



Woodchester Parish Plan



Foreword

A Parish Plan is both a record of the features that contribute to the character of a village and an action plan for what local people feel should be preserved or changed in the future. Local government at Parish, district and County level is committed to taking into account the needs and concerns of local residents when planning and formulating policy. Parish plans are seen as one tool by which local people can participate in and influence this process.

The Woodchester Village Plan was initiated by the Parish Council with the creation of a Village Plan Committee.

Following an initial meeting at the beginning of 2005, a questionnaire was circulated to all households in the village in April 2005 in which residents were asked their views on a variety of issues affecting village life. This was analysed by one member of the Committee Dr. Maurice Chestnutt and this was followed up by a local workshop was held in October 2005 in which areas of concern were prioritised and an action plan drawn up. The Village Plan represents the fruit of these consultations. As such it deals only with the concerns raised by the community during the consultation period. As the plan evolves other issues may become a priority and this is why the current plan is not seen just as a one-off, but part of a continuing project.

This publication summarises the key findings in an easily accessible form with detailed accompanying documents and raw data used during the process of

compiling the Parish Plan being available on the village website at www.Woodchestervillage.co.uk so they can be consulted directly. They are

Stroud District Profiles: Woodchester
The Questionnaire
Analysis of Woodchester Questionnaire

We should also draw attention to the full historical survey *History of South Woodchester, also known as Far Woodchester*. The full document is deposited in Stroud District Council, but the text is also available on www.Woodchestervillage.co.uk.

The recommendations for action will be incorporated into the village website www.woodchestervillage.co.uk and a short summary of the key conclusions and facts will also be available for circulation in paper format, however, only the website will be updated regularly.

This project has been made possible with funding from the Countryside Agency and Woodchester Parish Council and support from Stroud District Council.

We would also like to extend our thanks to Gloucestershire Rural Community Council for their support and advice in the preparation of the plan.



Stroud District
Council



Gloucestershire Rural Community Council



Dr Gervase Hamilton George Bastin Dr Maurice Chestnutt Mike Warnes Joan Gould

Members of the Steering Committee



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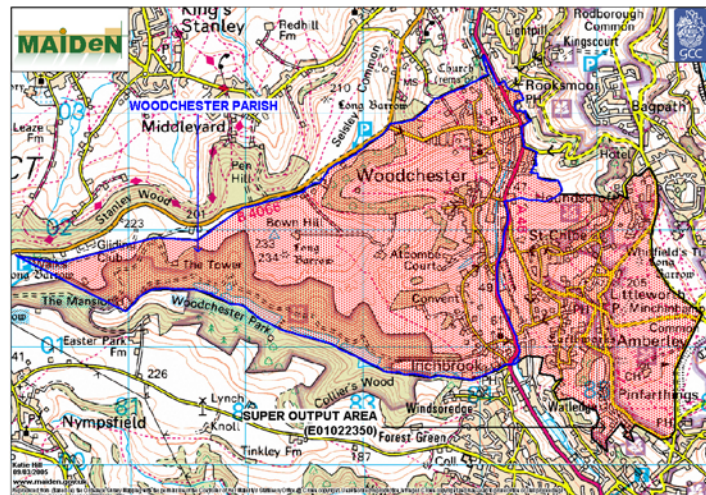
Major areas of concern

Solutions to the problems

- North Woodchester School runs
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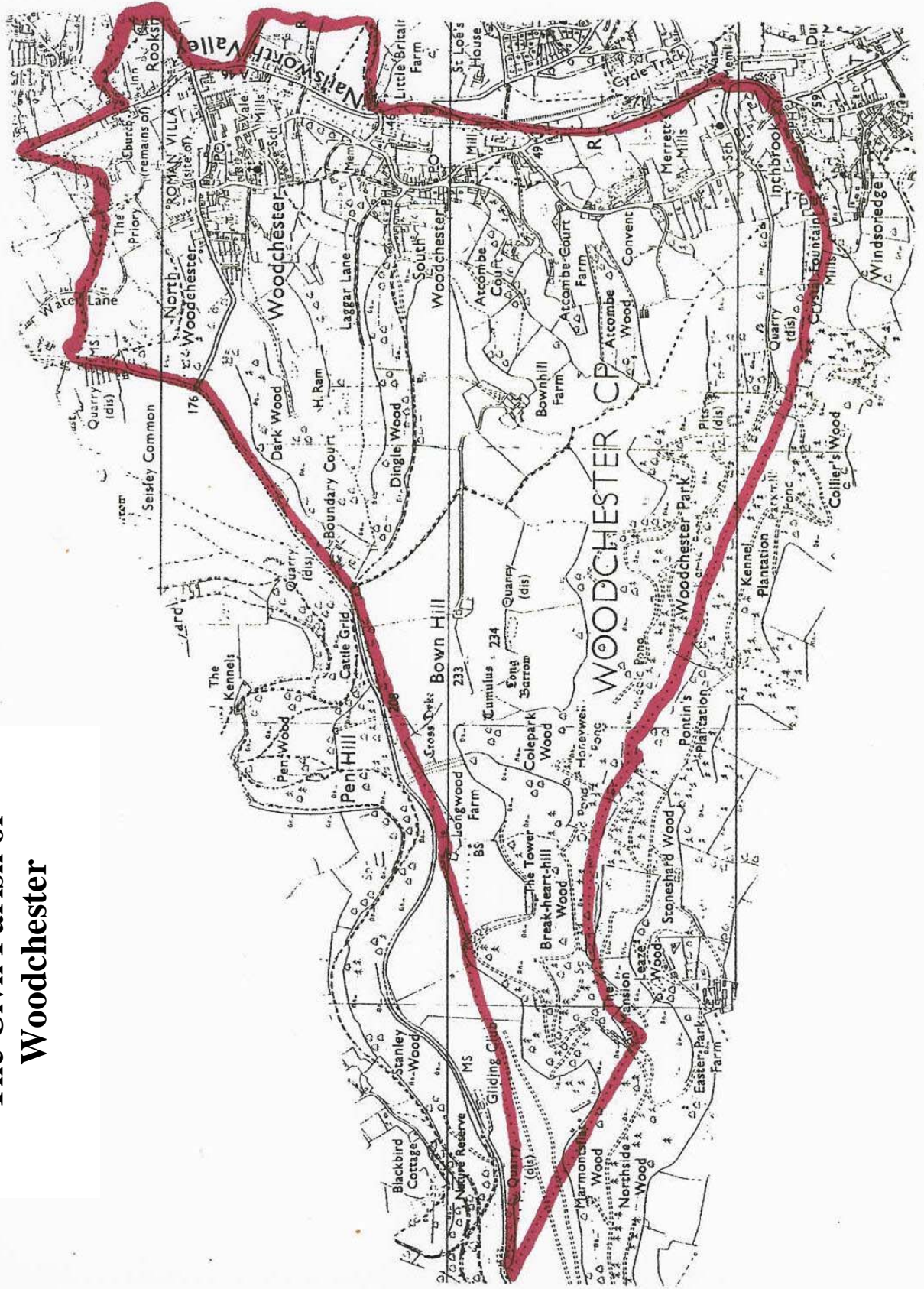
Location



Woodchester Parish outlined in blue

- Woodchester Parish lies to the south of Stroud, mainly to the west of the A46 main road and is situated close to Nailsworth and Stroud.
- It contains the settlements of North Woodchester, South Woodchester, Rooksmoor and part of Inchbrook.
- Area: 512 hectares, 1.98 square miles.
- The parish is part of the larger Amberley and Woodchester ward (it was formerly part of Kings Stanley ward)

The Civil Parish of Woodchester





A snapshot of Woodchester from the 2001 census

Population 1198

Households 505

Employment:

48% in paid employment (full and part time) of whom 64% work in the parish
18% retired
16% self employed
employers, 99 – and this is 60% more than the District average.

What do we have?

