

# Puriton Parish Plan

June 2012

Puriton

Downend

Dunball

Planning for the Community

Have Your Say!

# Puriton Parish Plan

## Foreword by Tessa Miller, Chair of the Steering Group

Thank you for participating in the Puriton Parish Plan.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the preparation of this plan including the Parish Council, Steering Group Members and individuals within the community. The document is intended to be a Plan for the whole community in the Parish not just those living within Puriton village.

Much has been achieved during the preparation of this Plan and we look forward to building on this and tackling the issues raised by the residents of Puriton Parish.

**Chair**

**Puriton Parish Plan Steering Group**

June 2012

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# 1. Introduction

## Geography

The Parish of Puriton lies at the western end of the Polden Hills, in the District of Sedgemoor in Somerset. It is approximately 3½ miles to the north east of Bridgwater. The village sits on the lower slopes of the Polden ridge, with the Somerset Levels stretching off to the north.

The Parish contains the settlements of Puriton, Downend and Dunball. It extends from the top of Puriton Hill in the South, to the tidal river and port at Dunball in the West, takes in the industrial site of the now closed 'ROF' to the east, the northern boundary is the area known as Black Ditch.

Running through the Parish is the M5 motorway, two A roads, one B road, a railway, a tidal river and a main Drain.

There are over 2,100 people living in the Parish, in nearly 900 households. The Parish also contains a public house, a hotel/restaurant, a convenience store, a butcher's shop, a post office, a hairdresser, and many businesses including one business park. There is also the largest solar park in Somerset.

## History

The settlement started to expand considerably in the 1960s and 1970s when new houses were built on former farm land, a former infilled stone Blue Lias quarry, Puriton Park, and on fields in between the existing houses. The old Victorian school near the church was converted into homes and a new school built in Rowlands Rise. The Manor house was also sold off in 1960 and four houses were built on its former tennis courts. The steps to the tennis court may still be seen from the road near No 6 The Rye. The former stables and carriage house now form the Tower House in Rye. The gateway, wall and trees that form part of the property are all protected.

The Manor House itself is still there and lived, in although some of the manor has been converted into flats.

### Demographics

The Parish has a population of around 2,100. The local parish church, St Michael and All Angels, contains many monuments to the Greenhill family who were Lords of the Manor at Knowle and Puriton for many years. The family still has the ownership of land, tracks and mineral rights of the Parish.

### Built Environment

The village predominately comprises one and two storey dwellings of varying sizes and styles. A number of historic buildings, which feature a range of attractive features, can be found amongst the more modern development of the village.

Natural stone detailing and well landscaped gardens are a common feature of the village which give it an attractive and welcoming environment.

Whilst the Royal Ordnance Factory lies close to Puriton it generally comprises low level buildings which are not viewed as part of the built environment.

### Natural Environment

The village is surrounded by open countryside on all sides providing a clear divide between the built up area of Bridgwater and other surrounding villages. The woods at the top of Puriton hill are a haven for wildlife and have a bridle path which links through to the neighbouring village of Woolavington. Footpaths run throughout the village and across local fields giving residents access to the surrounding countryside.



## 2. About the Plan

The development of a Parish Plan is a direct response to the Government's new Localism Bill passed as an act of Parliament, November 2011, shifting the balance of power from central government back to the hands of individuals, committees and councils

This plan is intended to be the start of an on-going journey for the Parish. It has been formulated to celebrate Parish life and highlight particular issues of concern. It has been prepared by volunteers and aims to reflect a full range of local issues and aspirations.

It is commonly regarded that the area is more a Community than a Parish and as such this Plan seeks to reflect this in its aims and objectives.

The intention is that the plan will be regularly reviewed and amended to reflect changing circumstances. However, through a process of local consultation, the Plan provides an important summary of key issues which should be taken into account in relation to future changes in the village, such as:

- What is valued in the community
- Future development proposals in and around the Parish
- Possible areas for improvement
- Perceived key threats to Parish Community life and amenities
- Action plans to protect/preserve the community amenities
- Helping members of the Community contribute to village life

## 3. The Consultation Process

The Parish Council organised a number of public meetings in 2011 and 2012 to let everybody know that they were encouraging the residents of Puriton Parish to write their own Parish Plan.

