

Willington Parish Plan

*Appraisal & aspirations of a Bedfordshire village
September 2006*



Living



Learning



Working



Enjoying !

WILLINGTON

PARISH

PLAN

SEPTEMBER 2006

CONTENTS

Preface.....	1
Foreword by Alistair Burt MP.....	2
1. Why we decided to create a Plan and the process we went through.....	3
2. History of the village by Dorothy Jamieson and Sheila Ward.....	5
3. The Plan.....	12
The Natural Environment	
The Built Environment	
Traffic	
Policing and Security	
Leisure and Recreation	

PREFACE

The Willington Parish Plan has been three years in the making. In that time well over a hundred people have been involved and many more responded to the questionnaire. The resulting Action Plan has a very strong claim to represent the views of the village now and for the immediate future on its priorities and how it should develop.

As you will see, there is a strong wish for the village to retain its rural feel, to constrain building development within narrow limits, to protect and enhance the environment and to develop the social and recreational aspects of village life. The detail of how these goals are to be accomplished is set out in the Action Plan.

Although it has taken a considerable period of time to arrive at the conclusions presented in this document, it is only a beginning. By itself the action plan is no more than a wish list. The challenge for the village is now to turn these aspirations into fact. But there is reason to believe that we will be able to realise our hopes; even before the publication of this Plan a number of initiatives have already got underway. The Willington Local History Group has just celebrated its first birthday and is flourishing, a walking group has been established for some months; the first gardeners' market is due to take place in September and we have conducted two village clean up days.

None of this could have been accomplished without a great deal of help from many people. The Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity has provided us with support and advice. We are especially grateful to Zoe Ashby. The Parish Council has been unfailingly supportive, both financially and with its encouragement. The Vicar and Parochial Church Council have encouraged us in the work of community building. The school and its headmistress Elaine Wheeler have entered into the spirit of the thing and enabled the children to participate by stating their opinions of the village. The Steering Committee, which over the three years has involved many people, has persevered in the determination to bring the project to a successful conclusion. Particular thanks are due to Graham Tillet, Mervyn Askew and Jean Bedford. A substantial group of about 35 people, known rather ominously as the Working Group, have carried out those sometimes dreary tasks of delivering leaflets, attending meetings in the Village Hall and generally furthering the work of the Steering Committee. There are particular individuals whose help has been invaluable. Among those are Shirley Jones, the magazine editor, who has enthusiastically received bulletins of progress, Barbara Young, who made possible an initial environmental survey and the entry of the data from the questionnaires on to computer. Rosalind Wilkinson, who carried out some of the analysis and Mike and Jo Watkiss, who generously funded the printing of this document. However, all of this would have been in vain had not two thirds of the households in the village responded to the questionnaire and enabled us to construct a comprehensive picture of Willington as we find it now and Willington as we would like it to be.

There are 118 parishes in Bedfordshire; so far 13 have completed a Parish Plan. It is satisfying to be among the first to complete the task. I am proud to have been the coordinator of this fascinating project and trust that it will be a source of inspiration and guidance for the development of the village.

Julia Buckroyd
September 2006



Alistair Burt

Member of Parliament for North East Bedfordshire
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
London office: Tel: 020 7219 8132 Fax: 020 7219 1740
Bedfordshire office: Tel: 01234 314491 Fax: 01234 314691
Website: www.alistair-burt.co.uk Email: burta@parliament.uk

Dear Chairman,

I am delighted to have been able to support the initiative of Willington Parish Council in taking forward their work on the production of a Parish Plan.

Our rural Bedfordshire villages are not simply attractive picture-postcard locations. Villages live, and it is the activity of those who have made their village their home which creates a community. That the Willington community is active, thoughtful and involved can easily be deduced from reading the pages of the plan.

It provides a fascinating snap shot of village life in the early part of the 21st century. People have been open and honest about their concerns and their aspirations. Transport, education, housing and the environment are among the issues which affect Willington as well as other villages in a similar position in the area. Commercial public transport links around the village loop are regrettably not as good as they could be, but being so close to Bedford, the volume of traffic, particularly HGVs, passing through the village is a source of much concern. While people understandably care for their environment, their concern for the younger generation and their need for facilities is well marked.

The report provides plenty of food for thought for public representatives and others, and is a model of its type. I am very grateful to all those involved in its preparation and I am certain that the community spirit it illustrates will remain a hallmark of Willington for many years to come.

With my warmest regards,

Alistair Burt MP

'Serving the people of North East Bedfordshire'

WHY WE DECIDED TO CREATE A PLAN AND THE PROCESS WE WENT THROUGH

Over recent decades there have been repeated applications for planning permission for large developments of housing within the parish of Willington. There was general feeling in the village that a formal statement of village opinion about the development of the built environment was needed. After further thought and consultation it seemed that there was a mechanism ideally suited to the canvassing of opinion about future developments and their formulation into a permanent document, in the shape of a Parish Plan.

