

Harberton Parish Neighbourhood Plan

Community Conversation: A consultation on priorities and ideas for our parish

This note summarises what was said at an open community gathering in Harbertonford primary school on 10 June 2023. The purpose of the event was to get a sense of what the main priorities and objectives should be for our Neighbourhood Plan, which is due to be finalised around the end of 2023. It was also intended to show up any areas where further, more detailed consultation might be needed.

Participants were divided into groups of about five to discuss a series of three questions:

- What do we love about living here?
- What challenges and opportunities do we foresee over the next 10 years?
- What would you most like to see happen here by 2033, and how could that be achieved?

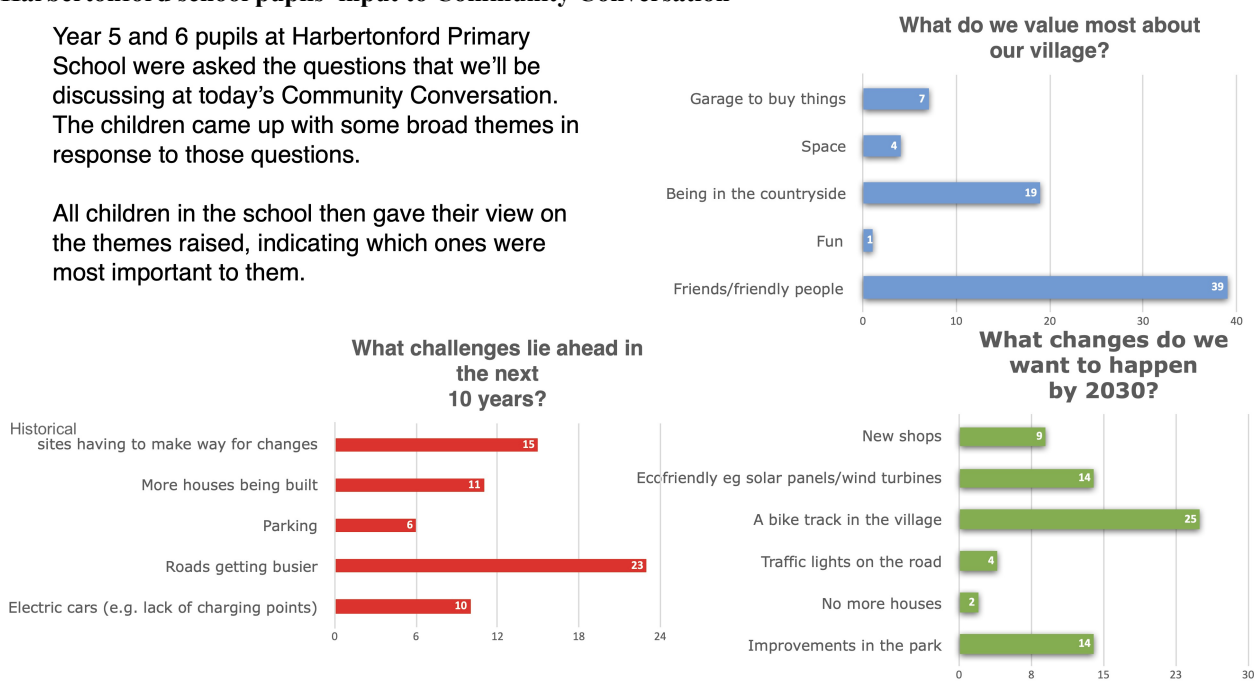
Volunteer "scribes" took notes of what each group said (the full text and photographs of these are available on request). This document summarises the conversations based on those notes and on debriefings from the scribes. Harbertonford school also consulted its pupils about the same questions, and their responses are summarised in the box overleaf.

People who were unable to attend the event are welcome to email their own responses to the three questions to Harbertonneighbourhoodplan@gmail.com by 31 August 2023. Anyone in the parish is also welcome to comment on this document, eg express anything important they feel has not been said, or if they agree or disagree with anything in it, by the same date. We will incorporate these further responses and comments into a final version of the document, which will be published on the parish website and used, along with other information, as a basis for drafting the final version of our Neighbourhood Plan.