A Community Steering Group, made up of local residents, was formed in November 2011. The first steering group meeting was held on 10<sup>th</sup> November and regular meetings will be held in the future. Membership is open to all and new volunteers are always welcome.

### The Key Stages

Funding has been provided by the Parish Council to assist in administrative matters where required. However, the day to day preparation of this Plan is the result of local community volunteers.

### The Survey

A questionnaire was prepared by the steering group following a review of likely key issues. Over 850 questionnaires were delivered by hand to every household in the Parish. In total 188 responses were received, 187 within Puriton and one on the boundary whose property clearly relates to Puriton.

### The Drop-in Event

A public exhibition was also held at the Village Hall on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December to capture local views. All households and businesses within the Parish were notified via leaflets, posters and two large banners erected at the entrance to the Village.

Members of the Steering Group were available to answer questions and explain the intention of the Parish Plan. A series of exhibition boards were also displayed to allow comments to be left. Around 150-200 people attended this event.

Members of the Parish Council were also in attendance to take advantage of the drop in event to meet and chat with parishioners.



#### Level of Response

There are approximately 890 households within the Parish, of which responses were received from 188. This level of response was generally considered satisfactory for a first attempt to engage the views of the residents. The range of age groups which filled out the questionnaire was also varied and overall the responses were considered to be representative of local views.

Nonetheless, at the start of the process the Steering Group recognised that the initial consultation process may not engage all parts of the community and that future stages should seek to address this.

### Collating the Responses and Preparing the Plan

Responses from the questionnaire and exhibition were then collated by the Steering Group and a Draft Plan was prepared. This was made available for further comment before the Plan was finalised.

A copy of the Plan was presented to the Parish Council for formal approval. The approved version was also submitted to Sedgemoor District Council



## 4. Results and Analysis

The following section provides a summary of the comments received from both the questionnaire and drop-in event, together with the underlying statistics which were analysed from the responses in the tick boxes on the survey form. Key issues of particular concern (i.e. raised on a number of separate occasions) have been particularly highlighted.

### About You

This section tells us about the age range and occupational status of those who responded to the survey.

In total 395 people from 188 households took part in the survey.

<b>Age of Persons in Household</b>	<b>Number of Persons</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Persons in Survey</b>	<b>Number of Households</b>
0 to 5	10	3%	9
6 - 10	6	2%	5
11 - 16	17	4%	13
17 - 25	31	8%	22
26 - 45	49	12%	34
46 - 60	91	23%	61
61 - 80	162	41%	101
80 +	32	8%	29

<b>Are the persons in the household</b>	<b>Number of Persons</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Persons in Survey</b>	<b>Number of Households</b>
Working	150	38%	95
Retired	171	43%	111
At school/student	41	10%	22
Housewife/husband	14	4%	14
Unemployed	7	2%	6
Other	12	3%	10

### Leisure and Amenities

Many of you appreciated the use of the Corner Shop, Butchers and Post Office, as well as the opportunity to use the local footpaths and bridleways. Others mentioned social aspects of the Village Hall as well as the newly founded allotments.

However, the cost of hiring the Village Hall was thought to be a barrier and that it needed some updating. There were suggestions that more use could be made for activities involving young people.

The Sports Centre was thought by many to be suitable for only a limited range of sports and therefore not meeting the needs of a large part of the community. There appears to be a feeling that, along with the building being unsuitable for a wide range of activities, the site is isolated and unwelcoming, with poor lighting and parking.

- The most used amenities are
  - The pubs, with 219 people, 55% of the total
  - The Village Hall, with 212 people, 54% of the total
  - The Church, with 121 people, 31% of the total
- Most people (73%) think the Village Hall meets the needs of the community
- 25% of people think that the Sports Centre meets the needs of the community. 32% think it does not meet the needs of the parish while 39% have no opinion
- The majority of people (70%) think that the Parish Church is important for baptisms, weddings and funerals and 66% think it is important as a place of worship
- 218 people (55% of the people in the survey) feel that the parish needs an informal recreation area
- 85% of people said they do not use the mobile library and 4% said they didn't know there was one

## Communication

There was a good response to the question of how Parishioners would like to be communicated to by the Parish Council, giving a wide range of options. The most popular ways were by leaflet drop, timely and detailed newsletters and the website. There were also suggestions that a calendar of meeting dates and improved Council agenda/minutes would be useful.

