

**HELIONS BUMPSTEAD
PARISH COUNCIL**

**PARISH PLAN UPDATE
INTERIM REPORT**

June 2008

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INTRODUCTION

This Interim Report has two parts. It is a report back to the village, following on from the Village Appraisal Report published in April 2003 and the subsequent Parish Plan of April 2004, summarising the achievements of the Village since then. It also outlines the results of the survey carried out in the Village in November 2007, and indicates the main areas of concern that require action in the near future.

The five members of the Parish Plan Update Working Party include representatives from both the Parish Council and the Village Hall Committee, as well as an independent member.

The Parish Council will arrange public meetings in the village during the summer, to consider the results of the questionnaire. The results will also be discussed with relevant representatives from Essex County Council and Braintree District Council, to clarify the best way to move things forward.

A more detailed report will be published later, which will also include a revised Parish Plan. This will identify the agency responsible for each of the actions required, where funding should come from, and a timescale for sorting the problem.

We are very proud of the huge amount that has been achieved over the past five years. This is reflected in the number of the awards that our Parish Council has received (detailed on page 9). But as some problems are solved, others inevitably arise. The list of 'jobs to do' is never completed.

The voice of Helions Bumpstead is now being heard right across Essex, and with your support we will continue to improve the quality of life in our small community.

PART 1

Progress Report on the Parish Plan

Many of you will recall that back in 2003 our community undertook a Village Appraisal. Every household in the Village was asked for their opinions on key issues that affect us all. The response was phenomenal, with over 91% replying to the questionnaire.

We subsequently published a Parish Plan, detailing the key areas that needed attention. Some problems were down to the Parish Council [PC] and the community to sort out; others required action from Braintree District Council [BDC] or from Essex County Council [ECC]; a few required national policy changes from Government.

The Parish Council and Village Hall Committee have been working very hard on your behalf to get things done, and we are pleased to report that the vast majority of items requiring attention have now been completed. Others are 'ongoing', requiring constant monitoring and checking. Inevitably new problems constantly arise, and have to be dealt with. The list of 'jobs to do' is never finished, and we have added to the list as the need has arisen.

We have been particularly successful in recent years in obtaining grant funding for specific projects, from various different sources. This has enabled us to achieve far more than would have been possible from precept (Council Tax) funding alone. Over the past five years, the village has raised over £60,000 in grant funding. To put this into context, the Parish Council's precept is less than £9,000 a year.

Village Green

A good example of this is the Village Green project, where the grant we received from the *Living Spaces* fund enabled us to transform this key area in the centre of the Village. The three new comfortable seats were generously donated, each in memory of members of our community.

The Green will soon be further enhanced by the addition of a permanent footpath map, showing some circular walks around the village. Grant funding for this was obtained a while ago, but there have been problems (not of our making) in implementing the scheme. It should be completed very soon.

Village Website

We also received grant funding to set up the Village website, which was designed to provide information quickly and easily, not just on the activities of the Parish Council, but also on virtually every other aspect of village life. The 'What's On' page will keep your diary up to date, and there are pages for every village club and group. The site is maintained by the Parish Council, and is updated every week. We were delighted that our website received the 'Website of the Year' award for 2006 from the National Association of Local Councils. www.helionsbumpsteadparishcouncil.gov.uk

The Parish Council does recognise that internet access is not available to all, and has continued to support the Village Magazine, which is distributed free of charge to every household quarterly, and provides a great deal of information on all aspects of village life. We have also provided new (waterproof) noticeboards throughout the village, which are also updated weekly. There can be no excuse for not knowing what is going on in Helions Bumpstead.

Village Hall

Probably the most dramatic transformation in the past three years has been to the Village Hall. The exterior of the Hall had deteriorated badly, due mainly to problems with the flat roof over the front entrance. The shabby appearance caused a reduction in bookings, and hence a fall in income, making it more difficult to raise the funds to rectify things.

One of the most significant outcomes from the Parish Plan was the strong indication of the importance of the Hall as a focus for village life, and this support enabled the Hall Committee to obtain the necessary grant funding to kick-start the renovation project. Two very generous bequests from villagers gave the Committee the working capital required. Everybody is delighted with the new front entrance, which has been transformed, with level access from the road and soft and welcoming planting to add interest.