2 schools Woodchester Endowed School and St Dominic's
3 pubs The Ram, The Old Fleece and The Royal Oak
2 Post Offices one in South another in North Woodchester
a village hall
2 churches both called St Mary's, one in Convent Lane another in North Woodchester

Population Changes between 1991 and 2001

Population has increased by a total of 11% from 1077 to 1198 and the greatest increase has been in the lowest (0–10) and oldest (65 plus) age groups

Car ownership and travel to and from work

89% of the households have a car and of these half have more than one car
37% travelled 5 km or less to work
39% travelled more than 5 km to work
18% work from home

Health

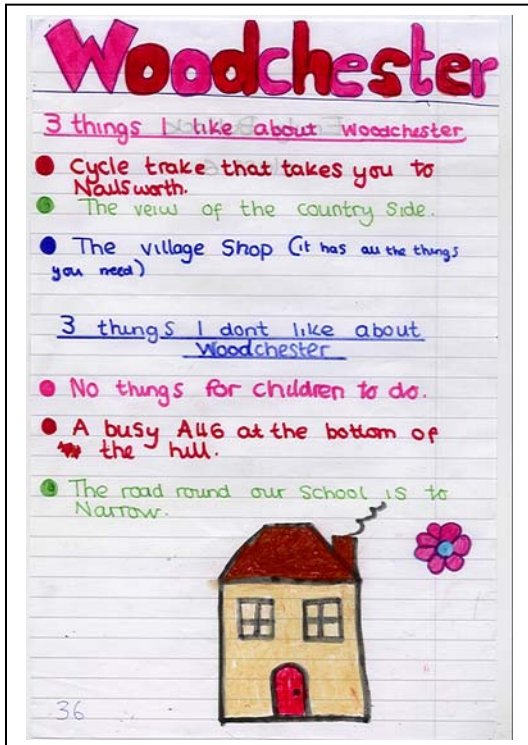
73% of residents classified themselves, in the 2001 census as being in good health and only 6% as being in poor health.
11% said they provide unpaid care to family and/or friends due to health disabilities. Most of these carers said they provide 1–19 hours of care per week.

Schools and childcare

North Woodchester Endowed School roll as at 2005 was 149 of which some 80% of children come from outside the village.

St Dominic's School roll as at 2005 was 103 of which 90% of the children come from outside the village.

In 2003 there were 4 registered childminders in Woodchester providing 58 places.



*A contribution from Emily Bullock
Aged 11,
Woodchester Endowed School*

Internet Access

(Figures from MAIDeN, July 2002) 40.4% of the residents of Woodchester had access to the internet compared with 22.2% in the District as a whole.

Crime

(figures from MAIDeN Gloucestershire Constabulary 2001–2003)

Woodchester is ranked as follows in the 51 parishes that make up the District

47th for violent crime (but this is only a quarter of the level in the district as a whole and a fifth of that in the county).

36th for domestic burglary

33rd for theft from a vehicle

16th for theft from a vehicle



The survey

The Questionnaire

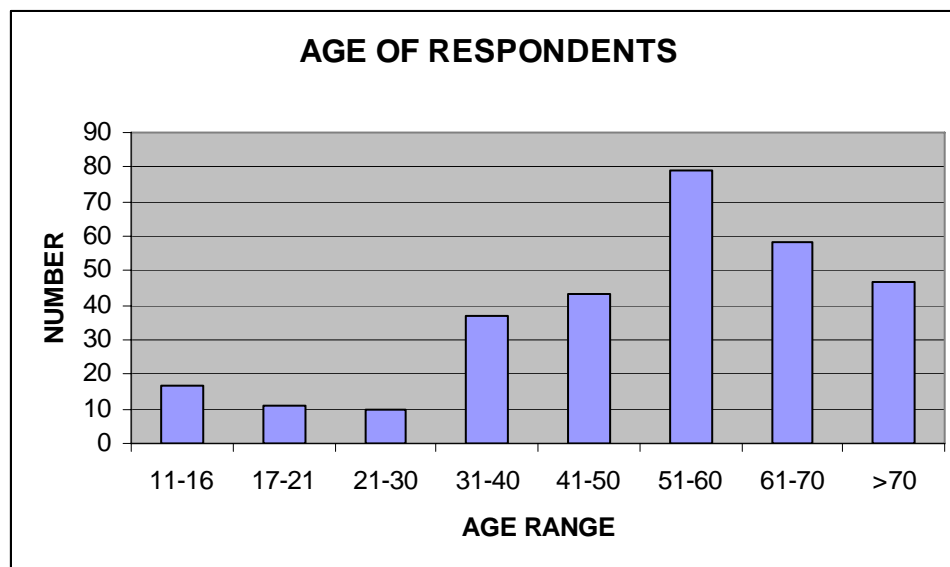
A meeting was held on 4th December 2004 to identify the main areas of interest and concern, and this provided the basis for the questionnaire.

A questionnaire was sent to each of the 500 households in Woodchester. All residents over the age of eleven were asked to respond and to add their own comments where necessary. Children attending the two village schools were also asked to contribute their views.

The questionnaire was analyzed (See Questionnaire Analysis on the Web) and at a subsequent meeting 14th/15th October 2005 residents were asked to prioritize those areas which were of greatest concern to them and/or which they saw to be of greatest importance to quality of life in the village.

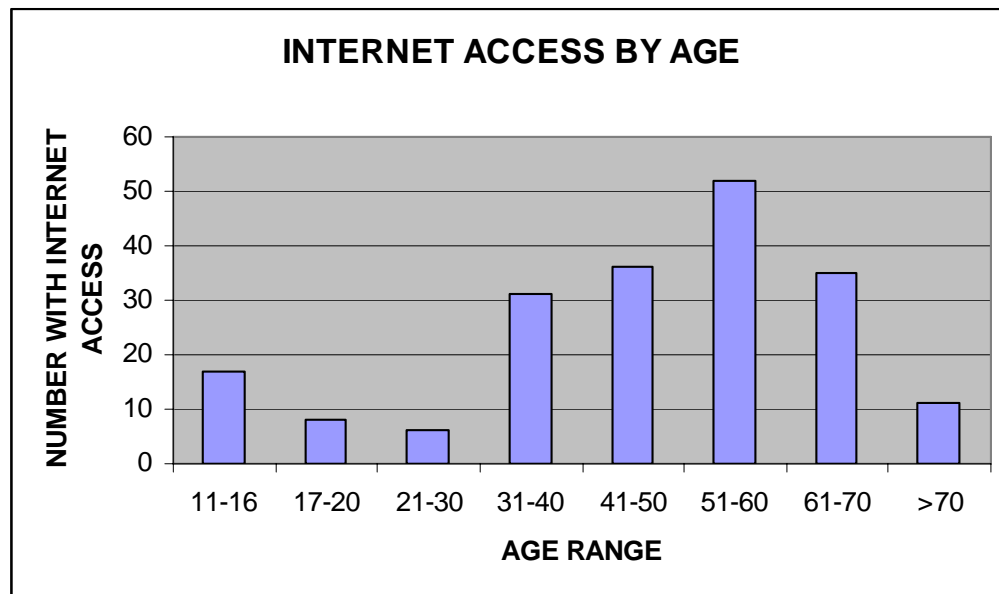
In all 163 questionnaires were returned covering 310 residents. This is a response rate of 32%.

The age distribution of respondents matches that of the village as a whole with the majority of respondents being in the 51–60 age group. (Children under 11 were not generally included)



Not all respondents indicated their sex but of those that did (235) there were equal numbers of male (115) and female (120) respondents. Of those that indicated, 257 were residents of Woodchester and 10 non-residents who send their children to school or who work in Woodchester. In the analysis of the replies we have taken note not only the responses but also extra written comments made on the questionnaires themselves.

197 respondents had access to the internet, almost 64% with the largest number of users being in the 50-60 age group. This gives some strength to the need for a village website which is now in place and can be found on www.woodchestervillage.co.uk

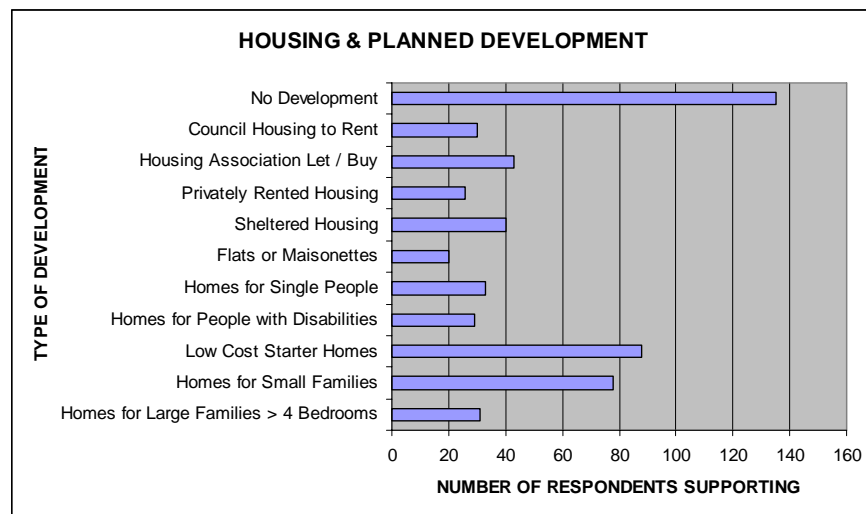


What the responses showed



Housing and Planned Development

The vast majority (80%) of respondents wanted no further housing development in the village. However, of those that did support development the majority were in favour of more low cost or affordable homes for small families.