- 47% of people feel that the Parish Council does enough to let them know what they are doing but 31% did not
- Most people get information about what is going on from:
  - The parish newsletter (70%)
  - Word of mouth (61%)
  - Parish notice boards (37%)
- Only 15% said they use the parish council website, although 77% of people in the survey said they have internet access
- 22% of people said they would like a community website

## Safety in our Community

Most Parishioners felt safe but were alert to possible issues. There was some concern of dog fouling, littering and other anti-social behaviour. Under this section concern was voiced about the apparent lack of visible Police presence in the Parish and slow/no response if called out.

- There are considerable concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour, the biggest concerns being about anti-social behaviour itself (57%), vandalism (56%), theft from home (55%) and cold calling (49%)
- 24% of people expressed an interest in a Neighbourhood Watch scheme
- Only 11% of people think that the service provided by the police is good and 40% think it is only reasonable, while 22% think it is poor

## Transport

Some respondents relied on family and friends for transport and some concern was raised regarding access to medical care. Changes to the bus service were also raised.

- Most people (86%) said they have their own transport, with 56% saying that they have no transport difficulties
- Where there are transport difficulties, the majority of these (11%) are to do with accessing medical care

## Highways and Traffic

This section raised by far the most comments. Parishioners commented on the lack of pavements throughout the Parish, but did recognise that the narrowness of some roads did make improving this difficult. Other improvements mentioned included additional dog walking areas and better access to footpaths.

In terms of potential danger 'hot spots', the majority of respondents were concerned about parking throughout the area, but particular mention was made regarding the area around the Corner Stores, Woolavington Road and Middle Street. Speeding was another area of anxiety, again throughout the village, but particularly Woolavington Road, Riverton Road, Hall Road and Puriton Hill from junction 23. Unsurprisingly, the access from Hall Road to A39 was also mentioned by the majority of people as being of great frustration and difficulty. The locations of bus stops were felt by some to be in the wrong places.

Suggestions for resolutions to these problems were varied; some favoured enforcing (or reducing) speed limits while others would like traffic calming measures. Some parishioners thought pedestrian crossings at various places would be helpful while others considered they would not help. Parking is clearly an issue so double yellow

lines were suggested at key points to help the flow of traffic and improve the safety of pedestrians.

Suggestions for the improvement of access from Hall Road to A39 included improving the junction by traffic lights or roundabout as well as reducing the speed limit on Puriton Hill.

Improved crossings and access for residents at Dunball was also raised, where difficulty is experienced in crossing A38 to bus stop and crossing A39 to access Puriton.

- The majority of people (61% ) think that there are enough pavements with 60% also considering the condition of pavements to be reasonable
- With regard to parking, only 7% of people said they frequently have difficulty parking their vehicle, but 28% said they frequently have a problem with other people's parked vehicles
- Many people (77%) feel that ease of car access in and out of the parish needs to be improved and 78% think that there are danger spots, including speeding, on roads in the parish
- In terms of road safety improvements, the majority (64%) are in favour of improved junctions, with 40% also in favour of lower speed restrictions and 30% in favour of traffic calming
- The need for better cycling and walking routes into Bridgwater was also highlighted - 26%

### Housing

Many people did not want to see any more housing in the Parish as they liked the village atmosphere and were concerned about additional traffic and the impact on wildlife. Some thought that limited housing (but no more estates) would be acceptable with a range of suggestions as to the type of housing required, e.g. bungalows, young family, affordable, disabled/sheltered housing. The majority of

people were concerned about the encroachment of Bridgwater towards the Parish and the development of land towards Woolavington and Pawlett. Residents expressed concern regarding the potential loss of countryside and the need to preserve village life. An area in which to cycle and the peacefulness of the surrounding countryside were mentioned as being valued.