Hall usage has taken off, with regular bookings every weekday morning and evening, and the hugely successful monthly Farmers' Market, which is run by the Committee. As a result of this success, it became necessary to provide more storage space in the Hall, and additional car parking space. The next phase will be the complete renovation of the kitchen, to meet current Health & Safety standards.

A less public, but none the less important, change in the Hall has been the conversion of the Committee Room to double up as an office for both the Parish Clerk and the Village Hall Committee. In the past the PC had relied upon the ability of the Clerk to find space in her spare bedroom to accommodate all the paperwork. With the increased responsibilities now being delegated to Parish Councils, and the associated increase in volume of paper, this was no longer realistic. With the addition of a phone line and internet access, the Clerk has a practical base from which to work, and she is available in the office at set times to meet and advise villagers.

The Parish Council has worked very closely with the Village Hall Committee on the renovation and refurbishment of the Hall. As Custodian Trustees of the Hall, the PC must take ultimate responsibility for the Hall's care and maintenance. This can be funded both through the precept and through supporting grant applications, as well as through specific fund-raising activities organised by the Village Hall Committee. The Hall is the only public building that we have, and is available for us all to use.

We are delighted with the changes so far, and look forward to further improvement

Recreation Ground

It became apparent at the public meetings held after the publication of the Appraisal Report, that many current villagers are unaware of the history of the Recreation Ground.

The land was purchased by public subscription in 1920 as a permanent memorial to the sixteen young men of the village who were killed in the First World War. Their names are recorded in St Andrew's Church, but it was felt that it would be appropriate to erect a plaque on the Recreation Ground to commemorate this.

It has proved very difficult to obtain any funding towards this project. Grants are available for the renovation of existing war memorials, but not for the creation of new ones. We hope to be able to move this forward this year. The stone will be mounted on a new brick plinth near the boundary of the car park extension.

A clause in the covenant drawn up when the Recreation Ground was purchased prohibits the use of the field for organised games on Sundays. This has been a bone of contention for the Cricket Club, when drawing up their fixture lists, and has long been outdated. With the co-operation of the Parish Property Trustees (the Custodian Trustees for the Recreation Ground) and the Charity Commission, we hope to be able to lift this restriction in the near future.

The Village Hall Committee were well aware that, although we had the play equipment for toddlers and young children on the Recreation Ground, there was not a lot provided for older children. After the publication of the Parish Plan in 2004, young people in the village were invited to special meetings to discuss their 'wish list' of facilities that they would like to see. As a result of those discussions, the BMX track was created in the small copse and the kickwall and basketball nets were provided. The teenagers also asked for an outside 'shelter' where they could meet with friends; this was provided near the play equipment, so that it could double as a rain shelter for parents with toddlers.

Summary

Overleaf we have tabulated the actions that were detailed in the Parish Plan, and the progress that has been made.

We have also summarised our recent grant successes. This extra funding has made all the difference to what the Parish Council and the Village Hall Committee have been able to achieve in the last three years. Some has come from national schemes, some from ECC and some from BDC.

Many people commented in response to the Village Appraisal questionnaire that they thought we received poor value from our Council Tax, since almost all of it goes to Essex (73%) or Braintree (11%), and very little directly to the village (3.5%). This is one way of getting some of that money back! The *Community Initiatives Fund* from ECC and the *Rural Communities Development Fund* from BDC are both limited to fairly small grants, but they have made a huge difference to small communities such as ours, and are much appreciated.

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Grants Summary

We have also been disappointed with many grant applications; success is certainly not guaranteed. We have been criticised by some for not tackling the most urgent problems first. This has been because we have dealt with problems whenever suitable funding became available. Funders change their criteria and priorities from year to year, so we have to be careful to match their required outcomes.

Most of the grants that we have received do not cover 100% of the cost of the particular project; we have to contribute "match funding", which may be in the form of additional cash, or may be as 'volunteer time', as in the Village Green project and the website design. Without these volunteers, we would not have been able to achieve a fraction of what has been done. You know who you are. Thank you.

