



Whixall

Parish Plan 2013

Introduction

WELCOME to your Community Led Parish Plan.

This Plan has been compiled by a steering committee comprised of members of the Parish and two Parish Councillors and is based on the questionnaires that were delivered to every household in Whixall to ensure everyone had the opportunity to voice their aspirations for the Parish. Over 25% of households responded, which for this type of community activity is very positive. The quotes throughout the Plan are taken from completed questionnaires.

The action plans in this booklet reflect the responses gathered from the questionnaires and will give added weight to discussions with Shropshire Council and other organisations regarding the future of Whixall.

This is a great opportunity to get involved and make a difference.

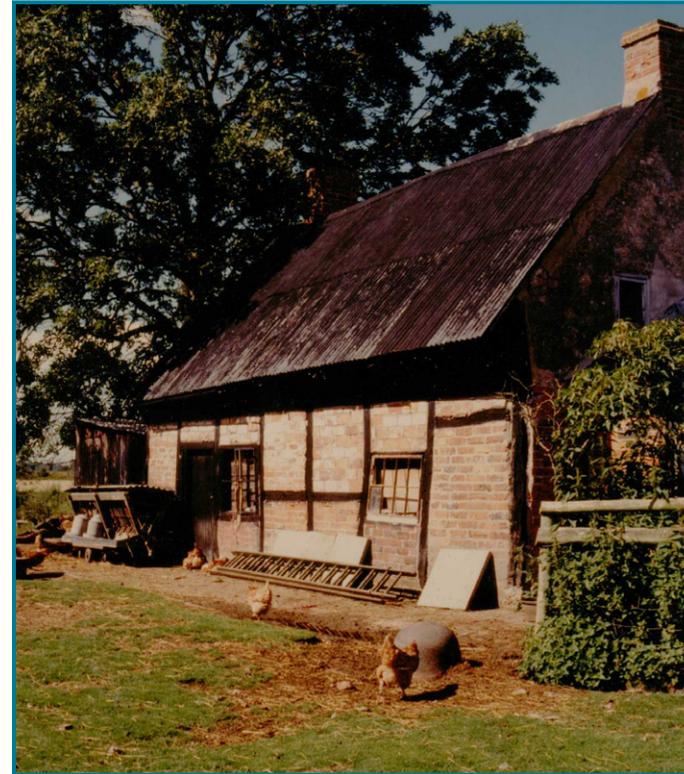
If you would like to join one of the volunteer groups in this Plan please contact Katie Hatton, Whixall Parish Clerk: clerk.whixallPC@hotmail.co.uk.

Jan Peters— Chair, Steering Committee

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Whixall: a history



IF YOU SAY YOU LIVE IN WHIXALL, a likely response is: “AARGH! That village of endless winding lanes where you get lost, landing up in a scrap yard on the edge of a peat bog like Siberian tundra?” Whixall, in truth, is a remarkable and beautiful place with a unique character compared to other Shropshire villages. This is tied up with its history.

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.

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 on Whixall Moss, an obvious surviving example is the tiny abandoned cottage (see photo on previous page) 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.

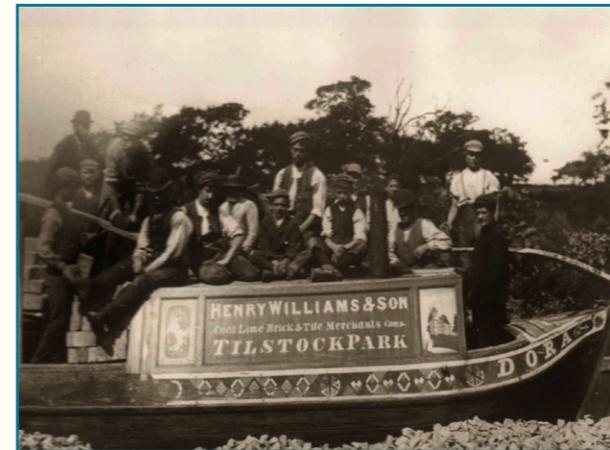
Hearsay evidence exists that querulous, unpaid soldiers (a disruptive element you would wish to get rid of into a spot off the beaten track), were given small parcels of land with the right to build such a dwelling in Whixall. Some of these may have been veterans of the English Civil War (1640–1649). 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.