Parish Plans were envisaged in the Government's Rural White Paper, *Our Countryside – The Future*, in 2000. This document envisaged a Parish Plan whose purpose was to 'set out a vision of what is important, how new development can best be fitted in, the design and quality standards it should meet, how to preserve valued local features and to map out the facilities which the community needs to safeguard for the future'. It additionally proposed that Plans should 'identify key facilities and services, set out the problems that need to be tackled and demonstrate how distinctive character and features can be preserved'. The whole emphasis of the Plan is practical; 'Parish Plans...should set out a vision for how the community wants to develop, and identify the action needed to achieve it'. Furthermore a Plan is required to be a statement of 'how the community sees itself developing over the next few years', and in particular reflects the views of all sections of the community'. As the Steering Committee, we have tried hard to live up to these ambitious aspirations and in particular have done our best to give a voice to all sections of the community.

In April 2003 the Parish Council agreed to support the creation of a Parish Plan and to appoint Julia Buckroyd as Co-ordinator. Some financial support was also guaranteed. In September a Steering Group was formed, which had its first meeting on 6 October. In the same month interviews with individuals in the village began, to assess their concerns and engage their support for the Parish Plan. These interviews were carried out over a period of months.

In November and December 2003 and January 2004, meetings of the Steering Group continued. The main business was to decide on priorities for action. A provisional list of concerns was drawn up and at the end of January letters were distributed to the village, recruiting people to a Working Group. It was explained that a larger group than the Steering Group was needed to establish priorities and that a questionnaire would be customised based on these initial discussions. This was supplemented on 31 January 2004 by a formal launch of the Plan. Displays were created in the various areas of concern: police and security, the built environment, the natural environment and roads and transport. The Village School supported the event with a display of children's work, showing their opinions of the village, what might change and what they hoped for.

In the following months work continued by the Steering Group and the Working Group to firm up the priorities for the questionnaire. We had access to a questionnaire already developed for use with Parish Plans, but it was far too long and included a considerable amount of material that was not directly relevant to our village.

During this period the Co-ordinator's mother became seriously ill and eventually died – this created a gap in the development of the Plan but by December a Working Group meeting was held to arrange delivery and collection of the Questionnaire for every household in the village. This process was carried out over December and January and resulted in the collection of 193 completed copies of the 311 that had been distributed. This constituted a 62% return, which can be regarded as a large enough sample to be a reliable indication of the spread of opinion.

In the first six months of 2005, analysis of the questionnaires continued and was discussed by both the Steering Group and the Working Group. By July the Draft Action Plan was launched at another event in the Village Hall. This was well attended and again there were displays in the various areas

for action that had now been identified: Youth and Community, The Environment, The Built Environment, Traffic and Security. Those who attended the event were invited to put down their names for particular activities and to indicate their support.

From that point some activities in the action plan began to take place. The Local History Group started, led by Dorothy Jamieson and Sheila Ward, and attracted a membership of more than fifty within the first year. A meeting was held to establish walking groups, which resulted in a Thursday morning group, organised by Marian Briscoe. In November an initial meeting to establish a Homewatch system was held and the first of a series of litter picking events took place, attended by approximately thirty people, led by Linda Syred and serviced by Bedford Borough Council.

Since then the task has been to develop the Action Plan, identifying who will take a lead in carrying through each of the proposed actions and attempting to create a time frame for each. The Plan has then been placed in the context of the history of the village. As you will see, the original impetus to the plan created by planning applications for a great many houses has resulted, not only in the decision to identify village views on future development, but also in a wide range of proposals to enhance and protect the life of the village.

The Steering Committee

1. A HISTORY OF WILLINGTON

The modern village of Willington is set within a landscape which holds evidence of human occupation for at least two thousand years.

The Danes, the Saxons and earlier

In 1984 archaeologists working near Willington discovered evidence of a small pre-historic farmstead down by the river. It dated from the early iron-age, between 500 and 100 BC. Another ancient feature in the parish is the most extensive and complex crop-mark site of the Roman period in Bedfordshire. This early settlement was situated where a Roman road crossed the waterway known as the Deans. Later the Willington/Cople parish boundary cut this settlement in half.

In late iron-age and early Roman times peoples' homesteads were scattered throughout the parish. Many were mid-way between the river and the ridge on which Sheerhatch Wood stands. It is probable that Willington village grew up along the river in the ninth century. In the tenth century Willington was a Danelaw frontier settlement, between the Danish fort at Tempsford and the English stronghold at Bedford. The series of moats by the 'Danish Camp Visitor Centre' may date from this period.