Awards

The success of our website in winning national recognition encouraged the Parish Council to enter various other competitions. In 2007, the EALC ran a contest to find the best community-led plans. Our Parish Plan was voted not only the best in Essex published before 2006, but also the best overall.

For the first time in several years, in 2007 the Parish Council entered the *Best Kept Village* competition organised by the Rural Community Council of Essex and sponsored by Calor. This is not designed to find the best chocolate-box village, but rather rewards community effort and achievement. We were amazed to be short-listed as one of the four finalists, and were delighted to be very close runners-up to the eventual winners, Ashdon, as *Village of the Year*, demonstrating that Helions Bumpstead is an exceptional place to live. This was a great achievement for a small village such as ours. It is very encouraging to see our efforts recognised.

PART 2

Results of Survey, November 2007

New problems have arisen since our original Village Appraisal survey in November 2002. The Parish Council wanted to obtain the opinion of the village on several key issues, and so undertook a further (shorter) survey in November 2007. Again, a questionnaire was delivered to every household in the Village, and again your level of response was outstanding, at over 81%. This high response rate is very important to us in being able to move things forward, and it demonstrates amply how much you all care about your village. Thank you to all who responded.

This section summarises the results from the questionnaire, and indicates the main areas of concern. A more detailed analysis will be published in the final report, together with the demographic information you provided.

Tele-Communications

G1: Radio and Television Reception

Poor radio and television reception continues to be a problem for a significant minority of the village. Looking at the responses in detail, there is a definite geographical correlation, with those in the dip in the village centre [Camps Road, Sages End Road] having much poorer reception than those up on the hill at Pale Green and Wiggens.

G2: Mobile Phone Reception

Mobile phone reception has been a major problem for many years, with 45% of respondents saying reception is poor. Of the remainder, 31% said that reception was only average. It is interesting to note again that the majority of respondents who said reception is good live on the higher land.

Several highlighted the differences between different networks – most of us now know that only Vodaphone works reasonably well.

G3: Broadband Reception

Steeple Bumpstead exchange was converted to Broadband in December 2003, as the result of a concerted campaign in both Steeple and Helions; it was described at the time as the largest infrastructure investment since electricity came to the village in the 1950s. Only four years later, and now two-thirds of households have a broadband connection, the majority rated at average or good quality of service.

Broadband has transformed lives for many people, enabling us to work from home and avoiding long commuting at least some of the time.

Those of us who use broadband would now be hard pressed to manage without it. The possibilities of on-line shopping and communication have helped to reduce rural isolation for many. It is to be hoped that an open access broadband connection will be available for all to use at the Village Hall soon

Traffic

T1: Speed Restrictions

The current speed restrictions in the village were introduced after our last Village Appraisal. Opinion was evenly divided as to their adequacy – many people commented that they would be adequate if they were enforceable – but they are not. Many would like to see 30mph extended throughout the village.

T2: Possible 20mph in Village Centre

Again, opinion is evenly divided. Predictably, residents of Mill Road, Church Hill and the bottom of Camps Road would welcome such a restriction. Enforcement is again the key issue.

We are all aware of the increase in traffic volumes in recent years, and the increase in the size of vehicles (private as well as commercial) using our narrow lanes. Putting up restriction signs will not produce the cultural shift that makes speeding socially unacceptable. Villagers must lead by example.

T3: Road Gritting in Winter

Gritting of our roads in winter is a perennial problem. Although some of our roads are gritted, we recognise that ECC Highways cannot possibly cover the whole county, and our lanes are not going to be a high priority. We also recognise that with a county as large as Essex, weather conditions will not always be the same from north to south.

This is a good example of the sort of problem that is best dealt with at local level, and 83% of respondents support the Parish Council taking on this responsibility. The PC has identified a small gritter designed for the purpose, and will try to move this project forward.

T4: Quiet Lanes

The concept of Quiet Lanes has been around for a while now, and was mentioned in our last report. These are minor rural roads that are suitable for walkers, cyclists and horse riders to share with motorised vehicles. They have a rural character with low traffic flows and speeds, and can link up with existing bridleways to form circular routes.

