

# BLAXHALL PARISH PLAN

*1<sup>st</sup> Edition – February 2004*

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*Prepared by Blaxhall villagers with the support of **Suffolk ACRE** and*

## **BLAXHALL - A vibrant Rural Community in Suffolk**

Blaxhall is a secluded Suffolk village rurally located approximately 9 miles Northeast of Woodbridge and 6 miles West of the coastal town of Aldeburgh along the Alde River. Blaxhall's population of some 230 people has lost its shops and post office but retained a public house (locally famous for generations of Suffolk folk music), a C of E Church (which has worked to interact with other local denominations), a small village hall and a recently modernised and expanded Youth Hostel. Blaxhall also has an international Language School, an international motorcycle scramble circuit and is within 1 mile of the internationally renowned Snape Maltings concert hall. The only routes into Blaxhall are along single-track roads (part of the National Cycle Network) or by foot (or horse) across the SSSI designated Blaxhall Heath and Tunstall Forest (including along the Suffolk Coastal Path). The 123 homes in Blaxhall are widely dispersed around two main residential groupings, Mill Common and Stone Common, situated about 1 miles apart. Blaxhall community includes farming, an agricultural contracting business plus many current day, non-agricultural, skills and professions and has a lively, communicative spirit.

### **What is the Blaxhall Parish Plan?**

A local consensus, in a single document, on how the quality of life in Blaxhall might be maintained or improved in the future. The result of opportunities everyone in Blaxhall had to express their views on social, economic, environmental and any other aspects of life in the Parish.

### **How will the Parish Plan be used?**

Parish, District and County Councils will use it as guidance on local views.

Government and other agencies (such as the Lottery Fund) which provide funds for Parish projects may require applicants to provide this Parish Plan as evidence of local support for such projects.

***The Parish Plan will provide a signpost for future activities in the Parish, subject to ongoing review as projects come to fruition and issues develop.***

### **What are the benefits of a Parish Plan?**

It provides a snapshot of local views on Blaxhall's amenities, services and housing.

It provides a clear statement on What, Why, How and When in response to the local consensus for specific improvement projects.

It will support Blaxhall's funding application for the Village Hall refurbishment. There is strong local support (as evidenced in a village hall survey) for improving the facilities in the Village Hall whilst maintaining the character of the existing building.

It has provided Blaxhall the immediate benefit of a Countryside Agency grant (in excess of £3500) to purchase equipment needed to prepare a Parish Plan.

### **How was the Parish Plan Achieved?**

Members of the Parish Council invited all Blaxhall residents to a meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2003 to discuss the potential for a Blaxhall Parish Plan. Annette Gray, the Rural Services Officer from Suffolk ACRE, gave a presentation on the scope and benefits of the Parish Plan concept. There was more than 75% support, by a show of hands, for going ahead with a broad review of social, economic and environmental conditions within Blaxhall Parish leading to adoption of a Parish Plan. A Steering Group, comprising one Parish councillor (Steve Smedley) and 6 other residents (Jonathan Cutting, Jackie Oliver, Bob Mackenzie, Tony Salisbury, Maggie Grenham and Joy Shaw), was set up at the meeting and assisted by the Parish Clerk, Joyce Iszard.

The Steering Group adopted the objectives of

***(i) To work with all Blaxhall villagers to identify views on potential improvements in village amenities and environment; and***

***(ii) To attempt to obtain consensus on these views, and identify improvement projects, in the form of a Parish Plan by November 2003.***

The Steering Group sought and achieved funding and resources for developing a Parish Plan including a grant of up to £3,537 from the Countryside Agency, £291 from local benefactors, including the Parish Council, and offers of volunteers' time equivalent to £1981.

These resources were used to provide an "in-house" printing and display capability by purchasing a computer, printing equipment, camera and display boards. This capability is believed to have reduced the overall cost of preparing the Plan whilst providing Blaxhall with the immediate benefit of equipment for use in other village projects.

