



# Appleton with Eaton Community Plan

Final Report & Action Plan  
July 2010

# APPLETON WITH EATON COMMUNITY PLAN

## PART 1: The Context

**Section A:** The parish of Appleton with Eaton is situated five miles south west of Oxford. It consists of the village of Appleton and the hamlet of Eaton, together totalling some 900 inhabitants. It is surrounded by farmland and woods, and bordered by the Thames to the north-west. Part of the parish is in the Oxford Green Belt, and the centre of Appleton is a conservation area. It is administered by Oxfordshire County Council, The Vale of the White Horse District Council and Appleton with Eaton Parish Council.

### Appleton with Eaton

Appleton and Eaton have long histories. Appleton is known to have been occupied by the Danes in 871 AD, and both settlements are mentioned in the Domesday Book. Eaton celebrated its millennium in 1968. The parish's buildings bear witness to its long history, with the Manor House and St Laurence Church dating back to the twelfth century, and many houses which are centuries old.

Appleton's facilities include a community shop and part-time post office, a church, a chapel, a village hall, a primary school, a pre-school, a pub, a sportsfield and a tennis club. Eaton has a pub. There is a limited bus service linking the parish with Oxford, Swindon, Southmoor and Abingdon. There are some twenty-five clubs and societies in Appleton, and a strong sense of community.

Businesses in the parish include three large farms, a long-established bell-hanging firm, a saddlery, an electrical systems firm and an increasing number of small businesses run from home. According to the Oxfordshire Data Observatory, levels of income, employment, education, health and housing are higher than the averages for the county and the region, but this is, of course, a generalisation which is not necessarily valid for all residents.

**Section B:** A community plan is about shaping a community's future for the next 5-10 years. It aims to engage people and motivate them to be involved.

### The Community Plan Process

The Appleton with Eaton Community Plan started in November 2008, with input to the Parish Council from Anton Nath of the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council. The Parish Council decided to proceed with the idea, and a Steering Group of seven members drawn from the community was established. This Group was awarded a £500 grant from ORCC. It set about finding out what were the advantages and disadvantages of living in the parish, and what were the issues people wanted tackled. Its initial research was conducted via notice boards in pubs and other public places, primary school book bags, a brainstorming session with the local youth group and a presentation by Anton Nath at the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2009.

This research period culminated in a Village Event in the Village Hall on 16 May 2009, with 22 village organisations represented and over 140 people of all ages attending. From the suggestions people made, a questionnaire was devised, covering topics such as Transport and Mobility, Community Facilities and Services, and the Environment.

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed at the end of October 2009 by a team of 22 volunteer helpers. 292 completed questionnaires were collected, which represented an 80% return. 614 people, of all ages from 10 upwards, responded.

The data was inputted onto an Excel spreadsheet by a team of 12, analysed, and presented in powerpoint form to a public Report Meeting in the School Hall on 11 February 2010. It was then distributed in summary form via the Appleton Advertiser, and made available on the parish website.

## PART 2: The Action Plan

*This Action Plan deals with the issues highlighted by responses to the Appleton with Eaton Community Plan questionnaire. It has three sections. Section A summarises those aspects of the parish which people value and want preserved. Section B deals with those aspects where change was wanted in the relatively short term; some of these have already seen progress, others remain to be achieved. Section C deals with longer-term issues for action.*

### Section A: THE SHOP AND THE POST OFFICE

#### Aspects of the parish which are valued by the community and need to be preserved

The shop has been run by the community since 2000, with around 90 volunteer helpers. 69% of respondents use it on a weekly or daily basis, and only 3% never shop there. The survey showed very high overall satisfaction with the service provided and with the premises.



Appleton Community Shop

#### THE CHURCH

73% of respondents attend St Laurence Church either regularly or for special services or occasions. It is valued by 93%, in particular as a community asset, an interesting building, a place for worship, and/or a setting for special events such as weddings and funerals.



St Laurence Church, Appleton

#### THE VILLAGE HALL

The present building, opened in 1977, is used for many different activities and meetings. It was considered important to the future of the community by 87% of respondents.



