



Northleigh Village Plan 2009



The conclusions of a collaborative exercise by the residents of the Parish of Northleigh and its wider Community in the summer of 2009

Our thanks go to all of the people who gave their time and energy to completing the questionnaires and participating in the public discussions of these matters.



Introduction

The Purpose of having a plan

The Parish Council had been advised by its East Devon District Council (EDDC) representatives to produce a parish plan, preferably through an inclusive community-based consultative exercise. By following such an approach the plan is intended to represent the majority and significant minority views of the community as it is at present and how it might develop. As such the plan will provide important input to decisions that may affect our future, and can inform future submissions that EDDC and or the County Council may be required to prepare for central government.

Aim

To produce the Northleigh parish plan based on the views of the community centred on the village of Northleigh, Devon. To identify: what features of the community and its life are thought most valuable, what needs attention now, and the criteria for how the community might develop.

As is required, the plan includes an action plan for the executive authorities to address issues raised by the community.



Introduction (continued)

Process and Inputs

A member of the Parish Council volunteered to progress production and realisation of the plan. A small representative steering group volunteered to take the plan forward to completion and a chairman was nominated. This group consisted of;

General Sir Rupert Smith (Chairman), Parish Councillor Mr Anthony Lear, Mrs Caroline Hurford, Mr Simon Potter and Mr Peter Symes.

In considering whom to consult the committee recognized that the boundaries of Northleigh parish do not include the whole of the community centred on the village of Northleigh. The people who live outside the parish boundaries are drawn into the life of the village for work, worship and leisure. It was decided to seek the views of the community rather than those of just the parish; by doing so all those who were regularly engaged in the life of the community would be represented. Further, should there be a difference of view between those of the parish and those of the community living outside the parish this would be noted and if necessary priority given to those of the parish; because of the democratic function and administrative responsibility of the parish.

A public meeting was held to outline the aims and purpose of the plan and to explain the process. Subsequently questionnaires were sent to 230 adults and 22 children over the age of 11 in 119 households in the village and surrounding areas. The parish itself includes 72 households with 132 names on the voters list. An additional 47 households in the larger surrounding community were sent our questionnaire, based on the steering group's local knowledge and judgement

Overall 65% of households and 62% of individuals responded to the questionnaire, providing a strong statistical significance for the conclusions we were able to form. Within the parish there was a slightly higher level of household response to that of the community but this was balanced by a higher level of individual response from the community outside the parish. This is predictably a result of the relative proportion of larger families in the community resident outside the parish boundary.



Profile of Northleigh

Northleigh – a thumbnail sketch

Northleigh is one of the smallest parishes in East Devon with some 132 adult residents. Even its wider community referred to earlier only accounts for a further 120 residents. The parish itself covers an area of around 4.74 square kilometres with a perimeter of some 14 kilometres.



Since the fourteenth century (and perhaps earlier) Northleigh has been defined by its agricultural heritage. Farming remains its most obvious and visible economic activity. To this has been added some tourism and home working. A substantial proportion of the residents of the parish itself have retired to live here.

Origins and Development

The oldest artefacts found in the parish have been dated back to 2000BC, in the early Bronze Age, suggesting a settlement in existence at that time. There are also records of Saxon and Norman occupation and some of the existing properties in the parish are mentioned in the Domesday Book of AD 1086. In AD 1066 the parish was included with its neighbouring village Southleigh under one place name, LEGA, in a gift from William the Conqueror to his half-brother, Robert, Count of Mortain. Northleigh Church was built in AD 1343 and continues to act as a pivotal point for the local community. Ownership of the parish changed hands several times through the centuries and sometime after AD 1557 all the properties had been returned to private ownership.

The main feature of the community over the centuries has been agriculture. Most of the surrounding land has been used in this way and continues to be so used. The ownership of land within the parish, however, often falls to members of the community living in other parishes. Similarly, land owned within the parish has been farmed by residents of other parishes. This interweaving of land tenure and the farms, businesses, workshops and school that once existed in the village have had the social consequence of knitting Northleigh closely to its surrounding countryside, transcending any administrative lines that may have been drawn throughout its history.

