

**Wickhambrook Neighbourhood Plan proposed Community Actions
for discussion with Parish Council – 12 July 2023**

Community Action 1 – Wildlife and Conservation

The Parish Council will work with the Wickhambrook Estates Committee and interested parishioners in order to sustain and improve the natural environment in and around the village. Actions to be considered will include:

- conserving trees and hedgerows, initially by carrying out an audit of assets
- protecting green spaces and woodlands and enhancing their value for wildlife
- working with landowners to promote take-up of stewardship schemes, including opening up permissive paths and fostering wild flower mixes on field margins
- promoting biodiversity by establishing wild areas, wildlife habitats and wildlife corridors around the parish.

Rationale for Community Action 1:

In the village questionnaire of March 2022, an overwhelming majority of respondents (98%) supported the protection of green spaces and the natural environment. In more detail, 96% of respondents argued that: ‘our hedgerows and mature trees need to be protected’; ‘I value the wildlife and biodiversity in our community’; and ‘open views across fields and woods are important assets to be protected’. Further, 82% of respondents declared themselves to be actively in support of ‘rewilding and conservation initiatives’. It is clear, therefore, that there is significant support in Wickhambrook for environmental and conservation issues and, potentially, for taking more proactive measures in support of enhanced biodiversity, the natural world and rewilding.

Community Action 2 – Tidy Village

The Parish Council and the Estates Committee will set up a ‘tidy village’ action group to tackle litter, dog fouling, graffiti and other forms of vandalism around the village. The ‘tidy village’ action group will work with teams of volunteers to maintain and improve public amenities, including the children’s play area; green spaces, including the playing fields; and, in collaboration with Suffolk Highways, the pathways, pavements and verges around the village.

Rationale for Community Action 2:

In the village questionnaire of March 2022, large numbers of respondents expressed their concerns about challenges to the village environment. Of these respondents, 98% were concerned about litter and 91% about dog fouling. It should be possible to mobilise volunteers in order to monitor and address these issues. A further 82% of respondents said that they were concerned about vandalism, although it may be more difficult to deal with the causes of this problem and to devise solutions.

Community Action 3 – Highways maintenance

The Parish Council will work with landowners and parishioners to ensure that actions are taken to improve and maintain the quality of Wickhambrook's network of roads and lanes. Emphasis will be placed upon matters to include:

- getting pot holes filled and repaired
- clearing ditches and drains
- maintaining hedges and verges.

Rationale for Community Action 3:

In the village questionnaire of March 2022, the majority of respondents recorded concerns about roads. Wickhambrook residents want to see better maintenance of the road system – including mending of pot holes; better drainage and maintenance of ditches in order to address problems with surface water and flooding; improved access and safety on pavements and pathways; and better maintenance of verges and hedges.

Community Action 4 – Traffic Management

The Parish Council will work with Suffolk Highways to ensure that actions are taken to make Wickhambrook's roads and lanes safer for all users, to manage traffic and to tackle speeding and inconsiderate road use. Priority will be given in the work of the parish's road safety working group to issues that include:

- inhibiting the speed of vehicular traffic
- ensuring that pavements are wide enough and well-maintained
- improving safety at crossing points and junctions.

Rationale for Community Action 4:

In the village questionnaire of March 2022, 90% of respondents argued that village infrastructure should be improved before any new building takes place. The majority of these respondents listed roads as the chief concern. Further, the largest number of concerns expressed in the development proposals survey carried out in April 2023 were about road safety and traffic management issues. Respondents argue for improvements in road safety around the village, for example, by improving junctions, imposing speed limits and creating better and safer pathways.

Community Action 5 – Footpaths and Bridleways

The Parish Council will take actions to maintain and enhance the network of safe and waymarked footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes around Wickhambrook. The Parish Council will also seek to work with the County Highways Department and neighbouring Parish Councils to extend this network further afield in order to develop safe off-road connections with settlements such as Ousden, Lidgate, Cowlinge, Stradishall, Denston, Depden and Hargrave.

Rationale for Community Action 5:

In the village questionnaire of March 2022, 62% of respondents indicated that they walk around the village and 19% cycle. Many people argued that the pavements and paths around the village are in need of maintenance (with many pavements needing to be widened) and that the roads need improvements in terms of repairs to potholes; signage; and better and safer crossing points. In all, 83% of respondents were in favour of the creation and maintenance of better footpaths and quiet lanes to make it safer and easier to get around the village and the wider parish on foot and bicycle.

Community Action 6 – Historic Assets

The Parish Council will co-ordinate actions to conserve notable listed and non-listed buildings, the outlying greens and hamlets and other cherished features of our environment. Local features noted to be of particular importance to village residents, and therefore in need of protection, include:

- old houses, historic buildings, history and heritage, including the churches
- Wickhambrook's ancient pattern of outlying village greens and hamlets.