Written records

Surviving local records of the manor begin in 1382, just after the Peasants' Revolt, and the first impression is of a self-sufficient agricultural community living peacefully here despite all sorts of national disasters in the fourteenth century, the Wars of the Roses in the fifteenth century and the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century.

Willington was a substantial community. More than 100 men are listed in the early fifteenth century court rolls. Most of these men would be heads of households living in the parish.

Willington was a single-manor parish, in the hands of major landowners, for over 800 years:

- Before the Domesday Survey it belonged to Aschil, one of Edward the Confessor's men who held extensive lands in Bedfordshire
- The barony of Bedford from 1086
- The honour of the Mowbrays from 1265
- The Howards, dukes of Norfolk from about 1481
- The Gostwicks from 1529
- The dukes of Marlborough from 1731
- The dukes of Bedford from 1775 until the early twentieth century.

Important women in its history

- For much of its history Willington manor was under the control of important wealthy women. From 1362 to 1389 it was held by Elizabeth de Vere, step-mother to the Mowbray lord of the time. He accused her of destroying

thousands of trees and she was fined about £900 in damages. This was a very large sum of money in those days.

- Between 1405 and 1412, Willington and many other manors in the Mowbray estates, were in the custody to Joan Queen of England, second wife of Henry IV.
- Between about 1432 and 1483 the widow of the second Duke of Norfolk held a life interest in Willington. She was Katherine Neville, a member of the Royal house of Lancaster. Her husband and their household visited Bedfordshire in 1411, but it is not known whether Katherine visited Willington after that date.
- In 1556 the manor belonged to Elizabeth Petre daughter of Sir William Petre of Ingatestone. In 1546 her father and William Gostwick had reached an agreement that Elizabeth, Sir William's eldest daughter, should marry John (then aged 7), Robert or any other surviving son of William Gostwick. Any other of Sir William's daughters could be substituted at his discretion! So Elizabeth married John who was said to be a man of great simplicity and little or no understanding. They had three children but he must have been a great trial to her before he died in his early forties in 1581. Fine memorials to John and Elizabeth's eldest son and eldest grandson can be seen in the Gostwick chapel in Willington church.

Passive resistance

Although in theory the lord of the manor in medieval times had control over his tenants, here in Willington the lord's bailiff was a local man and this seems to have meant that there was very little crime or violence. Elderly people were looked after and the village life followed a pattern known as the 'custom of the manor.'

However there are two examples of passive resistance to the decisions of the lord's stewards. At the end of the fourteenth century four tenants claimed that they were being overcharged for the rent of their land. For ten years the bailiff allowed them to build up rent arrears. Eventually these debts were written off and the rents reduced.

Building materials

Most of the houses and farm-buildings were made of a timber framework, with wattle and daub walls and thatch roofs. In medieval times distribution of timber, underwood, wood, and small pieces of wood or twig from the woods and warren was controlled by the steward and carried out by the bailiff. Careful management of the timber resources was always a feature of the manor. Some stone was used in the medieval manor buildings and recycled stone was used extensively when the medieval manor was demolished in the 1530s and new farm buildings, which included the dovecote and stables, now the property of the National Trust, were built. The splendid 'new' manor house was built with the fashionable local material of the time – Tudor brick!

The Gostwicks

The Gostwick family played an important role in the life of the village from the thirteenth century, to the early eighteenth century when they were burdened with debt and had to sell the entire parish to the Duchess of Marlborough.

Members of the family were wealthy farmers or bailiffs for the lord of the manor from the fourteenth century. The most successful member of the family was local boy made good, John Gostwick, later knighted by Henry VIII. He made his fortune in the service of Cardinal Wolsey and Henry VIII and by business dealings before he bought the parish in 1529. He extended and repaired the church, demolished the medieval manor and built a new Tudor house and farm buildings.

There is evidence in the 'Letters and Papers of Henry VIII' that the king and three of his most important counsellors visited John Gostwick's fine new house in 1541.

Sir John Gostwick died in 1545 and his only son died later that year. The Gostwick estate passed to Sir John's brother and he and his descendants lived here for almost 200 years.

The church

There may have been a wooden church here before Willington church was granted to Newnham Priory in 1166. The church was restored, extended or rebuilt in the 1530s by Sir John Gostwick. The fine east window, too large really for the wall in which it fits, probably came from Newnham Priory church. The Gostwick chapel contains a striking set of memorials to Sir John and later members of his family. In the late seventeenth century they provided a fine set of silver for the church.