The PC would like Sages End Road and Water Lane to be designated Quiet Lanes. They are already classified as 'protected' lanes, although that designation seems to afford them very little protection. In discussion, ECC Highways have been very reluctant to consider Quiet Lane status, but they have at last started consultations on three pilot schemes in the county. Since 84% of you agreed in principle, the Parish Council now has a strong mandate to pursue this further.

Environment

Environmental issues are now firmly at the top of the political agenda, and the energy and environmental implications of all that we do now has to be considered. We asked about just a few of the issues affecting life in Helions Bumpstead now.

E1, E2: Energy Efficiency

Only three households in the village [2%] have an alternative energy source; all three have installed solar panels. This surely reflects the significant capital costs involved, and until the efficiency of such alternatives improves, they are likely to remain a minority option. Improving insulation in the home will provide a more cost-effective energy efficiency alternative for most of us.

Over three quarters have installed at least some low-energy light bulbs. As designs improve and become more compatible with existing light fittings, this is likely to increase. Conventional tungsten light bulbs are due to be phased out by 2011, so this is an issue that we will all have to address.

The Village Hall Committee has pledged to make energy efficiency a priority in the redevelopment and refurbishment of the Village Hall.

E3, E4: Water Efficiency

Three quarters of households collect rain water for use on the garden, but only very keen gardeners [20%] re-use 'grey' water. We recognise the collection and re-use of grey water can be difficult in old properties, but it should always be encouraged with new build.

E5, E6: Recycling

The vast majority (97%) support the roadside recycling collections. Those few who don't, cited "laziness" or "forgetfulness" as the main reason why not. You know who you are!

Almost as many recycle glass – 84% at the bottle banks at the Village Hall, the rest at Sainsburys. One or two claimed not to have any bottles. Just a reminder that the bottle banks will take glass jars as well – but not drinking glasses. The Village Hall receives payment from BDC for recycled glass. BDC also organise a monthly garden waste collection during the summer months. There is also a clothes and shoes collection point at the Hall for the Salvation Army.

E7, E8: Nature Conservation Area

The creation of a nature conservation area in the village, open to all, was strongly supported (76%). This has to be a long-term aim, but there are suitable grants available for such projects. Thank you to the 40% who offered to help maintain such an area.

E9: Footpaths

Our network of footpaths in the village extends to over 25miles, and in recent years they have been significantly improved, with better signage and waymarking, and new bridges and stiles where necessary. The ultimate responsibility for footpaths lies with ECC Highways, but our Parish Council belongs to the Parish Paths Partnership [P3] scheme, whereby general maintenance is devolved down to the PC.

Over half (58%) now use the footpath network regularly. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, a map of our village footpaths is soon to be installed on the Village Green, and a leaflet detailing specific walks will be available.

The annual Boxing Day walk is now a well-established feature of village life, making the national press last year! Due to the popularity of the Boxing Day walk, a series of monthly walks will be instigated this spring, on Saturday afternoons after the Farmers' Market.

E10: Flooding

The flash floods that occurred in the village centre in June 2007 were far worse than any that had occurred previously. Severe flooding caused major disruption to households, and roadside banks collapsed in Camps Road and Water Lane.

The difficulties were aggravated by poor maintenance of streams and ditches – a problem that we have been trying to resolve for years. There has been a lack of clarity about responsibilities, and there are ongoing discussions with landowners, Highways, and the Environment Agency. 84% of you support the Parish Council taking on the responsibility for clearing the streams and roadside ditches on a regular basis; we will seek funding to move this forward.

The PC has provided sandbags to those properties most liable to flood damage. If you feel that your property is vulnerable, please contact the Clerk for advice. Landowners in particular are asked to be more aware of the potential problems that may be caused to neighbouring properties by changes in land drainage. Rapid drain off from the fields regularly causes our lanes to flood.

The PC has asked the Environment Agency to explore the possibility of reinstating the water meadows in Water Lane to help alleviate the flooding problems both here and in Steeple Bumpstead.

