FLAX BOURTON PARISH PLAN 2004

ABOUT **THE VILLAGE** JUNE 2004

Flax Bourton is a small North Somerset village surrounded by farmland and semi-ancient woodlands. It lies about four miles south west of Bristol city boundary – and only six miles from the city centre. This combination of rural charm and convenient access to urban facilities makes Flax Bourton a highly desirable location.

Today the village has around 380 houses, ranging from listed manor houses and quaint cottages, to modern town houses and octagonal architect-designed dwellings.

However, the village is not without its problems. The A370 road to Weston-super-Mare cuts along the east fringe of the village, separating off The Grange residential area. A 30 mph speed limit is enforced by mobile units/speed camera, but heavy traffic is an ongoing cause for concern.

Perhaps it was an omen that the village was destined to encourage safe driving, when on October 8th 1967, the first Briton ever to be breathlysed was pulled over in the village. In 1971 Somerset County Council proposed raising the speed limit through Flax Bourton to 40mph, but 100 electors objected and the 30mph limit stayed.

Stancombe Quarry is another major issue for villagers, especially after plans for a conveyor belt to carry aggregate to the railway in 1999 were narrowly stopped after villagers complained vigorously, and formed SOLVE (*Save Our Local Valley Environment*) group. In the last few years a new housing development, Farleigh Green, has established itself as a new community on the north side of the village on a disused brownfield site. However, there are fields separating the 'new' and 'old' parts of the village and no adequate footpath between the two, apart from an unpleasant walk along the A370. The village has a pub on the north edge of the village, but no shops. The Post Office closed in 1989, and by all accounts has been missed as a meeting place.

Surrounding Flax Bourton are some beautiful walks through Bourton Combe woodland and across farmland. However, there are no maintained green spaces for ball games or recreation★.

The local environment is a treasured part of life in Flax Bourton, but this has come under threat with the death of Lord Wraxall in 2002. His estate almost entirely surrounded the village, and while the woodlands suffered 'benign neglect', the village was fortunate to enjoy relative protection from developers. This comfortable position was shattered when all the land came up for sale – most famously, the dramatic and unique Tyntesfield house. After much speculation about who would eventually buy the Gothic Mansion (Kylie Minogue was frequently named), the National Trust finally secured the sale. At time of writing, other parts of the estate have uncertain futures, and the Parish Plan is therefore a timely piece of work. Putting the plan together has given villagers the chance to have their say about what they feel is important, and how they see the future of Flax Bourton.

★ A new village hall has been built with a sports pitch and children's play area in Farleigh Green, but there are legal and safety issues still to be resolved, and there is poor access to it from the 'old' part of the village.

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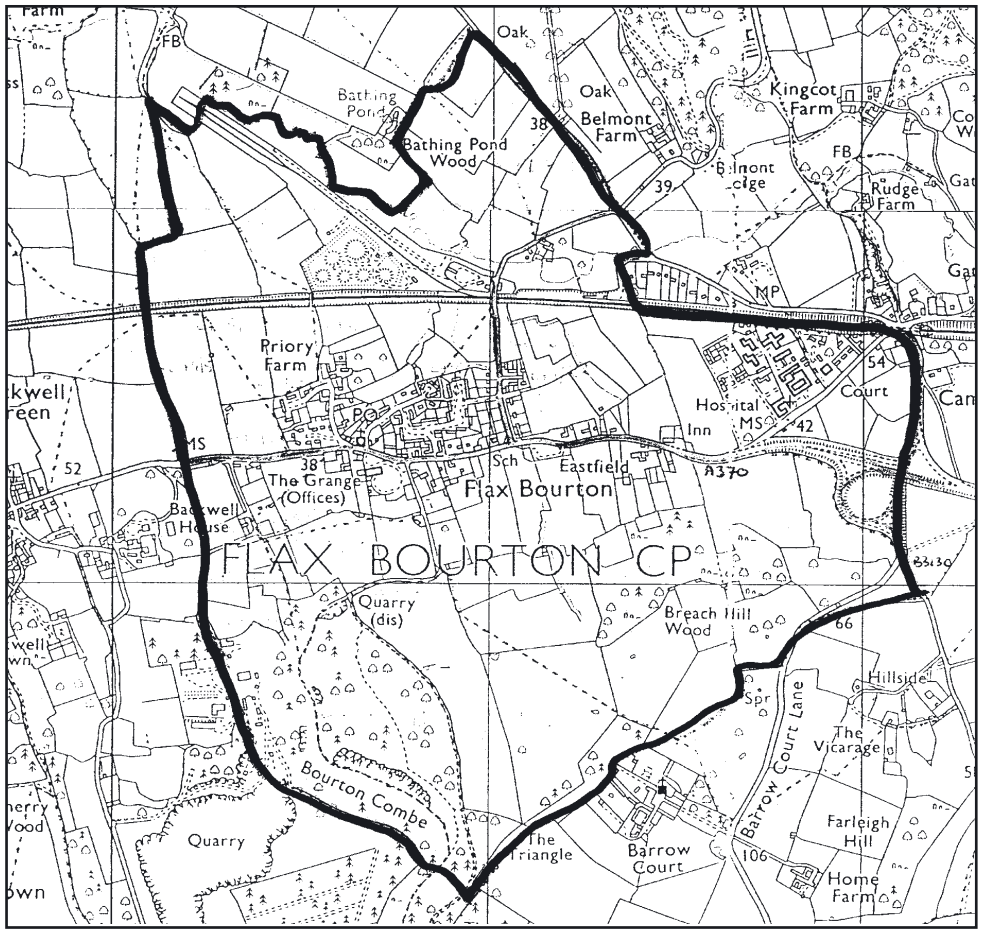


