

**Longwick Public Consultation Workshop**

**October 2014**

**Issues report**

# Longwick Public Consultation Workshop October 2014: Issues report

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## Longwick Public Consultation Workshop

### **1 Introduction**

This consultation event was held on Tuesday 7th October 2014 at Longwick Village Hall (3-9pm) to invite detailed comments from residents about the village today and how it could respond to change in the future. It was well attended with 137 people signing the visitor list, and 26 questionnaires handed in on the day. A further 19 responses were received via the Council's online survey and 5 emails, making a total of 50 written responses in addition to the many notes made at the event.

In order to invite discussion, the format of the workshop was a small introductory exhibition and five themed topic tables, with maps for notes and comments invited from participants, and the questionnaires included the same issues.

Additional activities included a 1:500 scale plan of Longwick with the opportunity to use wooden block models to look at the location of existing and possible new homes, plus 'mental mapping' and drawing houses for younger children.

The discussions around the five main themes are described fully below, and the issues highlighted have been used in the preparation of the Longwick Capacity Study.

### **2 Infrastructure**

Respondents were asked to consider the following questions:

*How does traffic affect life in the village? Are there enough places to cross the roads? Would better public transport help and to where? Is cycling a safe option? Do you use the footpaths and public rights of way surrounding the village for leisure / dog walking? If so how could they improved and which routes are most popular? Do you or would you consider walking or cycling to Princes Risborough to use facilities there? Is flooding a major issue and where? Do you experience problems with other utilities like electricity and telecoms?*

#### **2.1 Road Traffic**

Thame Road and Chestnut Way regularly see car and HGV traffic at speeds far greater than the speed limits there (30 mph), so that the junctions at Chestnut Way, Thame Road, and Lower Icknield Way (where the traffic speeds become 40 and 60 mph) are hazardous with poor visibility, especially with high traffic speeds across the B4009 roundabout. The 30mph road markings have not been repainted properly, and there is a desire for speed cameras at either end of the village to enforce speed limits (as in Tiddington), and with traffic calming in the centre of the village (as in Chinnor). There was also concern about HS2 construction traffic exacerbating this, as there is already a lot of six-wheeled farming and industrial traffic passing along Thame Road and Chestnut Way.

At peak times, which are 7-9am and 4-7pm here, drivers leave early to avoid traffic elsewhere. There is a lot of congestion at Chestnut Way onto Thame Road as people are unable to pull out of the junction, and at Walnut Tree Lane due to poor visibility caused by a badly sited new telecoms exchange box. The crossroads of Bar Lane and Walnut Tree Lane are seen as a difficult junction for access onto Thame Road, and parking on the roads and pavements makes visibility unsafe. Bar Lane

was also identified as a long-term rat run to Aylesbury (via Ford), with a speed limit of 60 mph making the narrow pavements and footway unusable and dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists.

The hedges and shrubs at the garage on the B4009 roundabout also restrict visibility of fast passing cars.

There were several discussions about the historic bypass proposal to connect Princes Risborough, Chinnor and Thame without passing through Longwick.

## **2.2 Pavements**

The pavements along Thame Road are very poorly maintained with uneven surfaces, and are too narrow, lying adjacent to fast moving traffic (30/40/60 mph in various places) and restricted by overgrown shrubbery in many spots. This is causing many more people to drive to school and the post office, adding to local parking problems at school drop-off and pick-up times. The lack of any pavement along the north side of Chestnut Way makes it very dangerous for pedestrians, and many people were concerned about children's and elderly people's safety here, as well as throughout the village.

Walking from the village to Princes Risborough and the station was not seen as safe or reasonable for the same reasons, as Summerleys Road and Longwick Road were too narrow, unlit and the traffic too fast.

The footpaths across the fields are judged to be far better quality, but not helping with transport issues. There were requests for better surfaces on the public footpath and bridleway connections to the Phoenix Trail, which become extremely muddy.

## **2.3 Road Crossings**

There was a perception that more road crossings on Thame Road would be helpful, but that this could increase congestion within the village. The traffic lights near the post office are not on an obvious desire line, and so people continue to cross the road where they can. New crossing points (e.g. at least zebra crossings) at the Thame end of village and near Chestnut Way should be considered, and to help children using the school bus services to cross safely, as the junction at the Red Lion pub is very busy at peak times.

The village has no street lighting, and opinion is divided between the village's rural character making it inappropriate, and great concerns about the unsafe pedestrian and cycling environment on the main road demanding better visibility. (There was an historic decision made to light the main road, which was apparently funded, but not delivered).

The brightness of the traffic lights also makes it hard to judge whether there are people in the road nearby by. There are also no 'cat's eyes' road markings through and beyond the village to guide drivers, or reflective bollards, and so several homes and fences have been hit by fast vehicles.

