



Whixall

Parish Plan 2020

Introduction

Welcome to your Community Led Parish Plan.

This Plan was initially compiled by a steering committee, chaired by Jan Peters, back in 2013. Chaired by members of the Parish and Parish Councillors the committee compiled and considered answers received to a questionnaire delivered to every household in Whixall. Everyone had the opportunity to voice their aspirations for the Parish.

In 2020 the Parish Council undertook a review of the Plan to ensure it continued to reflect the views of the Parish and Parishioners.

This booklet reflects the responses gathered from the initial questionnaires as well as those views communicated to the Parish Council since 2013. It continues to give added weight to discussions with Shropshire Council and other organisations regarding the future of Whixall.

Should you wish to comment on any aspect of this Plan, at any time, please contact the Parish Clerk at: clerk.whixallpc@hotmail.co.uk



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Whixall: a history

If you say you live in Whixall, a likely response is: "...that place that used to have a scrap yard by the Moss, the Bermuda Triangle of Shropshire, where you will get lost". In truth those that live here would have it no other way; it is a remarkable and beautiful place with a unique character compared to other Shropshire villages



In his history of Shropshire published in 1854, Samuel Bagshaw writes, "*Whixall is a village which at the census of 1841 contained 211 houses and 978 inhabitants. There is some good meadow and pasture land which produces a fine herbage and cheese is made to a considerable extent. The houses are chiefly cottages built of brick and slated, with a small portion of land. The inhabitants are chiefly employed in cutting the moss, which they dry and then take to distant parts of the country for sale*". Today there

are about 350 houses and a population of approximately 630 living in the village. Children are not included in this figure—the previous figure of 978 inhabitants was for the whole household. There is now no private or commercial cutting of peat.

Bagshaw's evocative snapshot of Victorian Whixall is explained by a number of unusual earlier historical factors. From the late middle ages, land was usually owned outright by the greater aristocracy, local gentry, or prosperous yeomen farmers. Yet Whixall doesn't fit this model.

In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, though they might claim authority and landowners rights, in reality, power of landed families such as the Hills of Hawkstone tended to end on the borders of Whixall. The Hill empire ended at Coton; the Hanmer estates at Fenns and Bettisfield. Bostock Hall, familiar as an area to anybody who has gawped endlessly at signposts while navigating a way around Whixall (but originally a substantial house resembling Alkington Hall, built probably in the late sixteenth century, demolished in the 1960s), would have been the home of a wealthy yeoman farmer.

Elsewhere the picture described by Bagshaw would have begun to emerge with a number of small independently owned cottage dwellings each with a small parcel of land and peat digging rights (turbary) on Whixall Moss, an obvious surviving example is the tiny abandoned cottage on Moss Lane.

This was a most unusual historical situation: many Whixall cottagers would have been outside the control of landed estates or large farms. Together with working on the vast, wide open, windswept, curlew echoing spaces of the Moss, it would have been likely to produce a fiercely independent spirit, which in the past was often remarked Whixall people displayed. Some cottages will have been of the type where if a person was able to erect a hearth, walls and roof in one day, they had absolute possession.

Hearsay evidence exists that querulous, unpaid soldiers (a disruptive element you would wish to get rid of into a spot off the beaten track), were given small parcels of land with the right to build such a dwelling in Whixall. Some of these may have been veterans of the English Civil War (1640–1649). Turbulent ex-soldiers would also have been likely to exhibit an independent frame of mind, and in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this spirit would have been a natural ally in Whixall to the fast rising non-conformist Methodist religious movement, itself a rebellion against the establishment—in this case, the overly comfortable Church of England. Chapels such as Welsh End date from this time.

Trying to shine a light on life in Whixall in the early middle ages, the Saxon or pre-history eras is more problematic. Three legendary ‘bog bodies’ discovered on the Moss in the nineteenth century are evidence that, perhaps 1500 years ago, very small numbers of humans lived in, or passed through a most inhospitable area, covered with forest, with the Moss prior to any drainage an excessively marshy location. Circa 1867, two peat diggers, Henry Simpson and Thomas Woodward, dug up the body of a young man. The body was partly covered by a leather apron, 2–3 feet down in the peat, in a sitting position near a three-legged stool. Circa 1877, the body of a woman was found at a similar depth. In 1889, the naked body of a man almost 6 feet tall was discovered lying flat between the grey and black peat layers, 4–5 feet down. The bodies lay within ‘300 yards’ of each other. What were Whixall folk of long ago doing on the Moss?

