 5 miles from the Welsh border. The Parish covers 1,396 Ha. lying across the top of a South-facing slope that runs down to the River Wye, 2.5 miles away.

Almeley Village is roughly in the centre of the Parish and is 60m. above the level of the river.

Six small streams drain the Parish and flow into Letton Lake, which is one of the largest flood plains in the Wye catchment. The three Western most streams run in deep gullies – Holywell Dingle, Cokes Yeld Dingle and the Batch.

On the opposite bank of the Wye, Merbach Hill, which is the first ridge of the Black Mountains, rises sharply to 250m. above the river. Just beyond are the sharply defined features of Hay Bluff and Lord Hereford's Knob. On clear days Pen y fan, the topmost feature of the Brecon Beacons, can be seen 28 miles to the Southwest whilst, from the top of the Parish, Clee Hill is visible some 25 miles to the Northeast.

With its elevated position facing a mountain flank the Parish is unique amongst neighbouring settlements and enjoys some spectacular views

THE PEOPLE

At the time of the 2001 Census the total population of the Parish was 582, living in 251 households. However, when the Survey was conducted in December 2003 the number of households had increased to about 260, of which there are about 130 in the Village itself. So the change has been only slight and the Census still provides a reasonably accurate set of figures.

Of the 582 in the Census, 86 were under 18 (one third lower than the County average). Out of the adults 138 were between 18 and 44 years (also one third lower than the rest of the County), and 199 were aged between 45 and 64 (about a sixth higher than the County average). The remaining 159 were over 65 which is about a quarter higher than the County average.

It follows that the population is rather older-than-average although this is not necessarily a reason for concern.

The Parish has been building houses and selling or letting them to incomers for the past 30 years or so. Some new arrivals were elderly when they got here, whilst younger ones have been happy to stay and grow older here. Times are now changing, building has slowed considerably, and a younger generation is beginning to come house-hunting. The density of people in the Parish (0.42/Ha.) is about half that in the County as a whole. About three quarters of us own our own houses, which is slightly above average.

These statistics are relevant, but they do not tell the full story. What they do not convey is the fact that the Almeley is a warm, friendly community where many of the traditional values prevail. There is an attractive stone Church, a primary school, two pubs, a post office and a village shop. Cricket is played on the "village green". It is not idyllic of course. Almeley has its share of problems that are addressed in this Plan. Nevertheless, it is, perhaps, fairly typical of the widely held view of what a rural parish should be like. This is why people have chosen to live here.

THEIR WORK

The 2001 Census found 284 "economically active" adults in the Parish, of which only a dozen were unemployed. Setting aside the households containing only pensioners, these working people must be living in about 168 of the households, so we are quite a busy lot! Around a third work mainly at or from home, which probably includes almost all of the farmers and some of their wives; but there is an increasing number of professionals working from home via the Internet as well as local tradesmen, etc.

Less than 50 out of the total work in agriculture or forestry, most of them probably self-employed. The great majority of the remainder work in the Census categories of manufacturing, health and social work, vehicle repair, real estate, education, building, public administration, hotels and catering, transport, communications, etc.

Some 188 workers have to travel to work, about a couple of dozen by cycle or on foot; so around 160 drive off each day. Most work in nearby villages, market towns, and Hereford, though a few go a lot further. It would clearly be beneficial to reduce all this travelling but this would require more employment to be established nearby, and this would necessitate a study of the range skills available before being able to decide what sort of employment would be useful.

All of the above refers to paid employment, but there is a huge amount of unpaid or voluntary work, which supports the life of the Parish. In the census 66 people declared that they provided unpaid care (though some of these may have a paid job too). Both employed and retired people put in many hours voluntarily to help run the school, the Village Hall, the several churches and various charities. This public-spirited activity occurs across the whole community regardless of where people live.

ACTION

Apart from helping tourism as discussed on Page 9 there are no specific measures that can be taken to attract local employment. The Parish Council will stand ready to support any initiative or enterprise, including farm diversification, that offers potential work for locals, as long as this is consistent with the Supplementary Planning Guidance (Pages 10-13).

AGRICULTURE

Although agriculture no longer employs most of the people in the Parish, it continues to occupy almost all the land and to produce a great deal of value from it. This is an area of comparatively small farms (40 or so in a Parish of 3,500 acres). Except for Herefordshire Council's ownership of the old Newport Estate, now divided and let as several units, it is an area of small landowners, though with a complex pattern of rented, owned and sub-let land. There has been mixed farming here for a long time – cattle, sheep, various arable crops, fruit, but the mix changes quite rapidly with movements in the market and the impact of diseases.

At this moment, farming faces yet more change with the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, although the full implication of that change is still not clear. Uncertainty, for whatever reason, can only be bad for an occupation, which relies on the long lead-times of seedtime and harvest and the life cycles of animals. A peculiar blend of media attention and heightened food consciousness has put farming under popular scrutiny as seldom before. The episodes of BSE, Foot-and-Mouth and TB have equipped stock with fancy ear-tags and filled farmhouses with paperwork. Farmers themselves seem divided about future prospects. Will it have to be units of at least 600 acres, or can family-run units survive? Can adding value to crops before they leave the farm (cheese, ice-cream, sausages etc.) boost incomes? Is there a best choice between sophisticated machinery and imported foreign labour? All these and hosts of other questions need answering.