E11: Allotments

With increased awareness of 'food miles', there is far more interest in growing your own fruit and vegetables. But many houses and cottages in the village have quite small gardens, not large enough to be very productive.

Sixteen households would like an allotment. It is within the powers of Parish Councils to provide allotments; we will therefore look for a suitable area of land.

Facilities for Young People

One of the key areas highlighted by our previous questionnaire was the need to improve facilities for young people in the Village. The Parish Council and the Village Hall Committee together addressed this by inviting teenagers to special meetings to discuss their wishes. Some of the projects we have completed since then include

- improving the play equipment
- creating the BMX track
- building the kick-wall
- and providing a shelter as a meeting place.

There are 43 young people between the ages of 11 and 17 living in Helions Bumpstead, and 25 of them completed the questionnaire.

Y1, Y2: Travel to leisure activities

Not surprisingly for a tiny village, responses show that most young people find their leisure activities outside Helions Bumpstead. Virtually all rely upon lifts from family or friends to travel to 'out of school' activities. However 7 said that they also use public transport and 8 said that they walk or cycle.

Y3: Where do young people meet with friends?

By far the most popular place for young people to meet with their friends is either at their own or their friend's home. Nine use the recreation ground to be with friends and it is pleasing to note that 8 say they also use the new meeting shelter

Y4: Clubs and Activities

The young people who responded to the questionnaire provided excellent feedback on the clubs and activities they would like to see in the village. There was wide ranging interest in sports facilities such as tennis courts, outdoor table tennis table, archery, a climbing wall, and rugby, cricket and football teams.

Other ideas included: jewellery making classes, ballet, a cookery club for children, disco, street dance lessons, tyre zip wire, a full sized motocross track, a gravity pole and a giant chess board.

Y5: Use of current facilities for Young People

Five say that they use the BMX track; 5 use the kick wall and 5 use the football nets.

It is noted that current facilities for young people are likely to appeal more to boys than to girls

Y6: What would most benefit young people in Helions Bumpstead?

Several young people mentioned the need for improved public transport especially to Cambridge and Haverhill. There was an overall theme of needing more things happening for young people. Again a youth club was mentioned by several, as was somewhere to go with friends (such as a coffee shop). Other ideas included a graffiti wall (in the hope that it would help prevent other areas being spoiled) a small skateboard park and a weekend mobile library.

Y7: Interest in a Coffee Shop

Eleven thought they would use a coffee shop occasionally. Only 2 respondents thought they would use a coffee shop more than once a week; 3 thought they would use it about once a week whilst 4 were not at all interested in having a coffee shop.

However, there was significant interest in having a weekly youth club in the village and several requests for 'somewhere to meet with friends so the coffee shop could be the ideal venue if it was open during the evenings. It was suggested that the coffee shop should also have a 'tuck shop'.

SUMMARY:

Although the thoughts and ideas from young people were very diverse and in some cases quite innovative, the following themes did emerge.

- 1 Young people need somewhere to meet with friends
- 2 Public transport does not currently meet the needs of young people in Helions Bumpstead.
- 3 There appears to be significant support for starting a youth club
- 4 Young people think it is important to maintain and increase the variety of sporting opportunities for young people in Helions Bumpstead: eg cricket, rugby, tennis, archery, climbing.
- 5 Permanent outdoor entertainment facilities would be popular – table tennis, giant chess, zip wire, 'half pipe' skate board park, gravity pole etc
- 6 There is a need for classes and activities likely to appeal to girls: eg dance classes, jewellery making, cookery
- 7 More Village Hall events for young people could be planned: eg discos

Village Hall

In the first part of this Report we described how the physical transformation of the Village Hall has resulted in an upsurge in interest, and a boom in regular bookings, so that it is now used every weekday morning and evening, as well as some afternoons.

In order to further improve the facilities available at the Hall, we need more space. You may recall that we unsuccessfully applied to the Lottery Community Buildings Fund for a large grant to enable us to build an extra room, allowing a wider range of functions to take place. The extension would have included the installation of a ground-source heat pump, to greatly improve the energy efficiency of the building, and save on running costs.