Appleton Village Hall

#### APPLETON PRIMARY SCHOOL

The school has around 140 pupils aged 4-11. It was judged outstanding in its last Ofsted inspection in 2008. 86% of respondents considered it important to the future of the community.



Appleton Primary School

#### THE PUBLIC HOUSES

After the closure of The Thatched Tavern in 2006, the parish has two pubs, The Plough in Appleton and The Eight Bells in Eaton. 60% thought it was important to keep them functioning.

#### THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT

Appleton and Eaton are surrounded by farmland, used mainly for arable, dairy and sheep farming. 77% thought it important to maintain our rural environment.

#### THE BUILDINGS HERITAGE

Appleton with Eaton has a mixed housing stock which ranges from a twelfth century manor to houses from most decades of the twentieth century, and includes 39 listed buildings. 54% thought it important to maintain our buildings heritage.

#### THE PRE-SCHOOL

The Pre-school received wide support in the initial consultations. It operates in the village hall, but needs its own premises. Suggestions were requested for a site for a new pre-school building, but no suitable location was suggested.



The Eight Bells, Eaton



Farmland, Eaton



Thatched cottage, Appleton



Northmoor Lock and Weir



Appleton Sportsfield

## THE APPLETON ADVERTISER

The monthly Appleton Advertiser is produced by the Church for the community, and delivered to every household in the parish. The questionnaire showed that at least 400 people read it, with many reading every section and only 106 reading none at all. This was an unexpectedly high number which confirmed that the paper publication still has an important role despite the new parish website. Several suggestions were made for changes to The Advertiser, which came very conveniently at the time the previous long-serving editorial team finished and a new editor took over. Several of the suggestions made have already been put into place, most notably a new design and layout.

## THE PARISH WEBSITE

The website is a comparatively new facility for the village. It is updated regularly and many people receive e-mail prompts when important additions are made. At the time of the survey it was used by 41% of respondents, but usage has increased considerably since then. It has proved very useful during the snow disruption in January 2010 and other events where the rapid dissemination of information has been important.

## THE GREEN BELT

90% of respondents wish to see the Oxford Green Belt maintained, with 72% of these feeling very strongly about the issue. The rural and historic features of our natural and built environment have helped define Appleton with Eaton geographically and culturally, and this strong desire to maintain them should be a major factor in any future proposed development.

## NORTHMOOR LOCK AND WEIR

Situated about 1 km from Appleton, with good pedestrian access (although not a designated right of way), this is a popular walk for local people. The Keeper's Cottage, Lock and Paddle-and-Rymer Weir were built in 1895 and are of unique historic value. The weir was refurbished sympathetically in 1995 using some of the original structures, and given a working life of more than 60 years. In 2009 the Environment Agency (EA) decided to replace the weir with an automated structure, citing health and safety reasons.

345 questionnaire respondents wished to maintain the Paddle-and-Rymer Weir. In March 2010 when the EA announced its detailed plans for the work on the weir, a Weir Action Group (WAG) was formed to save the weir if possible, or to negotiate an appropriate access route if the weir is to be replaced with an automated system. Individuals and the WAG have campaigned vigorously through MPs, the press, radio and television. The EA planned to start the work in April 2010 but has announced that this will be delayed for one year.

With the EA, the Parish Council and the WAG working together, it is hoped that a solution acceptable to both the EA and the people of Appleton with Eaton will be reached.

## THE SURGERY

Integral to Appleton Village Hall is a small doctors' surgery. This is run by doctors from The Malthouse in Abingdon. The surgery is open on Wednesday mornings from 9.00 am to 11.30 am every week. It has long been a concern that the surgery might be closed. The survey therefore asked how people would be affected if that happened. The number of people who would be adversely affected if the surgery closed was surprisingly high. More than 260 people said it would inconvenience them and of these more than 60 said it would make it very difficult or impossible to see their GP. These results provide a powerful argument for keeping the surgery open. This is a community issue which the Parish Council needs to ensure is promoted at every opportunity.