During the nineteenth century a series of repairs and improvements were made to the building, during which the remains of the rood screen were lost. When the walls were being cleaned in the mid-1840s some painted murals were found but were covered over with plaster.

The main restoration came when Henry Clutton supervised it for the Duke of Bedford in 1877. The work cost over £2,500. Willington was fortunate that the beautiful interior was not greatly altered by the enthusiasm of the Victorians. The stained glass in the huge east window dates from 1885. The church also contains an interesting example of a Gurney Stove. The inventor, Sir Goldsworthy Gurney, is a forgotten Victorian genius and his Gurney Stoves were used to heat large buildings and churches, including St. George's chapel, Windsor Castle.

The village school and other buildings paid for by the Duke of Bedford

During the nineteenth century the Dukes of Bedford were generous lords of the manor here. The medieval field system finally ended and the fields were enclosed and let out to tenants. A nursery in Willington grew the hawthorn saplings to hedge round the new fields.

About 1850 the Duke wanted to demolish his old farm buildings in Willington, but there was a public outcry. As a result he demolished the great barn and other buildings because they were unsafe, but repaired the dovecote and stables, which now belong to the National Trust.

In addition to paying for the restoration of the church, the dukes also built cottages for their workers, which were very comfortable for their day. Many of them still survive, some with the duke's coronet and construction date clearly marked.

The first school to start in the village was a Sunday School started by the Rev. Hunt in 1832 in a single story building opposite St. Laurence's Church and carried on by Rev. Fuller. But it was Rev. Augustus Orlebar who as vicar started a day school and a Sunday School in 1858. This soon became too small and in 1867 the present school was built under the eighth Duke of Bedford. The duke employed his architect, Henry Clutton, to design the new school in a restrained Gothic style and paid for the building of it and of the schoolmaster's house next door. Lighting came from oil lamps and the water supply from a pump in the yard. In the first year there were no fewer than six different school mistresses but then Mrs. R. A. Ratcliffe taught for ten years.

Changes in land ownership

Willington continued to be a single-manor parish until about 1900. At that time there were still gravel roads, cottages were lit by candle or oil lamp and most people used the wells in their gardens for water. The Duke of Bedford divided up the parish in the early twentieth century and all the land and buildings were sold. For the first time most people living in Willington owned their own homes. The population of the village at this time was 275. From that date people came into the village buying plots, building houses and setting up market gardens. Isaac Godber came from Kempston and purchased the land where the Willington garden centre is today. He then moved into the Manor and set up a nursery at Manor Farm employing about fourteen men. Mark Young was another big land owner who bought 350 acres of land and employed men from the villages around. He grew onions and put up onion barns in the field along the main Bedford road and elsewhere. He also kept pigs and grew potatoes on the land. It was this land which was later sold to Bryant & Mays for their trees for matches. Young was also a dealer in gravel.

The Railway

The Bedford to Cambridge single-track railway line ran through Willington. The former Willington Mill was removed to make way for the line. Willington goods siding (now the 'Danish Camp Visitor Centre's car park) opened in 1896. Coal for heating was brought in and market gardening produce was sent out. Willington station opened for passengers in 1903. The first station was destroyed by fire and had to be rebuilt. People still remember taking the train to Bedford to do their shopping on a Saturday afternoon.

Among the many station masters and signal men there are some who are remembered. Bert Watts, who lived at Moggerhanger, but worked at Willington Station, won a competition for his Station Garden in 1932 out of 300 who entered. Ken Golder was a signaller who lived in a cottage at the bottom of Balls Lane. He used to wait till he heard the train coming, then race down the playing field to get to the signal box on time. He must have been fit! Mr Swanell was Station Master there in 1966 at the time of a severe flood. On the north side of the river, from Bedford to Great Barford, the water reached

the sides of the train sleepers on the track, the highest it had reached in living memory.

In 1967 the passenger service was withdrawn and goods traffic ceased on January 1st 1968. The line of the railway is now the cycle track.

The Dovecote and Stables

In 1912 the daughter of the late Augustus Orlebar, Miss Caroline Orlebar organised a collection to purchase the Dovecote and preserve it by giving it to the National Trust. Her death meant that her wishes were carried out by her brother in 1914. In 1947 Joyce Godber persuaded her father to give the Stables to the National Trust. Since that time the Dovecote and Stables have remained the only National Trust buildings in Bedfordshire and remarkable emblems of the village. These two buildings are now opened by appointment with the custodian on a casual basis by local volunteers and on Bank Holidays; refreshments are provided in the Church and many visitors are attracted.