ABOUT THE **PARISH PLAN**

The Government wants to give rural communities the opportunity to have more control over local issues and to set a vision for their own town or village. To help achieve this, the Countryside Agency launched a Vital Villages programme, which made grants available for Parish Councils to develop a Parish Plan.

A Parish Plan can cover any issue of relevance to people who live in the parish – including social, economic and environmental issues. It aims to address the needs of the entire community and everyone should have an opportunity to participate in its preparation.

A Parish Plan should:

- **Address all issues of concern to the community in one document (not single themes)**
- **Be 'bottom up' – developed by the village and owned by the village**
- **Be based on information provided by survey, research and consultation**
- **Have a focus on future action**

There are many good reasons for undertaking a Parish Plan, most notably to:

- **Increase community spirit**
- **Take stock of what we have and what we would like**
- **Collect evidence to support decisions**
- **Form the basis for voluntary self-help action**

A working party was established in 2001, initially with a view to developing a Village Character Statement. But with the introduction

of the 'Vital Villages' programme and the demise of Lord Wraxall, it quickly transformed into a Parish Plan working group. Flax Bourton Parish Council successfully applied for funding from the Countryside Agency, and matched it with a financial contribution of its own.

Many villagers gave enormous amounts of time and energy to help with the village plan, and around 40% of village households returned a final full survey.

THE PARISH PLAN JOURNEY:

- **January 2002:** SWOT analysis of Flax Bourton
- **February 2002:** Pilot questionnaires sent to 25% of residents (via local community groups)
- **May 2002:** presentation of survey results to the village at a Parish Council meeting
- **October 2002:** Open Day consultation
- **Summer 2002:** Youth Survey undertaken
- **November-March 2003:** Focus groups comment on what issues should be covered in a full village survey
- **March 2003- September 2003:** Full survey questionnaire written
- **November 2003:** Full survey distributed to villagers
- **Jan 2004-April 2004:** Full survey data captured and analysed
- **May 2004:** Parish Plan written

PILOT **QUESTIONNAIRE** RESULTS

A number of local groups were sent a pilot questionnaire to identify the main issues. These were returned by:

- **Church Group**
- **Farleigh Green Group**
- **Flax Bourton Youth Group**
- **Parish Council**
- **SOLVE**
- **Tuesday Club**

The Survey results showed that the main concerns of the villagers (with the exception of the need for permanent school buildings which have since been constructed) were:

- **Traffic calming**
- **Protection of the environment (greenbelt/village boundary/wildlife)**
- **Provision of social spaces (village hall/meeting place/provision for young people)**

Results were presented to a Parish Council public meeting on Tuesday 7th May 2002, which was attended by around 40 villagers. There was general support for the Parish Council to purchase land (if appropriate and possible) to further the main survey findings.