- The majority of people (53%) do not want any more houses built in the parish, with 56% citing loss of rural character and 54% citing roads and infrastructure issues as the main reasons.
- If new houses were to be built the most favoured (42%) are starter homes followed by family homes (39%)
- Most people feel that it is important to maintain the countryside between:
  - The parish and Bridgwater – 82%
  - The parish and Woolavington – 81%
  - The parish and Pawlett – 76%
- The most valued elements of the countryside around the parish are:
  - Openness – 71%
  - A place for walking or rambling – 69%
  - Tranquillity – 61%

### Local Facilities

Respondents recognised the value of local shopping facilities

- Local facilities are well used, with 85% of people using the corner shop, 81% the post office and 58% using the butchers, although only 24% said they use the hairdressers
- Most people said the main reasons for shopping in Puriton are to support local shops (66%) and because they need last minute items (54%)



### Major Developments

The majority of residents received information regarding past and future developments via leaflets/post, village meetings/drop in sessions and newspapers/newsletters. Word of mouth, internet/email and notices in shops were also found to be useful. When asked to express a preference of how they would like to receive information, the majority of people stated they preferred to receive information through their door and to be able to attend meetings to discuss the issues.

Residents did express significant concerns regarding further developments including the amount of traffic with light, noise and air pollution as well as the rural nature of the Parish being lost along with the loss of wildlife and the threat to the general quality of life.

In terms of possible benefits from development, some expressed that they could see no benefits and were concerned about promises being made but not kept. When asked what we should be seeking as part of a planning application while some expressed a preference to stay as we are, to retain open spaces and peace; there

were suggestions such as high speed broadband, improvement of play facilities and other improvements to the appearance of the village.

- With the exception of Hinkley C (54%), less than 50% of people feel that they are informed about these proposed major developments (ROF – 48%, Wind turbines – 43% and pylons – 35%)
- Even fewer people feel that they had been informed of developments already in place such as the solar panel park (23%), Morrisons (25%) and EDF (34%)
- There are serious concerns about the effects of developments. The main ones are:
  - Difficulty in entering and leaving the parish – 83%
  - Increase in traffic volume – 80%
  - Increased delays getting in and out of Bridgwater – 74%
  - Route of any new roads – 68%
  - Disruption by construction traffic – 59%

Few people perceive benefits/opportunities arising from developments. The main one is improved access to and egress from the parish – 59%

The need for proper consultation following best practice guidance which reached all sections of the community was considered to be extremely important.

### Young People

Young people expressed a desire for sports facilities (football, basket ball, hockey, netball, BMX), classes (zumba, dance) as well as improved play facilities for younger children and a youth club for older children. Holiday clubs using the sports centre were also suggested.

### Any Other points

There were many other points which residents raised, too numerous to list here but which will be made available for comment at the next public drop in session so that full discussion may take place.

## 5. Consultation on the Draft Plan

Following analysis of the earlier consultation a draft plan was prepared and published for comment.

A second consultation drop-in was held at the Village hall on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2012. As before the event was advertised by leaflets, notices and signs posted in prominent locations around the village. Copies of the draft Parish Plan were also made available for inspection prior to the drop-in event in a number of shops and public places in the village.

A series of boards were displayed at the drop-in event summarising the findings of the previous consultation stage and summarising the content of the Plan. Copies of the draft plan were also made available at the event.

As before members of the Steering Group were available to answer questions and explain the intention of the Parish Plan. A separate area was provided to ensure that the views of children and youths were captured. Around 250 people attended this event. All attendees were asked to provide comments on the plan and provide suggestions on any areas which had not been addressed in the earlier consultation stage.

Members of the Parish Council were also in attendance to take advantage of the drop in event to meet and chat with parishioners.

