

Leigh & Bransford Parish Council

THE PARISH PLAN

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THE PARISH

Established in 1971, the Parish Council of Leigh and Bransford serves two civil parishes, Bransford and Leigh. With just under 700 households and a population of around 1800, it has three main centres of population - Bransford, Leigh and Leigh Sinton – together with small outlying hamlets. All are rural, but have different characteristics.

Leigh Sinton, the largest, sits astride the A4103, with several estate developments of differing sizes. Also on the A4103, Bransford is smaller and less developed, but has the two main employers in the parish. Finally Leigh, situated well off the A4103, is the smallest, with no estates and only a score of houses built in the last fifty years.

Although facilities like the primary school and Memorial Hall are shared, the fact that the parish has effectively no real centre presents a challenge in planning for the whole community.

Until after the Second World War, farming was the main occupational activity. Now the majority of those employed work outside the parish. This means that transport is an important issue, not only to the nearby towns of Worcester and Malvern, but further afield.

HOW THE PARISH PLAN WAS PRODUCED

The production of this Parish Plan has meant that *everyone* has had the opportunity to say about how they would like the parish to develop. To draw up the plan, a Steering Group was formed, with twelve members, only three of whom were parish councillors – in accordance with government guidelines. It applied for a Countryside Agency grant to fund the whole activity, and in November 2003 was awarded £4000.

To determine the issues important to the residents, six months were spent in consultations with the different parish groups, augmented by two evenings of slides and discussions (“The Parish

Past and Future”). Using models of the parish as a focus (along the lines of *Planning for Real*), people were invited to write down the issues which they considered to be the most important for the future of the parish.

Over four hundred ideas were received, and used as the basis for a household questionnaire, which was delivered and collected by hand. The return rate was 70% (469 respondents from 667 questionnaires distributed), ensuring that the views expressed represented the majority of the households in the parish. The returns were post-coded, to check for any differences of opinion between the settlements. In addition, a special evening was held to sound out the opinions of the ninety parish businesses. They then had a different questionnaire, to which all the major employers responded.

Following analysis and discussion, a draft Parish Plan was drawn up, which was modified in the light of comments made by the Parish Council, at three public consultation meetings and through the Parish Council’s web site. The plan approved by the Parish Council is presented here.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fact that 70% of the households in the parish filled in the questionnaire has made it possible to draw up a plan at all. The resulting comprehensive data on the wishes of the community will allow the Parish Council both to be proactive and to respond appropriately to government initiatives and funding opportunities.

The Parish Council would like to thank the members of the Parish Plan Steering Group who worked to produce this Plan. They are:

Maureen Chambers, Jane Cox, Pat Dee, Brenda Guise, Richard Howard, Alan Lewis*, Shirley Lee, Ann Pallett, Philip Ralph, Malcolm Scott*, Lillian Somerville and Zoe Wood.*
(the three parish council members are marked *.)

It would like to thank The Countryside Agency for its grant, and to thank members of the Malvern Hills District Council and of Worcestershire County Council, and Karen Humphries of Community First, who have given valuable information and assistance.

It would like to express its gratitude to the following individuals and businesses who have given help in different ways:

Bransford Garage, Burton Print Works, Pat Fellows, Ken Jones, Charlie Payne, Trevor Shaw, Mike Smith, Netty Stow, and Mark Walker (Centremaps) .

Finally, recognising the need for parishes to co-operate, it is a pleasure to acknowledge interaction with the Alfrick and Lulsley Parish Plan Group.

Copies of the questionnaire statistical analysis may be obtained from the Parish Council’s Clerk (01684 566 109) or from the Council’s web site (www.leighandbransford.org.uk)

NOTE: The percentages given are of the respondents unless stated otherwise.

THE PLAN

THE ENVIRONMENT & HOUSING

PARISH APPEARANCE

Over 50% expressed a desire for more planting of bulbs and flowers throughout the parish, whilst 73% indicated the need to keep roadside hedges short and tidy. The questionnaire also referred to the preservation of old orchards. However, in retrospect, it is unlikely that local residents will be able to exert much pressure in this area, as ultimately it is affected by commercial decisions taken by landowners.