As an exercise, three main areas of land were identified and villagers were asked to vote for the most important piece of land that the village should own, if it had the choice. The three choices were:

1) The field adjoining the youth club, for use as a recreation area (especially for young people)
2) The land between Station Road and Farleigh Green
3) The field between Bourton Combe and the A370

A show of hands revealed most support for **option 1** – the purchase of the land next to the youth club for recreation.

A number of issues were explored in the pilot survey, and respondents were invited to make additional comments on any issue that mattered to them.

YOU SAID:

'We need a place to meet for recreation and play area'

'A quiet tarmac covering for the main road'

'We need a village hub – a focal point'

'Any new housing should only be built on brownfield sites, not greenbelt'

'We need a footpath from Farleigh Green to the main village, linking the two'

'Better public transport to Weston-super-Mare, Nailsea and Bristol'

YOUTH GROUP SURVEY

Flax Bourton had a Youth Group operating for over 20 years until 1999, when it was forced to close due to lack of volunteers and resources. During the process of developing the Parish Plan, a questionnaire was circulated throughout the village aimed at households with 10-18 year olds. The questions were designed to find out what facilities young people wanted.

Results from the survey showed that most parents and young people felt there was a lack of facilities for young people in the village – especially in terms of green space to kick a ball. Most agreed there was a real need for a recreation area in the village, and widespread support was given to the proposal to develop the field behind the Youth Hut into a recreation space★.

Young people said they wanted the Youth Group to reopen – for at least one night a week and preferably more often. Specific activities were mentioned by some respondents such as music and art evenings, football and a scout or guide group.

In addition to the survey, the Youth Group committee received feedback from mainly older residents who were concerned about groups of young people hanging about the village in the evenings. Some complained about anti-social behaviour and wanted the Youth Group to reopen to give young people something to do and help develop responsible behaviour.

Fortunately, the Youth Group managed to find new volunteers, and it was re-launched in Spring 2003 as a pilot, before the Parish Plan process was completed. The Parish Council funded the renovation and redecoration of the Youth Hut and the new Youth Group was a remarkable success. Over 24 young people turned up on the first evening and the average attendance continued at between 15 and 20 throughout the first year.

The pilot demonstrated a clear need for the Youth Group, but keeping enough volunteers on board was a strain. The situation was resolved in early 2004, when the Parish Council agreed to provide funding for two professional part-time youth leaders. The Youth Group now operates three terms each year – offering up to 35 sessions.

The Parish Council is expected to maintain its support for the foreseeable future, and the Youth Group hopes to secure additional match funding from fundraising events or grantmakers to maintain and develop the service, as necessary.

★ For over 20 years, the Youth Hut paid a peppercorn rent to Lord Wraxall. David Luff (Chair of the Youth Group committee, and one of the Youth Group leaders for over 20 years) had contact with him about once a year.. In 2002, David met with Lord Wraxall to discuss the need for the recreation space for young people. Lord Wraxall agreed (verbally and in writing) and was in the process of identifying how the field to the north of the Youth Hut might be made available, either on a long lease or by selling to the Youth Group for a low agricultural land price. Sadly, Lord Wraxall died two days after the meeting. At time of writing, the trustees of the Wraxall estate are trying to find ways of carrying out Lord Wraxall's wishes through their agent.

CONSULTATION DAY

The Parish Plan Working Group organised a Consultation Day on October 19 2002 to give everyone the chance to drop in and have their say. The day was a great success and drew around 70 villagers of all ages. 'Graffitti boards' were used to capture feedback to controversial statements such as 'Flax Bourton needs more housing' and villagers were asked to place flags on a village map to show what development was needed where. The two major issues to emerge were villagers' desire to protect the rural environment that Flax Bourton enjoys and to provide a recreation area for young people next to the Youth Hut. Young people were particularly keen to have a skateboard ramp.

FOCUS GROUPS

Following the success of the Consultation Day a number of focus groups were organised to help formulate questions for the final, full survey. Each group had a theme, and members were asked to brainstorm ideas, consult with other villagers, and give feedback on what questions should be posed to the Working Group. The aim was to get the views of the village on key topics and develop an understanding of what is important to residents and how they want the village to be in the future. Focus Groups were asked to think about what facilities were needed and how well they might be used.