## **2.4 Public Transport**

There are no peak time buses through the village in any direction. There are two midweek midday scheduled bus services, but with no return journey the same day. The free community bus runs off peak and is a lifeline for those without a car (funded originally by Hypnos and now sustained with community support). There are no direct public transport links to Princes Risborough station, or

services which could interchange in the town for Aylesbury or High Wycombe. Thame would also be a popular destination, but currently the local bus only allows for a 2 hour off peak visit. There was a strong feeling that any new homes would need to provide a substantial change to this to be sustainable, or should be located closer to existing services and jobs.

The school bus service is judged to be significantly more expensive than Arriva services in the wider area, but which do not come to the village.

## **2.5 Cycling**

For those without cars, this is only option for journeys to work. However, Bar Lane is too narrow for 60mph traffic and cyclists - with a ditch along one side - as it is a rat-run to Mill Lane and beyond. Similarly Lower Icknield Way, Summerleys Road and Longwick Road routes into Princes Risborough are hazardous for cyclists at any time, and crossing the junctions on these routes is also dangerous. The impact of speeding traffic forces many cyclists onto the already narrow and poor quality pavements, causing conflicts with pedestrians, including young children.

## **2.6 Parking conflicts**

As Longwick's facilities also serve other villages (Owlswick, Ilmer etc which have none at all), local parking is needed. This is an issue at school times on Walnut Tree Lane, in the village hall car park, and outside the post office in general, where many people reported regularly witnessing near-miss accidents with passing traffic. Many children and visitors to the shop come from beyond the village, but the parking problems are also caused by local people driving and not walking.

Briants' and the Red Lion pub's delivery lorries have to park on Longwick Road to make deliveries, which was seen as good for slowing traffic down, but also unsafe for pedestrians.

## **2.7 Sewage Flooding**

The sewage pump at Thame end of village receives all of the village waste, and then pumps it back to Princes Risborough sewage works (Summerleys Road). However for more than 10 years, this pump has been failing regularly and flooding the local area with sewage. This sewage flooding is a major infrastructure concern for the village and any growth in Princes Risborough. Residents have mounted a campaign with Thames Water involving Ofwat, but the utility company has been paying fines, rather than investing in new equipment. In 2012-3, there were 8 sewage floods, and in 2013-4 there were 5, and which were not always linked to periods of heavy rainwater, which can exacerbate the issue. The pump is judged to be inadequate, but also frequent power cuts mean that it regularly stops working completely. The capacity of the Summerleys Road sewage works also needs to be verified, especially given expansion at Haddenham and the pumping station capacity there, and the capacity of Henton pumping station.

## **2.8 Electricity**

Longwick and the surrounding villages have frequent power cuts, sometimes for minutes or many hours, and the reasons are not clear. For residents who have lived there for 35-40 years, these seem to be slightly less frequent now, but it is not resolved. The power cuts seem to affect different ends of the village, or pairs of houses at the same time, with no pattern between off peak and peak periods. It is thought to be due potentially to the overhead cabling being vulnerable in areas where there are trees nearby, as at the Thame end of the village, or the substation at Ilmer being unreliable. (The development at Sawmill/Wheelwright Road seemed to be less affected.)

There is however an immediate link between the power cuts and the sewage pumping problem, as an emergency generator to maintain power was installed, but was reportedly stolen and has not been replaced.

## **2.9 Broad band and mobile communications**

As the electricity supply is so unreliable, broad band and other internet services are significantly affected, and mobile phone signals are judged to be poor. These two factors have a bearing on businesses operating in the area, and limit its appeal for any future employment prospects.

## **2.10 Surface water flooding**

Longwick is an area of springs and streams. There are two main areas within the village which see surface water flooding regularly. The first - at Bar Lane, along the rear of the eastern side of Thame Road, and Sawmill Road properties - is seen to be caused by the Bar Lane ditch which had allowed water to drain away later being filled in. (The stream passes under Thame Road here to run on the western side in the south). Bar Lane becomes impassable and the flood water in the field to the north can be 18-24" deep.

At the second area in the south - Chestnut Way, Bell Crescent and the residential roads nearby - flood water is common in gardens and on the field south of the playing field. The green areas that also flood are along the stream west of and parallel to Thame Road, and the lane to school from the playing fields past the Scout Hut.

There is also localised flooding reported on Walnut Tree Lane close to the railway line embankment.

## **3 Social Facilities**

Respondents were asked to consider the following questions:

*Are there enough places to play in the village? Or space for meetings? Does the village need more space in school now? What do you travel to other towns for – doctors, dentists, shopping, pub? Is parking a problem here and where is it needed? What else would make village life more enjoyable and convenient? Are there some facilities that are struggling to survive or that have closed recently?*

### **3.1 Outdoor Play Space**

The playing field by the village hall is the only facility in village and surrounding areas, and includes a multi-use games area, a skate-park, play park with equipment, one football pitch and one cricket pitch (sharing the same space but seasonal). Adult cricket and football clubs use the playing fields, but not many children's clubs. Annual village-wide events are very popular including the May Fete and may-pole dancing, which is held there. There are no indoor sports facilities however. The field near Strattons Farm is a privately owned now, not a public playing field as implied on the OS maps.