ACTIONS

1. Promote more planting within the parish - not just springtime bulbs, but other planting ideas to improve the appearance throughout the year.
2. Obtain sponsorship from local businesses for planting schemes in certain locations - for example, at the entrance to villages.
3. Encourage farmers to clear up hedge trimmings to avoid them being washed into the drainage system, causing blockages and localised flooding.
4. Identify 'old orchards' to be preserved, and approach landowners to establish if they can be protected.

LITTER & DOG MESS

Litter was mainly a cause for concern around bus stop areas and at school pick-up points. Several respondents commented on the increase in litter amongst the hedgerows, particularly along the Hereford Road, Stocks Lane and Suckley Road. Dog mess was also perceived as a problem, particularly along pavements in Leigh Sinton and on the Memorial Hall playing fields.

ACTIONS

1. Provide litter bins at bus stops and school pick up points, to be emptied regularly.
2. Promote education within schools about disposing of rubbish in the appropriate way.
3. Investigate having a Parish Clean-up on a regular basis.
4. Provide regularly emptied dog mess bins on either side of the main road in Leigh Sinton, and near the playing fields.

POLICING , SECURITY & ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

The general consensus within the parish was that police coverage was poor. We attribute this primarily to the fact that seeing a policeman is a rarity. However, the local beat officer reports regularly to the Parish Council, and the seemingly poor police coverage is due to the very low crime rate within the parish.

The results of the questionnaire indicated that more people would liked to get involved in Neighbourhood Watch schemes. However, the statistics indicated a reluctance of individuals to act as co-ordinators.

Anti social behaviour was not widespread, with 88% of respondents not experiencing any problems. Where respondents did indicate a problem, the anti-social behaviour tended to be localised, e.g. barking dogs, cars racing down the lanes at night, and in the Memorial Hall car park.

ACTIONS

1. Publish regular updates on crime statistics in the Sphere magazine, to allay people's fears.
2. Publicise the phone number for all non-emergency calls (08457 444 888) and encourage people to report **all** incidents, so that problems can be highlighted by the police.
3. Put information on how to organise a Neighbourhood Watch scheme on local notice boards, and encourage people to become co-ordinators..
4. Address localised anti-social behaviour by referring to the appropriate authorities.

MAINS SERVICES

Generally there are no major problems with mains water supply.

Fifty eight percent of respondents do not have mains gas. Of those who do, there was no indication of any major problems.

With regards to electricity supply, it was noted that, although the supply had improved over the last ten years (with fewer lengthy breaks), there still remains widespread dissatisfaction. With the common usage of computers, short disruptions in services can have serious consequences, particularly for businesses.

ACTIONS

1. Submit a request for more widespread gas provision to the appropriate body.
2. Bring the dissatisfaction with the electricity supply to the attention of the utility providers.
3. Make advice available to computer users on how to minimise the effects of transient breaks in electricity supply.

RELATED ACTION:

Encourage energy conservation and the use of environmentally friendly energy sources.

REFUSE COLLECTION

Since the introduction of the collection of recycling waste, the general consensus within the parish is that the service offered is excellent. Keep it up!

ACTION

Write to the Malvern Hills District Council to express our appreciation of the refuse collection services.

HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT

The provision of additional housing within the boundaries of the parish remains a contentious issue. However the parish plan questionnaire coupled with a subsequent Housing Needs Survey clearly identifies a demand for more affordable housing within the parish, with an emphasis on Local Authority/Housing Association rented accommodation and low-cost shared ownership. Of those with an opinion on new housing, more Shared Ownership was preferred by 61%.

The questionnaire highlighted a number of individuals who had to leave the parish due to lack of affordable housing, and a total of over one hundred people with a need for affordable housing in the next five years. There was very little support for any additional private housing, either owner occupied or privately rented.