There is not much that a Parish Plan can do to help with these problems because they derive from forces working on a global scale, but, since it does address an audience outside the Parish, it must say, to County and Regional authorities, that agriculture, here and in neighbouring parishes, is the main economic driving force and should continue to be so. The land here – its climate, topography and soil – has its own advantages and official encouragement should be directed towards enhancing the value of it. We do not want to be “diversified” out of agriculture. We would rather see agriculture enriched by embracing a broader sector of the food industry, and offering a decent living to increasing numbers of people.

FARMERS AND OTHERS

One point raised by the Surveys – not by many people, but enough to make it worth examination – was a certain lack of understanding between some farmers and some of the others who work and live here.

It is a plain fact that all settlements and isolated dwellings in the Parish are surrounded by farmland and, in many cases, are in between parts of the same farm, so cultivation comes right up to garden fences and farm machinery passes many front doors. Breathtaking as it can be, this is not primarily a scenic gem. It's a 3,000-acre workshop.

Anyone allergic to farming who buys a place in Almeley Parish has made an unwise choice. On the other hand, the days when Almeley was almost exclusively about farming and the support of farming are long gone. The world has moved on, and non-farming people are nationally, even internationally, mobile and they live where they please.

Those who live in this Parish have done remarkably well in settling down together. The farming families still occupy many of the leading positions in community activity, but new (i.e. in the last 30 years) arrivals have brought an array of talents and experience with them which longer-term residents have been kind enough to welcome, so that, together, they have made this a different, broader, more outward-looking place. As such, a measure of give and take is sensible. Poultry, sheep, cattle and tractors make noises, but carting muck through the Village is not the same as carting it through the yard and spillage avoidance is a matter of common courtesy.

ACTION

Again, this is not something that a Parish Plan can do much about – it's a matter of personal behaviour – but it may be useful to suggest that greater understanding might increase mutual respect? To those who have lived only in cities, farming may be a mystery, but a greater understanding of it may help people to become more aware of the seasons and colours that surround them. So, any steps that farmers can take, such as organised visits to explain why they are doing what they are doing, would be most welcome. It is important to keep up the tradition of Village Hall lunches, and people should try to break the supermarket habit in favour of local farm shops and farmers' markets

TOURISM AND HERITAGE

The 2001 Census showed that some 57 people of working age were engaged in renting and catering activities, and the Parish Survey revealed moderate enthusiasm for the development of tourism as a source on income and employment. Almeley is well placed for those wishing to attend Festivals at Hay, Brecon and Presteigne, as well as the many leisure activities available in the Wye valley. The historic city of Hereford is a mere 30 minutes drive away along a comparatively quiet road. However, the Parish alone contains much to attract visitors, particularly those keen on walking and cycling. There are many historic buildings and ancient remains – the Church, the two castles, buildings from Tudor times, Newport estate, etc. All of this in most beautiful countryside with ancient woodland, eight commons and three dingles, one of them an official Nature Reserve, all with an extensive range of flora and fauna.

TOURISM AND HERITAGE

Since the potential for walking and cycling is a major factor in attracting visitors to the Parish as well as being one of the many assets for those who already live here, it has been suggested that the various sites referred to on the previous page could be linked together to form a “heritage trail” such as already exists in some other parishes in the County. Central to this idea is the Old Railway Station that has stood derelict for the last sixty-seven years. In the recent survey 183 people, 54% of those responding, felt that steps should be taken to preserve this bit of recent history if the opportunity arises.

ACTION

Form a working group to develop the concept of a Parish “Loop” for walkers and/or cyclists.

In the process seek to acquire the Old Railway Station for the benefit of the Parish.

Include tourist attractions in the proposed Parish Directory (Page 40).

WIDER PARISH

ACTION

Pages 10-13 summarise proposals for matters that are subject to planning control. A fuller version of these proposals is attached as an Appendix and is intended to be adopted by Herefordshire Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance

The Parish outside the Village is almost entirely farmland, except for a few small settlements, the three dingles and the six small commons. There are a few woods, some cider apple orchards, smallish fields (some arable and some grazing) divided by hedges, and there is quite thick tree cover. Planning policies apply strict limits on residential development; though allow a certain amount of rural enterprise. Apart from a small area West of Batch Brook, the whole Parish is subject to policies which protect the character of the landscape – an area around Newport House is an Historic Park and the rest is designated “least resilient to change”. Our Survey showed that most people support these policies. The problem for the Parish is to reconcile these protective policies with the need to continue profitable cultivation within a rapidly changing agricultural industry. Older farming techniques shaped the landscape that planning now seeks to protect, and many farmers are rightly proud of that, but new techniques produce new effects. This Parish Plan needs to formulate guidelines that can manage change acceptably. We propose :

- The main features that form the framework of the landscape should be protected and enhanced. These are the immediate settings of the settlements, the dingles and the woods (these last being already subject to various forms of management).
- Because of its location in the wider landscape (see pages 2 & 3) the Parish contains several notable viewpoints, and special care should be taken with the siting, design and landscaping of all substantial new structures that are proposed within the prospects from these viewpoints. The effect of new structures on the wider views thus needs to be considered, as well as their positioning on their immediate site.
- The general character of the Parish’s landscape is created by its hedges and tree cover, and the overall total of these should be maintained. Hedges and trees that

have been brought into the landscape by our predecessors for practical purposes are still valid. A well-managed hedge is stock-proof and contributes to biodiversity. Trees, especially in hedgerows, provide shelter and reduce surface wind as well as contributing further to biodiversity.

Replacement planting for the future should be continuous.