BRIEF FOR FOCUS GROUPS

ENVIRONMENT:

- **Conservation**
- **Wildlife**
- **Recycling**
- **Pollution**
- **Open spaces**

COMMUNITY & VILLAGE SERVICES

- **Needs of older and/or disabled residents**
- **Meeting places & what they could be used for**
- **Shops**
- **Use of open spaces**

CHURCH

- **Church in the community**
- **Social and pastoral care**
- **Use of facilities outside normal church use**

EDUCATION

- **Pre-school needs** (eg nursery groups)
- **Post school needs** (eg further education)
- **Current needs for the exisiting school**
- **Improving and expanding the current use of the school facilites outside school hours** (eg use of the hall and playing fields)

TRANSPORT, HOUSING & DEVELOPMENT

- **Road** (speed, road surface, noise etc)
- **Rail** (opening up Flax Bourton station)
- **Bus** (frequency of service)
- **Housing** (low cost starter homes, retirement homes, new homes)
- **Light industry**
- **More jobs in the area?**

COMMUNICATIONS

- **Does the village need a website?**
- **Parish newsletter**

FINAL SURVEY

Results from the Focus Group were fed into the Working Group who formulated the final survey. This was distributed to all households in November 2003. 151 households returned their survey from all parts of the village, giving a reasonable response rate of approximately 40%. The survey revealed the following information:

GENERAL

- Almost half of respondents (46%) have lived in Flax Bourton for 10 or more years.
- By far the majority of respondents live in owner occupied houses.
- A surprisingly high number of under 3s were counted amongst respondents (22). Around half of households said they had no children (89).
- A high proportion of residents are aged between 40-59 (42%). 19% are aged 65 or over.
- Most villagers are employed, 11% are self-employed and 22% are wholly retired. 56% of villagers are commuters; most work within a 5 mile radius of Bristol City boundaries (53%) and 17 said they worked from home in the village (9%).

SCHOOLING

- Most primary age schoolchildren of respondents do not attend Flax Bourton primary school (86%). 39% are sent to private schools, the remainder go to other primary state schools. The most often chosen reason was 'academic standards' followed by 'better facilities'.
- Most parents chose to send their children to Backwell Community School (73%). 8 were sent to a private school. None of the secondary school children attended Nailsea Comprehensive.

VILLAGE HALL

- The survey suggested various activities that could be held in the new Village Hall when it opens. The most popular choices were Adult Education classes (41%) and Keep Fit/Yoga (38%).
- 21 respondents said they could help organise various kinds of activities in the Village Hall. In particular, 5 villagers said they could help run a toddlers' group, three said they could help run Adult Education Classes and three said they could help run Youth Football.
- When respondents were asked if they would consider hiring the village Hall for private parties 38% said 'yes' and 38% said 'possibly'.

FOOTPATH/CYCLE PATH

- 87% of respondents said they were in favour of a new combined footpath/cyclepath between Station Road and Farleigh Green. Only 9% were against the idea. 50% said they would use the footpath and 71% would like it extended to reach Backwell. 54% thought it should be lit and 30% thought it should not be lit.
- The most well-attended village event was the school fete (56%) closely followed by SOLVE fundraising events (49%) and the village fete (42%). Only 17% of respondents or a member of their household had not attended any village events. Almost all villagers were aware of at least some of the events that were held in the village.

FUTURE VISION

- A selection of future visions were offered to respondents, and most said that in ten years time they would like Flax Bourton to be a 'close knit village with plenty of social activities' (69%). 28% wanted the village to stay as it is. 7% wanted a 'working community with light industrial and commercial businesses'. 4% wanted a 'commuter community' and only 1% said 'none of these'.

PUB

- 67% of households visit the local Jubilee pub occasionally/infrequently, 23% say they always choose to go elsewhere. Only 6% visit regularly - at least several times a month. The gardens were the most highly rated feature of the pub (considered 'good" by 51% of respondents). Most people ranked the pub as 'average' when it came to ambience, quality of food and staff.

