

APA Report from Hermitage Village Vision 21st April 2011 - (SLIDE 1)

After getting the survey results I think I am a typical Hermit - I have lived in Hermitage for over 20 years so in common with the majority of residents I am a long term villager but I am not a native, and I am in the most responsive age group. What I have always done, probably because I am not happy for other people to make decisions for me, is try to get involved in village life serving on various committees over the years. What all these committees have had in common is they are a bunch of active people who perhaps think they know what other people want and even if they don't they are still the people making decisions on our behalf and that has to be the case or nothing would ever happen. What attracted me to Parish Plans when I first heard about them 2 or 3 years ago was that producing a new one for our village was a chance for all of us, the villagers, to say what we want for our village, to document it and put it in place as a guide to the Parish Council and West Berkshire Council and to some small extent to remove the need to rely on the decisions other people make on our behalf. Fortunately there were a keen group of volunteers who thought the same way and so the Hermitage Village Vision Group came into being with the purpose of producing this Parish Plan for Hermitage. I was here last year hoping to generate wider interest in the project and as additional benefits register a small army of volunteers who would step up to the okey to work the targets in the plan into achievements and finish with a united village after the upheaval brought about by the 2 new areas of housing. Hopefully these survey results tell us all what we want for our community.

SLIDES 2/SLIDE 3

The village already has a Parish Plan written by members of the then Parish Council in 2001/2002 before the village saw a 70% growth. It was essential we canvassed the views of everyone in our expanded village and over the last year supported by the Parish Council this is what we have been trying to do. During late 2009 and into 2010 the Village Vision group were seen about the village trying to elicit the views of parishioners as to what was good and what was bad about life in Hermitage (SLIDE 2). We tried to speak to all ages and both genders as everyone's view is equally important and having carried out this exercise the group of 8 volunteers then spent quite a long time developing the survey which was then delivered by hand to all 741 homes in the parish and to as many businesses as possible. These documents were delivered during January by most members of the group plus some additional volunteers[– Tracie Carter, Tim Benson + sons and Claire Povey on Forest Edge, Jude Cunningham and boys on Hermitage Green and Kamal..... , Rosie Bass and Roy Marr around the old village –] and thanks goes to all of them. The same people then made at least one return trip to collect completed questionnaires, in fact some of them went back numerous times to ensure the largest number possible were returned. The final count showed that 267 surveys were completed, surprisingly, to me at least, that most of these were done the old fashioned way in pen (SLIDE 3).

SLIDES 4 +5

A study of the comments made by respondents shows that whilst the majority didn't hold back in commenting on what they perceived to be the problems with living in Hermitage they were equally keen to rate the village as a place as a good place to live with 71% rating it as a good or better with only 2% rating it as poor (SLIDE 4). The most frequently stated reason for choosing Hermitage as a place to live is the environment although clearly there are always other factors as well (SLIDE 5).

SLIDE 6

The questions in the survey can be split into 5 main areas all hoping to find answers that will allow our community to grow becoming a SAFER, STRONGER, GREENER, HEALTHIER AND MORE PROSPEROUS community. However none of the suggestions, regardless of the level of demand, can be brought to fruition without a great deal of work by committed volunteers and once the plan is written and adopted by

both West Berkshire Council and the Parish Council we will be looking for champions to progress the actions called for by the survey. Looking at each of the areas in turn:-

SLIDE 7

TOWARDS A SAFER HERMITAGE – the questions were about pavements, cycle tracks, traffic and crime.

- About 40% would like more pavements towards other local villages and 40% would like south bound cycle track towards Newbury and Curridge.
- Half of those responding to the survey felt everyone's safety would be improved by having a pedestrian crossing close to the village shop with about 30% feeling a crossing should be located closer to the butchers.
- Almost 60% feel traffic speed is a problem for all road users with 21 people volunteering to join a speed control group
- 33% report traffic volume as a difficulty of village life
- The majority of residents have no experience of crime; in fact only 35 reported any personal experience but almost half are interested in joining a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme to keep it that way.

Slide 8

TOWARDS A STRONGER HERMITAGE - The questions in this area covered planning issues, communication and village life.

(SLIDE 8)The issues surrounding planning were the most often answered questions and many strong views were expressed in the comments column. There was agreement among 90% of those responding that Hermitage has seen enough development. Should further development be forced upon us there is opposition to infill or building in gardens, high density building, homes with small gardens and homes with inadequate parking space. It was often stated that lack of parking space does not deter householders from having cars but rather causes the roads to be crammed with parked cars and the pavements used as parking space causing problems to vehicles, pedestrians and children playing. There is about 50% support for starter homes and sheltered accommodation to be considered essential within new developments.

SLIDE 9 +10

The survey shows that over 80% of those responding used the community magazine, The Pathfinder, to keep up to date with what is happening in the village and that there is widespread use of Notice Boards and some use of the village website . We didn't ask about word of mouth and quite a few people reminded us that this is still the most popular way of hearing the news. Suggestions made for improvements in communications will be passed on.