The Post Office, the pub and other shops

The first Post Office was situated at the end of the row of cottages opposite Balls Lane on Church Road. At the same time there was a shop on Station Road selling groceries and sweets. By 1936 the Post Office was in its current position on Bedford Road. Mr. Pink who was the village baker also kept the post office and the village shop. At a time when very few people had cars, the only transport was the train until the bus came, and consequently the village shop was an essential resource. There was also a butcher's shop belonging to Mr. Gilbert next door to the Post Office. The current village shop and Post Office, is a centre of information and activity for the village, energetically run by Duane and Jessie Horlock.

There had been an ancient pub in Willington called the White Hart Inn, situated at the cross roads opposite the Forge. It closed some time about 1790. Thereafter there was no pub in Willington – the men used to go to Dog Farm Inn beyond the Cople turn on the Bedford Road - until the Crown opened about 1907. It was built by the Newland and Nash Brewery.

The Village Hall

In 1913 the first steps were taken towards providing a village hall with the setting up of a Committee (nothing changes!) A fete was held in the Vicarage Garden then at 32 Church Road, which raised £50. When the First World War broke out in 1914 the money was invested in war loans. Once the war was over the women of the village started to raise money by running jumble sales, whist drives, dances and concerts using Golders Barn or an iron hut behind the Crown, at one of which the Vicar gave a monologue about a stuffed owl. In 1919 a village Fete made £106. For four years the funds accumulated until 1923 they totalled £500. There was conflict over the design of the building but a contract was eventually awarded to Robert Jeakins of Bedford, brother of George of Willington. On the 9th. October. 1922, the Foundation Stone was laid by Alderman Nichols of Bedford. Mark Young declared the Peace Memorial Hall open on Easter Tuesday 1923. In the evening Madge Cope and

Charles Pink (then a school boy) played and Godfrey Gammons sang the first song. For a population of 432 the creation of the village hall was quite a feat.

In 1927 electricity arrived in the village and was put into the Hall. The Hall has since been well used for all sorts of meetings and events. In 1927 the charge was 5 shillings for a village charity and 12/6 for a function. It continues to be used by organisations for all ages from Willingtots and Brownies to Evergreens. The pattern of use has changed over time away from uniformed organisations and changing demands of work have meant that fewer people are available during the day, however it continues to be a valuable village resource.

The Second World War

Willington had its war experiences even though it was a small village. Evacuees were billeted here from 1939. The village also had a part in the anti-aircraft defences and had searchlights for a time. Two bombs from the same attack fell nearby one on the railway line between Willington and Blunham and the other in Mr. Lack's market garden which was said to have made a crater you could put a bus in.

Rations were sent to Willington during the war, in July 1942, for emergencies. These consisted of:

- 230 tins, each containing 15lbs biscuits.
- 19 cases, each containing 48 tins corned beef.
- 10 cases, each containing 48 tins soup.
- 17 cases, each containing 28lbs.sugar.
- 5 cases, each containing 48 tins condensed milk
- 6 cases, each containing 20 tins Margarine
- 5 cases, each containing 25lbs tea.

The supplies were divided into three lots: one was stored at the Vicarage, one in Mr. Stokes barn and one at Mr Godber's nurseries. Arrangements were made for Mr Gilbert to act as a butcher in case of need, with a slaughter house on Grange farm. Emergency stocks of flour were kept by Mr Pink for the baking of bread, if necessary.

Prisoners of War were accommodated in camps near the village and over one hundred of them came here to work. Interestingly the trusted ones had cottages which Mark Young owned and went with their jobs in the market garden. Land Army girls from local army camps also worked there.

Concerts were put on in the Village Hall to raise money for the service men when they came home from the war. Willington was one of the first villages to do this. Mr. Pink got a band together with other members of the community. Lily Bygraves played accordion, other members including Frank and Mary Godber, Don and Florrie Stokes and Edna Martin sang and acted. They even took their concert to London.

One organisation that no longer has a branch in the village, the Women's Institute, was very active towards the end of the war. The Willington branch was established in 1944. The WI organised village shows for flowers and garden produce. They put on concerts, taught home and domestic skills and also ran bowls and darts competitions. In 1945 they gave a Victory party for the children. At about the same time a branch of the Red Cross was set up in the old Vicarage, which was run by Winnie Larkins. There was also a branch of the Mothers' Union for many years.

Sadly a number of men from the village lost their lives in the service of their country during Second World War. Memorials to them, and to the even larger number who died in the First World War, are in St. Lawrence Church and in the Peace Memorial Hall.

Changes since the Second World War

Since the Second World War the major change in the village has been the increase in housing. The questionnaire for the Parish Plan indicated that there is now a strong feeling that there should be no further major building programme. There are currently about 320 households and a population of approximately 850. Willington is now included in the Forest of Marston Vale and the Bedford River Valley Park so it may be fortunate enough to benefit from their policies of landscaping, tree planting and limited additional building.