**Section B:**  
**Issues for Action – now and  
in the near future**

**A PLAYGROUND AND RECREATION AREA**

The villages do not at present have a play space or playground for children. Providing such a facility was considered important or very important by 80% of respondents. The Community Plan survey coincided with the formation of group of volunteers dedicated to building a playground in Appleton. They too needed to survey the community and so the two surveys were distributed and collected together with both groups sharing the work. The results of the Community Plan Survey have already been used to help gain support from the Parish Council which now has a playground subcommittee. A site at the end of Badswell Lane has been identified and applications for grant funding have been made, with some success. With the level of support now apparent there is every prospect the new playground will be a reality in 2011.

**BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS**

Appleton with Eaton is only five miles from Oxford, which is one of the foremost centres of learning in the world. Yet internet connection via broadband is very slow in most of the parish. Most households are unable to use iPlayer services and other streamed video. Not only is this unsatisfactory for normal domestic usage but it affects the many young people and children for whom school and college courses rely on the internet. It also affects local businesses and individuals who work from home. The community is, however, taking action. During the course of the Community Plan project a public meeting was held and an action group formed. This group is collecting hard evidence of the problems, exploring alternative methods of providing broadband services and lobbying British Telecom and the main Internet Service Providers to upgrade the infrastructure.

**MOBILE PHONE COVERAGE**

As with broadband, most of the parish suffers from very bad mobile phone network coverage. However, the survey results confirmed anecdotal evidence that Vodafone provides a reasonably good service here. The solution is therefore in the hands of individual residents.

**ROAD SAFETY**

Several aspects of road safety in Appleton caused concern, in particular parking problems, pedestrian access and heavy traffic. The main issue by far involved parking in the vicinity of the primary school. This has been a problem for some time and several meetings have taken place between the Parish Council, police and school representatives, the most recent of which was held in early February 2010. As a result of this meeting, several actions are being taken, including a risk assessment of the area, leaf ets to parents about parking safely and consideration of a minibus to and from Southmoor.

There was notable support for improved pedestrian access around the war memorial (30% in favour of a footway or crossing) and for a footway along Oaksmere (42%). Both these issues should be periodically reviewed especially in the case of Oaksmere in connection with the bus stops on the A420. Heavy traffic also caused concern, with 42% of respondents complaining. Generally these problems are dealt with on an individual basis, and need to be reviewed accordingly. A recent success in this respect has been the postponement of the work at Northmoor Weir, due partly to concerns about the heavy traffic which would have used Oaksmere, Eaton Road and Badswell Lane during construction works.

## FLOODING

13% of houses are known to have been flooded in the last 10 years, with 44% affected by flooding to house, garden and/or road. The most frequent responses to what should be done to alleviate flooding were improvements in the clearing and maintenance of drains and ditches. A Flood and Rainwater Group has been set up by the Parish Council and a £5000 grant has been received from the Vale of White Horse District Council. Some of this money has been spent on an emergency rapid response system of pumps, hoses, safety equipment and aquasacs. Flood wardens should be appointed soon. Many drains have recently been cleared and a new culvert built under Millway Lane by the Vale of the White Horse District Council. Work by Oxfordshire Highways Department in Netherton, Oaksmere and Badswell Lane is planned in 2010-11. It is an ongoing process not only to minimise the damage caused by flooding but also to reduce the risk of its recurrence. Residents can play their part by ensuring that ditches on or beside their land are kept clear and free-flowing.

## POTHoles

57% of respondents complained of potholes and, as in many other parts of the country, these have become worse after last winter's severe weather. Individuals can act by registering complaints by phone or email with Oxfordshire Highways. In the short term we may need to mark the worst examples with cones and in the medium/long term improve the drainage near the worst sites. A road safety group (similar to the flood group) may be the best way to monitor this and other road safety problems in the future.

## LITTER

There is obviously a wish to continue previous efforts to keep Appleton with Eaton litter-free. A litter group has been formed and during one Saturday in early March volunteers collected a very large amount of litter.

## DOG FOULING

The most popular measure to help with dog fouling was more waste bins with bags. This has not yet been achieved. At the Report Meeting on 11 Feb 2010 it was suggested that people raise the issue with offending owners and that a notice should be placed in The Advertiser. The Neighbourhood Action Group has taken on board this contentious issue and has published an article in The Advertiser.