SLIDE 11 +12 +13

Questions about Village Life were to do with what regular activities and less frequent events would villagers like to become involved in. There are moves underway to build a new Village Hall and it will be very useful to the fundraisers to know what will generate the most interest for fundraising activities and what sorts of demands for time and space will be made on the Village Hall. By far the most popular suggestions were for an annual Village Fete with BBQs or Hog Roasts coming a close second; the Christmas Tree Event is also popular. The idea of Visiting Theatres coming to the village generates interest as do Quiz Nights, Treasure Hunts, Musical Evenings and Book Clubs. There is also demand for Coffee Mornings. There also appears to be enough demand to support the establishment of a Village Choir, Language Classes, a film club, IT Classes and clubs for Art, Craft and Camera Enthusiasts.

SLIDE 14

We asked a question about how the proposed move of the Village Hall from its present site to Forest Edge was perceived. 232 people answered this question and the split was 60:40 in favour of the move. The strength of the comments made by opponents of the move suggests the VPMC have a great deal of PR work to do to bring everyone on board which must be essential to successful fund raising activities.

There is support for changing rooms at Forest Edge should they prove essential to maximising the use of the pitch.

SLIDE 15

Asked about concerns adults responded in much the same vein as the children at the Primary School did last summer. They see the quality of life in our village being reduced by

Dog fouling, litter and fly tipping and to a lesser extent by low flying aircraft, motorway noise and power cuts

We asked what role the local church could play in the wider community and there were about 65 responses. The comments left here ranged from 'no role', through youth work, greater pastoral work among the elderly and infirm to become more visible in the village and at village events. All comments will be passed to the Parochial Church Council.

TOWARDS A GREENER HERMITAGE (SLIDES 20 TO 26)

17 people signed up to volunteering for community working parties and a further 67 expressed interest in wanting to know more. This amounts to a considerable army of volunteers that can be used to carry out work that we feel the village could benefit from; for example litter picking. If anyone has ideas about how to use this resource, or wants to take part, please sign up with one of the group members.

The Hermitage Greening Group are already known about the village encouraging us to be more aware of how we use precious resources and the group will be the champions in moving us forward towards a Greener Hermitage. The Greening questions asked about interest in an Energy Conservation Group, in increasing recycling facilities, in car share schemes and in joining the Greening Campaign itself. 106 people were interested in becoming involved in an Energy Conservation Group or at least finding out more. There is great support for more recycling with 198 people saying they would bring recyclables not currently covered by kerbside collections to a local recycling site. The Greening Group will be in touch with volunteers in the near future. On a broader front the Greener questions covered a 'walking bus' to school but the response level was disappointing.

SLIDES 16 + 17 +18

TOWARDS A HEALTHIER HERMITAGE

The questions here involved activity geared to getting and staying healthy and the provision of health services in our enlarged village.

Almost 70% of surveys returned supported the provision of Health Services within the village. About the same number supported for Flu vaccine clinics and to 94% for Mother and Baby Clinics to be provided locally despite only small numbers having difficulty in getting to the surgery in Chieveley.

SLIDE 19

Asked about what sports facilities would be supported in the village the response showed that villagers are keen to have the opportunity to keep fit within the confines of the village itself with support for tennis

courts, badminton courts, a trim trail as well as outdoor equipment for all age groups. There is also strong support for the school playing field to be opened outside school hours.

Public rights of way are well used with 66% of respondents using them at least once a week. One third of these users have no problems with the footpaths whilst litter, fly tipping and obstructions cause difficulties for about 20% of users. It was suggested that a booklet with detail of local walks would be appreciated. The idea of themed walks has been raised by sufficient number of people to make it an idea worth pursuing.

TOWARDS A MORE PROSPEROUS HERMITAGE

Generally the response from the business community was disappointing.

Of the Hermitage Businesses (the majority of those appeared to be people who work from home) 16 saw the advantages of being included in a services directory. This is enough of a response to investigate further how this can be achieved and to find someone to do it.

In the village 2 own up to being in the Finance/IT industry, 5 in building/construction, 1 health worker, 2 education specialists, 2 in retail, 4 in the food sector and 6 doing other things.

From this we can initiate a network of local businesses who can propose ways in which life can be made easier for them; better for all of us.

CONCLUSIONS

The survey didn't ask about community cohesion; I said last year one of the objectives was to achieve a more unified village and what has emerged from the survey based on the postcodes provided is the response rates varied greatly between different areas of the village; the old village showed a 46% response rate; Hermitage Green had only a 7% return and Forest Edge returned 25% of their surveys. We clearly have some way to go in engaging newer sections of the village. We also have a way to go in involving the younger people in the village as only 17 youth surveys were completed. Clearly these 2 matters will figure strongly in the new plan.

There is perhaps nothing surprising in the survey results but now instead of feelings we have statistical evidence to support the causes shown to be close to our hearts. As I said at the beginning nothing can happen unless we have people who will pick up the points and keep working with them to achieve what is required. There are members of the Village Vision Group here and they will be happy to talk to you about the survey and take contact details for anyone who would like to get more involved.

The group now has to translate the results into a workable plan with targets to work towards and this will be happening over the next few months. When the plan has been adopted we aim to have a limited number printed that will be available for purchase and to make it available free of charge online. There will also be a Saturday in the near future when there will be a drop in session for anyone wanting to take a closer look at the results.

Thanks are due to CCB and especially Sarah Ward for their support during this process and to GCT for all their work with the questionnaire. Finally I would like to thank the group for their labours over the last year and in anticipation of their future efforts and on their behalf I thank you for your participation