- In particular, roadside trees should be retained and lopping should be done with restraint and only when absolutely necessary. New groups of trees can be a useful tool for reconciling new structures within the existing landscape.

THE VILLAGE Page 12

The buildings in the Village are very mixed in age, type and style but are well blended together by trees and by generously planted front gardens. Planning policy applies a Settlement Boundary around the central part of the Village and will allow any type of building within this, (up to densities much higher than exist at present), while prohibiting residential building outside it. Our Survey showed very strong support for this policy, though with some misgivings about the effects of infill. Since there are now no vacant plots inside the Boundary, but some larger plots that might be divided, our Guidance needs to offer ways to control adverse overcrowding. We propose that, for building:

- The policy of confining any new building to within the Settlement Boundary should be firmly applied.
- Applications to sub-divide existing plots for development likely to degrade the Village environment, resulting in loss of amenity for nearby residential properties, or resulting in dwellings having insufficient garden space, should be refused.
- Proposals that are out of scale, or in a style not sympathetic to nearby buildings, should be refused.
- Applications for Outline Consent should be required to state the type, size, number and location of proposed buildings.
- New developments should be sited so as to preserve and, if possible, enhance significant views in and out of the Village.
- Use of overhead cabling should be discouraged.

There is already a high proportion of social housing in the Village, but there has been difficulty, recently, in ensuring that it is used for its original purpose of providing affordable housing for local people who need it. We propose that:

- Applications for social housing should only be approved if subject to Section 106 Agreements giving priority in the letting of the houses to people with a local connection, and that the results of such letting will be monitored and open to scrutiny.

Trees and other planting are very important for the practical and visual environment in the Village. Most of them

are growing on private property and the Village is dependent on owners to maintain them (see cover picture), but we propose that:

- Significant trees, tree groups and hedges should be identified, particularly those which frame important vistas or enclose public spaces, and the owners

encouraged to refrain from felling or lopping them, unless unavoidable for safety reasons in which case they should be encouraged to replace them.

- Proposals for new development which would result in loss of significant trees or hedges should be refused unless adequate replacement can be provided.
- Ground works involved in laying services and the like should be located outside the root spread of significant trees and hedges.
- The public amenity open spaces and their surroundings in the Village, including Spearmarsh Common, should be protected against development or encroachment, and work should be put in hand to remove or tidy the existing clutter of overhead cables, street furniture, etc.

Page 13 THE VILLAGE

The Village contains a number of ancient sites and buildings and several older buildings that have an interesting character. Part of the Village is within the Almeley Conservation Area which encloses some, but not all, of these.

The Conservation Area is to be reviewed fairly soon. It is proposed that:

- The area of the Village within the Conservation Area should not be reduced.
- The normal Conservation Area conditions should be vigorously enforced, including those which protect trees, and particular attention should be paid to the protection of the character of open spaces,
- Identified older buildings of particular interest, outside the Conservation Area, should be the subject of special care in any proposals for development, including a presumption against their removal and a requirement for sympathetic treatment of new buildings to be placed near them.

PAGE 14 MANAGING THE ENVIRONMENT

The Survey revealed strongly held views on the need to preserve and enhance the beauty of the surroundings, with no less than 30 people expressing their willingness to be personally involved in an environmental plan of action for the Parish. While the previous pages (10-13) have been concerned with protection, these two (14 and 15) are about positive action. The structure of road verges is discussed on page 18. Verges are mowed by Council contractors from time to time and paved roads are occasionally swept mechanically. This contract work is chronically under funded. Bulky dumped rubbish will be removed on demand. Litter was also shown to be a matter of much concern with 18 persons actually prepared to partake in an organised programme. Unfortunately the high cost of insurance premiums to cover health and safety liability prohibits this, so it is necessary to rely on those public-spirited individuals who have always picked up small litter in their vicinity, and to encourage others to do the same.

Herefordshire Council offers parishes the opportunity to employ a "lengthsman" to do minor ditch clearance, etc. A small sum is paid to cover part-time wages and administration, but longer term funding seems uncertain. Nearby parishes have participated and seem pleased. Personnel would have to be paid. Dog fouling can be an unpleasant nuisance in the Village streets and on the common. There is a scheme of special collection bins but they appear to be excessively expensive and inefficient in practice. Public-spirited residents do pick up their own dog's mess and, although this problem is enforceable under County Bye-laws, a far preferable solution would be to persuade everyone to follow their example.

Various management arrangements exist for some of the woods and dingles. Holywell Dingle is an official Nature Reserve managed by Herefordshire Nature Trust. Coke Yeld Dingle is owned partly by Herefordshire Council and partly by Newport House. The Council is altering the tree planting with a view to opening a public path from Upcott Pool to the road by Cokes Yeld Farm. This is scheduled to take several years. A substantial stretch of Batch Dingle is Council-owned and contains Ancient

Monuments and historic sites. Highmoor Wood is no longer used for shooting and Hereford Council has proposals to open public paths through it at some future date. Since all of these are matters of considerable public interest, it would be desirable for the Parish Council, or a voluntary group acting on its behalf, could become involved.

The Commons. The eight Commons in the Parish present particular problems. Spearmarsh. Spearmarsh Common serves as a Village Green although not technically defined as such. It acts as the home ground for Almeley Cricket Club and provides a playing field for the Primary School. It is regularly used for

Village fetes and sports days. The Primary School and the Village Hall are both built on Common land. The Parish Council has long assumed a degree of responsibility for the management. It pays an honorarium to the Cricket Club who tend the square and outfield whilst a separate contract is negotiated for grass cutting at the fringes. The Survey identified a need for a group to co-ordinate the various activities whilst respecting the rights of six registered "Commoners".