A variety of opportunities were provided to the villagers for input to the Plan including:

· ***May 2003, a door to door survey based on a simple survey form generated from Steering Group research as to which issues affected Blaxhall. These issues included those raised at the January 2003 meeting together with others identified by Steering Group members from previous village meetings, a 2002 village survey and limited Steering Group discussion with other residents. All villagers had an opportunity to expand the number of issues under consideration as part of the survey form;***

- *an exhibition on the Parish Plan in August 2003, which further raised awareness of the issues under consideration and provided opportunity to contribute on a potential Action Plan; and*
- *circulation of a draft copy of the Parish Plan and Action Plan to every Blaxhall residence in October 2003 for comment and approval (or rejection) in November 2003.*

**The results of this work formed the foundation for a local consensus to focus attention on those areas requiring immediate action.**

**This consensus was strengthened by the voting outcome from circulation of the draft Plan which provided a return from 82 villagers and a vote of 95% in support of adoption of the Plan by the village.**

" We are impressed by the amount of work that has been done and the comprehensive document produced. Very well done! "

" Good community spirit but poor opportunities for meeting on a social basis "

" Improvements are fine but let's not lose sight of what we've got here, beware of importing urbanisation "

" I hope the peace and tranquillity here will always be retained along with the community spirit "

" Work and live" has created Blaxhall – it needs work to be available to maintain character for the future or it will just be a dormitory / holiday place "

***The Parish Plan and Action Plan was formally adopted by the Blaxhall Parish Council on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2004.***

## May 2003 Pilot Survey for Parish Plan

115 questionnaires delivered

71% were completed and returned

" Blaxhall is a very happy and friendly village with a great many organised activities going on. Many people love it as it is so please do not try to change it except in a few ways as long as you keep the old-fashioned rural feeling that is still here "

" Very happy with Blaxhall "

" Blaxhall is a lovely village with just a few problems that local residents can probably solve. High contentment factor amongst local residents. Good community spirit - need more social/meeting opportunities "

" Care must be taken to maintain Blaxhall's unique peace and charm "

### The Good

***Blaxhall villagers saw certain aspects as good or very good: -***

<b>Youth Hostel</b>	<b>100% very good or adequate</b>	" Youth Hostel could have shop for basics, ie., milk, bread, cigarettes, papers? Probably not feasible. "
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<b>Footpaths</b>	<b>92%</b>	" Footpaths - lack of reinstatement after crop planting. Missing signs. "
<b>Environment</b>	<b>93%</b>	" Keep the busibodies off the heath let people enjoy it."
<b>The Church</b>	<b>95%</b>	" The church is very much alive but we need to try to get more children and young people. "
<b>Allotments</b>	<b>92%</b>	" Stone Common needs sorting. "

***The above items need action pointing to how they may be preserved and further improved. This action would be recorded in the adopted policy for each issue.***

### The Poor

***Villagers felt some aspects of Blaxhall were poor and required action: -***

#### **Missing Services – shops, Post Office, deliveries**

" Shop needed "

" A village shop is a must. It would be excellent as a general store and meeting place. "

"A question of economics"

Blaxhall lost its Post Office in the late 90's. The nearest PO and a general store are some 1.5 miles away in Snape.

#### ***ACTION***

*A volunteer group of villagers is to survey Blaxhall and surrounding areas to determine if the strongly expressed need for a shop would be met in practice by volunteers to staff the shop and customers to create an ongoing commercially viable enterprise.*

*A volunteer group of villagers is to investigate local Internet delivery services and how best these could be accessed by locals (or by others on behalf of locals without computer familiarity).*

#### **The VILLAGE's sole PUB needs a boost**

" This is a private business so policy is up to the landlord (but if he would be more inclusive, it might be jollier for the village)."

" It's a pity the pub is not more welcoming "

" Pub should encourage local people, a la carte & also good value food. People would eat out regularly if prices reasonable, etc. "

Blaxhall's pub has hosted generations of local folk music. More recently the pub's management has restricted opening hours. Also planning applications have been lodged which contained an attempt to impose a change of use from a public house to tourist accommodation for a significant portion of the current social area within the pub. The voting response and comments from Blaxhall villagers, collected as part of the Parish Plan process, are in the hands of the Suffolk Coastal District planners for their use in consideration of these applications. Blaxhall villagers' consensus, given at an extraordinary meeting of the Parish Council, was to oppose these changes. The Parish Council together with many villagers has formally objected to the change of use.

#### ***ACTION***

*The owners of the Pub should be encouraged by a representative group of villagers to welcome locals.*

*As this is the sole pub in the village, the views of the local authorities should be investigated by the Parish Council to ensure there could be no future change of use and that the pub physically remains adequate as a large social gathering point.*

#### **AFFORDABLE HOUSING is a concern**

"Attention needed to ensure local families can stay in Blaxhall"

" 2nd home owners should pay full Council Tax or more "

Blaxhall has some 123 houses, cottages, farmhouses and other residences of which approximately 13% could be regarded as "affordable" housing and approximately 20% are holiday lettings and weekend homes.