COMMUNICATIONS

- The Parish Magazine was identified most frequently as a way of finding out what is happening in the village (82%); flyers , SOLVE newsletter, notice boards, word of mouth and press were the next frequent (in that order). Only 6% said they didn't know what was happening in the village.
- When asked if Flax Bourton should have a website, 52% said 'Yes, I would use it'. 25% were not interested and 17% had no internet connection. 6 people said they would be interested in helping set up and manage the website for the village.

PARISH COUNCIL

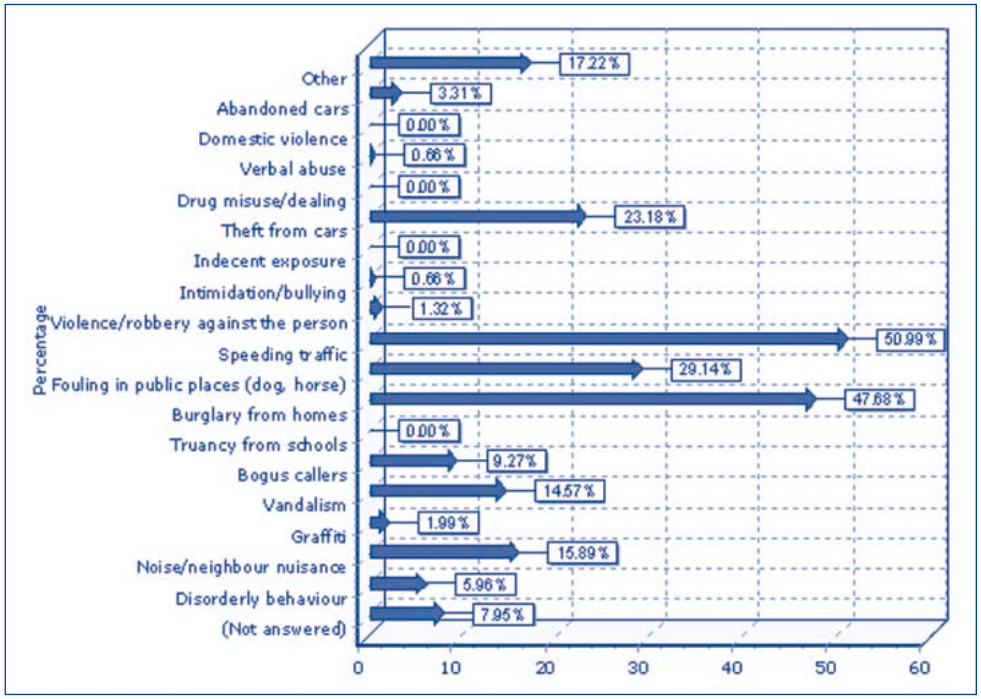
- Almost half of respondents had attended an Annual Parish Council meeting and most of these (84%) had found it informative/ constructive. 80% said they would consider attending future meetings. The main reason people gave for not attending an annual meeting was lack of time (48%); 34% didn't know it was on and 15% said they were 'happy with things'. Only 4% said they were 'not interested'.
- 45% of respondents said they 'didn't know' if the Parish Council was effective or ineffective. 40% thought it was effective and only 10% thought it was ineffective.