Overall the consultation event confirmed that the draft plan reflected the views of attendees and addressed comments received during the previous consultation event. However, for completeness the following provides a summary of issues raised at the second drop-in event:

**Concerns**

- Fly tipping
- Encroachment from development
- Parking and traffic
- Safe and convenient access to the A39
- Cold Callers

**Would like**

- Summary of newsletter emailed
- Prescription deliveries
- The opportunity to have a say on future development proposals

**Aspirations**

- Improved access to A39 which reduces queuing at peak times
- Improved parking for the school
- A coordinated scheme of traffic calming and safe pedestrian routes
- Improved facilities for the elderly
- Improved walking/cycling routes to Bridgwater
- Community Woodland to protect the village from encroachment
- Informal Recreation Park
- Private funding initiatives and on-going business links between the school and local businesses
- Improved footpath/cycleway/bridleway network
- Youth specific recreation
- Internet facilities
- Skate Park
- Repairs to the Church

- Digitisation for parish records
- Play facilities West of village
- Major improvements to the car park and entrance to the Sports Centre.
- The installation of mains drainage at the Sports Centre
- General refurbishment of the Sports Centre
- The provision of a skate park

## 6. Key Actions

The following section provides a summary of actions in response to the key issues raised.

### Leisure and Amenities

- Improve the use of the sports centre for all parts of the community
  - Investigate better access
  - Investigate improved car parking
  - Improve communication on activities
- Identify an informal recreation area
- Maintain the countryside between:
  - The parish and Bridgwater
  - The parish and Woolavington
  - The parish and Pawlett
- Review major development proposals to ensure the visual quality of the area is not harmed
- Consider schemes to identify leisure opportunities in the village (walking or rambling etc)

### Communication

- Continue to highlight the benefits of the parish newsletter/website and identify ways to improve use
- Explore the possibility of a community website
- Improve communication between the various social committees within the community
- Require prospective developers to communicate clearly to all members of the community their proposals setting out in detail any likely impacts on the village

### Safety in our Community

- Ensure neighbourhood watch coverage across the village
- Improve links with the Police
- Re-launch Community Speedwatch Scheme
- Designate the whole Parish as a 'No Cold Calling Zone' and Neighbourhood watch area
- Require prospective developers to demonstrate how their proposals will maintain the safety of our community

### Transport

- Encourage greater use of transport other than the private motor car (car share schemes etc)
- Explore transport options for those unable to drive, especially for medical care

### Highways and Traffic

- Secure a continuous footpath and cycle network
- Introduction of road painting and local improvements in problem areas
- Seek opportunities to introduce 20mph zone through centre of village and other traffic calming
- Secure pedestrian crossings along the Woolavington Road
- Consider improved road treatment outside shop to improve pedestrian safety
- Review HGV use along Woolavington Road and consider weight restrictions, vehicle routing along sensitive routes
- Establish missing parts of footpath along Woolavington Road from Puriton Park to Woolavington
- Improve road junctions into and out of village to allow safe egress and reduced queuing at peak times

- Seek detailed consultation on any major proposals affecting the village with potential assistance from highways consultant
- Investigate the possibility of parking area for car sharers to alleviate problem of using lay-bys and roads close to A39/M5.

### Housing

- Prepare position statement in relation to the circumstances where housing would be considered appropriate including preferred location.

### Local Facilities

- Encourage the use of local shops and services

### Major Developments

- Improve local knowledge of major projects affecting the village, possibly a central resource on the website
- Ensure any major proposals do not encroach on the open countryside surrounding the village
- Establish formal mechanisms to engage with the promoters of major projects affecting the village (i.e. liaison group meetings) with a view to highlighting the following issues:
  - Difficulty in entering and leaving the parish
  - Increase in traffic volume
  - Noise, air and other pollution
  - Increased delays getting in and out of Bridgwater
  - Route of any new roads including
  - Disruption by construction traffic
  - Local benefits

### Young People

- Consider enhancing teenage recreation areas
- Identify local employment opportunities for locals
- Establish junior play areas for 5 to 11 year olds
- Improve toddler play areas

## 7. Future Work

The following work is considered necessary in relation to the preparation of future updates of this Plan and the specific actions highlighted in section 5.

- Ensure future changes in the village are reviewed against the findings of the Parish Plan
- Further consultation with residents - particularly the young people
- Agree a programme to review the Plan
- Raise awareness for future versions of the Plan
- Secure funding for future consultation
- Consider developing a Village Design Statement and/or Neighbourhood Plan
- Secure community funding and investment from major businesses and other potential bodies with an interest in Parish Life