It should be noted that there was no local take-up of the new affordable housing in Jubilee Close. The views collected from villagers on Affordable Housing need further investigation to determine if they represent a real need or are just an expression of general concern.

#### ***ACTION***

*The Parish Council is to consult with local housing associations to obtain guidance on methods to determine the true demand for further affordable housing in Blaxhall including potentially raising funds for a Housing Needs Survey.*

#### **Remedy needed for FLOODING of roads and property**

" All roads need clearing after flooding "

" If any amount of rain all roads out or in, Blaxhall are flooded (not good) "

" Need urgent attention "

Many of the roads into and within Blaxhall suffer from flooding following heavy rainfall creating access difficulties particularly for pedestrians and cyclists.

Flash flooding also caused damage within a number of Blaxhall houses this year.

### **ACTION**

*The Parish Council is to consult with local authorities and farmers to obtain a consensus on the causes of the flooding and proposals for remedial action.*

### **YOUTH ACTIVITIES need action**

" Suggest a meeting for children (no parents) to discuss their needs"

" The best thing for young people is organised sport "

*Further action is required to encourage views from the younger section of Blaxhall's community on the adequacy of youth facilities in Blaxhall and, if found lacking, what would be their preferred options to remedy the situation.*

### **ACTION**

*A volunteer group of Blaxhall's young people is to find out the views and preferences of Blaxhall's younger people on the situation and to investigate and progress improvements].*

### **IMPROVEMENT NEEDED**

***Other Issues seen by Blaxhall villagers as needing improvement : -***

#### **Blaxhall Village Hall**

Around 1911, the then Rector of Blaxhall, Reverend Ernest Bates, gave a piece of land of an area of "around nineteen poles" (approximately 575 square yards) between Church Road and Station Road for the erection of a Parish Room to be used for "purposes beneficial to the inhabitants of the Parish of Blaxhall". A Parish Room was duly erected, in the form of a timber-clad building with tiled roof. This unique character is one which local people are still keen to preserve.

" Toilets and kitchen are embarrassing "

" Loos and kitchen upgrade "

A questionnaire was distributed throughout the village in order to gain a snapshot of local opinion about the current state of Blaxhall Village Hall, its current uses, its potential future uses, and attitudes to potential funding options.

The questionnaire was prepared by the Village Hall Management Committee in April 2002 and circulated over the following summer to 105 households in the village. Responses were received from 65 households (62%).

A village wide survey was undertaken in late 2002 requesting views on the potential future use of the Village Hall. The results of this survey support future projects to expand and renovate the village hall to enable additional activities.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents claimed to use the Village Hall. By far the main use for the hall appears to be as a venue for social gatherings. Art, line dancing and carpet bowls are popular activities, and the hire of the hall for private functions is also significant. There are also many other diverse, low-key uses.

Two out of five people are deterred from using the village hall in its current state, with the condition of the kitchen, toilets and floor being specifically mentioned by a number of respondents.

After improvements, it is clear that the village hall would retain its importance as a meeting place for the village and as a venue for a wide range of village events. Art,

dancing and carpet bowls would still be significant activities. There is, however, a very diverse range of other activities for which the village hall could be used in the future, and for which there may be local support. The most popular future activities identified by the respondents were craft/hobby workshops and evening classes, while meetings, sales and dances will continue to be important for the local community. An IT facility could be installed in the Hall bringing together the Village's existing computing equipment into one secure and accessible location.

Surprisingly, activities specifically aimed at children (youth club, toddler group, mother and toddler group) did not attract much support.

There appears to be a lot of local interest in the activities of keep fit, yoga and tai chi. Currently, it would appear that the condition of the hall floor prevents these activities from taking place now. Providing suitable flooring for these activities would appear to be a priority.