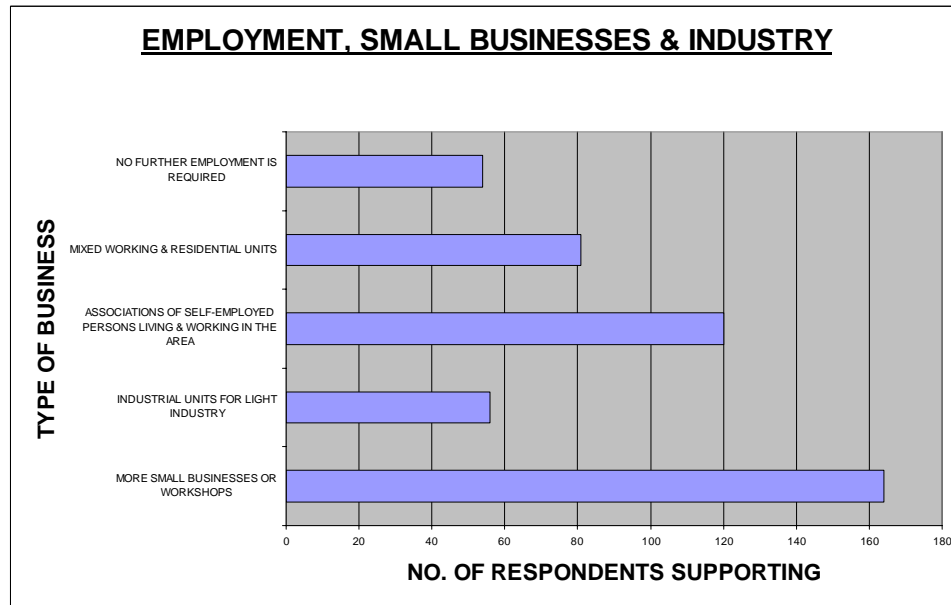


Residents commented that they would prefer to see any proposed development on brownfield sites only. And were opposed to ribbon development along the A46. Conversion of existing commercial sites (e.g. The Piano Factory and Fenworths) to residential use was also favoured together with discrete infill, e.g. the land opposite the Royal Oak Inn, although this particular site might also be used for a much needed children's play area.

The poor state of some historical buildings in parts of the village (Goring House is an example) was identified as an area of concern. While repair and dilapidation orders would provide temporary respite most residents saw a greater need for movement by the national historical organisations in upgrading such properties and possible conversion of existing commercial properties, e.g. the old piano factory, to residential use.



Employment

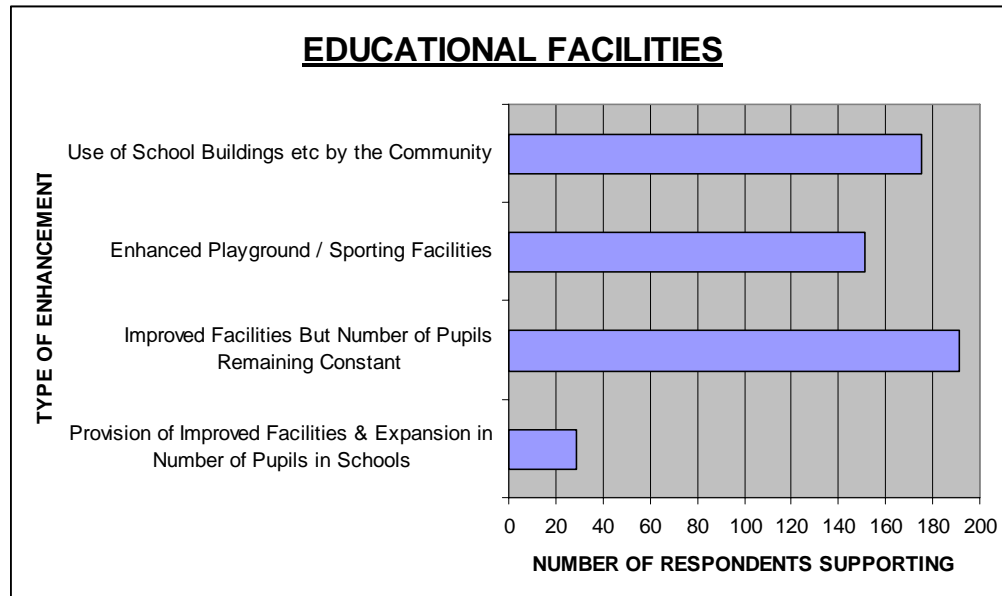


A majority of those responding were in favour of seeing more small businesses or workshops or associations of self-employed people living and working in the area. Half of all residents would like to see mixed working and residential units.

As to location, most residents favoured small business development on brownfield land (e.g. Station Road) or in existing commercial buildings, e.g. the Piano Factory.



Educational Facilities

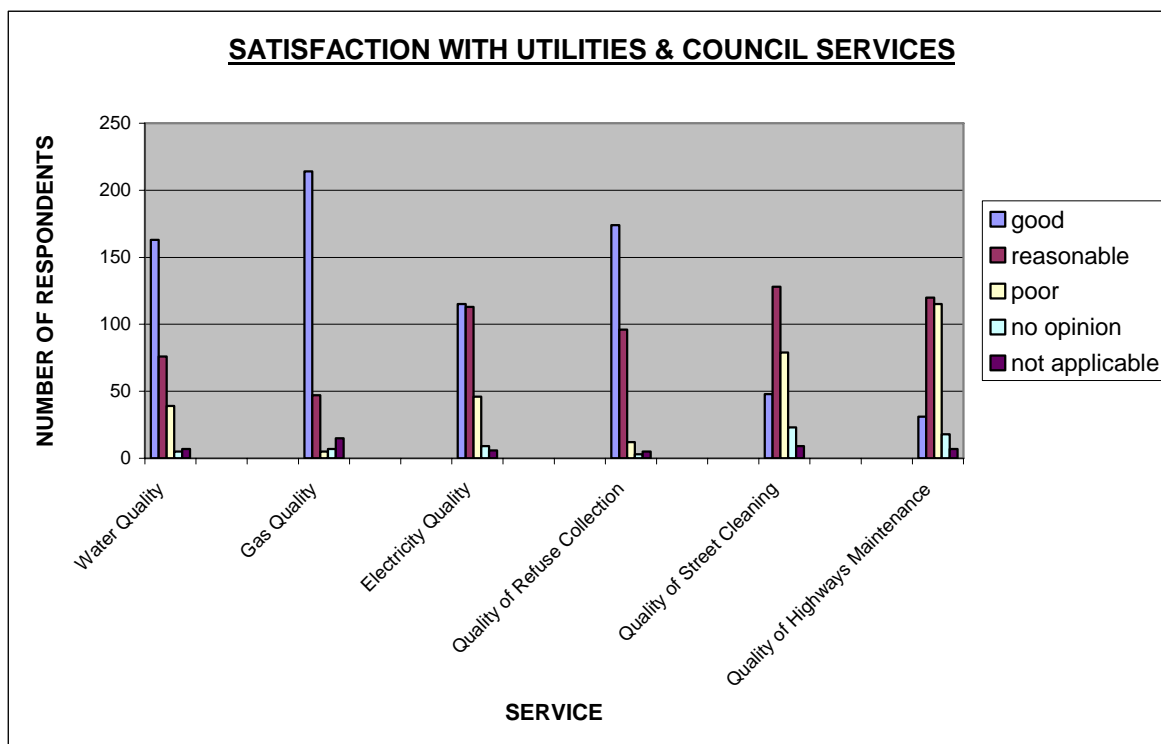


Respondents wanted greater use of the existing school buildings for community activities and said this should be combined with provision of improved facilities.