## **Section C: BUS SERVICES** **Issues for Action - in the longer term**

The main issues which emerged from the questions about bus services concerned the 63 and 66 services to Oxford. There was a demand for a daily 63 service instead of the current Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday service. The service to Abingdon was not well supported, but has recently been reviewed and will be continued. The late bus back from Oxford now operates six nights a week. There will be a further review of bus services in the near future and the Parish Council will obviously lobby on behalf of the parish. It will help, however, if more people could use the existing services in the meantime as the questionnaire revealed that few people used the services more than once a week.

## RECYCLING

53% of respondents were in favour of a recycling point in Appleton and 30% were opposed. It is recommended that further consideration of this issue is delayed until after the implementation of the new Vale of the White Horse District Council waste disposal scheme in October 2010.

## THE SPORTSFIELD

Appleton is fortunate in having a large, well cared for sportsfield with a cricket square and practice nets, senior and junior football pitches and a training area. It also has a modern changing pavilion and car parking. It is owned by the Parish Council and paid for through the precept, subscriptions from teams, donations and fees from private users. However, it is some distance from the village and there is no pavement along the stretch of road leading to it. As a consequence it tends to be used almost exclusively by organized teams/clubs with very little casual recreational use. Allowing for these constraints the survey results still showed a surprisingly low level of usage (even taking into account that sports teams are often drawn from a wider area than just the parish). Fewer than 170 people reported using the sportsfield in the twelve months before the survey. Of those nearly 100 said it was in connection with teams, as players or spectators.

Clearly the sportsfield is important for the teams that use it, and encouraging people to engage in team sports is a worthy cause, especially for young people. Yet there remains significant unused potential. In the past, there have been several successful functions held at the sportsfield including fetes and barbecues, particularly when raising funds for the pavilion. The parish needs to organise similar events in the future in order to realise the potential of this valuable facility and to bring it to the attention of more villagers.

## SPEEDING

Speeding was considered a problem particularly on Netherton and Eaton roads and Oaksmere. The most popular suggestions to control speeding were to use speed indicator devices (40%) and/or a 20mph limit (21%). There have been several speed checks done in Appleton over the years and there is a lot of information available regarding the relative methods used to control speeding in residential areas around the country. Further analysis will need to be done in conjunction with the local police and Parish Council and this could be another item on the agenda of a road safety committee.

## FOOTPATHS

Approximately half of respondents walk a footpath about once a week or more. There was overwhelming support in favour of maintaining footpaths to keep them passable.

The long-term maintenance of designated rights of way is an ongoing issue. Paths such as that to Besselsleigh Woods from Appleton and the Green Lane to Appleton Wharf are examples that would greatly benefit from good maintenance.

In the questionnaire many households proposed independently that the Lock Road from Badswell Lane to Northmoor Lock and the Thames Path should become a right of way for pedestrians. This complex issue will require further investigation and discussion.

## **PART 3: The Volunteer Section**

A very good response was made to the Volunteer Section at the end of the questionnaire which asked for additional volunteers to help with several village needs.

Of 86 new volunteers, 27 volunteered to help with the proposed playground; 11 to help in the shop; 21 with footpath clearance; 20 for pond restoration; 21 to work in the woodlands and 20 in other habitats; 19 to clear ditches; an impressive 60 to clear litter; 4 to help with pre-school fund-raising; 3 for the website and 13 to investigate the possibility of alternative energy sources. At the Report Meeting in February 2010 volunteers from each of the new groups came forward to act as team leaders to organise the activities.

To date there has been the large-scale village litter pick in early March 2010, and other volunteer groups have begun to operate.

## **PART 4: Acknowledgements**

With thanks and acknowledgements to:

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Anton Nath and Oxfordshire Rural Community Council

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Janet Thompson and the Appleton Advertiser

Graham Rose and the parish website: [www.appletonwitheaton.org.uk](http://www.appletonwitheaton.org.uk)

The Community Shop

The 250 Club

The Playground Committee

Ian Bowen-Morris

Nick Withers

Other village organisations and individual volunteers

Appleton Primary School

Thames Valley Police

The 1998 Appleton with Eaton Parish Appraisal

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