Harbertonford school pupils' input to Community Conversation

Year 5 and 6 pupils at Harbertonford Primary School were asked the questions that we'll be discussing at today's Community Conversation. The children came up with some broad themes in response to those questions.

All children in the school then gave their view on the themes raised, indicating which ones were most important to them.



Community Conversation: Overview

What we LOVE

COMMUNITY

Friendly - connection - diverse
belonging - empowerment

Amenities

Post office/shops - halls - churches -
playing fields/parks - school -
allotments - pub - etc

Activities & groups

NATURE

Wildlife - river - trees - green spaces
- beauty

CHARACTER

Rural - quiet - safe - heritage

PRIORITIES

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

More affordable/social provision - planning policies on
second homes? - Creative solutions (cohousing, tiny homes,
eco/smallholdings, mutual care communities, etc)

ATTRACT YOUNG FAMILIES

Affordable family homes - facilities for young people -
school capacity?

MEET NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE

Options for downsizing - local health/social provision

SUPPORT COMMUNITY

- Better "hub"(s) (post office, cafe, refurb village hall, use of
churches etc) - Support groups & activities, and local
business - Support informal/mutual care networks

RESPOND TO CLIMATE CHANGE

- Community renewable energy - ecologically sustainable
development (eg solar, EV) - home insulation - local food
production (eg allotments) - green transport

PROTECT NATURE and make it more accessible

- Avoid development overburdening infrastructure (roads,
parking, sewage) - More protected green/wild spaces - More
allotments/local food - Expand footpath network - Better
recycling/composting facilities - Protect river - Ecofriendly
public buildings (eg rainwater capture)

MINIMISE IMPACT OF CARS AND A381

20mph - signage - safe footways - more residents' parking in
Hford - bypass? - better bus services - better cycling/walking
routes, - e-bike/car share schemes

CHALLENGES

HOUSING

Affordability - availability
Second/holiday homes

PRESSURE FROM DEVELOPMENT

On infrastructure: road - parking
sewage - school - etc
On nature

AGE MIX

Ageing population - fewer young
families/young people

CLIMATE CHANGE & BIODIVERSITY LOSS

Water resources - floods - food
security

What we love about our parish

Community

Overall, the importance of community was emphasised more than anything else in the conversations, and this was also echoed in what the children said. It was clear that the people who live here and the connections between them really matter to us. Our community was described as "friendly", "welcoming", "sociable", "informal", "not anonymous", with a sense of "good will", "openness", "belonging" and "neighbourliness". The diversity of people here (eg ages, skills, length of residency here) was appreciated.

Participants valued how people help each other here, and are committed to the place and engaged with what's happening locally ("being connected and involved", "responsible"). This "people infrastructure" was identified as a key resource ("a variety of amazing people living here gives us a fantastic network to make things happen").

People appreciated the many groups and activities (eg cricket club, Sustainable Harbourne Valley, youth club, pantomime, Transition Streets, village show, open gardens), and the amenities that provide contexts for people to come together (eg school, community shop, allotments, village halls, Harberton pub, cricket pitch, farm shop, playing fields and play parks). Participants also valued the parish's Facebook pages and newsletters.

Several people mentioned the value of the whole community working together to influence our future ("We have a say, people listen", "No head honchos here"), and said they'd like more days like this one where we can come together to talk about what's important and how to create positive change.

Nature

The other aspect of the parish that people most said they loved was the nature and wildlife here, the river and the trees, and the beauty of the natural environment. "We're a community that cares about the countryside", and we have a "vibrant sustainability focus" (volunteer river monitors were mentioned as an example).

Character

Participants valued the quiet, rural character of the parish - dark skies at night, a safe place for kids to play freely, plenty of green spaces both around and within the villages (eg village green, churchyards, playing fields and playparks). People appreciated its local traditional "feel", including around the village centres ("still quintessentially a Devon village"), and liked that the place is generally "well cared for". The historic nature of the older buildings, eg the churches, was also valued. Both the rural and historic aspects of the parish were also valued by the children.