Expansion in the numbers of pupils in the schools was also favoured (where the rolls are currently falling) though there was disagreement as to whether pupils should come from Woodchester only or also from adjacent parishes.



Satisfaction with Utilities and Council Services

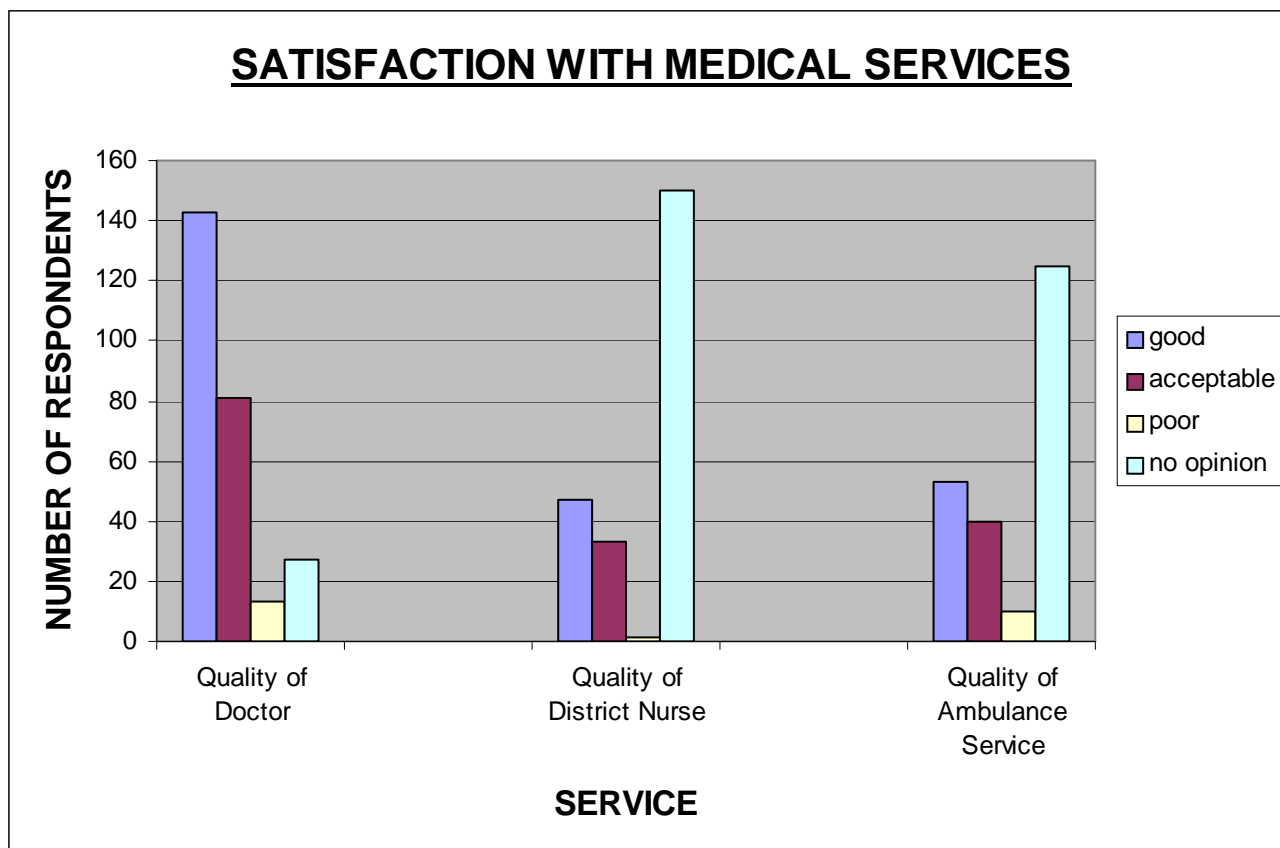


In general residents were satisfied with the existing utilities, although there was criticism of the unreliability of the electricity supply and frequent power cuts/breakdowns in the area.

There was criticism of poor or non-existent street cleansing and the condition of some of the local roads, in particular pot holes, cracks and poor surfaces.



Medical Facilities and Police



Medical facilities in Woodchester were generally regarded as good although many expressed no opinion on district nursing or ambulance services as they had little experience of them.

Although there were relatively few comments on this issue most respondents thought the police response (even in relatively low crime areas like Woodchester) was only acceptable or poor. The local visibility of the police or even of community wardens was adversely commented on.



Environment and conservation

SUPPORT FOR CREATION OF WILD LIFE / NATURE RESERVE	34%
SUPPORT FOR EXTENSION OR NEWLY OPENED FOOTPATHS	35%
SUPPORT FOR MAP SHOWING FOOTPATHS & BY-WAYS	60%
SUPPORT FOR INFO ON WILDLIFE HABITATS, FLORA & FAUNA	45%
SUPPORT FOR IMPROVED ACCESS OR FACILITIES TO OPEN SPACES	30%
SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH OR OTHER GREENS	17%

Concern was particularly expressed, in the form of comments on the questionnaires, over litter, graffiti and dog fouling. The absence of litter bins and 'pooper scooper' facilities, combined with poor street cleaning was perceived as leading to unsightly accumulation of rubbish, often in areas of beauty like Nailsworth Stream.

The poor state of repair of some of the buildings in the parish was mentioned as having an adverse effect on the appearance of the village.

Some residents wanted an improved signposting for access to Woodchester Park and Mansion, especially from the South Woodchester/Inchbrook end of the village and extension of footpaths up to Selsley Common from North and South Woodchester through NT property which would enable walkers to avoid Selsley Road.



Shops and Pubs

Only 14% of respondents supported all-day opening of pubs and only 5% supported the idea of late night opening.

Some comments were made suggesting a tea shop or one-stop farmer's shop should be developed in the area.

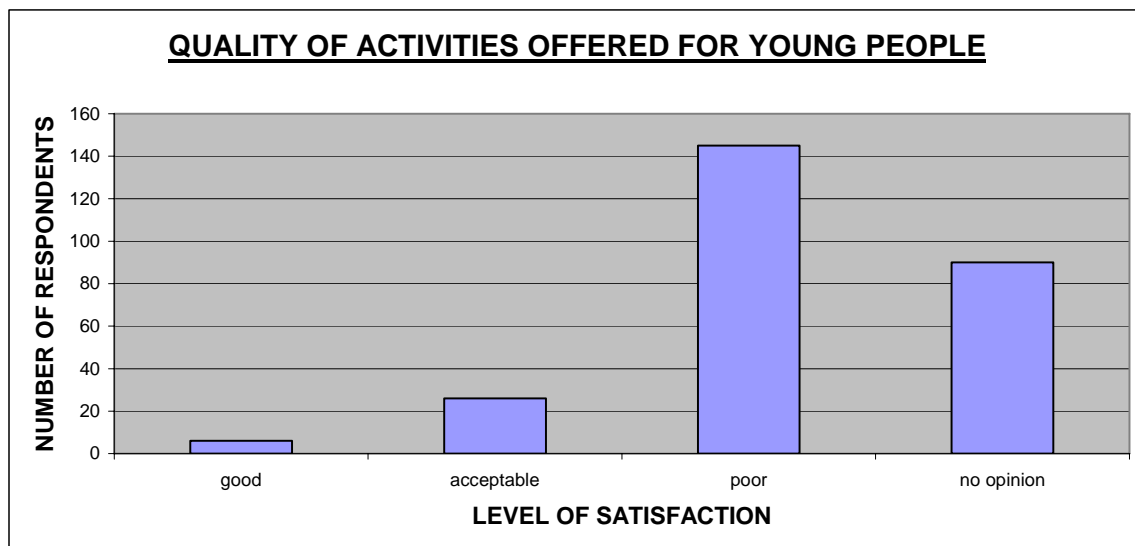
The Post Offices should be open for longer and sell more produce.

There was much praise for the two Post Offices in the both North and South Woodchester although some would like to see them opening longer and selling more produce. Our Post Offices are seen as being focal points of the village providing a much needed service to the local community. Protecting their future is a high priority.