A further major change has been the shift in employment away from the village and away from agriculture. Until the 1950s many people in Willington earned a living on the farms and market gardens. Although the Willington Garden Centre is still a major employer in the village, most people work elsewhere. This has been made possible by the ease of transport by car and the connections from Willington to major road links. The danger is that Willington becomes a commuter village and the village community declines. The Village Plan is designed both to encourage the development of community in the process of creating the Plan and to identify measures to sustain the village as a community.

Dorothy Jamieson
Sheila Ward

2. THE PLAN

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Villagers are very appreciative of the natural environment in which we live. When asked what made Willington a good place to live there were many responses along the following lines:

Quiet rural village
Peace, quiet lovely surroundings
Small, quiet, rural
Riverside walks
Nice walks and countryside
Unspoilt countryside
Lots of places to walk and bike ride
Natural open spaces
Lovely scenery

However some people felt that the environment could be enhanced – that it was ‘scruffy’ and that there was little pride in the appearance of the village. Only 50% of respondents thought that the appearance of the village was ‘good’, whereas 46% thought it was just ‘OK’ or ‘reasonable’. There were worries about the gravel works, especially noise and dust. Air pollution from the brick works was another concern. There were many complaints about dog fouling (107 complaints). Litter and rubbish were of concern to 75 respondents. As many as 107 respondents said they would be prepared to be involved in a village clean-up. There were comments about a lack of large trees, the disappearance of hedges and the lack of flower beds.

People obviously wanted to look after the village and improve its environmental appeal. Tree planting (many supporters and 74 prepared to be involved), better path maintenance, and the improvement of old landfill sites to create parkland were proposed. The former landfill site north of Bedford Road (currently privately owned) was repeatedly mentioned as an area that did not enhance the village; it was described among other things as ‘waste land’ and ‘an eyesore’. Its regeneration was suggested by a number of people. There was support for more outdoor seating, landscaping of the land behind the village hall, a village pond and in general better land management. A number of people suggested that Willington should be included in the Forest of Marston Vale; in fact it always has been, although awareness of that fact obviously needs to be increased. Many people wished to increase wildlife and 92 people said that they would be willing to take part in a wildlife survey.

The following actions had wide support:

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Action/Proposal	Method	Timescale	Leader	Partner(s)	Comments
Curtail dog fouling	Notices; more dog bins	Already	Linda Syred	Parish Council BBC	Lots of comments in the responses
Village Clean-up	Clean-up days	Already	Lynda Syred	BBC	Two very successful half days. Huge amount of rubbish removed
Wildlife Survey	Organised survey	Probably next winter/ spring	Geoff Pickerell Geoff Budden	Forest of Marston Vale; RSPB; other environmental agencies	Much interest especially in birds and the preservation of their habitat
Tree planting	Community effort	From this autumn	Geoff Pickerell Geoff Budden	Forest of Marston Vale; Bedford River Valley Park	Needs to be consensus about where trees should be planted
Improvement of paths and bridleways	Community effort in conjunction with partners	From this autumn	To be identified	Public paths partnership; BCC; Forest of Marston Vale	Needs to bear implications of construction of Rowing Lake in mind
Open Garden Scheme	Identification of suitable gardens; creation of calendar of open days	To be identified this winter with a view to starting next year (2007)	Parochial Church Council (beneficiaries of previous scheme)		Has been done in the past. Needs villagers to volunteer their gardens. Could also raise money for good causes.
Beautiful Gardens competition	Needs a steering committee	From 2007	To be identified	Parish Council	Needs to be seen as a community effort
Better liaison with Gravel Works	Parish Council sub-committee	Already established	Parish Council	Lafarge Aggregates	On-going monitoring, village feedback and consultation needed

Larger scale improvements, such as the regeneration of old land fill sites, the creation of parkland etc would depend on the emergence of a significant group of people willing to support the lengthy processes that would be involved. The easiest of these projects would be the improvement of the land behind the village hall since that belongs to the village. Both landfill sites (north of Bedford Rd and behind the school) are privately owned: their regeneration probably would depend on them being brought into community ownership. This is not impossible, but difficult. These processes may be made much simpler by the proposed inclusion of Willington within the Bedford River Valley Park. We await further details of this proposal.

Other concerns such as those to do with the gravel works can be dealt with by the Parish Council and air pollution can be referred to DEFRA, although it now looks as if the remaining brick works will be closed down anyway because of the levels of pollution that it is producing.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

It was concern about planning applications for hundreds of houses on sites around the village, which was the immediate impetus for the creation of a Parish Plan. Since the village currently has only around 300 houses, development on that scale would have destroyed the village. These proposals prompted many people to think about what development was appropriate for the village and how their opinions could be made known. The questionnaire gave an opportunity for the voicing of those opinions, some of which are recorded below and will, we hope, lead to the creation of a more formal statement of village opinion on future development.