Superficially much has changed: during the last 30-40 years the post office, pub, workshop and blacksmith have all closed, the number of working farms reduced and their land absorbed into fewer, larger farms. No agricultural land has been lost to development. As agriculture and the associated local commerce moved out of the village itself so buildings became available for other businesses and new residents, some of them retired. Nevertheless the community remained cohesive. Community life centred on the church and village hall reflects a comfortable balance between the established working agricultural community as a whole and the interests of the more retired population in the village. The community is united in its view that theirs is first and foremost an agricultural community and they wish to live in a small rural village.



Profile of Northleigh

Northleigh Today—Geography Demographics and Economy

The village is situated in the main on the north side of a low spur in the bottom of a steep-sided valley. Around 40% of its 72 houses are clustered in close proximity to the church. It lies about 4 miles South East of Honiton and 4 miles North West of Colyton in a quiet pastoral setting between the major roads A30 and A35 and the A3052 coast road from Lyme Regis to Exeter. The village is at the centre of a Conservation Area, part of the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There has been relatively little new development in the past 50 years. 97% of the housing stock was built before 2000, and 64% of it before 1950. In most cases the agricultural and trade buildings have been converted to dwellings and houses have been built on the old sites. The remainder of the dwellings and farms in the parish and of the community at large are dispersed, some in isolation and others in small clusters. 14% of the buildings are listed. Only two houses are second homes.

There is no shop and only a limited weekly bus service to Honiton. The nearest primary schools are in the villages of Farway and Offwell (each some three miles distant) and the village lies in the Farway School catchment area.

In terms of inward- and outward migration the parish and community are relatively stable. 75% of respondents have lived in the community for over 5 years and 25% for more than 25 years. 20% of the community were born here or have family links to the community.

The community of 252 people is approximately evenly split male and female, the majority are over 40 years old and own their own homes. There are 33 children in full time education.

There is an important distinction between the demographic and economic profiles of the parish itself and the community as a whole. 41% of the community are retired, indeed 14% moved to the village on retirement. Of those in retirement, 74% live in the parish, the majority of them in the village itself. On the other hand 45% of the community are working in some business or service; 22% are self-employed. However this more or less equal balance of retired and working residents changes when the parish is compared to the community.

Of those outside the parish, the majority (63%) are working, and half of this working population is employed in agriculture. This working proportion compares to only 30% in the parish itself, with only 7% employed in agriculture. Of those in employment the majority work either locally or from home. Very few in the community commute even 10 miles to work.

Apart from agriculture, businesses range from; publishing, consulting, financial services, tourism and cabinet making to building maintenance, hairdressing and small holding. Until recently there was a saw mill with about twenty employees but this business was relocated and the site developed with three executive houses.

Almost 90% of respondents favour the creation of more jobs to encourage young people, but opinions vary as to how to go about it. There are significant minorities in favour of one or other of creation of small business units, affordable housing tied to employment opportunities, or measures to encourage small businesses. With the exception of a significant minority of 30%, most people are not in favour of stimulating further short-stay bed and breakfast tourism. There is little support for extra longer-stay holiday business development and virtually no support for development of any form of caravan site.



Living in Northleigh

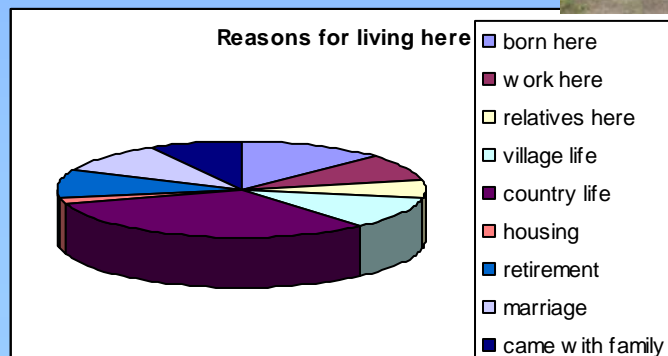
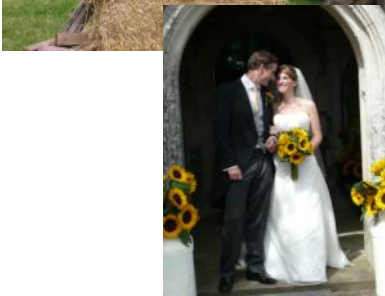
Community Values



Almost all respondents described the community as “supportive, caring, progressive and active” and felt that it functions well. Quality of life in the village is seen to be better or the same as it has been over the last ten years. Levels of recorded crime are very low.