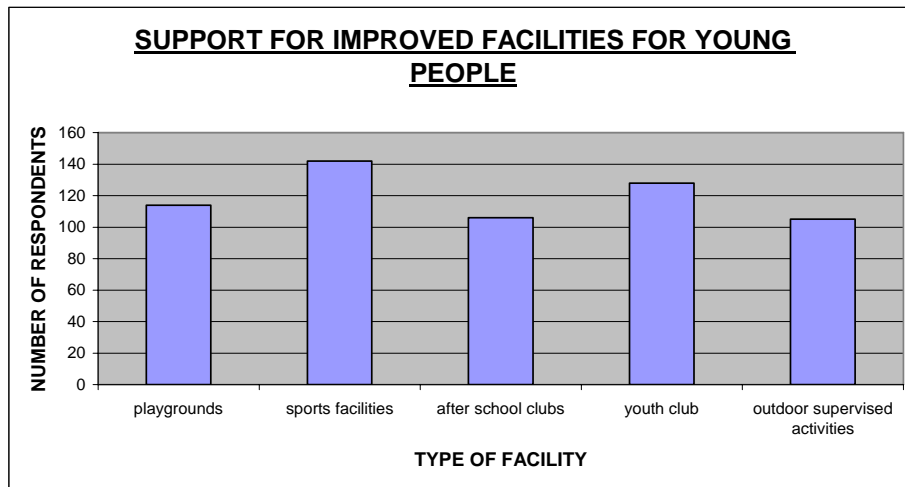
Recreation

The quality of activities for young people was classified by 80% of respondents as poor and this was confirmed by the survey of the school children themselves (both from St Mary's Endowed C of E and St Dominic's RC school)



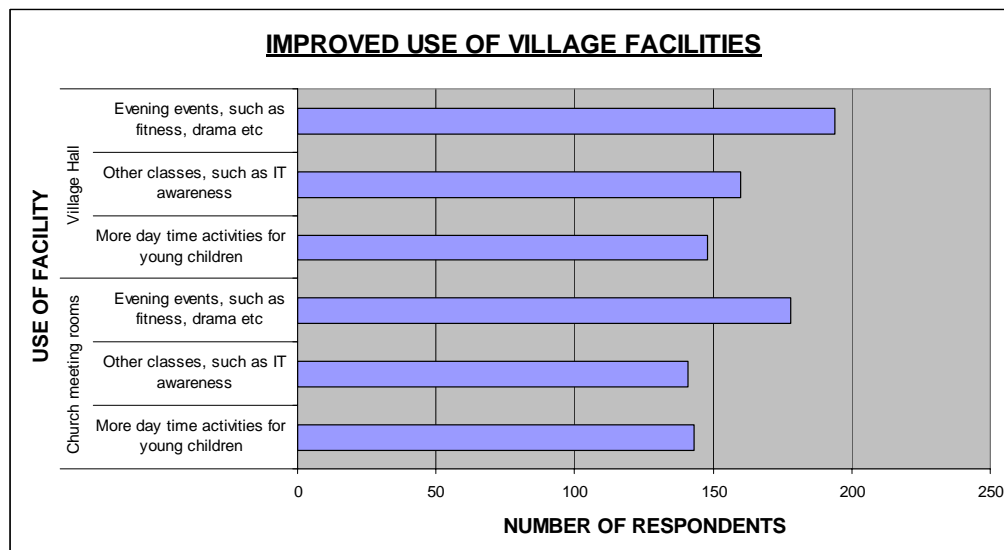
Two thirds of the village children wanted some form of adventure playground, play-space or area where they could skateboard safely.

40% of respondents and children wanted improved or extended sports club facilities or expanded sports club facilities and/or local youth club.



Nearly all respondents who favoured the above said the non-availability of facilities was a contributory factor in not getting involved with more sporting or other outdoor activities.

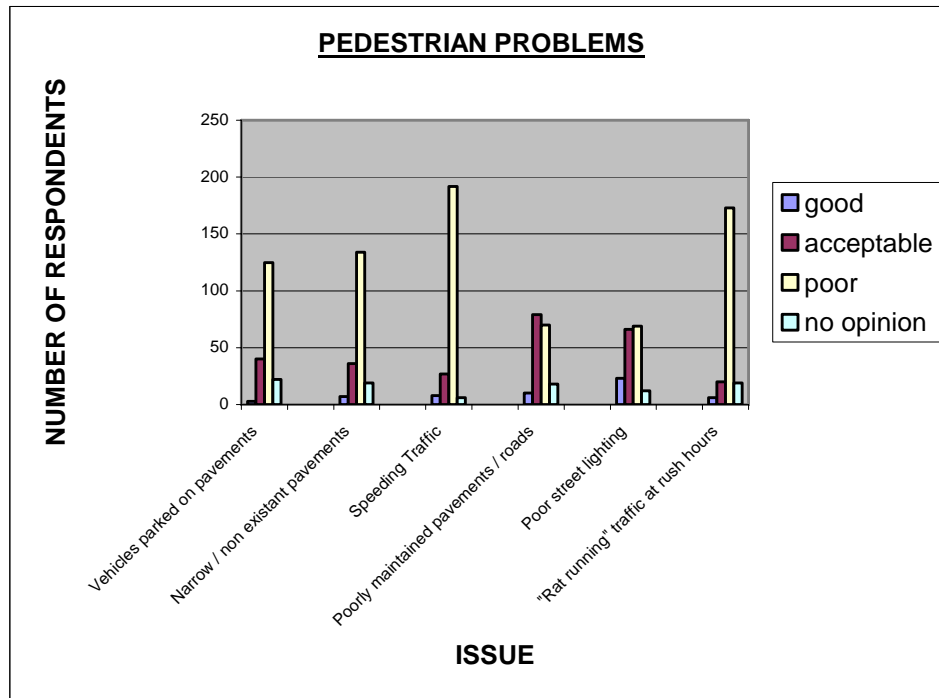
Comments indicated people supported the need to raise funds for the village hall particularly IT, activities for the over 60s and making the hall free of charge to youth groups such as the Brownies.



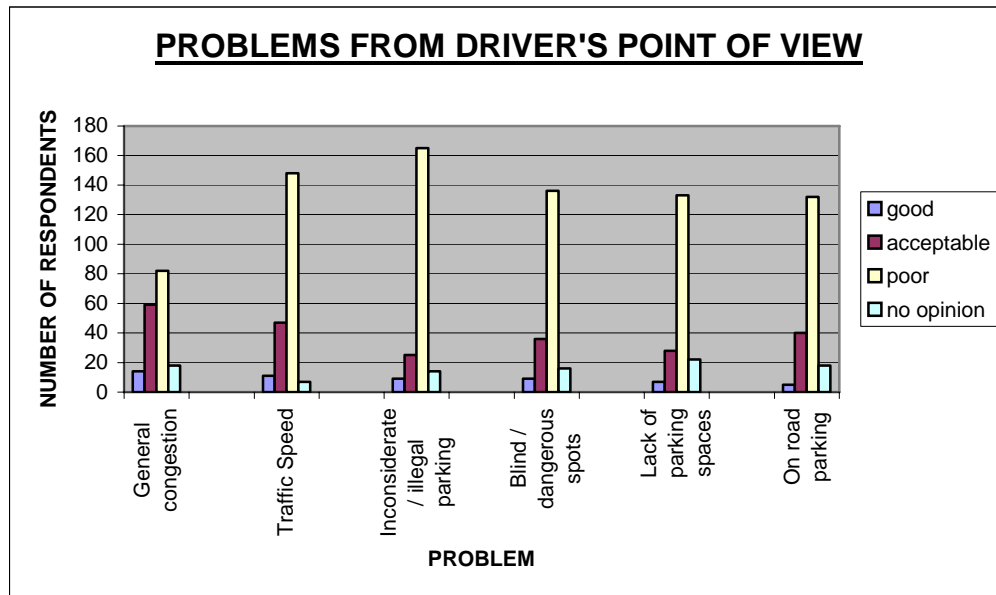


Traffic and Travel

In initial meetings about the village plan, the problem of traffic in Woodchester was the issue that proved of greatest concern to residents. Because of this we included questions about possible solutions in the questionnaire.