Logaston, Meer and Hopley's Green. These three larger Commons are places of charm and tranquillity with considerable potential as informal nature reserves. The County Land Agent has inadequate human and financial resources to manage them properly, and would welcome any local assistance. Some adjacent residents have agreed to act as a point of contact with regard to any proposals for the future.

PAGE 15 MANAGING THE ENVIRONMENT

Smaller Commons. The Survey revealed that these are largely in good shape thanks to the trouble taken by certain caring individuals who have quietly got on with such matters as grass cutting and tree planting. It would be helpful if these public-spirited individuals could be identified.

ACTION

- **Given the high level of interest shown by parishioners in every aspect of environmental management and the numbers volunteering to get involved, the Parish Council will consider what steps to take to meet their concerns.**
- **A Spearmarsh Co-ordination Committee should be formed to deal with the management of the Common in consultation with the County Land Agent.**
- **For all other Commons the Parish Council should seek to obtain the agreement of nearby individuals to be nominated as unofficial wardens, acting as watchdogs on behalf of the Parish and becoming the first point of contact with the County Land Agent.**

PAGE 16 MAIN ROADS

For most residents, living in Almeley involves plenty of travel - to work, to shop, to recreation, to family and friends. All this travel can only be done by road and by car since almost all destinations are beyond walking or cycling distance. Bus services are limited and infrequent (see below), so 92% of households possess cars, and over half of them have more than one. Many of the cars-less householders are elderly people who rely to some extent on other people.

The map on the facing page shows the main road network near the Parish, with an indication of routes to distant places, though everyone has their own favourite routes and there are many to choose from.

The Parish is unusual in not being penetrated by a main road except the A.480 that runs through the Eastern end at Woonton. This, with A.44, A.4111 and A.4112, forms three sides of a box around the Parish carrying large flows of heavy goods vehicles, which cause severe problems in nearby villages such as Pembridge and Eardisley.

Herefordshire Council intends to study these in the next phase (2006-11) of its Local Transport Plan. One possibility being mooted, and featuring in the Parish Plans for both Eardisley and Pembridge, is to relieve these parishes by diverting traffic from A.44 and A.4111 on to A.4112 via A.480, by-passing Lyonshall. If successful, this would increase HGV traffic through Woonton seven-fold (based on 1998 L.T.P. figures). Even half success would increase flows through Woonton to something similar to those now experienced by Pembridge. If such a scheme is seriously considered the hazards for Woonton must not be overlooked just because it is a small place. The narrow and twisting length from The Buck to The Lion is itself enough to make a by-pass worth considering. Major works in this corner of the County are unlikely in the predictable future. Nevertheless, Almeley should be involved in all preliminary discussions to protect its interests.

ACTION

The Parish Council to ensure that it plays an active role in all discussions of the constraint or re-routing of heavy goods vehicles through Northwest Herefordshire

More immediately, Herefordshire Council is considering a speed limit on the A.480 through Woonton. The Survey showed mixed feelings about this. The Highway Regulations suggest a limit of 50mph, though it is hard to see the value of that since most traffic does not exceed it now, and it is manifestly too fast for some of the Woonton bends. There may be merit, however, in drawing attention to the need for care through Woonton as traffic continues to increase.

MINOR ROADS

The Parish contains some 14 miles of roads, not all adopted, all narrow and mostly winding. There are almost no footways alongside them.

Page 18

Conditions on these roads raised many concerns in our Survey – excessive speed, crowding out of pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians, great width of some vehicles leading to rutting of verges, breaking of edges of paving and drainage to ditches. These conflicts need to be resolved. It is obvious that the old-fashioned solution of

wholesale widening and straightening cannot be applied, because of cost and because it would destroy much of the ecology and most of the charm of the Parish. Therefore, the worst effects of traffic need to be constrained in the interest of maintaining the proper working use of the network.

SPEED LIMITS

A 30-mph. limit was established in the Village in June 2004. First observations suggest that it has made very little difference. The Police have said that they will enforce limits only if they are persistently exceeded and persistently reported. Systematic and careful observation is therefore needed. Elsewhere in the Parish the existing traffic regulations are such that it is very unlikely that speed limits could be established (except for the A480 in Woonton – see Page 14). Various schemes to reduce excessive speed throughout the Parish have been considered and should continue to be explored. The “Quiet Lanes” concept has some promise but it is not yet widely understood and carries no powers of enforcement. Schemes involving proliferation of signs Should be avoided

ACTION

The Parish Council will arrange for the monitoring and enforcement of speed limits in the Village and on the A480.

STREET LIGHTING

The Survey showed a large majority opposed to street lighting within the Village. Many people are distressed by light pollution. Individual lamps, as at Woonton, can be useful. Regulations now permit these, but they should be installed only rarely where special need can be shown.

ACTION

The Parish Council will oppose general street lighting, though may consider cases for individual lamps

SMALL ROAD WORKS

Small adjustments to the roads themselves could produce modest protection

- A few more passing places could reduce overrunning of verges. These might be provided at field gateways to benefit field access as well as passing traffic, e.g. on the straight lengths West of Newport Lodge and North of New House.
- Persistently broken edges could be reinforced with flush haunching and perforated blocks set into verges with grass allowed to grow through. Verge widths should not be reduced, as this would encourage speeding. On no account should raised kerbs or pedestrian footways be installed.
- Some junction priorities could be revised in order to discourage speeding. Herefordshire Council is refusing, at present, to amend the junction at the top of the Village by the shop, but they should be asked to reconsider.