For most people community spirit, the environment and the attraction of country and village life were the main reasons for living in the community with family ties, retirement and work being the next most popular reasons. There is a strong desire to see a balanced community with a spread of age groups

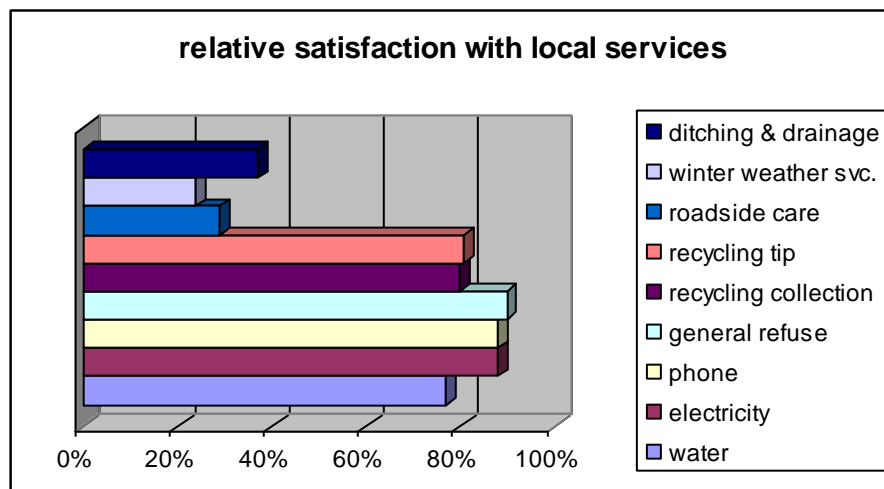
The majority of respondents confirmed that they have had no difficulty in getting help from neighbours in the event of an emergency



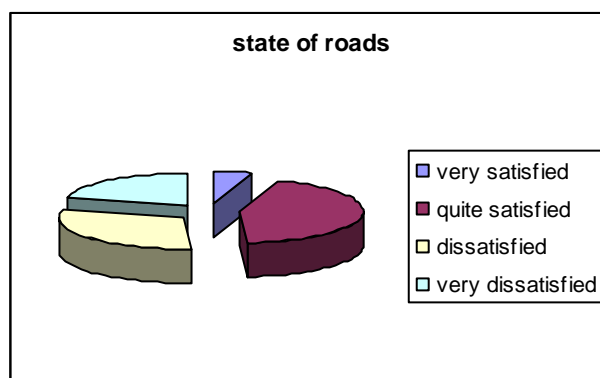


Services

With the exception of the roads, local services are seen as reasonable to good, with some scope for improvement in most. However, there is a widespread view that services relating to the road network are in need of considerable improvement. This is particularly significant considering residents' high level of dependency on motor cars on these minor rural roads to access local services and amenities for their everyday requirements.



A network of narrow lanes often sunken below the level of the surrounding fields links the parish together and provides routes to Honiton, Colyton and elsewhere. In large measure drainage, such as it is, follows the line of the lanes; in bad weather up to 45% of the community experience difficulties with surface water drainage. Most people are very dissatisfied with the state of the roads and drainage ditches and want to see them maintained better. Poor road maintenance is seen as a major hazard (see 'action plan'). 20% of respondents were also concerned that other drivers were speeding. Road signs are considered generally adequate.



Mains water and overhead electricity were supplied to the village in the early 1950's. Recently there has been an increase in the frequency of broken water mains with the consequent loss of service and disruption to movement through and around the village. Electricity supply interruption is becoming a more frequent occurrence, affecting not only domestic supply but also home-based businesses. There is no mains drainage or gas supply. Opinions on alternative energy provision were mixed but there were strong negative views about wind provision especially in relation to its potentially damaging visual effect on the environment and in particular any interference with the skyline. Some households have installed thermal solar panels. Interest in the use of solar micro generation is currently limited by cost v. benefit.