Many people were concerned about aspects of the built environment in the village, especially housing. Some people commented on the high cost of housing in the village. 11% of respondents to the questionnaire said that members of their household had had to move out of the area. A further 5% were staying with parents because of the cost of housing. 22% said that members of their family would return to Willington if cheaper housing were available. However a very large proportion of respondents (67%, 130 responses) wanted only those 25 houses for which planning permission has already been obtained, to be built. If houses were to be built, there was support for starter/low cost houses (89 responses) and medium sized family homes (96 responses) and some support for building sheltered housing (54 responses). There was little support for larger sized family homes (23 responses). A number of people commented on the danger of over-development of the village and on the apparently haphazard design and lack of co-ordination in the new build housing.

There was concern about pavements, which were generally judged to be unsatisfactory (70 respondents). The lack of a footpath on Balls Lane was repeatedly noted. However 96 respondents thought that paths and pavements were adequate. A number of people wanted additional bus shelters.

Light pollution from security lights on private houses and from the gravel pits was a concern to some, while many complained about street-lighting (77 respondents). Many others were pleased by the lack of street-lighting (all the better to see the stars, as several people commented) and wanted to resist the suburbanisation of the village and retain its country feeling. Many, many people said how much they valued the rural feeling of the village.

The development of the village is obviously an issue of great concern for many people. For this reason we are proposing the following actions.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Action/proposal	Method	Timescale	Leaders	Partners	Comments
Village Design Statement	Report created with consultation	In the next 12 months?	Graham Tillett Richard Payne Jo Watkiss	BBC BCC	A VDS would be regarded as a supplementary planning document and give us some influence over future planning decisions
Exploration of improvements to street-lighting and pavements and the provision of bus shelters	Consultation with relevant authorities	In the next 12 months	Parish Council	BBC BCC	

TRAFFIC

Issues to do with traffic management were a major concern to respondents to the questionnaire.

The volume (82 respondents), speed (104) and noise (50) of traffic were repeatedly noticed as issues seriously affecting the quality of life in the village. 107 respondents wanted speed reduction measures on the A603 and 53 wanted them on the village loop. However 55 explicitly did not want traffic calming measures. Many people mentioned the A603 as a major hazard as well as a source of air pollution. There were many complaints about traffic speeding through the village. Some people wanted a speed camera installed. A number of people mentioned the possibility of a village bypass. Noise from the Bedford bypass was noticed. The speed and volume of traffic round the loop was also frequently mentioned.

Parking was a major source of discontent. Parking in Chapel Lane which was likely to impede emergency vehicle access, was a matter for concern. Traffic and parking generated by Danish Camp and other attractions especially the cycle track, were often seen as problems for the village. A number of people commented on inconsiderate parking generally, especially car parking on the pavement on the A603. The problems of access for both cars and pedestrians, to the village shop were noticed. There were a number of suggestions for redesigned and improved parking for the shop.

Exits from the village, from Balls Lane and especially from Station Road, were seen as dangerous and in need of re-design.

Changes to traffic management and road layout will require action from a number of bodies. The proposal for action is the formation of a lobbying committee which will liaise with relevant authorities in association with the parish council, on a continuing basis.

TRAFFIC

Action/proposal	Method	Timescale	Leaders	Partners	Comments
The improvement of traffic management and road lay-out	Formation of a lobbying group in association with Parish Council	ASAP	Mervyn Askew Terry Wilkinson Richard Payne Daphne Payne	Parish Council BCC Police etc	This will be an on-going commitment which will need a number of people to sustain it

POLICING AND SECURITY

A number of people commented on low crime levels in the village, the relative absence of vandalism and the feeling that the village is a safe place to live and have children. Very few people (28) said that they had been worried about their safety in Willington, compared to the number (158, 85%) who had not. Vandalism to property/cars and theft from vehicles were the most noted (28 respondents each) security issues.

Despite this general sense of the safety of the village a large number of people (116) said they would support a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, wanted more police on foot patrol (102) and felt there should be better street lighting for security reasons (75). A huge number (150, 83%) thought that the police presence in Willington was too light, while only 30, 17%, thought that it was about right.

It seems that our sense of safety is not matched by our sense of appropriate policing. The parish council has raised this issue recently with the police, who pointed out the regular vehicle patrols through the village and the regular visits of the beat officer. Interestingly, despite the large number of people who wanted an increased police presence, very few villagers took the opportunity to come to the parish council meeting and meet the police commander on his recent visit. However there seems to be a wish for a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and indeed a start has already been made on this action.