The lack of affordable housing was also highlighted by local businesses as one of the reasons for problems in attracting staff.

ACTIONS

1. To undertake a regular Housing Needs Survey, to keep abreast of demand.
2. To identify potential development sites for a modest rolling programme of small affordable housing developments within the parish.
3. Ensure that any new housing promotes good design, both to ensure that the character of the parish is retained and to promote energy efficiency.
4. To ensure that any new housing is restricted to individuals or families with a local connection.

ORGANISATIONS & AMENITIES

PUBLIC HOUSES

There are three pubs, or hotels with bars, in the parish (the Bank House and the Fox in Bransford, and the Royal Oak in Leigh Sinton) and two on the edge (the Bear & Ragged Staff and the New Inn). It is therefore surprising that over one third of the respondents would like a new one. Pubs have traditionally been places where people wind down and socialise informally after work, and at weekends. In the past, work for many was on the farms in the parish. Now most people commute to work, yet the need to socialise informally would still seem to be strong.

In order to make their businesses profitable, pubs have increasingly had to serve food, and in many cases bar areas have been reduced to accommodate this. It seems likely that it is this change which has made them less attractive for casual social drinking.

ACTIONS

1. Support the existing pubs and hotels in any action which they may take to provide more bar areas where people can relax and talk over a drink.
2. Support any innovative ideas which promote social interaction.

SHOPS

Thirty years ago there was a Post Office in each of the villages, two with a shop attached. Now the only remaining Post Office & Stores is in Leigh Sinton. The re-opening of the store at Bransford Garage is very welcome, but the loss of the Post Office & Stores in Leigh is still acutely felt.

In the survey, Leigh Sinton Post Office & Stores was the most commonly visited amenity. It offers a comprehensive range of Post Office services, and the shop stocks a good variety of basic provisions for everyday use, as well as a range of takeaway food. Moreover, it provides a valuable meeting place for local people.

Bransford Garage is the second most visited amenity in the parish, providing motor fuel and basic household necessities. It also provides hot food and sandwiches for both the local working population and passing trade.

The other amenities in Leigh Sinton (Burton Printworks, the Chinese Takeaway and Leigh Sinton Garden Centre) were all well supported.

ACTIONS

1. Leigh Sinton Post Office stores is a vital amenity, and should be supported in any development.
2. Support Bransford Garage in maintaining and developing the site, particularly the stores.
3. Use all local stores and services as much as possible, or risk losing them.

THE MEMORIAL HALL

The first Memorial Hall was built over 80 years ago. With its more modern extension, it provides an excellent and versatile facility in a rural setting, with an integral playing field site. It is very well used throughout the week (a total of nearly fifty hours), with many different activities and societies covering a wide range of age groups. It is also well booked at weekends for private and social functions.

Accessibility by anything other than a car seems to be a drawback, and when both halls are fully used car parking is not adequate.

ACTIONS

1. Support any improvements to the hall which widen its use.
2. Improve accessibility to this excellent facility by providing safe walkways and cycle paths.
3. Support the Memorial Hall Committee in any attempts to improve and increase parking.

FACILITIES FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

Apart from improved bus services, which is covered under Transport, the majority of those responding called for a medical centre. There is provision for a room which could be used for medical consultations in the Memorial Hall's latest development plans, which would allow GP practices to run local clinics.

ACTION

Support the Memorial Hall Committee in providing facilities which could be used as a local outreach clinic.

SPORTING AND PLAY AREAS

For sporting facilities, the greatest demand was for a swimming pool (39%) and tennis courts (17%). There is already an unheated pool at the Bank House Hotel which is open to non-residents. There are also several private tennis courts in the parish and public ones in neighbouring parishes.

The need for a children's play area in Leigh Sinton is a long-standing one. Inasmuch as only half an acre or so would be needed, it is disappointing that a suitable area has not been found.