Historical generalisations, however, may not contain the whole truth; one should be wary of too much certainty. The Domesday Book calling Whixall Witehala, suggests that in 1086 there was a sole Lord of the Manor with absolute authority, one Ranulf Peveral. On his demesne there was an “ox-team” and “two neatherds” (cowherds). The impression may have been given that more recently independent-minded cottagers of Whixall were somewhat withdrawn, focussed on work on the Moss,



their small plots and chapels. That’s not the full story: the coming of the canal (1807) and railway (1863) would have put Whixall on the map creating much excitement. Whixall cottagers also worked at market gardening and wreath making. The adjacent photograph (part of the business of the writer’s great great grandfather) shows there were thriving businesses in the area in the late Victorian era.

At that time even the independent cottagers of Whixall existed in a world defined by deference. The writer’s grandmother told of an incident, the recounting of which she was present at as a child. An old man returning from digging peat on the Moss, told how he met Sir Wyndham Hanmer strolling on the Moss, smoking a cigar. Sir Wyndham enquired of the peat digger how he would feel if their positions were reversed. The old man charmingly but dutifully replied: “like a great shining silver sixpence amongst a lot of old half-pennies”. Life in Whixall has changed.

Based on the original account by **Henry Williams 2013**

[see also www.whixallhistory.co.uk]

Housing, development and employment

- **70% of respondents** supported the need for affordable housing for local people to buy or rent and almost 50% of respondents thought there should be new housing in the Parish. There was also support for sheltered accommodation for the elderly to rent or buy and open market housing to buy.
- **94% agreed housing** should be sensitive to the surroundings. **82% of respondents** agreed that new housing should be built on suitable infill sites avoiding agricultural land and green spaces.

“Not large expensive housing that the ‘locals’ and our children are unable to afford”

“Small energy efficient, suitable for first time buyers or the elderly wanting somewhere smaller to retire to without leaving the Parish”

“Need more housing for our children to live here otherwise they have to move away which isn’t good for our community”

“But not too much more”

Objective	Actions	Partners	Timescale
To meet the housing aspirations of the Parish whilst retaining its rural identity	Whixall Parish Council to hold an annual public meeting for residents to put forward their views	Lead: Whixall Parish Council, Whixall residents, Shropshire Council	Ongoing
To ensure the existing infrastructure is able to support any new developments	Shropshire Council to comment within applications	Lead: Shropshire Highways, Utility companies, Whixall Parish Council	Ongoing
To consult regarding the introduction of new planning regulations or adjustments to existing regulations	Whixall is currently classed as Open Countryside (CS5) – as authorised and confirmed by the Secretary of State	Lead: Shropshire Council Planning, Whixall Parish Council	Ongoing



Health and social care

The majority of respondents consider that the following issue needs addressing:

- The need for the elderly to have access to more support (56%)
- 65% of respondents agreed with the statement “*I can access the healthcare and social care services I need*”



Objective	Actions	Partners	Timescale
To provide more community transport to enable people to get out and about	Raise awareness and promote North Salop Wheelers	Lead: Whixall Parish Council, North Salop Wheelers, Shropshire Council	Ongoing

North Salop Wheelers

01948 880037

www.northsalopwheelers.co.uk

Traffic and transport

The majority of respondents consider that the following issues need addressing:

- Improvement of road maintenance (**94%**)
- Promotion of road safety by cutting hedges and verges more frequently (**60%**)
- Improvement of bus service (**50%**)
(Whixall currently is not served by any commercial bus services)

- **60% of respondents** disagreed ‘*We should have more pavements in the village*’

- Vehicle road speeds are a major concern among residents

Objective	Action	Partners	Timescale
To improve road maintenance	Residents, via Whixall Parish Council to continue to report problems to Shropshire Council Highways Department	Lead: Whixall Parish Council, Shropshire Highways Department	Ongoing
To promote road safety by encouraging more frequent hedge and verge cutting by landowners	1. Whixall Parish Council to advise landowners as appropriate 2. Landowners to take responsibility for their roadside verges and hedges	Lead: Landowners, Shropshire Council Highways Department, Whixall Parish Council	Ongoing
To improve the bus service	Promote North Salop Wheelers	Lead: Whixall parish Council, North Salop Wheelers	Ongoing
To address speeding concerns	Whixall Parish Council to liaise frequently with West Mercia Police	Lead: Whixall Parish Council, West Mercia Police	Ongoing