The Village Hall Committee need to know how you use the Hall now, and how you would like to use it in the future.

VH1: Importance of the Village Hall

In the 2002 survey, 90% of you considered the Village Hall to be an important focus for village life. In 2007, that had risen to 97%. With the improvements that have already been completed, and those planned for the near future, we have a thriving community building providing many opportunities for social interaction in the village.

VH2, VH3, VH4: Current Use of the Hall

Almost half of the village (47%) use the Hall on a regular basis, and 39% have used it for a private party.

Of the regular Hall users, WI currently has about thirty members, and Carpet Bowls is also well established. The new Parent & Toddler group usually has about 14 families attending, many from outside the village. The various morning fitness classes, including Pilates, Circuit Training and a mobility class for the over 50's, are all popular.

The Silver Link club for the over 60's is, unfortunately, struggling to keep going, with only 8 members. This group has just celebrated its fiftieth birthday, and deserves our support.

VH5: Farmers' Markets

Our monthly Farmers' Market has been run independently, and very successfully, by the Committee for nearly three years. 69% of villagers use the Markets regularly, as do many others from Haverhill and surrounding villages.

Comments about the Markets were very positive, and included several suggestions for additional stalls, as well as requests for a fortnightly, rather than monthly, Market. Unfortunately, the number of stalls has to be limited by the size of the Hall.

VH6, VH7: Future Use of the Hall

The questionnaire suggested some possible activities that might be provided in the future, to gauge their popularity. Since the survey, Yoga classes have been started very successfully; 18 would like an evening fitness class.

The village used to have a Gardening Club not so long ago, and 20 people would like to see that restarted. The idea of a regular Film Club was also popular, and 15 would like a History Group.

The Hall Committee would be pleased to assist any volunteers in organising any of these activities.

The concept of running a modern 'coffee shop' in the Hall, open on a regular basis each weekday, as a social centre and place to meet with friends, and providing internet access for those who do not have it at home, is a new idea. It would principally benefit older people and parents at home during the day, who often feel very isolated. It would not be possible with the limited space that we have now, but may be possible in the future if we can extend the Hall.

Interest in the idea was disappointingly low, with only 10% interested in using the coffee shop on a regular basis, 40% "occasionally", and 40% "never".

CONCLUSIONS

This report has summarised progress so far on the Parish Plan published in April 2004, and has also summarised the results of the questionnaire circulated in the Village in November 2007. In order to produce a new Parish Plan, the Parish Council will now enter into discussions with appropriate representatives from Braintree District Council and Essex County Council, and the Rural Community Council of Essex. Once the required new actions have been agreed, a more detailed report will be circulated.

The Parish Council will continue to provide information through the Village Magazine, on noticeboards and on the website, as well as at the Annual Parish Assembly in April. But communication needs to be a two-way process. The PC wants to know what you think about life in our village, both good and not so good. Please don't wait for the next questionnaire, but let us know if a problem arises, and tell us what you think needs to be done.

Either write to or phone the Parish Clerk, email us via the website, or come along to any PC meeting, when there is always a 'public question time' item at the top of the agenda.

The Parish Council is still not always consulted, but our voice is beginning to be heard, and our Parish Plan has contributed to wider discussions and policy decisions at both District and County levels. This is not the end of the process. As some issues are resolved, others will inevitably surface. This has to be ongoing.

As we said in the Appraisal Report, residents of Helions Bumpstead love the Village for its peace and tranquillity, its friendliness, and its truly rural character. We hope to keep it that way, but we do not wish to live in the past. We need to plan for the future so that we live in the village we want, not the one we could have avoided.

The Parish Plan Update Working Party are:

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------|---------|
| Jane Catchesides | [Chair] | 730 422 |
| Malcolm Rowson | [Chair, PC] | 731 744 |
| Terri Freight | [Chair, VH] | 730 897 |
| Charlotte Purdie | [PC] | 730 323 |
| Martin Catchesides | [Ind] | 730 422 |

If you would like a copy of the original Village Appraisal or Parish Plan reports, contact Terri or Jane.