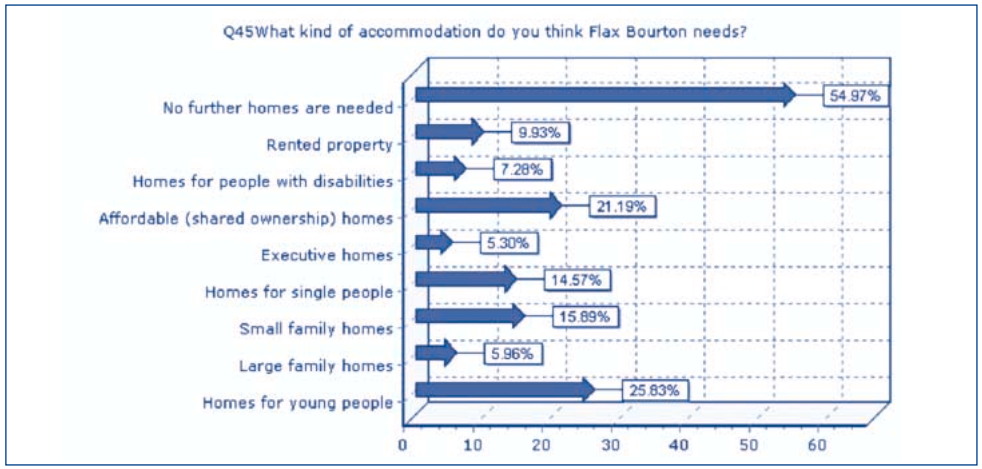
CRIME AND SAFETY

- Most respondents agreed with the statement that Flax Bourton is 'fairly safe' (66%). 29% thought it 'very safe'. Only 2% thought it was 'not very safe'.
- 'Greater police presence' was the preferred crime prevention initiative, followed by 'Neighbourhood Watch', 'improve facilities and activities for young people', 'improve street lighting' and 'more traffic calming' (in order of popularity). 54% said they already had a Neighbourhood Watch scheme in their area, and 44% said they either didn't have one or were not aware of one.
- A significant section of respondents (31%) said they were either 'fairly' or 'very' dissatisfied with the police service in the village. 35% didn't know and 28% were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied.
- The worst types of crime or antisocial behaviour in the village were - by a clear majority - 'speeding traffic' and 'burglary from homes'. ■ **see graph below**
- 27% of respondents said they had been a victim of crime that had occurred in the village in the last two years. 13 respondents said they had been burgled and 10 said they had suffered damage to their car. Not all these crimes were reported to police. Respondents who did report the incident gave a mixed reaction to the outcome of the police investigation - ranging fairly evenly from 'very satisfied' to 'very dissatisfied'.

THE CHURCH

- Most respondents attached greatest importance to the church as an historic feature of the village, closely followed by its function for weddings, baptisms and funerals; and as a place for Sunday worship.
- An oversight in the survey meant that a question was posed asking respondents whether they would attend family services if they were held. In fact the church does already hold services specifically for families. Of 132 respondents who answered this question, 42% said they would occasionally attend these family services.



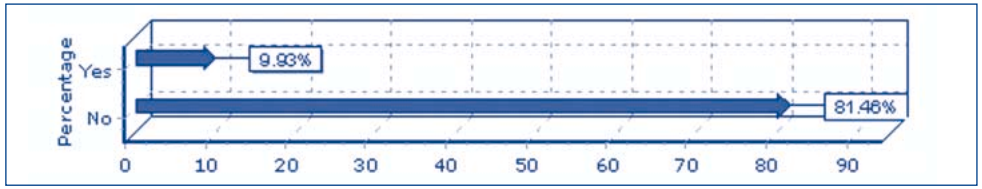


SERVICES AND FACILITIES

- The most popular service that would be used by respondents was a 'convenience shop' (84%), followed by a 'recycling facility' (69%) and a 'doctor's surgery' (68%). Since the survey was undertaken a kerbside recycling service has been introduced by North Somerset Council.
- Most respondents do not use the mobile library (89%), which stops outside the Old Post Office every other Thursday. 29% said they preferred to use other libraries and 23% didn't know there was a mobile library.

LAND USE AND PLANNING

- By far the majority of households who replied did not have a member currently in need of alternative accommodation (81%). 9% said their son or daughter was in need of housing, and the main barrier to moving was 'price'.
- Many respondents commented on what kind of accommodation was needed in the village, and most (55%) agreed with the statement 'no further homes are needed'. 26% agreed with 'homes for young people', and 21% 'affordable (shared ownership) homes'. Only 5% thought the village needed more 'executive homes'. ■ **see graph above**
- The vast majority of villagers (81%) would not support development within the green belt around the village. ■ **see graph below**
- When asked what type of housing development would be acceptable in Flax Bourton the majority favoured 'conversion of redundant buildings' (52%) but a significant minority (35%) wanted 'none'. 22% would



support single dwellings in planned locations, and 8% would support 'carefully designed larger groups'.