Respondents felt that refuse collection and recycling services at Sutton Tip were good but there was room for improvement in water, electricity and telephone services. Improved mobile phone coverage and faster broadband speed would be welcomed by almost half of respondents for both business and more general everyday living requirements.

Despite our proximity to the Stockland transmitter the topography of the village still leaves many homes without a terrestrial TV signal and hence access to the Freeview service, other than by satellite. Improved terrestrial TV reception would be welcomed. However this survey was completed before digital switchover and there has been some improvement in certain areas. There is a very high level of satisfaction with the postal service.

In sum there was a general opinion that the service infrastructure was under stress and that in its present condition it would not support a greater dependency.

A number of the issues and concerns above are addressed in the 'action plan' section.



Services (continued)

Health & Welfare

The majority of everyday health service needs are satisfied in Honiton and Colyton and are readily accessible by car for most people.

Most people feel safe with the emergency services cover although there is some concern in more remote corners of the community about the mapping used by these services and consequently how quickly some households could be located. In particular sat.nav. does not accurately pinpoint every house in the community. This issue is addressed in the 'action plan' section of this plan.

Getting about

There are very high levels of access to one or more cars in the community which condition the responses to questions about transport and mobility. The very limited weekly bus service to Honiton is little used and there is no clear indication that it would be used substantially more even if the service was improved. Most shopping needs are met in local towns with very little interest expressed in a mobile shop or in using the Offwell shop.

There is a shortage of space to park cars when there is an event in the village such as a church service or a special event at the village hall. These matters are referred to in the 'action plan' section.

The parish is served by a network of footpaths, adequately signed and maintained and in reasonable condition that the majority find sufficient for their needs. Some modest improvements to improve awareness and accessibility are referred to in the 'action plan' section.



Other Services

Half of those responding would welcome a community website with most of those in business wanting to link to it (see 'action plan').

Only 10% of respondents use the mobile library service but those who do are very satisfied with it.



Assets and Facilities

For a wide range of reasons St Giles Church is counted as being important to most respondents.

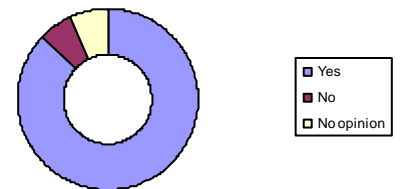


Northleigh village hall is central to community life, is widely accepted to be adequate for the needs of the community and offers a large number of functions and activities which are generally well supported. A number of suggestions for additional activities were put forward (but with far fewer offers to help organise them!)

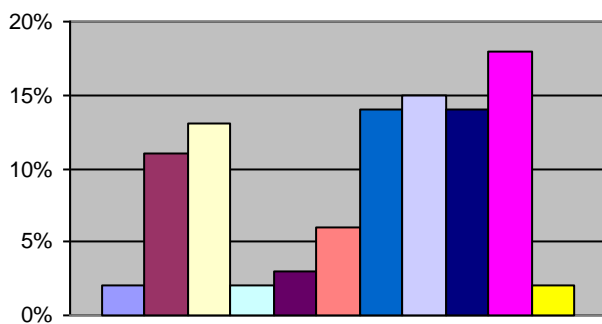
Over 80% of respondents referred to parking problems associated with village hall events and the church (see 'action plan').



Village Hall adequate for likely needs?