ACTIONS

1. Advertise the existing local sporting facilities more widely, including putting details on the Parish Council's web site.
2. Approach the owners of private tennis courts, to see under what circumstances they would allow limited public access.
3. Make the provision of a young children's play area a condition of any future development in Leigh Sinton.

HIGHWAYS, FOOT- & CYCLE-WAYS STREET LIGHTING

Overall, the idea of increased street lighting was not supported, only 26% wanting an increase. Sixty percent wanted no more lighting, several emphasising their concerns about light pollution in the countryside. The majority of those in favour cited Leigh Sinton for more street lighting in general (43 responses). A further 25 mentioned the main road specifically, with six citing Leigh Sinton Road. Special emphasis will inevitably now be placed on street lighting for any road junction alterations needed to cope with extra traffic resulting from the North Site developments in Malvern.

Very few were in favour of street lighting in Bransford or Leigh.

ACTION

Consider the question of street lighting on the two main roads in Leigh Sinton in conjunction with any road junction changes arising from the Malvern North Site development.

HIGHWAY DANGER POINTS

Danger spots were identified mostly along the A4103, notably at the junctions with Chapel Lane, Stocks Lane, Suffield Close, Malvern Road and at the Bransford roundabout. Many responses were concerned with the bottle-neck in Stocks Lane, especially because of the high number of commercial vehicles using the route : two accidents were reported there between Christmas 2004 and the New Year. Concern was also shown with trees and hedges overhanging the highway, restricting the passing of vehicles.

Although the speed camera is having the desired effect in Leigh Sinton itself, responses showed concern for speeding elsewhere on the A4103, as well as on the Suckley Road and on the road to Leigh. The success of Leigh Sinton Post Office and stores continues to give parking problems, but it is thought that the congestion acts as a considerable traffic calming measure.

Significant road drainage problems were highlighted, the most frequently cited being Sherridge Road, Leigh Sinton Road, and the A4103 by the Bank House Hotel and in Leigh Sinton. Other areas of concern were in Leigh Sinton (Sherridge Road and Stocks Lane), in Bransford (Chapel Lane and Station Road) and in Leigh (by the church, Dingle Road, and on the Alfrick Road above Bank Farm).

ACTIONS

1. Keep the situation of all the highway danger points under review, and ask residents to keep a record of accidents or incidents, in order to make any case for changes to the highway authorities.
2. Notify the highway authorities of any trees or hedges encroaching on roads.
3. Report any new flooding problems for action by the parish Lengthsman, and take measures to alleviate the existing ones.
4. Ask the Highway Authority to put priority signs at the Stocks Lane bottleneck.
5. Ensure that any changes to the Malvern Road - A4103 junction are integrated with consideration of the Stocks Lane - A4103 junction.

CYCLE WAYS, PAVEMENTS & FOOTWAYS

The provision of the extremely popular cycle way/footway from Upton to Hanley Castle was considered to be an example which we should follow.

The most popular request within the parish (46%) was for a cycle way/pavement from Leigh Sinton to Malvern. With the certainty that any North Site development will increase the traffic down the Malvern Road, the case for this is very strong indeed, serving both school children and those who work in Malvern.

The second choice for a cycle way/pavement (40%) was from Bransford to Leigh Sinton. Pavements are already in place along some of the way, but on different sides of the road. Crossing the main road (A4103) is clearly undesirable, so ground works such as a tunnel would be required, as well as widening of verges along some stretches. Local landowners would need to be approached to solve these problems.

The third choice for a cycle way was from Leigh Sinton to the Memorial Hall (39%) which would serve people wishing to attend activities at the Memorial Hall and children wanting to go there to play. Although the Sherridge Road route appears impractical, footpaths across the fields could be considered for improvement. It should be noted, however, that bicycles cannot be ridden on footpaths, and that with the stiles at field boundaries using push-chairs is also very difficult.