ACTION

The Parish Council will collaborate with Herefordshire Council in devising and implementing a long-term programme of small works.

BUSES

Almeley has been designated as a “Main Village” partly on the strength of its bus service, the fact is that bus service through Village is limited and infrequent, and is used by only a few people. However for those few it is very important, so it is a pity that it is so poor. Since nearly everyone in the Parish has recognised the poverty of the service and equipped themselves with a car, there is little local pressure for improvement. By contrast, at County and national level the aim is to get people out of cars and into buses. It is a policy that has failed dismally for one obvious reason – the buses are too large for our rural roads. Public money has been used to subsidise large, even double-decker, buses that by-pass this Parish with just a sprinkling of passengers as illustrated on the opposite page. The service could easily be improved by re-routing, but some feel strongly that this would only exacerbate the problem of large vehicles covered on pages 18 and 19 and insist that any changes should be conditional to smaller buses being used.

Meanwhile, there is another form of public transport operating, namely cars or small buses making trips on demand. In North Herefordshire it is called “Community Wheels” and is based at Leominster. At present it is not well funded and relies on volunteer drivers, but it has the potential to be far more useful for Almeley and its neighbouring Parishes than the fixed-route services. Its primary virtue is flexibility. It can take people to various places at lots of different times, given a little notice. Whilst this is very much the poor relation of the transport world it could, nevertheless, be expanded at comparatively modest cost. In doing so it is felt that the lives of those without cars would be much improved and, if expanded effectively, could improve the perceptions of public transport among the rest of the residents

ACTION

The Parish Council to collaborate with Councils of neighbouring Parishes to press for smaller buses as a prior condition to improving the fixed-route services and for substantial expansion of on-demand services

PAGE 21 BUS SERVICES MAY - SEP. 2004

The uneven split between Eardisley, Lyonshall and Almeley could be corrected by diverting some or all of the Woonton to Lyonshall service via Almeley. 140 more dwellings would be served with only 5 minutes more running time. The service would be even more acceptable if smaller vehicles were used

PAGE 22 WALKING

There are about 13 miles of Designated Footpaths in the Parish, divided into 20 numbered sections. 5 of them join to paths in neighbouring parishes. Their main use now is for recreation and health. Many provide the only access to striking pieces of landscape. There are no bridle paths, though a few of the footpaths are used by equestrians occasionally. Parts of AM7 and AM10 are on paved roads, sometimes used also by vehicles.

The field paths are a peaceful alternative to the lanes in the Parish, which are all narrow, mostly with narrow verges and, of course, no footways; but with frequent motor vehicles. Paths are maintained by the landowners and are

supervised by the County Area Footpath Warden, who assists by providing stiles, gates and signposts. Most paths are in a good walkable state. There are occasional

problems of damaged stiles, locked gates, and new fences without crossing facilities, electric fences, broken signs and so on, but these are resolved by the Area Warden on receipt of reports by the Parish Footpath Officer.

At the moment there is a recurrence of the perennial problem on A10 in The Batch where Batch Brook steadily erodes the path. Parts of it need either consolidation or a boardwalk. In 2004 Herefordshire Council asked for a report on the state of footpaths, with suggestions for improvements, as part of its implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, and requested that the topic be included in the Parish Plan. This report was prepared by the Parish Footpaths Officer and, as well as detailing minor points and the problem in The Batch mentioned, made 3 suggestions. Clearly the County Council would have to secure the agreement of the landowners if these proposals are to be taken further.

ACTION

- **Resolve present ambiguity by designating the drive at Newport as a footpath from the Lodge up to AM8. This is open to the public and much, if not all, of it belongs to Herefordshire Council. It would facilitate the completion of several possible circuits.**
- **Designate Camp Lane from the Buck at Woonton and its continuation along the existing track to PM57 as a footpath. This would restore an old pathway and provide another circuit for Woonton.**
- **Consider using the remaining railway track bed as a footpath. cycle and bridle way from Upcott to EE12 at Eardisley which leads directly to the centre of that Village. This would comply with Policies T5 and T6 of the draft UDP and would provide a vehicle-free alternative to the existing road, which carries fast traffic**

The Pathfinders

This is a long-established, informal walking group which seems to have been initiated by Mr. Andy Johnson in 1984 with a view to clearing and marking paths. There are currently about 30 members who walk twice a month, except in winter, on local paths and in a variety of other places within a radius of about 20 miles.

UTILITIES

WATER SUPPLY/DRAINAGE

Water is supplied by Welsh Water and comes mainly from the Dunfield borehole near Kington where it is pumped to the Crossing reservoir on the Hereford road. There is mains drainage in the Village only.

MAINS GAS

There is no mains gas supply in the Parish, with little prospect in the future.

ELECTRICITY

With no gas available the Parish is hugely dependent on the electricity supply. Yet this is by no means reliable with predictable interruptions of service in severe weather conditions. Most connections are by an unsightly tangle of overhead cables.

REFUSE COLLECTION

Herefordshire Council arranges for weekly collection, by contract, of basic household waste. There are occasional collections of bulk items in the Village: otherwise these must be taken to Kington or Leominster. With the exception of a bottle bank at the Village Shop, there is no serious attempt to recycle waste. There is an absurd situation with regard to garden waste. Green bags have to be purchased and used before the contractors will remove it, whereupon it is promptly thrown in with the remainder of the rubbish. There is little point in separating other material, such as plastic, cans, cardboard and newspapers, since this treated in the same way.