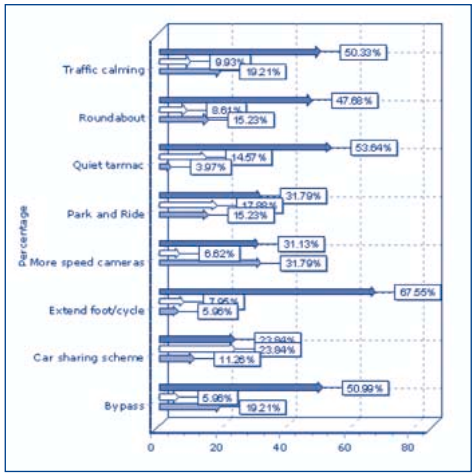
- The vast majority of respondents said they would be opposed to the introduction of heavy industry into the village (85%). As for light industry/workshops - 52% said they would oppose, and 42% would not oppose.

THE QUARRY

- When asked what impact the quarry had, 'lorries and traffic' had by far the most negative effect - rated as having a 'high impact' by 38% of respondents and a 'medium impact' by 28% of respondents. 'Vibration' was rated as having a medium impact by 28% of respondents and as having a high impact by 23%. Dust was also an issue - with a 'high' impact for 24% of respondents and a 'medium' impact for 27%.
- The overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) do not support the quarry's planning application for enlargement and extended working hours.

TRANSPORT

- A range of measures were suggested by the survey to reduce the impact of traffic on the A370, and all of these were supported by respondents to a great or lesser degree. The most popular measure was to 'extend the foot/cycle path'.
- A range of measures were suggested to improve the safety of Station Road. The most popular was a 20mph reduced speed zone (55%), followed by traffic calming (50%), extended pavements (42%) and street lighting (40%). Other measures suggested included making the road 'access only' or 'one way'. ■ **See graph below**
- The car is by far the most frequently used form of transport amongst respondents, but half walk regularly. 19% use the bus 'regularly' or 'mostly', 17% cycle, and 17% catch the train. 40% said they would use bus service more often if the timetable was more widely known, and 34% would use buses more often if 'reliability' improved. For 29% 'cost' was an issue that prevented them using buses more often and for 28% it was 'routes'.



OTHER

- Of those who expressed a preference, 72% said they would like to learn more about the wildlife in and around Flax Bourton.
- The main reasons for respondents to live in Flax Bourton was 'rural environment' (79%) and 'proximity to Bristol' (64%).
- When asked what most needed changing in Flax Bourton the biggest issue was 'traffic management on the A370', followed by 'improved security' and 'community spirit'. The least needed was 'more housing'.
- A question to measure support for the creation of a recreation area for young people in the field behind the youth hut was overlooked. However, enough evidence has been provided to support this development from the consultation day, young people's survey and high number of representations made to North Somerset Council.

CONCLUSIONS

- Flax Bourton could be characterised as a 'commuter village'.
- At the time of the survey, many parents expressed dissatisfaction with the standard of academic achievement at Flax Bourton Primary School and the standard of facilities. However, since the survey was completed the school has built new, permanent classrooms and a new Head Teacher has been appointed. Information on academic achievements is not available in the school league tables because pupil numbers are too small. There are a high number of young children living in the village who could potentially use Flax Bourton Primary School in future, as long as parents feel the new facilities and current standards of teaching are of a high enough quality.
- There appears to be a high level of social capital in the village. Some respondents said they might be able to help organise activities at the new Village Hall, and villagers were overwhelmingly supportive of the proposed new facility. Six people said they would be interested in helping set up and manage a website for the village. Almost half of respondents had attended an Annual Parish Council meeting and only 4% said they were 'not interested' in attending such meetings. Most respondents said they were aware of social events in the village and at least one member of their household had attended one or more. Most people supported the vision statement that Flax Bourton should become a 'close knit village with plenty of social activities'. Despite this high sociability, the village does not have a central meeting place, and there are hopes that the Village Hall will meet this need when it is opened. The Jubilee Pub is not a village 'meeting place', and is used by most households either infrequently or never.
- The village is overwhelmingly in favour of a cyclepath/footpath between Farleigh Green and Backwell. This will link the 'old' and 'new' parts of the village and help reduce car use. Most would like it to be lit but a significant minority would not like it to be lit.
- Villagers appear to have embraced internet technology, and just over half of respondents said they would use a village website.
- There appears to be a need for more security measures. Flax Bourton is considered by most to be a 'fairly safe' place to live, but a third of respondents said that in the last two years they had been a victim of a crime which occurred in the village. Most people would appreciate a greater police presence and other crime prevention activities. Speeding and burglary are the main concerns.
- Villagers clearly want the green belt around Flax Bourton to be protected against development. An overwhelming majority of villagers are also opposed to development within the village boundary, apart from the conversion of redundant buildings.
- Stancombe Quarry has a significant impact on villagers - mainly from lorry traffic, vibration and dust (especially for residents living on the main road). Villagers do not support the quarry's most recent planning application for enlargement and extended working hours.
- Villagers want Station Road to be traffic calmed, not least because of the primary school entrance.
- The car is by far the dominant form of transport, but many villagers said they would consider using buses if the timetable was published more widely.
- Villagers clearly want a safe green space for young people and others to enjoy. The land identified as most suitable is the field behind the youth hut next to Station Road. This proposal has been adopted in North Somerset's Local Plan.