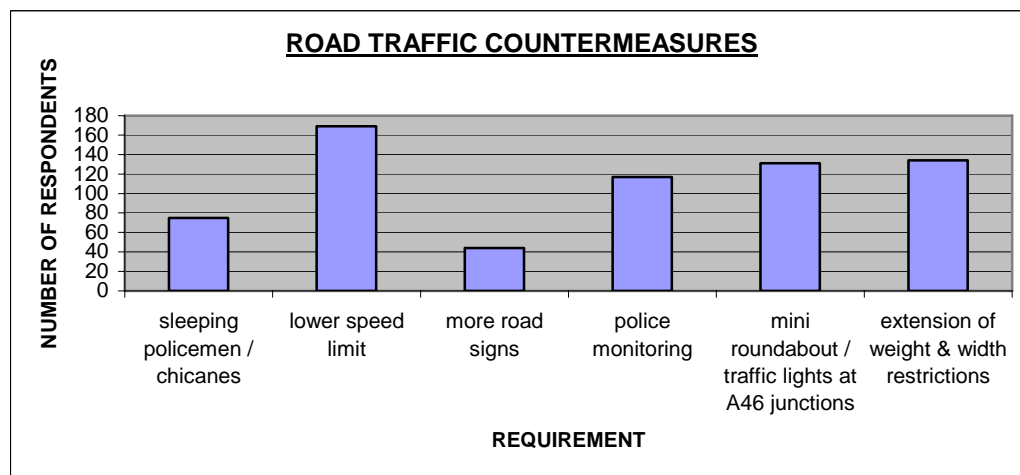
From the **pedestrians point of view** speeding traffic, on the A46 and Selsley Road in particular, was seen as the biggest problem, but 'rat running' along Southfield Road and other small roads traffic in the rush hours, inconsiderate parking (including on pavements) were also seen as contributing to their difficulties.



From the **drivers point of view** speeding, illegal parking or absence of parking space and blind or dangerous spots were all identified as problems.



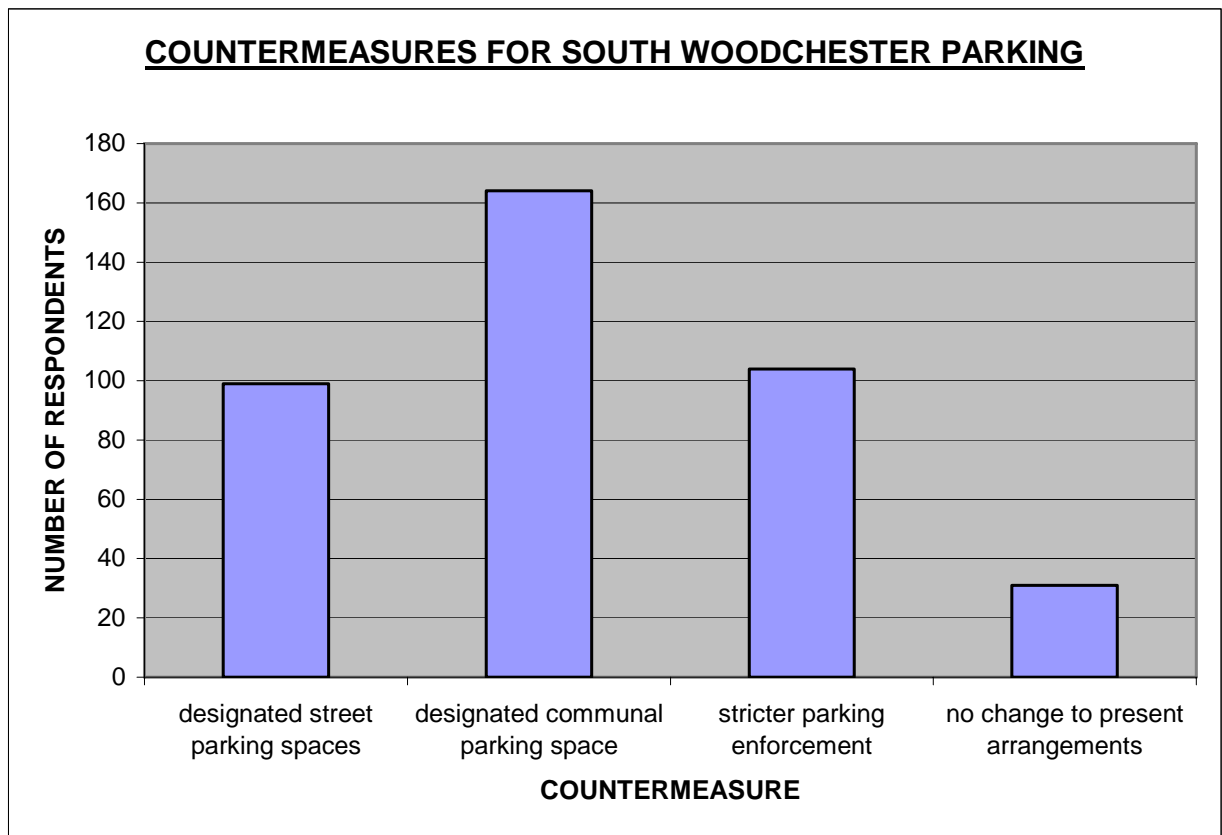
First Thoughts on Solutions





Parking

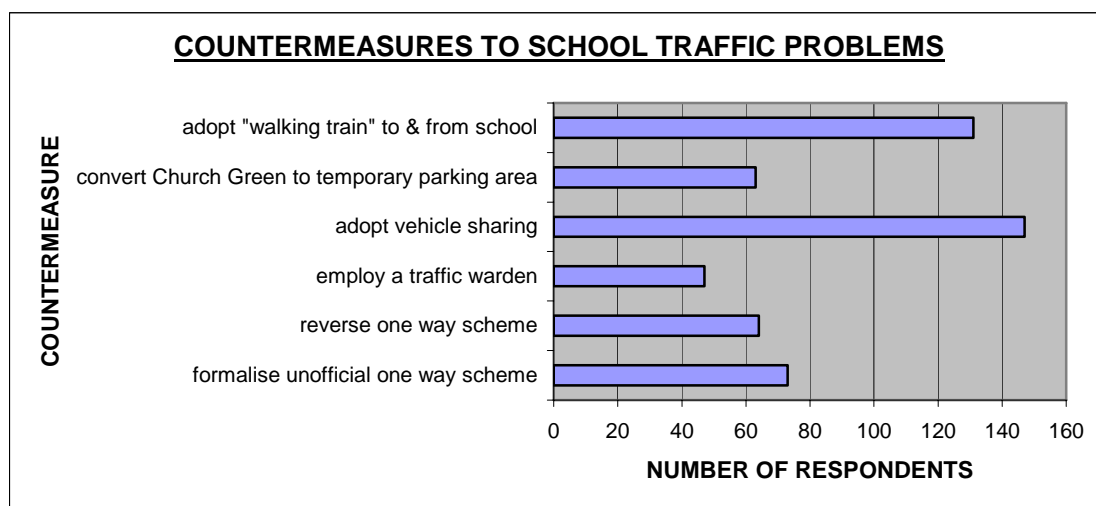
Parking in the narrow village streets (particularly in South Woodchester) is seen as a continuing problem. The most popular measure would seem to be the adoption of a designated communal parking space for residents combined with stricter enforcement of parking regulations.