ACTIONS

1. Explore the possibility of establishing cycle ways and pavements from Leigh Sinton to both Malvern and Bransford with the appropriate authorities.
2. See whether a cycle way or an all-weather footway can be established from Leigh Sinton to the Memorial Hall, possibly using, or modifying, existing footpaths.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The household questionnaire established the needs of parishioners, whilst the business questionnaire showed that poor public transport affected staff recruitment. However, the solution to our transport problems can only be through an integrated transport plan for the whole area - that is, as part of local and regional transport planning strategies.

BUSES

Having more buses on the existing services would make bus travel more attractive, with people in Leigh Sinton wanting more buses to Malvern, and those in Leigh and Bransford favouring more to Worcester. For both, more morning and evening services were the first choice, improved day time services being second. The North Site development might strengthen a case for bus services through the parish to Worcester.

There is a need to publicise existing services, the problem of getting information being a county-wide problem. There is also a need to find out about existing bus usage in the parish, to see if any simple changes could be made to increase the number of passengers.

The new Sphere evening bus service to Malvern (on Fridays) and Worcester (on Saturdays), which is run in collaboration with Alfrick and Lulsley and Suckley parish councils, is to be welcomed. It is hoped that promoting this will make it possible to expand the service to satisfy clearly identified local needs, particularly for young people.

ACTIONS

1. Ensure that timetables for all local bus services are displayed on notice boards, and are put in the Sphere magazine and on the parish council's web site.
2. Noting the need to be proactive in getting timetables, see if a volunteer will take responsibility for obtaining and publicising them.
3. Promote the three parishes Sphere bus service as actively as possible.
4. Collaborate with neighbouring parishes to improve common services.
5. Survey the use of existing bus services.

TRAINS

People would use trains more if existing services were more reliable (180 responses) and there were more frequent trains to Worcester, Birmingham and London (around 70 responses each).

There was an extremely positive response to the suggestion that an edge of parish railway station be opened, with 75% saying that they would *definitely* or *possibly* use it. The majority said that it would be instead of making a car journey, whilst one third would use it instead of catching a train in Malvern. Since most parishioners commute to work, having a local station would clearly reduce car usage significantly. However, our survey gives pointers only, and a full traffic survey would have to be undertaken to establish the viability of such a proposal.

Historically, there were five stations between Malvern Link and Worcester Foregate Street, including Bransford Road (by the Bear and Ragged Staff). Although there is only a single track on sections of the line to Hereford and to London, from Worcester to Malvern it is still double track, suggesting that this section could be more intensively used. Opening one or more stations along the line with adequate parking would help to reduce the car traffic into Worcester and beyond significantly, as well as easing parking at existing stations.

ACTIONS

1. To bring the survey findings relating to train reliability to the attention of the rail service providers..
2. To bring the survey findings relating to establishing an out-of-parish railway station to the attention of (i) those responsible for the rail services, (ii) Worcestershire County Council and (iii) organisations promoting integrated public transport schemes.
3. To press for a detailed transport survey to be undertaken to establish whether the proposal for an edge-of-parish station is viable.

OTHER MEANS OF TRANSPORT

The survey showed little support for Community buses or Dial-a-ride. However this may be because they would serve mainly disabled or elderly people without a car, which is a relatively small group of people. If this is the case, this is a small but important group who should be catered for.

There was also little support for a voluntary car service. It may be that a shift in culture is needed for such a scheme to become a useful alternative to personal car use.

The survey also showed little support for a *Walking Bus* (accompanying groups of children walking to school) except in Leigh Sinton, where such a scheme would make sense, and is worth investigating.

ACTIONS

1. Monitor schemes to help elderly and disabled people, either through the use of buses or private cars, and encourage the groups concerned to consider making a case for such services.
2. Approach Leigh Sinton school or its PTA to see whether they would take the idea of a Walking Bus forward.

WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

What happens now depends on *everybody*. Some actions depend on the Parish Council, some on the District Council, some on the County Council, and others on individual parishioners. Some actions are short term, others are very long term.

This plan is simply a start in trying to get what the parish wants in the future.