Henry Williams

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	ACTION
To meet the housing aspirations of the Parish whilst retaining its rural identity	Whixall Parish Council to hold annual public meetings for residents to put forward their views
To ensure the infrastructure is able to support new developments	Whixall Parish Council to liaise with Shropshire Council
To consult regarding the introduction of new planning regulations SAMDev	Introduction due autumn 2014

PARTNERS	TIMESCALE
Lead: Whixall Parish Council Whixall residents, Shropshire Council	Ongoing
Lead: Whixall Parish Council Shropshire Council Highways Department, utility companies	Ongoing
Lead: Shropshire Council Planning Department Whixall Parish Council	Ongoing

Health and social care

THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS consider that the following issue needs addressing:

- The need for elderly people to have more support (56%)
- 65% of respondents agree with the statement *I can access the health and social care services I need.*



North Salop
 Wheelers
 01948 880037
northsalopwheelers.co.uk



OBJECTIVE	ACTION
To provide more support for elderly people	Form local Volunteer Focus Group
To provide more community transport to enable people to get out and about	Raise the awareness of North Salop Wheelers

PARTNERS	TIMESCALE
Lead: Relevant Shropshire Council service(s) Whixall Parish Council, voluntary sector, Volunteer Focus Group	Medium
Lead: Whixall Parish Council North Salop Wheelers, Shropshire Council	Ongoing

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%)

- 60% of respondents disagree with the statement *We should have more pavements in our village.*
- Speeding is a major concern among residents.



OBJECTIVE	ACTION
To improve road maintenance	Whixall Parish Council to continue to report local problems to Shropshire Council Highways Department
To promote road safety by encouraging more frequent hedge and verge cutting by landowners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Whixall Parish Council to advise landowners where appropriate 2. Landowners to take responsibility for their own roadside hedges 3. Community News editor to reiterate at pertinent intervals
To improve the bus service	Promote North Salop Wheelers
To address concerns about speeding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Form local Volunteer Focus Group 2. Whixall Parish Council representative and Volunteer Group representative to meet with West Mercia Police to request greater Police visibility

PARTNERS	TIMESCALE
Lead: Whixall Parish Council Shropshire Council Highways Department	Ongoing
Lead: Landowners Shropshire Council Highways Department, Whixall Parish Council	Ongoing
Lead: Whixall Parish Council North Salop Wheelers	Ongoing
Lead: Whixall Parish Council and Volunteer Focus Group West Mercia Police	Medium

Leisure, recreation and environment

THE RESPONDENTS believe the following issues need to be addressed:

- We need to keep Whixall free of litter (80.8%)
- 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
To ensure that the Parish remains free of litter	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify those interested in helping with / organising litter picks 2. Organise regular community litter picks
To protect wildlife and nature sites in the Parish	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with Shropshire Wildlife Trust on the Down to Earth Project within the Meres and Mosses Landscape Partnership 2. Work on the restoration and maintenance of the Marl Allotment 3. Work with / support / encourage local landowners to enter into agri-environment type schemes in order to promote best practice
To explore the practicality of a village pub	Investigate the possibilities of a community involvement scheme
To work towards the maintenance of the Shropshire Way, existing footpaths and bridleways, plus associate signage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Survey local footpaths and bridleways to assess accessibility as well as condition and existence of signage 2. Organise volunteer work parties to clear footpaths and maintain stiles 3. Organise volunteer work parties to install waymarkers where necessary 4. Advise Shropshire Council Access Team where difficulties arise which volunteer teams are unable to address 5. Liaise with landowners over improvements and issues

“There is no meeting place for Whixall residents on a general basis.”



PARTNERS	TIMESCALE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lead: Whixall Parish Council 2. Shropshire Council, Whixall residents 	Short / Medium
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lead: Shropshire Wildlife Trust 2. Lead: Marlot Conservation Group Shropshire Council 3. Lead: Shropshire Wildlife Trust Whixall Parish Council, Whixall landowners 	Ongoing
Whixall Parish Council, Shropshire Council	Ongoing
Lead: Whixall Parish Paths Partnership Group Shropshire Council Access Team	Ongoing

Key to action plan timescales

Short: Up to 1 year • **Medium:** 1–5 years • **Long:** More than 5 years

Crime and community safety

THE RESPONDENTS believe the following issues need to be addressed:

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

“We feel that Whixall is reasonably crime free.”

“We need a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.”



OBJECTIVE	ACTION
To work towards setting up and developing Neighbourhood Watch schemes throughout the Parish, to help prevent burglary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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

PARTNERS	TIMESCALE
Lead: Whixall Parish Council North Shropshire Neighbourhood and Farm Watch association, Whixall residents	Medium

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
To support the development of small rural businesses	Actively support the development of home based enterprises
To explore the viability of a local shop run by volunteers	Form a Volunteer Group
To improve broadband connectivity to encourage the growth of local businesses	Keep up to date with the progress of 'Connecting Shropshire'

PARTNERS	TIMESCALE
Lead: Whixall Parish Council Shropshire Council	Long
Lead: Volunteer Group Whixall Parish Council, Shropshire Council	Long
Lead: 'Connecting Shropshire' Whixall Parish Council	Medium

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





USEFUL CONTACTS

www.2shrop.net/whixallparishcouncil

www.shropshire.gov.uk

www.westmercia.police.uk

www.connectingshropshire.co.uk

www.nshropsnfw.co.uk