POLICING AND SECURITY

Action/proposal	Method	Timescale	Leaders	Partners	Comments
Neighbourhood Watch Scheme	Meetings to establish scheme	ongoing	Tom Honeywell Graham Tillett Additional support needed	Home Watch Co-ordinator	The two meetings held so far have been poorly attended. Interested villagers should contact T.H.
Requests for more visible policing	Continued lobbying by Parish Council and members of the public at consultations with police	ongoing	Parish Council		

LEISURE AND RECREATION

We were interested in using the questionnaire to evaluate how far people participated in village activities and how far their needs or interests were met by what is currently available.

70 respondents (41%) said they would like to be more involved in community activities but 102 (59%) said they would not. This result seems to show how the pattern of village life has changed since the time when most people would have been involved. 114 people said that they did not have enough time to be more involved. Quite a number of people commented that they were too old to do much any more, so the demographic profile of the village has an impact on levels of activity. The village's situation, with relatively easy access to larger centres, the rail and bus system and the motorway system was a cause of satisfaction. A number of people felt that living in a small relatively unspoilt village with access to the outside world was an ideal combination.

But there were many comments on how commuting and couples both working meant that there was a lack of support for village activities. 'Outsiders' who moved in to the village but had nothing to do with village life were a source of disappointment for some people. Willington has become 'a dormitory village' according to one respondent.

On the other hand many people commented on the sense of community in the village and on friendly, sociable and helpful people on their sense of having good neighbours and of the opportunities to get involved in activities and with others. There were many favourable comments on the shop/post office and the school and a good number on the facilities offered by Frosts and Danish camp. The churches and their activities were important for some people. The pub came in for a lot of unfavourable comment and was generally thought to be ugly and inappropriate for a village - 'vandalised to be a town pub' as one respondent put it.

Some people felt there was a lack of activities generally and especially for children and young people. Proposals for various activities had the following levels of support

- Scouts –21 respondents
- Youth clubs –52
- Keep fit/yoga/aerobics – 42
- Bowls club – 36
- Cricket club – 25
- Football club – 23
- Gardening club – 41
- Music group – 23
- Village walks – 47
- Village website –38

There seems to be a considerable interest in sports clubs and youth clubs – activities that readily attract funding these days. However our discussion with

informed contacts suggested that the problems of insurance, premises and bureaucracy and legislation generally are very daunting. A number of examples were provided of how initiatives to set up additional facilities in our village and others had foundered on onerous statutory requirements. As a result of this discussion in the work group, our proposal is that we form a sports panel with a view to identifying facilities in nearby villages which our village might join. We were informed that many villages which have facilities such as football clubs or bowls clubs draw their membership from a wide area and would be glad of additional members. As well as identifying these facilities the sports panel would be asked to explore the issue of whether the village might help with transport needs. In addition the panel would be asked to consider how the existing facilities in the village, particularly the village hall, could be further utilised for youth and sporting activities.

A community produce market seemed to be a popular idea – 167 respondents said that they would buy produce from it, 20 said that they would provide produce for sale and 11 volunteered to help organise it.

What wasn't on the questionnaire but has got off to a roaring start is a Local History Group

LEISURE AND RECREATION

Action/Proposal	Method	Timescale	Leader	Partner(s)	Comments
Keep fit/yoga/aerobics	Class in village hall	On-going	Run by fitness instructor		Anyone interested should contact instructor
Local History Group	Series of meetings and activities	On-going	Dorothy Jamieson and Sheila Ward		Anyone interested should contact one of the leaders
Walking Groups	Regular scheduled meetings	On-going Thursday am and Thurs pm	Contact Marion Briscoe		Anyone interested should contact organiser
Website for the village		ASAP	Parish Council		Website run by BRCC has failed. New method needs to be identified
Gardening Club	Meetings and outings	From this autumn	To be identified		
Sports panel to explore use of facilities in other villages and better utilisation of our own resources	Meetings to explore levels of support and available funding	From this autumn	To be identified		
Youth Clubs	Establishment of regular meetings	From this autumn	To be identified	Beds. Youth Service	
Community Produce Market	Schedule of markets to be held near/in Village Hall	Initial pilot September 30th 2006	Julia Buckroyd	BBC for environmental health	Will start with sale of late summer produce

We

Willington Parish Plan

Compiled by the Community, for the Community



*Supported and part funded by Willington Parish Council
and other generous benefactors
from financial donations and in kind.*

With advice from Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity



© Willington Parish Plan 2006. Julia Buckroyd 01234 831316, j.buckroyd@herts.ac.uk

Front cover images by Mervyn Askew