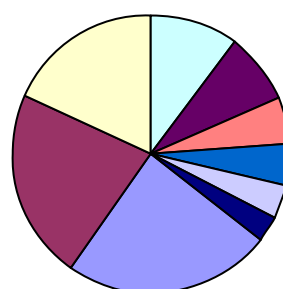
I regularly support:



- Bell ringing
- Church activities
- Valley Troupers
- Art Club
- Short mat bow ls
- Garden Club
- Sports & Social Club
- Harvest Supper
- Big Nights In
- Other
- Parish Council

A wide range of further or additional uses for Chilcombe Field was forthcoming with tennis courts and nature reserve topping the list. Further action to determine its future is indicated in the action plan.

main suggested uses for Chilcombe



- tennis court
- retain playground/as is
- nature res./ w woods
- sports area
- housing
- allotments
- bike/skateboard park
- picnic area
- parking





Future Direction

There is an overwhelming view held by the parish and community alike that they do not want the agricultural environment or their small rural village to change, in so far as the change may adversely affect their quality of life and the spirit of the community. It is the quality of life in the community that drew people to the village and is their stated main reason for staying.

Notwithstanding this, the majority of respondents to our questionnaire signalled acceptance of limited change. Some acknowledged they were part of the community because of change and it was acknowledged that change was necessary to keep the community balanced, between young and old, and, working and retired, by for example converting or building houses, providing affordable homes, or encouraging small businesses. 61% of parish respondents and 80% of respondents in the wider community would like to see some new housing in the future. However, there was a unanimous view that any such development should not occur piece-meal but be part of an overall scheme that included the necessary infrastructure to support the particular development in the form of roads, sewage, schools, employment and so forth.

It is noted that within the parish there is less willingness to accept new housing provision than in the rest of the community, driven perhaps by a perceived lack of suitable sites and the impact on already overburdened infrastructure. In the larger community there is more acceptance for the provision of local homes for family members working in family businesses.

We were not asked to produce a village design statement and have not attempted to do so. In any case, the size and make-up of the community probably make it uneconomic and unnecessary. There is already a wide variety of house styles and there is no clear indication of what sort of housing would be acceptable if more were to be built.



Actions to be taken

action	action by	When	Review
<p>Road Defects to be advised to the parish Clerk Posted to the Northleigh website Notified to DCC highways direct (Possible direct link from website)</p>	<p>Individuals in community Plus: by Parish Council</p>	<p>When first seen After each meeting</p>	<p>3 monthly</p>
<p>Blocked or overgrown ditches 1. to be advised to the parish Clerk 2. posted to the Northleigh website 3. parish Lengthsman notified</p>	<p>Individuals in community Plus: by Parish Council</p>	<p>When first seen After each meeting</p>	<p>3 monthly</p>
<p>Inadequate/reduced broadband speed Inadequate speed to be reported to appropriate ISPs</p>	<p>Individuals in community</p>	<p>As experienced</p>	
<p>Inadequate mobile phone reception to be reported to appropriate cellular Network providers</p>	<p>Individuals in community</p>	<p>As experienced</p>	
<p>Digital TV Reception black-spots to be reported to Digital UK</p>	<p>Individuals in community</p>	<p>As experienced</p>	
<p>Directions for Emergency Service Response Local emergency centres to be asked what they use for directions and any problems investigated and corrected</p>	<p>Parish Council</p>	<p>By April 2010</p>	<p>Quarterly</p>
<p>Parking for village Hall events Suitable parking arrangements to be negotiated</p>	<p>Village Hall Committee</p>	<p>By April 2010</p>	<p>Annually</p>
<p>Parking for church services Suitable parking arrangements to be negotiated including verge reinforcement and improvements outside Suddons/ St Giles Cottage</p>	<p>Parochial Church Council</p>	<p>By April 2010</p>	<p>Annually</p>
<p>Footpath map Tastefully sign-written boards to be erected in (two?) prominent locations for reference by residents and visitors</p>	<p>Parish Council</p>	<p>By April 2010</p>	<p>Annually</p>
<p>Footpath maintenance & other issues 1. To be advised to the local footpath warden for attention 2. To be rectified as soon as possible</p>	<p>Individuals in community Parish Council</p>	<p>As experienced As soon as practicable</p>	<p>Annually</p>
<p>Set up Northleigh website to provide information for the local community and for visitors</p>	<p>Village Hall Committee</p>	<p>By April 2010</p>	
<p>Chilcombe Field Arrange an open meeting to discuss in the light of the village plan consultation</p>	<p>Parish Council</p>	<p>By March 2010</p>	