**ACTION** – *The Village Hall Management Committee to continue its work to raise funds for improvements (existence of a Parish Plan will help with fund raising).*

### **ROADS**

" All roads need clearing after flooding "

" Lorries and tractors are taking too many banks down, instead of pulling into drive way and waiting for passing vehicle. "

**ACTION** - *Parish Council to continue its work in lobbying relevant organisations to take remedial action.*

### **SPEED LIMITS**

" Not enforced "

" Enforcement + extension of speed limits before further accidents "

### **ACTION**

*Parish Council and volunteers group to obtain views on what improvements are practical and achievable.*

### **LITTER AND DOG FOULING**

" Litter, Dog fouling - DREADFUL!! The amount of rubbish left around is distressing & the dog fouling is appalling. "

**ACTION** - *More social responsibility.*

*Also more people take the example of those who pick up after the irresponsible drop-it.*

### **LOCAL ECONOMY, Employment, Business Needs**

" How can we encourage businesses "

" Farm buildings as business units? "

**ACTION** - *Volunteer group to work with local businesses to obtain views on what improvements are practical and achievable.*

### **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

" Transport has declined (public) "

**ACTION** – *Parish Council to repair bus shelter and to continue its work in lobbying relevant organisations to take remedial action (special thanks to Maureen Adie).*

### **TV, INTERNET**

" No channel 5 access "

" TV, etc., broadband connection needs attention "

At present the only route to Channel Five in the village is via Sky satellite –you will need to pay for installing the Sky equipment which provides a link to 8 BBC digital channels and Channel 5 (Telephone 08700 100 123 or contact [www .bbc.co.uk/digital](http://www.bbc.co.uk/digital)).

**ACTION** – Volunteer group to lobby relevant organisations to take remedial action

#### ADEQUATE ISSUES

*The following Issues were seen by Blaxhall Villagers as not requiring remedial action: -*

Health Services	74% very good or adequate
Building Design	64%
Parking	77%
Other Amenities	71%
Social Services	78%
Social Activities	86%
Access to Village Computer	87%

**ACTION** - The Parish Plan results would require regular new surveys by the volunteer Steering Group to ensure the current level of adequacy is being maintained.

#### BLAXHALL VILLAGE ACTION PLAN – 1<sup>st</sup> Edition February 2004

SCDC = Suffolk Coastal District Council SCC = Suffolk County Council

ISSUE	Champions	Partners	ACTION	Schedule
Local Services	Volunteer Group	Parish Council, SCDC, SCC,	Provide support for use of Internet delivery services.  Carry out feasibility study on the potential location and viability of a village shop.	2003/2004
Public House	Volunteer Group Parish Council	Parish Council SCDC	Consult with existing owners on enhancing social inclusion at the pub.  Consult with SCDC planners to ensure no future change of use.	2003/2004
Housing	Parish Council	SCDC, SCC, Housing Trusts, Suffolk ACRE	Carry out Housing Needs Survey	2004
Flooding	Parish Council	SCDC, SCC, Anglian	Identify remedies for	2003/2004



		Water, DEFRA, NFU	flooding of roads and property	
Youth facilities	Youth Volunteer Group (under 18's)	Parish Council, Playingfield Committee, Village Hall Committee	Carry out consultation with village youth to identify potential areas of improvement	2003/2004
Roads	Parish Council	SCDC, SCC	Review and improve	Ongoing
<b>ISSUE</b>	<b>Champions</b>	<b>Partners</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Schedule</b>
Speed Limits	Parish Council	SCDC, SCC	Review and improve	Ongoing
Village Hall	Village Hall Committee	Parish Council, SCDC, SCC	Raise funds and implement proposed village Hall expansion scheme	2003/2004
Business	Volunteer Group		Carry out consultation with local businesses to identify potential areas of improvement	2003/2004
Public Transport	Volunteer Group	Parish Council, SCDC, SCC, Countryside Agency	Carry out consultation with villagers and review transport options to identify potential improvement options	2003/2004
Television	Volunteer Group		Lobby service providers for improvement	2003/2004
Health				Adequate
Parking				Adequate
Other amenities				Adequate
Social Services				Adequate
Social life				Good
Computer	Volunteer Group	Parish Council, Village Hall Committee	Provide secure and accessible location for IT resource and	2003/2004

			training	
ISSUE	Champions	Partners	ACTION	Schedule
Allotments	Allotment Committee	Parish Council, landowners, SCDC, SCC	Provide water to Mill Common	2004/2005
Church	Church Parochial Council	Congregation	Maintain current high standards	Ongoing
Environment	Volunteer Group(s)	Suffolk Wildlife Trust Parish Council	Action to maintain Blaxhall Common	Ongoing
Footpaths	Volunteer Group	Parish Council, SCDC	Identify work needed	2003/2004 then ongoing
Youth Hostel	YHA	Parish Council	Potential for Village services	V.Good
PARISH PLAN	Volunteer Group	Parish Council, Countryside Agency, Suffolk ACRE	Regular review of Parish Plan	Annual review by villagers