Leisure, recreation and environment

Respondents believe the following issues need to be addressed:

- We need to keep Whixall free of litter (**80%**)
- There is a need to protect wildlife and nature sites in the Parish (**77.8%**)
- We need a pub in the village (**72.8%**)

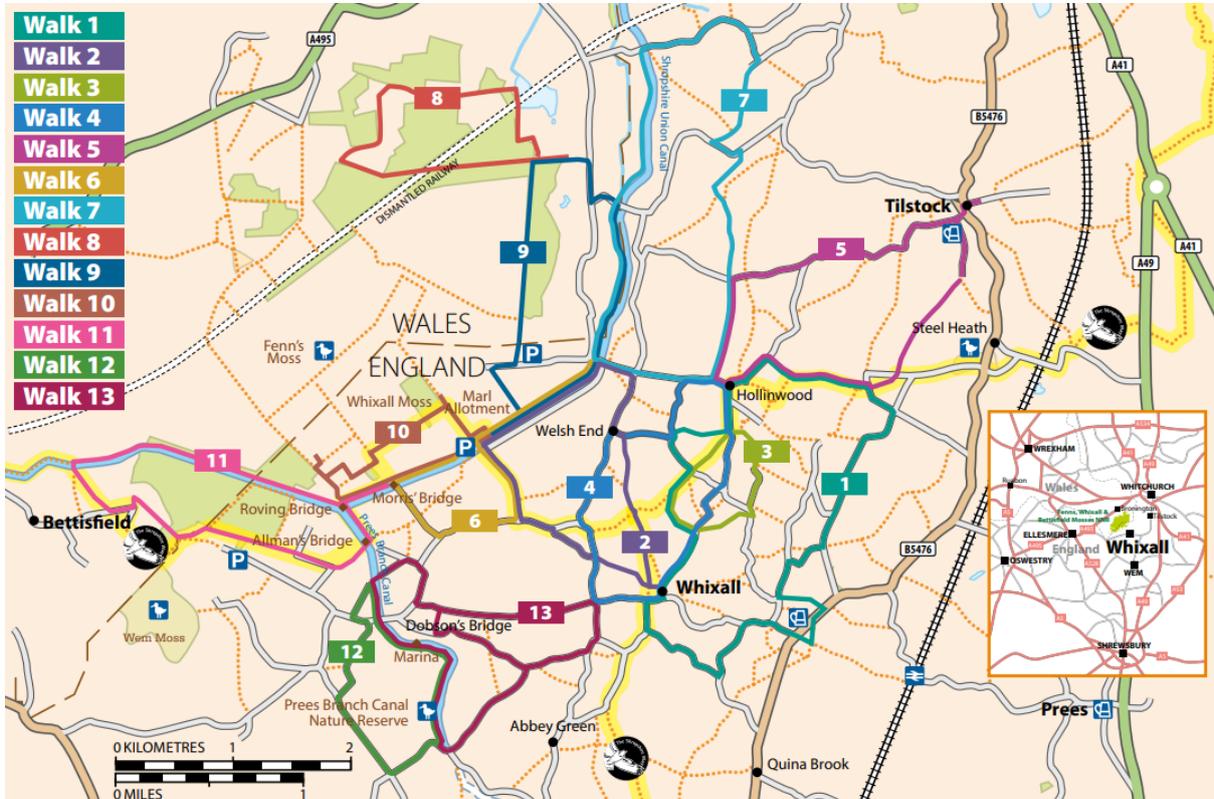
Objective	Action	Partners	Timescale
To ensure the Parish remains free of litter	Identify and organise those interested in performing litter-picks	Lead: Whixall Parish Council, Shropshire Council, Whixall residents	Ongoing
To protect wildlife and nature sites of the Parish 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with Shropshire Wildlife Trust with respect to Sinker's Fields Work on the restoration and maintenance of the Marlot Promote and encourage local landowners to enter into agri-environmental schemes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lead: Shropshire Wildlife Trust Lead: Marlot Conservation Group Lead: Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Whixall Parish Council, Whixall landowners 	Ongoing
To explore the practicality of a village pub	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A 'Community Concern' has been registered with respect to the Waggoners site. Continue to investigate possibilities or replacement 	Whixall Parish Council, Shropshire Council	Ongoing
To work towards the maintenance of the Shropshire Way, existing footpaths and bridleways, plus associated signage 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Survey local footpaths & bridleways for access, condition, and signage Organise a P3Group to clear and maintain pathways & bridleways Liaise with Shropshire Council Access team if difficulties arise Liaise with landowners over improvements and issues 	Lead: Whixall P3Group, Shropshire Access Team	Ongoing 

Whixall Walks

This project grew out of the Meres and Mosses Landscape Partnership Scheme which provided the impetus and funding to produce a booklet on 13 walks around the Parish.