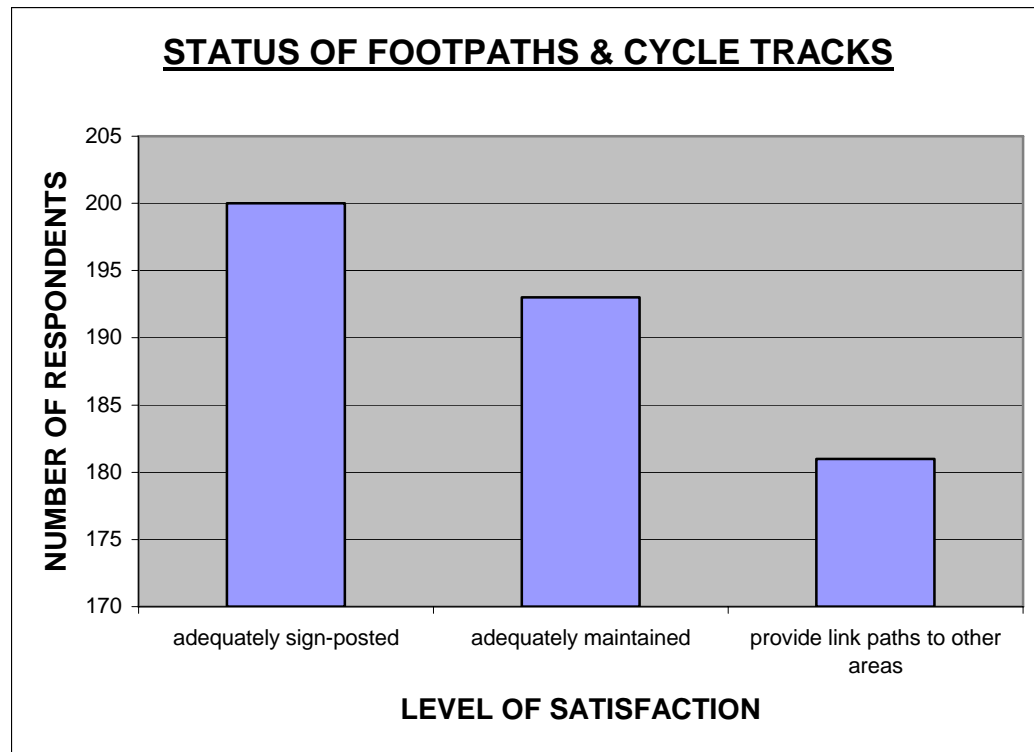
School Run

To ease the problem of traffic congestion associated with the 'school run', residents suggested the adoption of a vehicle sharing scheme, together with a 'walking train' for those children and parents living within a short distance from the school.





Cycle Track and Footpaths



Most respondents said they thought the cycle track along the old railway was adequately signposted and maintained at an acceptable level. Greater use would be made of the existing cycle paths were these to be better maintained and signposted.

The network of footpaths could be improved by providing link paths to other areas, e.g. from North Woodchester through Boundary Court to Selsley Common which would avoid the need to walk along Selsley Road.



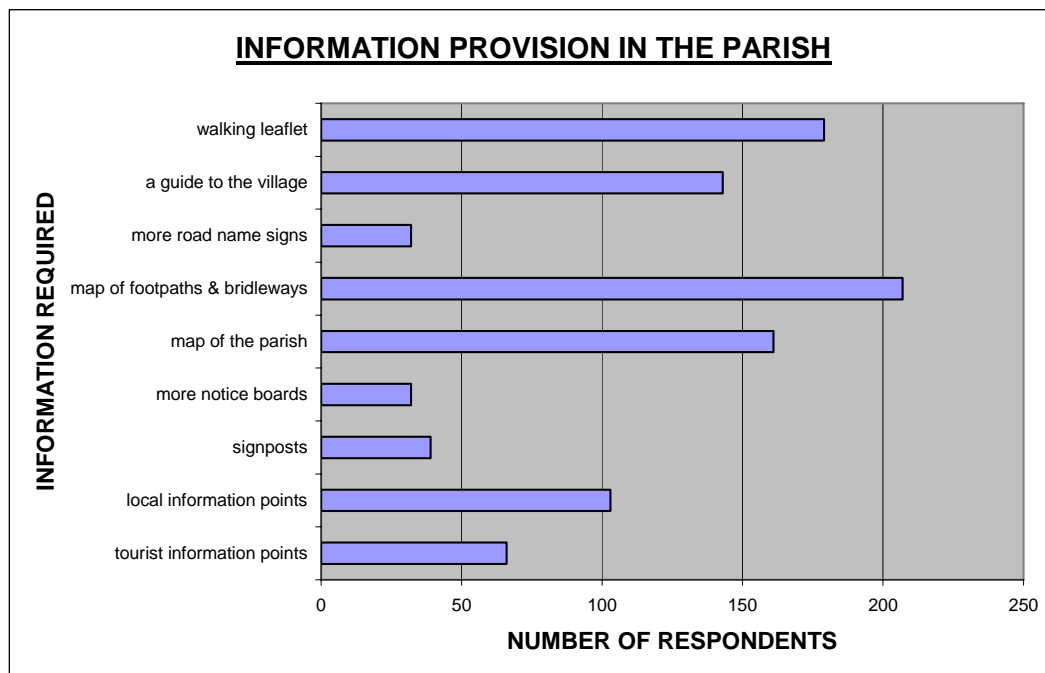
Bus services.

Not surprisingly, it was felt these would be used more often if fares were kept to a reasonable level and there were more regular and frequent services. Several pointed to the need for crossing points at South Woodchester from the bus stops to the village.



Tourism, History and Leisure.

Woodchester has a network of attractive paths and bridleways besides easy access to Selsley, Minchinhampton and Rodborough Commons and Woodchester Park. Visitors to Woodchester come to view the site of the Roman villa and Orpheus pavement in North Woodchester or visit the Mansion.



Although some respondents did not want to encourage more tourists (especially car bound) there was support for the suggestion for improved information. In particular for:

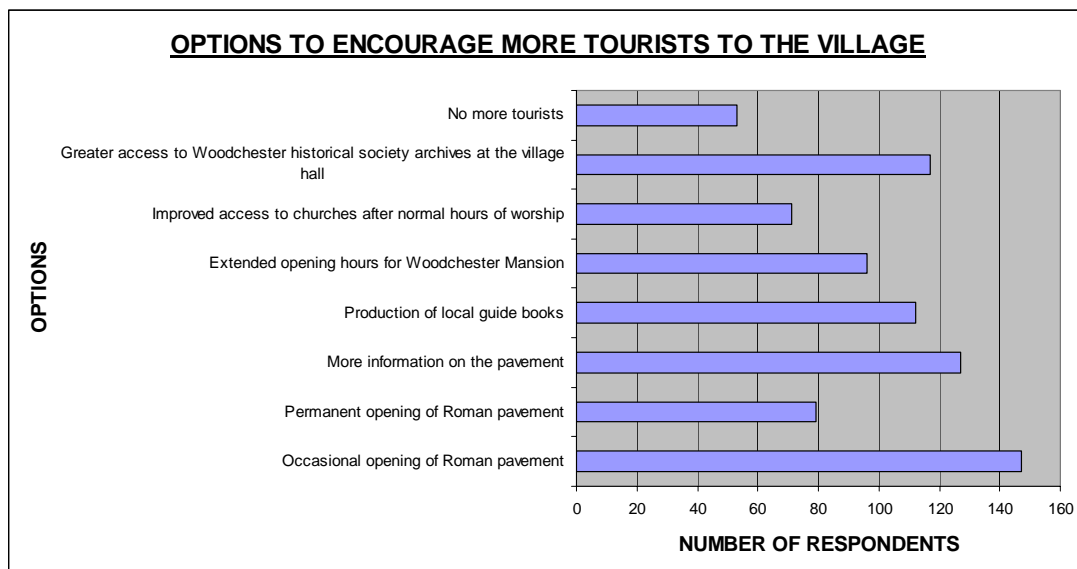
Occasional opening of the Roman pavement, though it was acknowledged that this would result in considerable access problems in coping with the large number of those who might wish to view it.

A sign drawing attention to the full size exhibition of the reproduction mosaic at Prinknash Abbey.

Extending opening hours for Woodchester Mansion were also advocated.