Challenges

Participants identified four key challenges they felt we will need to respond to over the next 10 years:

Challenge 1: Pressure on housing availability and affordability

Rapid increases in housing prices and rents made it more difficult for local people to stay in the parish, made it harder for young people and young families to move here, and led to inequality. Some concern was expressed that purchases of second homes and holiday lets could make this worse in future. The rise of remote working post-covid meant we could expect more people to move to the area.

Challenge 2: Strain on infrastructure and nature from new development

Various concerns were expressed about new development in and around the parish putting too much strain on existing infrastructure - eg parking facilities in Harbertonford; the A381 was already too busy, and housing development around Dartmouth was making it worse; our narrow lanes were prone to congestion; sewage infrastructure was already overburdened. Capacity at the primary school was also mentioned as a possible constraint.

Challenge 3: Changing age profile of parish - The parish population was ageing, with a decreasing number of young people and families.

Challenge 4: Climate change and biodiversity loss

Several aspects of this were highlighted, including drought and extreme weather, leading to increased flood risk and challenges to local farming, and also threats to food security. The health of our river was a repeated theme ("where are the fish?"), with concerns expressed about sewage discharge. Several participants mentioned the need to insulate houses and to reduce carbon emissions, and how challenging this can be for older properties. Many people welcomed trends towards local electricity generation and the opportunity this creates for cheaper energy for our community. But some people were also concerned that wind turbines and ground-based solar panels could be harmful to nature in the parish and undermine its character. The shift towards low carbon transport was seen as creating challenges, like ensuring there are enough electric vehicle charging points, but also opportunities, like creating better public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure. The children expressed a clear wish for low carbon transport and electricity generation.

Priorities and objectives for next 10 years

Participants came up with a range of ideas for objectives for what should happen here over the next 10 years. These ideas have been grouped into a series of overall priorities, and linked to one or more of the chapters of our Neighbourhood Plan. Some ideas, while potentially very fruitful, need further work to make them into more specific objectives and clarify how they could be achieved, and the Neighbourhood Plan process will seek to facilitate this as far as is possible in coming months (see below).

What's the big idea?!

The Hub

At the end of the event, all groups were asked to share the single idea they most wanted to see happen by 2033. Remarkably, most groups came up with much the same vision - one which brings together many of the ideas and themes listed below.

The idea is of a community "hub" - a place where people can meet each other, gather and do activities, and also where there are resources to help people make positive changes in their own homes and also in the community more generally. People imagined it could be part of an existing amenity, like the community shop or a village hall; or at a new site. Here are some of ideas voiced for what the "Hub" could include:

- Community cafe
- A space for kids
- Support/advice for food growing
- Locally grown food on sale - support local growers
- Arts activities and resources
- Place where local groups could meet - a venue for talks and activities
- A place for meetings
- Electric vehicle charging outside
- Advice and resources on home insulation, cutting energy costs
- Simple advice and resources on health and wellbeing.
- Store of a "library of things" (eg tools) available to share or hire at low cost
- "Bring and take" area - leave things and clothes you don't need/want, take things you do

Priority 1: Make housing more affordable for local people

- By "using existing housing creatively as well as limited new provision".
- Housing: facilitate and support development applications for affordable housing for local people (including self-build options). "More social housing".
- Housing: identify planning policies that effectively restrict use of housing stock for second homes and holiday lets.
- Housing: look for opportunities for new/radical models of sustainable development eg small sustainable dwellings on smallholdings.

Priority 2: Attract new young families and young people

- Housing: Create small properties into which older residents can downsize if they wish, freeing up family homes for incoming young families. (Eg "tiny homes")
- Housing: Ensure an adequate supply of larger homes (perhaps with gardens) for families.
- Amenities: Provide more activities and opportunities for children and young people, eg improve playpark, better sports facilities at playing field(s).
- Amenities: Evaluate whether capacity at the school is a constraint.