Rationale for Community Action 6:

There is a great sense of commitment in Wickhambrook to the conservation and protection of our listed buildings; other historical assets; and buildings or locations of interest. In the village questionnaire of March 2022, 95% of respondents confirmed that any new development must 'respect the local character, landscape and environment of the parish'. Further, 85% of respondents argued that conserving listed buildings and their surroundings was important and 83% of respondents wanted any future policy to enhance existing heritage and historic assets. Finally 97% of respondents demanded that the integrity and character of Wickhambrook's ancient pattern of hamlets and village greens must be maintained.

Community Action 7 – Activities and Opportunities

The Parish Council will explore options, in consultation with village residents, for providing additional activities and social opportunities for various groups of villagers including:

- social care and activities in the community for older people
- activities and opportunities for young people
- a group providing activities for men, perhaps located in a 'man shed'.

Rationale for Community Action 7:

The idea of promoting a greater variety of activities for parishioners emerged from the village questionnaire of March 2022. Results indicate that 50% of respondents are in favour of this kind of increase. Respondents specifically requested both more activities and opportunities for young people and social care and activities in the community for older people, suggesting there is a need for additional provision for a wide range of groups of village residents.

Community Action 8 – Allotments and community gardens

The Parish Council will work with developers and parishioners to explore options for providing family allotments or community growing spaces in the village. Future provision for vegetable and flower growing and general gardening might include:

- spaces allocated to individuals and families
- spaces gardened by community groups.

In consultation with parishioners and in partnership with developers, the Parish Council may also decide to set aside spaces for community use as play areas, wildlife zones, enhanced landscapes and places for relaxation and leisure.

Rationale for Community Action 8:

Landscapes, green spaces and specifically gardens are clearly of great importance to the residents of Wickhambrook. In the village questionnaire of March 2022, for example, 84% of respondents argued that the provision of gardens in any new development should be a priority. The survey of villagers' views in April 2023 expanded upon this finding. Survey respondents argued strongly for landscaping, green spaces, rewilding and 'attractive outdoor spaces' in and around the village and certainly within any new development. A total of 61% of respondents were specifically in favour of the provision of allotments. There is a requirement, therefore, for any new development in the village to explore the options for providing garden space for individual homes; for individuals and families as allotments; and for use by the community – possibly as part of any Community Land Trust initiative (see Community Action 8 below).

Community Action 9 – Community Land Trust

The Parish Council will work with landowners and interested village residents in order to set up a Community Land Trust for Wickhambrook. This Community Land Trust will be tasked with planning, building and managing a group of 16 new and affordable homes on land adjacent to the developments south-west of Bunters Road. These homes will be maintained in perpetuity by the Community Land Trust for the benefit of local people (village residents and/or close family members of village residents) and will provide a range of affordable living options for people at various stages of their lives – starter homes for young people; family homes; and homes for older people. Partnerships with housing associations will facilitate the day-to-day management of these homes and maintain costs for residents permanently at affordable levels.

The Community Land Trust will also manage land to be devoted to the provision of community facilities. In consultation with parishioners, the Parish Council will determine whether these facilities should include, for example:

- community gardens or leisure spaces as set out in Community Action 7
- community retail facilities such as a stall for fruit, vegetables and produce
- community workshops or meeting rooms
- a relocated health centre.

Rationale for Community Action 9:

It was very clear, from the results of the village questionnaire of March 2022, that a majority of respondents were in favour of providing a mix of homes in any new development in the village. For example, 76% of respondents supported provision of affordable homes and 65% of respondents suggested that any development should provide a variety of forms of housing including homes of various sizes and homes for sale, for rent, under shared ownership and offering support for older people. Indeed, the questionnaire results show that villagers regard the provision of 'starter' homes for young people from the village and 'sheltered' properties for older people wishing to remain here as priorities.

These views were echoed in the survey of April 2023, when respondents indicated that new homes should 'meet local needs' and achieve 'social inclusivity' with provision of a range of sizes and types of accommodation. We also know, from the housing needs survey of March 2022, that people want to stay in Wickhambrook – both as young people leaving their parental homes and starting an independent life and also as they age and require more support – but find that house prices in the village are too high.

Many contributions to discussion around the village and within the Parish Council have indicated an interest in exploring whether the establishment of a Community Land Trust could enable the village to meet the needs of parishioners for affordable accommodation. While the provision of such homes, sustained in perpetuity for the benefit of village residents, would be a key factor driving the creation of a Community Land Trust, it would also be important to consider the need to provide other amenities and facilities under the control of the village.

The survey of views of April 2023, for example, showed that people want the village to be 'thriving' and 'progressive' but with developments managed by local people. There was support for the provision of facilities such as a café and a farm shop or produce stall and for the relocation of the health centre to offer a range of medical and therapeutic provision. Any moves to establish a Community Land Trust should explore possibilities like these as well as securing affordable homes for local people.

WNPWG 12 July 2023