Compiled by parishioners Sharon Eversfield, Arnie Jones, Di McNeish, Sara Scott, Rob Sharam, Jen Spenser and Lynne Westworth, with all walks tested by Jo Schup, the run of printed booklets were soon used up. Digital copies are now available on the Parish Council website www.whixallparish.org.uk

Whixall Walks	
Dog and Bull circular walk	6.5 miles
Around Whixall	4 miles
Circling Stanley Green	2.5 miles
Places of Worship	3.5 miles
Tilstock to Hollinwood	4.5 miles
Whixall Parish Walk	3.25 miles
Canal and Old Shropshire Way	5 miles
Fenns Bank Area	3.5 miles
Canal and Fenns Moss	3 miles
Walk along the fringe of the Moss	2.6 miles
To Bettisfield and back	4.5 miles
Waterloo, the walk not the Battle	2.5 miles
Walk for all Seasons	3 miles



Crime and community safety

The respondents believe the following issues need to be addressed

- Burglary (72.5%)
- Speeding (68.6%)

Objective	Action	Partners	Timescale
To work towards setting up and developing Neighbourhood Watch schemes throughout the Parish, to help prevent burglary	1.Contact North Shropshire Neighbourhood and Farm Watch Association for advice 2.Arrange a public meeting to promote the Scheme in the area 3.Set up Schemes and co-ordinators in all areas of Whixall	Lead: Parish Council, North Shropshire Neighbourhood and Farm Watch Association, Whixall residents	Ongoing



“We feel that Whixall is reasonably crime free.”

Whixall does have a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme which is facilitated by Graham Turnbull on behalf of the Parish (graham.turnbull.nhw@gmail.com). This contact correct February 2021.

See also: <https://www.hugofox.com/community/north-shropshire-neighbourhood-and-farm-watch-12896/home/> for more information.

Business development, training, phones and broadband

- **70% of respondents** agreed there should be appropriate small business development in the Parish. **65%** agreed the need for a local shop but only **23%** would be prepared to contribute to the running of a community enterprise.
- **Only 33% of respondents** are satisfied that their broadband meets their current needs

“All new business should be encouraged as the area is devoid of progress.”

“To encourage small businesses, good internet and mobile signals are essential.”

“As long as no significant increase in HGVs”

“[Phones and broadband] is one of the most important factors for rural businesses.”

Objective	Action	Partners	Tim
To support the development of small rural businesses	Actively support the development of home based enterprises	Lead: Whixall Parish Council, Shropshire Council	>5 years
To improve broadband connectivity to encourage the growth of local businesses and support parishioners	Keep up to date with the progress of ‘Connecting Shropshire’	Lead: ‘Connecting Shropshire’, Whixall Parish Council	Ongoing



Restoring the Whixall Marl Allotment



The Whixall Marl Allotment (Marlot) is a 2.5 ha area of Common Land lying just outside the Fenn's and Whixall Moss National Nature Reserve. The Marlot was once a rich mosaic of wetland, heathland, grassland and woodland habitats, with an amazing array of priority species present. Years without management resulted in much of the valuable open habitat being lost. The Whixall Biodiversity Group submitted a successful application to the Community Biodiversity Fund, to restore the site for wildlife and improve community access. The project officer approached Natural England, who provided matched funding for work at the Marlot. This enabled an extensive programme of clearance and restoration work, particularly focussing on the south -east and north-west corners of the site. Timber produced by the clearance was provided to the local community for use as fuel. The Trust for Conservation Volunteers helped to create a number of paths, to improve access and encourage community use.

The transformation was quite astonishing. Just four months after the initial restoration work, a series of shallow pools had established and wetland plants were colonising. To monitor the impact of the restoration surveys were undertaken by specialist recording groups, revealing a huge diversity of species at the site, including numerous local and national priority species. Of particular importance is the presence of Creeping willow (*Salix repens*), White sedge (*Carex curta*), Water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*), Great Crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and some high quality unimproved, species-rich grassland. The specialist surveys provided base-line data for future monitoring and training for the local community group, so they can take on monitoring in future years.