ACTION

Every opportunity must be taken to reduce overhead wires, particularly with regard to new buildings. Hereford Council must be pressed to remedy the totally inadequate re-cycling arrangements

PAGE 25 EMERGENCY SERVICES

POLICE

Policing is provided by West Mercia Constabulary. There is a part-time manned Police Station at Kington and the Divisional HQ is in Hereford. Emergency cover is provided by mobile patrols and response time is about 20 minutes, depending on where the patrol is at the time. Police presence is very thin, but they justify this by the low level of crime, mostly small-scale theft. Public disorder has not been a problem. A Community Support Officer provides valuable service on small and domestic matters but is required to cover too large an area at present.

The Parish is a Neighbourhood Watch Area and all residents are regarded as members. A small group of coordinators keeps track of local crime and publishes the few warnings that the Police issue. Neighbourhood Watch in Eardisley patrols at night and records movement of vehicles.

ACTION

Neighbourhood Watch and Parish Council will press for more Community Support Officers

FIRE

Hereford and Worcester Fire Brigade has a part-time manned station at Eardisley. Response time can be as little as ten minutes if the appliance is not busy elsewhere. The next station is at Kington. The Fire Brigade is under pressure to economise and is reducing the variety of emergencies that it will attend and is putting fresh emphasis on fire prevention.

ACTION

The Parish Council will continue to support the retention of the Fire Station at Eardisley

AMBULANCE

Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service has a station at Kington and the response time can be as little as 10 minutes. An Air Ambulance is based at Hereford.

NOTE

All the Emergency Services suffer occasional delays because they often cannot find premises where an incident has occurred. This is because the Parish has few named roads and many un-named dwellings. Clear directions can save vital time.

PRIMARY SCHOOL

Almeley Primary School is very well patronised at present and takes children from a wide area beyond its direct catchment of most of Almeley and half of Lyonshall. The Survey showed a huge measure of support for the School with 74.3% considering it to be “vital” and only 2% thinking it “unimportant”. The School’s success has made it almost too large for its buildings and it relies on the Village Hall for overflow, causing some inconvenience in that building. Forecasts of decline in numbers of children suggest that the School may become vulnerable to closure again in a few years’ time. As some protection against this, and to ease conflicts with the Village Hall, the Governors propose to try to enlarge the School building by adding teaching space and an assembly hall. The latter could accommodate other village activities at certain times.

ACTION

Having regard for the overwhelming wishes of the residents the Parish Council will continue to support the School in every way possible, and will strongly oppose any suggestion of closure

CHILDREN’S PLAY

Provision of a children’s play area was suggested in the “First Ideas” list and received some support in the Survey, but it has not been possible to find anyone who is prepared to take the idea forward. It is greatly complicated, these days, by health and safety regulations, the need for frequent inspection, supervision and insurance. There is also difficulty in finding a site that would be close enough to housing to allow supervision and easy access while not being so near as to cause a nuisance. For these reasons it is not intended to proceed with the idea.

PAGE 27 SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

“Parental Choice” in education is a major plank of Government policy, but has little relevance in a rural Parish like Almeley. Pupils leaving the Primary School mostly go on to Lady Hawkin's High School in Kington for their secondary and tertiary education, eventually taking their A-levels there. There are excellent academic and sporting facilities at Lady Hawkin’s and a daily school bus to get them there. Pupils wishing to attend secondary schools such as Bishop’s or Aylestone in Hereford are faced with the problem of transport. Buses have to be paid for and, as noted earlier, the service is appalling. The same is true for pupils preferring to complete their A-levels at Hereford Art College, Technical College or Sixth Form College. Inevitably, with little prospect of local employment, there is an exodus of young people from the Parish at 18+.

YOUTH SERVICE

The Survey showed a strong measure of support for the suggestion to form a Youth Club, with eight adults offering to help run one. However, a general enquiry conducted by the Kington-based Youth Officer revealed only limited interest from the young people themselves. Some attend the main youth centre in Kington, and more would probably do so if transport were available outside school hours. It was pointed out that the Young Farmers Club always welcomes new members and they do not have to be drawn from the farming community

ACTION

The Kington Youth Officer has taken note of the views expressed in the Survey and the support on offer, and has agreed to keep the matter under review.

SHOPPING

The Parish is fortunate to have a Village Shop This was clearly indicated by the Survey with 120 people saying that they use it regularly. Many said how much they appreciate the newspaper service. It is, of course, vital for those without cars. It is also a valuable source of information. The present proprietor stresses that the shop alone does not provide a full living. The range of stock that can be carried is in direct relation to turnover. Prices are more competitive than many realise when the cost of petrol and journey time are taken into account. However, the ruthless competition from the ever-expanding supermarkets in Hereford, Leominster and Kington is impossible to counteract. Moreover, the practice of taking home deliveries in response to e-mail orders is bound to increase in the coming years as more households come on line.

There is a small farm shop at New House, selling high quality organic dairy produce, meat, etc. and several others nearby.