ACTIONS

ACTION: The Parish Plan Working Group will inform Flax Bourton Primary School of survey findings.

ACTION: The Parish Council will do all in its power to resolve the legal issues to bring the Village Hall, sports field and children's play area into use.

ACTION: The Parish Council will work with Sustrans and North Somerset Council to ensure a cyclepath/footpath is created between Farleigh Green and Backwell.

ACTION: The Parish Council will establish a village website which will include details of refuse collections, recycling collection times, opening hours of Backwell refuse site, mobile library timetable, bus timetables and local events. Volunteers will be recruited, if possible, to provide information on local wildlife.

ACTION: The Parish Plan Working Group will inform the Police Authority about the crime figures found in this survey, and the Parish Council will support any initiatives which lead to greater police presence in the village.

ACTION: The Parish Council will support traffic calming measures in the village - especially along the main road and Station Road. Villagers will be consulted on proposed initiatives.

ACTION: The Parish Council will support measures that protect the green belt surrounding the village, and land within the village boundary, from housing development.

ACTION: The Parish Council will seek to stop any expansion or enlargement of Stancombe

Quarry and will support initiatives which alleviate the impact of traffic, vibration and dust that arise from the quarry.

ACTION: The Parish Council will liaise with the Youth Group and the agents for the Wraxall estate to endeavour to make the field next to the Youth Hut available for recreation, especially for young people.*

* During the process of creating this Parish Plan, the Parish Plan Working Group informed residents about the need to make representations to North Somerset Council to amend the Local Plan regarding the need for green space. In response, North Somerset Council agreed to allocate this land for recreation space in the Local Plan, particularly for young people. The council officer said: "significant demand has been demonstrated for an area of open space to meet a variety of recreational needs. The proposed site is well located within Flax Bourton and has potentially good links with Farleigh Green. North Somerset's policy outside the urban areas is to transfer provision and maintenance of open space to Parish Councils and allocation in the local plan will facilitate its development. The precise use of the open space will be a matter for the Parish Council taking into account local needs."

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

'Flax Bourton – a village of rural charm and community spirit'

'It would be nice to see more community activities to engender a livelier community spirit.'

'We need a cycle route to Nailsea and Backwell Station.'

'We live here because we like the rural environment – fields, trees etc and the proximity to Bristol is an important factor.'

'One of the greatest needs is to link Farleigh Green with the existing village as one community with shared aims.'

'It would be nice if Flax Bourton could remain a small rural village and not be swallowed up with building, commercial or otherwise.'

WITH THANKS....

Many thanks to everyone in the village who helped put together this Parish Plan. Many hours were spent developing questions, distributing surveys, attending meetings, inputting data, and analysing results. Special mention goes to:

- **Sally Wellman**
- **David Luff**
- **Helen Walder**
- **Cameron Stewart**
- **Sheila Wolfenden**
- **Sandy Hore-Ruthven**
- **Caz Hore-Ruthven**
- **Vicky Colebourne-Brown**
- **Mary Johnson**
- **Rose Courtier**
- **Mike Eustace**
- **Colin Warren**

Apologies to anyone who has been missed off this list!

FLAX BOURTON PARISH PLAN