Priority 3: Ensure the needs of older people can be met

- Housing: Look for opportunities to create assisted/sheltered living facilities; or housing that encourages mutual care within the community (eg "co-housing", or the "Dutch model" of younger and older people living alongside each other) or within families (larger properties housing several generations together).
- Encourage local health, wellbeing and social care delivery (eg mobile health services,

voluntary mutual care networks)

Priority 4: Protect nature and make it more accessible

- Housing: Ensure new development has adequate sewage infrastructure to avoid further overflows into river.
- Amenities: Protect and increase provision of allotment space, and water supply to existing allotments.
- Environment: Ensure existing green spaces are protected from development, and create more accessible, protected green spaces (eg community gardens/orchards), eg via a "call for green sites" (as opposed to a call for development sites).
- Environment: Create more footpaths, eg along river ("moor to sea" walking and wildlife corridor); or signed/mapped "nature walk" routes.
- Encourage wild areas and hedgerows for wildlife.
- Environment: Ensure provision of full recycling facilities in Harberton.
- Environment: Set up community composting schemes.
- Environment: Provide access to the amenity land near Palmer's dam.
- Environment: Improve the water quality and biodiversity of our river.

Priority 5: Respond to climate change

- Housing: New developments to be designed and built sustainably, eg prioritise walking and cycling; include solar and electric vehicle charging.
- Transport/Housing: install electric vehicle charging points.
- Transport: set up system to facilitate car pooling.
- Energy: Facilitate the development of community renewable energy in appropriate places which reduces our energy bills and/or provides financial benefits for the community.
- Energy: Facilitate mutual support and skill/knowledge sharing to insulate homes.
- Encourage local food production (eg via allotments - see above).
- Encourage efficient water use, eg rainwater capture on public buildings.

Priority 6: Support community and empower local action

- Ensure community shop is well supported and used.
- Create new open access "hubs" for people to come together. Ideas included: a cafe at the shop/pub, new pub in Harbertonford; make more use of the churches, which are underused.
- Support community groups and activities. Ideas: refurbish Harbertonford village hall to make it more comfortable; exercise trail and tennis court on playing field(s). Create a combined newsletter for the whole parish.
- Economy: Support local businesses, eg create better advertising/directories for local businesses.

Priority 7: Minimise the impact of car use and the A381

- Housing: new developments to minimise effects on parking and traffic flows locally, and to include off-road parking.
- Transport: build bypass around Harbertonford.
- Transport: enforce a 20mph zone in Harbertonford and improve signage to make it safer.
- Transport: improve bus services.
- Transport: create safe, signed cycling and walking routes between Harberton, Harbertonford and Totnes; and elsewhere (eg on path of old Kingsbridge railway?).
- Transport: create shared e-bike scheme.
- Transport: create more residents' parking areas in Harbertonford (eg near shop).

Next steps

Part of the purpose of the event was to identify areas where further, more focused consideration and consultation might be needed. We think three possible areas emerge from the conversations where, time and resources permitting, further work could be helpful:

- **Community energy:** considerable support was voiced for community green energy schemes that would reduce our energy costs and funnel money to the community; but there was also concern about ground based solar and wind turbines. Further information and conversation on this could be useful.
- **Young families:** finding out more about what would attract or prevent young people and young families from moving here. ("Where are the millennials? What do they think?")
- **Connecting community, farming and nature:** farming was identified as an crucial and valued aspect of our parish, and it could have a big influence on some of the strategic priorities identified (eg protecting nature, responding to climate change, local food production). It could be helpful to hear more about the perspectives of farmers and landowners.

In addition, there will be a consultation on whether specific sites should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan as preferred locations for new development. A number of potential sites have been identified in recent years, including through a call for sites in 2022. Consultants have been engaged to assess objectively which of these sites are suitable for development. Their findings will be presented to the community, and comments invited, in the early autumn.

Stay informed - or get involved

Sign up for updates on the Neighbourhood Plan process at <http://eepurl.com/iswoq-/>

Everyone in the parish is welcome to volunteer to join the Neighbourhood Plan steering group or to attend its meetings as an observer. Minutes of meetings and update on the plan are published on the parish council website at <https://www.harbertonparishcouncil.org/hnp/>