PAGE 29 THE POST OFFICE

Sub-post offices throughout the land are under threat of closure. From the Survey it was clear that the retention of the Sub-Post Office is hugely important, with 82.4% rating it as “essential” and only 2 people thinking it was not needed. This extensive support has been conveyed to the Post Office Head of Area. Whilst there has been no suggestion of closure it must be recognised that the present postmistress is likely to wish to retire during the time-scale of this Parish Plan and, when that time comes, the residents must be doubly alert. Meanwhile full advantage should be taken of the wide service now available. Here are some examples:

- Personal banking free of charge, including cash withdrawals using card and pin numbers.
- Personal loans
- Travel insurance
- Foreign currency exchange at 0% commission

ACTION

Encourage greater use of the facilities on offer.

Press for a vehicle licensing service to be included.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

It is a paradox that whilst those in remote rural areas can claim to have the greatest need for good telecommunications they remain “at the end of the line” for service. Even public telephone boxes are threatened. Whilst mobile phones are now the norm for most families the reception in this area is poor and most people are still heavily dependent on the use of land lines. Similarly, the lack of broadband is a major inconvenience, and the Parish remains “out of area” for television digital boxes.

ACTION

Prepare orchestrated approaches to the various service providers, if possible in conjunction with neighbouring parishes experiencing similar problems.

PAGE 30 MEDICAL SERVICES

There are no medical services in the Parish, so everyone has to travel, unless quite incapacitated. There are two General Practices in the area, one with surgeries at Eardisley and Kington, the other with surgeries in Weobley and Staunton-on-Wye. The nearest Dentists are at Weobley and Leominster. Opticians are at Kington and Hereford. There is a Pharmacy at Kington, sufficiently distant to allow GPs to dispense medicines. The nearest Hospital is at Hereford and a convalescent facility at Kington. More specialist Hospitals are at Cheltenham and Birmingham.

Only 10 to 15 people on our Survey expressed difficulty getting to one or more of the medical services. Several people made the obvious point that they could manage as long as they had use of a car, but there are bound to be occasions when illness or treatment prevents them from driving, a particular problem for the elderly, and many have cause to be grateful to friends and neighbours who give them lifts. Even so, the chronic difficulty of parking on or near the Hospital in Hereford makes visits there an uncertain business. Public transport is totally inadequate and Hospital transport is available only to the seriously ill. This reinforces the point made on Page 20 that an “on demand” service is by far the most useful for this and similar parts of the County.

SOCIAL LIFE AND CARE

PAGE 31 GOVERNANCE

Almeley is a separate Parish with its own Parish Council of seven members.

It is part of Castle Ward which returns one member to the County of Hereford District Council, a Unitary Authority.

Herefordshire is part of the West Midlands Region, which seems to be in the process of taking over some of the functions of Herefordshire Council, e.g. strategic planning. The Regional Authority, together with Advantage West Midlands, acts as a distributor for National Government and European Union policy and funding.

PAGE 32 THE CHURCH

St.Mary's, Almeley is notable for its welcoming and prayerful atmosphere and for its continued involvement in the community. As only one of eight Anglican churches comprising the Eardisley Group under one Vicar, the day-to-day running of the Church relies heavily on the dedication and energy of the Parochial Church Council and the lay community generally.

The Church remains a focal point in the Parish and there is always strong support at all the main festivals. There is an excellent musical tradition, with a lively choir of both adults and children. New voices are always welcome and the number of choristers is increasing each year. Regular joint services are held with other choirs and choral concerts have been given in the Village Hall. The sound of church bells is very much part of Village life thanks to the efforts of an enthusiastic team of bell ringers.

Children are warmly welcomed. There are frequent Family services and a Children's Corner. Candidates are regularly prepared for Confirmation.

The Church is always bright and inviting, and the skills of the devoted team of flower arrangers are in evidence throughout the year. It is open every day for visitors and is a popular venue for concerts, talks, festivals and other community events.

The whole community was closely involved in fund-raising for a major £29,500 restoration project on the fabric in 1998. More recently a kitchen and lavatory (with disabled access) have been added and a cracked bell has been re-cast to bring back a peal of six.

The two Churchyards (Old and New) contain many graves of local families together with those of Latvians who lived in Newport House.

ACTION

Ensure that Almeley Church continues to serve the community by:

- **Maintaining the Church as a place of worship, beauty and peace.**
- **Aiding people's spiritual development and education through prayer meetings, study groups, children's playdays etc.**
- **Increasing the use of the church building as a focal point for workshops, arts and events that enrich the community.**
- **Extending the church's involvement within the community in helping people deal with the issues of life in the 21st century**

PAGE 33 THE NON-CONFORMIST TRADITION

ALMLEY QUAKERS TODAY

From the earliest times Quakers have had the distinction of having an influence far in excess of their numbers, much to the discomfort of successive governments, and modern Quakers still continue the tradition of "speaking truth to power".

There are a number of local families whose ancestors were Quakers and the Society of Friends are alive and well in the area. Today the Almeley Meeting has a nominal roll of nearly fifty and is active in many issues both at home and abroad.

Meeting Houses are not consecrated buildings. Typically, the one at Almeley is used by both Quaker and non-Quaker organisations, religious and secular, who are broadly in sympathy with Quaker aspirations. Presently, the meeting is considering a proposal to demolish the old stables and build an extension to the Meeting House in their place.

OTHER NON-CONFORMISTS TODAY .

NOTE – THIS PAGE STILL UNDER REVISION

PAGE 34 VILLAGE HALL

The Village Hall is a registered charity run by a Committee of Management elected annually at the Annual General Meeting. The object is to “provide and maintain the property for the use of the inhabitants”. Income has to be generated for this purpose with any surplus being put into trust for “further investment” as required.