### **3.2 Community meeting space**

The village hall is well used, as the village has a good community life, and so more capacity would be welcomed. The hall includes the car park and changing facilities to support the playing field, but it is managed separately from the playing field. There is often conflict over the hall car park as it is used intensively at school times especially. The Scout Hut is only used by them. The school hall is also used after school hours.

### **3.3 Shopping**

The local shop and post office is currently limited in size, but provides an essential service and has limited parking for visitors. (There are reports of the shop expanding soon). Most people visit Princes Risborough for convenience and supermarket shopping (Tesco and M&S), but car parking is major deterrent as it is either full, or it is not free as it is in Thame town centre. Thame is also popular as it is seen as having a greater variety and quality of shopping (including Waitrose), or Aylesbury for convenience and comparison shopping. There is concern that Tesco in Princes Risborough is already a small store, which would need to be expanded.

### **3.4 Doctors**

Longwick residents are registered with the two GP practices in Princes Risborough, as that is the required catchment, but many find it hard to get appointments promptly, and so would welcome a new GP in the village.

### **3.5 Dentist**

NHS dentists are hard to find in the area, with most people visiting Thame, Aylesbury and Princes Risborough, while some travel 40 minutes away to Abbots Langley in Herts, due to a lack of places closer.

### **3.6 Primary School**

Longwick Church of England Primary School is regarded locally as excellent, but currently has low pupil numbers in the upper years (less than 20 per class). The Reception and KS1 classes are full this year, but the school has previously been under threat due to the low take-up of places. The village feel of the school is an important aspect, and so any expansion needs to be carefully assessed for future demand and the scale of growth. (All numbers and forecasts need to be verified with the school and Buckinghamshire County Council, as different estimates have been received).

Its capacity is 200 pupils, but there are currently 165 pupils enrolled, with a problem coming in three years' time due to the lack of capacity. Expanding it would require a rethink of the parking and access problems witnessed today around Walnut Tree Lane and the village hall. The school's Travel Plan supported by Buckinghamshire County Council is hard to promote given the local access problems, and this also applies to children going to secondary school in Princes Risborough who have to cycle along Longwick Road, or try to cross Thame Road to catch the school bus.

### **3.7 Affordable housing**

There were several references to the need for more affordable housing in the area.

## **4 Landscape & Wildlife**

Respondents were asked to consider the following questions:

*Do you know of wildlife areas around the village? Where are the best views from? What do you like about the landscape here?*

### **4.1 Landscape setting**

Long open landscape views to the Chilterns are a key part of Longwick's appeal, especially for residents on the eastern side of the village, along Bar Lane to Owlswick, and for walkers past the

railway line on the west. Closer to the village, the landscape is less spectacular but valued for its quiet rural character, and residents can be out in the countryside within minutes of leaving home on foot.

Circular walks are popular to the west along the public rights of way (footpaths and bridleways), and over to the Phoenix Trail and Bledlow, and east to Owlswick and Ilmer. The public rights of way are all well used for walking, biking, horse riding and running, and there was a desire to see more links, better signposting and routes to walk to Princes Risborough through the fields.

## 4.2 Wildlife areas

The hedgerows are important visual features of the village as well as providing good wildlife areas, along with the railway embankment. On all sides of the village there have been lots of sighting of different wildlife, including: a long eared owl, barn owls, tawny owls, buzzards, kestrel, merlins, skylarks, nesting red kites, grey and red legged partridges, hares, glis-glis (edible dormouse), voles, bats, badgers, foxes, muntjack and roebuck deer, various butterflies, as well as newts, toads and frogs along the stream. Wildflowers were also mentioned including yellow rattle.

Having no street lighting and dark skies is seen as ensuring that the area remains very rural and allows people to see the night sky. The green frontages and hedges along Thame Road were also seen as an important part of the village's rural character.

## 5 Boundaries and historical development sites

Respondents were asked to consider the following questions:

*Where do you think Longwick starts and finishes? Where would you say the 'heart' of the village is? If there were new homes in the village, should these be in small pockets or on one larger site? Where would this be? Does the phasing of any sites matter?*

### 5.1 Village boundary and heart

The perceived village is much larger than the formally identified settlement area ('Settlement beyond the Green Belt' in WDC maps), with the farmsteads to the north included, starting from the first house in the village at the Thame end or the speed limit signs. To the south the boundary is seen as being at the cluster of homes and Longwick Mill through the railway bridge, but more commonly just up to Lower Icknield Way. The railway embankment is a village boundary to the west, but for many it is the line at the edge of development on Walnut Tree Lane running north and south. In the east, the boundary is seen as the line along the back of Wheelwright Road running north and south. There were widely expressed concerns that Princes Risborough's expansion should not go north of Alscot or the Longwick bog area.