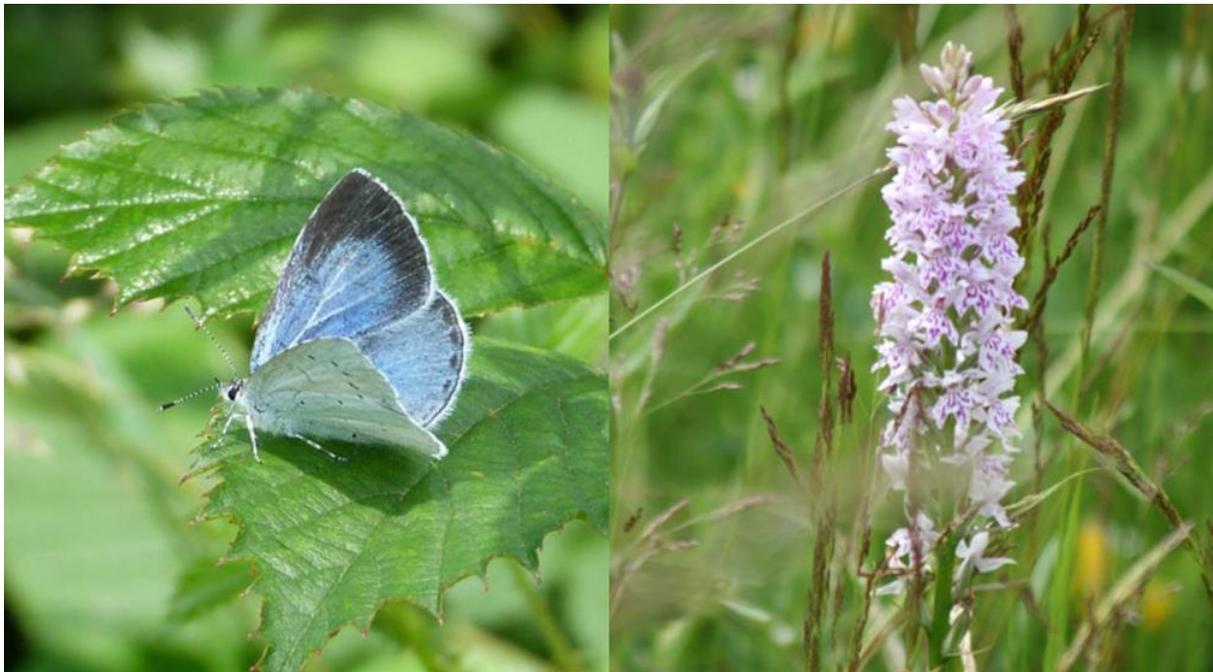
It is important to implement a long-term management plan at the Marlot, in order to ensure that it continues to improve and does not revert to scrub. The Marlot Conservation group were provided with tools to undertake basic management and the site. In later 2012 they helped to remove young willow from the valuable species-rich grassland. The key management intervention is grazing, as this

will help to prevent growth of trees and scrub, thus encouraging the grassland and wetland vegetation to establish. The ‘Your Natural Heritage’ project funded the purchase of some electric fencing, which will allow conservation grazing to begin. Discussions are currently underway with Natural England to recruit one of their licenced graziers. Following the restoration work, the Marlot may now merit designation as a new Local Wildlife Site for Shropshire.

Gareth Parry

A local grazing agreement has been initiated by the Conservation Group /Parish Council as part of the Management Plan for the Marlot. This is to help with habitat management and diversification.

As of Autumn 2020 a ‘Task and Finish Group’ including Parish Councillors, The Marlot Conservation Group and a representative from Natural England are exploring the possibility of redesignating the Marlot as a Local Nature Reserve.



Volunteers are welcome to help with any aspect of the Marlot management.

Contact: turnbullgraham7@gmail.com or m.spenser@btinternet.com

Useful contacts

Whixall Parish Council

<http://www.whixallparish.org.uk/community/whixall-parish-council-15252/home/>

Local Neighbourhood Watch

<https://www.hugofox.com/community/north-shropshire-neighbourhood-and-farm-watch-12896/contact/>

www.shropshire.gov.uk

www.westmercia.police.uk

www.connectingshropshire.co.uk