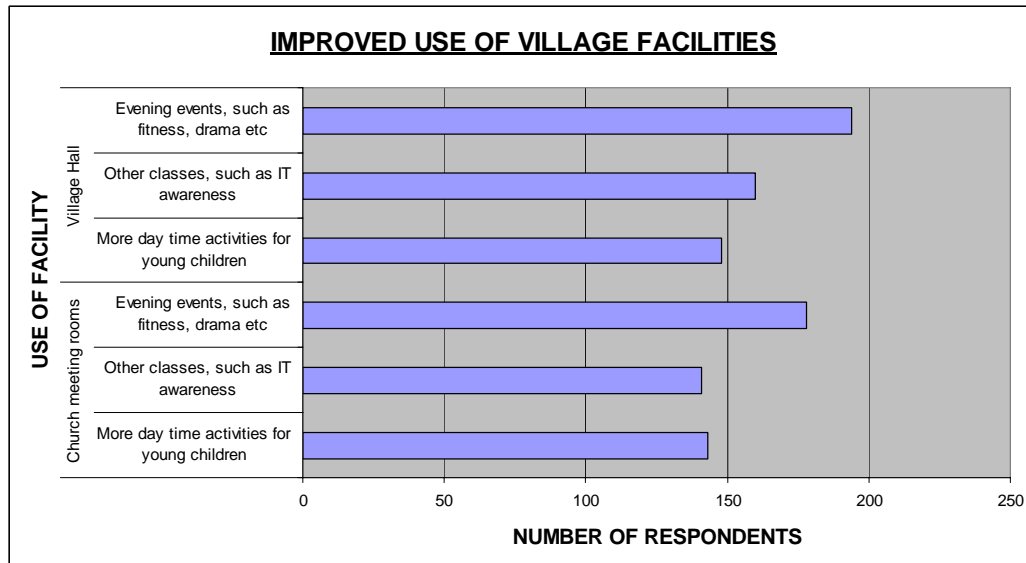
Production of a walking leaflet, complemented with a map of the parish showing all the footpaths, bridleways and cycle ways.

Availability of a guide book to the village.





Improved Use of Village Facilities.



There was strong support for an extension of, and improved use of, existing facilities, viz

Evening events such as fitness classes, dance, IT awareness and day activities for young children both in the village hall and church meeting rooms.

Easier access to Woodchester Historical Society archives at the village hall

An occasional license for serving alcoholic drinks.

Use of the kitchen facilities for a lunch club.



General observations: what we feel about our village.

The overriding view of the village is that we live in a well-rounded community. The village is friendly, well integrated, has a sense of community, good local post offices/shops, good character and atmosphere, beautiful surrounding countryside with stunning walks and tranquillity but with an interesting history.

Many people could not find anything they disliked about the village.

The following comments/areas of concern were those received most often where action needs to be taken. Some, e.g. the Website have been acted upon already:

1. speeding traffic on the A 46
2. lack of facilities for the young including playgrounds and sports facilities
3. dog fouling
4. parking and access for emergency vehicles in South Woodchester
5. access at Station Road
6. lack of affordable housing
7. lack of 'whole village' events
8. need for crossing point on the A46
9. preservation of the older village buildings in need of repair viz Tower House, Goring House
10. village website
11. urban sprawl.



Major areas of concern

At a workshop held in the village school on October 7th 2005, village residents were asked to prioritise their concerns about the environment in terms of importance to themselves and their families and the community. They were asked to prioritise the possible solutions.

In order to bring about the changes suggested in this plan villagers would support a subvention of £25 on their Council Tax Bill, but the money would have to be spent on the priorities identified.

Both categories were identified in the following order of importance.

1. urban sprawl along the A46
2. preservation of the older buildings in the village in need of repair and updating
3. need for a proper pedestrian crossing point on the A46
4. speeding traffic on the A46 and Selsley Road
5. dog fouling
6. lack of affordable housing
7. the need for a village website
8. improved parking and access for the emergency vehicles particularly in South Woodchester
9. better road access at station road
10. the lack of 'whole village' events
11. lack of facilities for the young including playgrounds and sports facilities
12. changes to North Woodchester School run.



Solutions to the problems

Solutions to Speeding and Parking

In order of preference

1. Reduction in the speed limit on the A46 through Woodchester and Inchbrook to 30 mph
2. More signage to indicate the need to slow down and potential hazards was indicated
3. Reduction of speed limit to 20 mph on Selsley Road because of its steep widening, narrow nature.

However, respondents were against traffic lights and controlled crossings and barriers and more street lighting.

As regards parking in South Woodchester and access to the village from Station Road, villagers favoured

- Width restrictions

- Limited waiting restriction times

- Restricted parking to allow access for emergency vehicles

But were against

- Double yellow lines

- Residents parking permits (especially if restricted to one per household)

Policing parking restrictions might well become an area of concern!



Solutions to the North Woodchester School Run

To minimise the traffic congestion associated with the school run, villagers suggested

- making the unofficial one-way system , via Church Road, to assist parents picking up their children permanent.

- opening the schools earlier to stagger the run.



Improving Facilities for the Village

Solutions in order of preference

1. more free activities
2. greater use of the village hall
3. improved football pitches
4. designated tennis court
5. a designated playground area for children



Solutions to Housing

The majority wanted no further housing development in the village but that does not provide a solution to increased housing need in the village.

In order of preference villagers favoured

1. Development of the old piano factory (but many were against the current proposal to develop the Rooksmoor site)
2. Change of use of sites e.g. In Station road from industrial to residential
3. Development of existing Fenworth estate for housing

However, people were against development of but not the land opposite the Royal Oak Inn or any ribbon development along the A46.

It was a major concern of many that with the possible redevelopment of Rooksmoor, the Piano Works and Fenworths that ribbon development would result which would not be to the benefit of the rural community and would have an adverse effect on the environment and quality of life in the area. Further development would inevitably lead to more traffic on the A46 which is already a major local problem.



In conclusion.

Many villagers made individual observations in the questionnaire on areas of concern as did the 50 individuals attending the workshop meeting on October 14th. In general there were very few grudges. Major concerns were expressed about traffic and the nature of any housing developments in the area. A number of respondents stated categorically that '***they loved Woodchester and its rural friendly atmosphere.***'

Although a number of respondents wanted to open the Roman Pavement there many objections as to the practicability of so doing. Some wanted more street lighting while others objected to other buildings being lit up unnecessarily. Parking restrictions in South Woodchester have to be balanced against accessibility. Inconsiderate parking in both villages is an irritation but yellow lines are not favoured.

The Parish Plan has attempted to balance the many opinions from the parishioners and others and to draw up an action plan that is both attainable and practical. We do however need an on-going input from the village so that our action plan is continually updated.





Post Script

Urbanisation of Woodchester

As this Parish Plan was being finalised, Stroud District Council announced that Woodchester and Nailsworth, together with 5 other Parishes were being urbanised. Under the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Council have adopted the Current Local Plan. In addition the Council is preparing the Local Development Framework (LDF) that will eventually replace the Local Plan. No consultation or notice was given to the Parish Council in advance of this announcement which has considerable implications for our village both in terms of planning and the environment and its effect on our Parish Plan. We do know that urban areas are the next most vulnerable to development after brownfield sites according to Government guidelines.

The Planning Inspectorate held an inquiry that ran from 15th January 2002 to 3rd June 2004 and the report was received by Stroud District Council on 25th November 2004. The Government had demanded a full and thorough review of the urban capacity of the district in the context of meeting the housing need. One of the recommendations it made was that the urban capacity would have to be increased to relieve the pressure in Stroud.

The Stroud District Council Local Plan states (Appendix 1 Page 8 Para 3.1.4) that 'future growth on greenfield sites in the area will be firmly controlled up to 2011 by the Local Plan itself.... It will be highly unlikely that any further large scale housing development is delivered in the Stroud Valleys up to 2011. The only possible exceptions will be sites that are already allocated or those that come forward on suitable brownfield sites within the settlement boundaries. There is little likelihood that any housing development would be allowed on greenfield sites without overriding and specialist reasons.' Furthermore 'for the period 2011-2016 the Gloucestershire Structure Planhas established that no further allocations of housing land will be necessary up to 2016.'

The Plan also states (paragraph 3.18) 'objectors give the impression that housing growth all along the valleys could result to form one continuous built up area. They perceive that individual existing settlements would be merged into one built area destroying the destroying their unique character.'

Although Stroud District Council insists that urbanisation will not have any material effect on Woodchester, the parishioners are not, surprisingly, entirely convinced. The rules and regulations governing planning and building will not change and therefore we are informed that we need have no worries. However it is believed that there could be areas where urbanisation will have an effect. For

example, our Post Offices will lose their 'rural' status thereby making them more vulnerable to closure. Also there is a real possibility of a ribbon development from Stroud to Nailsworth that would completely change the rural character of Woodchester.

Urbanisation will need to be considered in the Action Plan that accompanies this Parish Plan. The actions will need to be very closely monitored and updated to take into consideration the changing climate that Stroud District Council have inflicted on our Village.

The Woodchester Village Envelope (within the green lines)