There were mixed views about the location of the village heart – whether there was one at all – but it was identified as being at the shop, village hall and the school area, or around the Red Lion pub.

### 5.2 Development sites

Respondents were aware of many land parcels that had been looked at for development before, e.g. the triangular field next to Laurel's Farm (Briants yard) along Thame Road was once proposed for a masonic hall.

The scale of the current planning application for 175 homes north of Williams Way is seen as too big, and its impact could be very disruptive to village life today with major traffic and infrastructure concerns. Dispersing new houses around the village was seen as better and in phases to make it easier to manage. There was a desire to work to the same density levels at the village today, and to maintain green pockets throughout the village. (One respondent had calculated that historically Longwick has absorbed 5 new houses per year for the last 20 years.)

Small infill sites of 20-30 new homes, like the controlled but organic growth that the village had seen before, were preferable to larger 'housing schemes', and some residents wanted to see a limit of 50 new homes in the village for the foreseeable future. Any development in Longwick would involve commuting to work elsewhere and so this has to be recognised in more sustainable transport (e.g. cycling ways, peak time buses, and improved road junctions) than residents have today.

There was a clear view that the old farmsteads along Thame Road represent Longwick's distinctiveness, which is not statutorily protected as the listed buildings are, infill development would spoil this heritage if the farms were redeveloped.

### 5.3 Potential Locations

There was strong consensus that there needs to be a strategy for the whole village area to manage any further applications coming to the area, as well as setting the quality and character of new development. Any sites to be considered would need to be along Thame Road or at least with very good access to it. Small pockets of housing could be appropriate on some sites (but not all should be filled):

#### Eastern side of Thame Road:

- North-east of Wheelwright Road/ Sawmill Road (historic application site - but see flood mapping)
- South of Wheelwright Road/ Sawmill Road development (see flood mapping), and with the suggestion to leave a small 'green' opposite Rose Farm
- North of Bar Lane (see flood mapping)
- South of Bar Lane (see traffic issues at the junction too)
- Next to Laurel's Farm (historic application site)
- At the B4009 roundabout corner (see archaeological mapping).

#### Western side of Thame Road:

- Field south of Home Farm – no direct access available
- Northern two fields of Rose Farm – direct access to Thame Road possible
- Large field from Rose Farm to railway line – access via Walnut Tree Lane or Rose Farm sites
- New frontage development (of bungalows) on south side of Walnut Tree Lane
- North of Williams Way (current application site) for far fewer homes (see flood mapping) - access via Chestnut Way.

## **6 The Best of Longwick**

Respondents were asked to consider the following questions:

*What is the best thing about living in the village? Is it the rural setting, community life, or proximity to other places? How could change improve on that?*

### **6.1 Rural setting**

Longwick's rural character means that residents have a strong attachment to the open landscape and scenery around it, and access to the countryside for walks on well-kept public rights of way. It is a peaceful and quiet location (apart from traffic issues), with many working farms around the area growing barley and corn. It is also in a useful strategic location with good access to London, Oxford, High Wycombe and Aylesbury, as well as the two nearby market towns. The lack of light, noise and vehicle pollution is also valued.

### **6.2 Community spirit**

The village is popular with long-time residents, as well as people settling from London and other towns and villages, due to its strong community and village life, which are felt to originate from its small scale.

People know and keep an eye on each other, being 'not too close to neighbours' visually or physically. People appreciate that the village is safe and friendly, with a low crime rate. Being able to walk to school and pre-school is important and the shop-post office and pub are valuable assets. The sports clubs, youth organisations, WI, scouts and Parish Council are seen as very good, and there is a sense that the facilities suit the population as it is today. Longwick should not become 'a suburb' or 'an off-shoot' of Princes Risborough.

Residents recognise that Longwick's linear shape on historic maps shows how it has gradually absorbed new development over the last 120 years, as well as different housing styles.

### **6.3 Potential ways of enhancing village life**

Most respondents feel that the village works well as it is, despite the issues outlined earlier. A large development in a relatively short time would make it very difficult to successfully integrate new residents into community life and ensure that the infrastructure difficulties and new facilities were properly provided. As a result, the quality of life in the village would be greatly affected and much of its character would be lost.

Some respondents felt that the village heart could be stronger, as the traffic dominates it today, and a more sociable centre which included a coffee shop or other retail/ mixed uses would be popular. More benches and another climbing frame were suggested for the children's park, along with better indoor facilities for young people. Affordable housing for young people and families would encourage them to stay in the village. The location of the church and a burial ground were also mentioned as ideas to consider for the future.

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