The Survey revealed considerable appreciation for the facility and for the work undertaken by the Management Committee. There were several suggestions for improvement of the facilities, which have been passed on to the Committee.

There were a number of suggestions for additional activities that have also been passed on to the Committee. However, the primary purpose of the Committee is to help and advise rather than to organise events themselves.

Because the neighbouring Parish primary school lacks a school hall and dining room (see Page 26) the Village Hall is used extensively by the school at nominal cost but only when it is not required for other purposes. Nevertheless, this is an unsatisfactory situation and one that the Local Education Authority needs to address.

ACTION

- **Press the LEA to pay realistic rental charges for school activities**
- **Co-operate in any steps to improve car-parking facilities for joint use by the Village Hall and the Primary School.**
- **Develop plans for extending the accommodation in order to increase the present (hazardous) storage space and to provide an additional meeting room.**

PUBLIC HOUSES

The Bells

The Lion

FOR COMPLETION

Page 37 ALMELEY CRICKET CLUB

The Club first formed in 1952 and played on land at Bridge Farm. In 1973 it moved to the present pitch on Spearmarsh Common. The Club has for many years played competitive cricket as part of the Hereford Times League. At the end of the 2003 season this League was dissolved and the Club applied to join the Marches League.

Provisional membership was granted for the 2004 season on condition that, from 2005, both the pitch and pavilion would be brought up to League standards. The pitch has now been fully accepted, but work on the pavilion is needed in order to comply. This involves the installation of showers, provision of a ladies' toilet and dividing the changing rooms into two dressing rooms. This is expected to cost around £2,000, and much fund-raising has been needed to ensure completion by 30 September 2004.

Meanwhile, there has been a struggle with rising bureaucracy to register with the Inland Revenue as a community amateur sports club, and to ensure compliance with the Child Protection Act. The latter measure ensured that the Club could continue to field a Sunday side wherein under-16s can play in preparation for the more rigorous league cricket. We welcome youngsters to come along and play in a safe environment where their development will receive positive encouragement.

The support of the Parish Council and local residents is greatly appreciated.

PAGE	ITEM	OTHERS INVOLVED	TIMESCALE
POLICIES WHICH THE PARISH COUNCIL WILL ADOPT			
10 to 13	Implement the Supplementary Planning Guidance when commenting on Planning Applications		Immediate
19	Oppose the installation of street lighting, except where an over-riding case can be made for individual lights on safety grounds, as at Woonton		Immediate
14	A pro-active approach to the safeguarding and improvement of the environment, making use of those who have offered their services as necessary	Environmental volunteers	Immediate
INITIATIVES TO BE TAKEN IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHERS			
15	Establish a Spearmarsh Common Management Committee	County Land Agent Commoners	Immediate
16	Protect Woonton from excessive speed Participate in any plans to by-pass Eardisley or Pembridge	Highway Authority Neighbouring Parishes	Immediate and On-going
19	Ensure the compliance of the speed limit in the Village	Police Highway Authority	Immediate and On-going
20	Programme of small works to protect verges and add passing places	Highway Authority	Medium term
22	Add links to the Footpath network as suggested	Herefordshire Council Local landowners	Medium term
9	Develop a "Heritage Loop" to encourage small scale tourism	Tourst Board Heritage Trusts Local landowners	Medium term
38	Establish a public notice board at Almeley Wootton	Planning Authority Landowners	Short to medium term
ACTIONS THAT OTHERS WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE			

24	Introduce segregated refuse collection for re-cycling	Herefordshire Council	Short term
29	Introduce full range TV and mobile phone reception plus broadband internet	Relevant Companies	Short term
25	Improve availability of Community Support Officers	Police Neighbourhood Watch	Medium term
20	Expand "On Demand" transport services for those without access to cars and for non-ambulance journeys to medical services	"Community Wheels" Herefordshire Community Transport	

PAGE	ITEM	OTHERS INVOLVED	TIMESCALE
ACTIONS THAT OTHERS WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE (CONT.)			
21	Introduce smaller buses and then re-route more services to pass through the Village	Bus Operators Herefordshire Council	Long term
12	Reduce the clutter of Street Furniture in the Village and elsewhere	Herefordshire Council	Medium to long term
12	Reduce overhead cables in visually sensitive parts of the Village and elsewhere	BT and Power companies	Medium to long term
ACTIONS BY OTHERS THAT THE PARISH COUNCIL WILL SUPPORT			
15	Local residents acting as Wardens for Parish Commons	County Land Agent	On-going
26	Continuation of the Primary School, expansion of the premises, and parking improvements	School Governors Education Authority	Medium to long term
27	Improved access to recreation for young people	County Youth Service	Short to medium term

28	Continuation of Village Shop and local Farm Shops		On-going
29	Continuation of the Village Sub-Post Office	Post Office Ltd.	On-going
32	Upkeep of St. Mary's Church	Parochial Church Council	On-going
34	Upkeep of Friends Meeting House	Society of Friends	On-going
35	Upkeep, extended use and moderate expansion of the Village Hall	Village Hall Committee	On-going
37	Up-grading and facilities for Almeley Cricket Club	Club Committee	Short to medium term
25	Continuation of Eardisley Fire Station	Hereford and Worcester Fire Service	Long term

NOTE: It is realised that a number of these facilities, while running in a satisfactorily and highly-valued way at the moment, may encounter difficulties during the time span of this Plan. The Parish Council stands ready to assist, within the full range of its powers, should this occur.