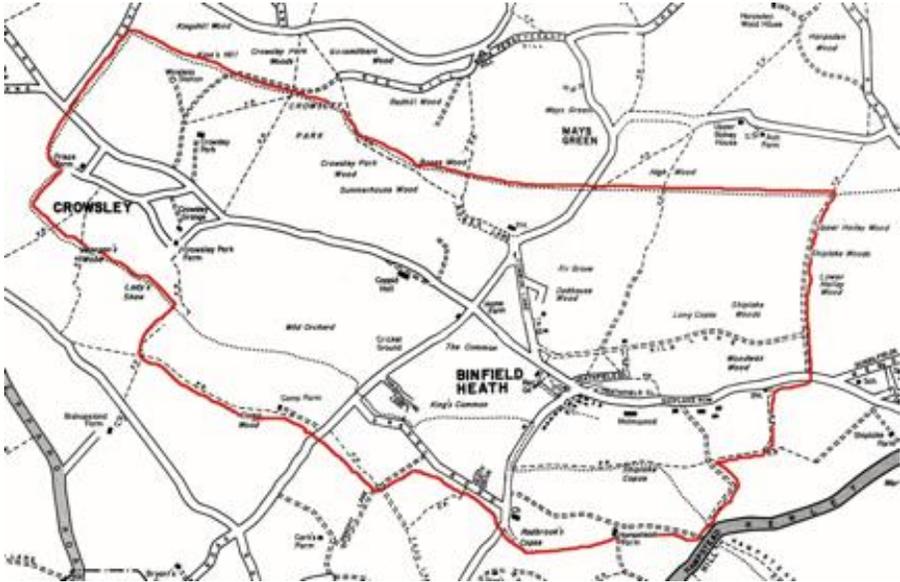




BINFIELD HEATH COMMUNITY LED PLAN

June 2016

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1 INTRODUCTION

The parish of Binfield Heath comprises 280 households with a population of more than 700, and covers an area of approximately five square miles in South Oxfordshire, including the hamlet of Crowsley. Most of the village is made up of several small groupings of houses separated by open fields and woodland. It is designated officially as a Small Village under the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy, Policy CSR1. Part of the village – Common Lane and the area around the Bottle and Glass public house, and the area stretching from the allotments up to and including Crowsley – are within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



2 THE PURPOSE

Binfield Heath became a parish in its own right in 2003. It issued its first Parish Plan in 2013 following an extensive questionnaire and analysis of parishioners' replies and with the blessing of South Oxfordshire District Council and the organisation that is now known as Community First Oxfordshire, a charity that helps with community issues.

The Parish Plan is wide-ranging and comprehensive, covering many key aspects of village life, and contained eight actions and six activities. When it was issued in 2013 one parish councillor was given responsibility for monitoring each of the eight actions.

With the actions ongoing, it was decided that the Parish Plan should be updated. It was agreed that the best way to conduct this refresh was by producing a second plan, to sit alongside the original plan. Consideration was given to developing a Neighbourhood Plan but owing to the Small Village official designation of Binfield Heath it was decided to produce a Community Led Plan, containing the outcomes of the actions and activities. A sub-group was formed to produce the Community Led Plan, consisting of villagers and two members of the parish council.

The progress on each of the actions and activities contained in the 2013 Parish Plan is listed in Section 3 below.

3 ACTIONS & ACTIVITIES

The eight actions and their current status are:

1: [To introduce a neighbourhood watch scheme](#)

Action complete – A scheme has been successfully set up, managed by ten street coordinators and covering 60 per cent of homes in the parish

2: To support the village shop and post office

Action complete – Help from the Post Office and the Phillimore Estate has enabled the shop to be extensively redecorated. The outside has been repaved and the parish council has provided outdoor tables and seating.



3: To support the village pub and restaurant

Action complete – The Bottle and Glass pub was scheduled to be sold and converted into a private dwelling. The Parish Council registered it as an Asset of Community Value, allowing time for it to be purchased and developed as a pub and restaurant. It is scheduled to reopen later in 2016.



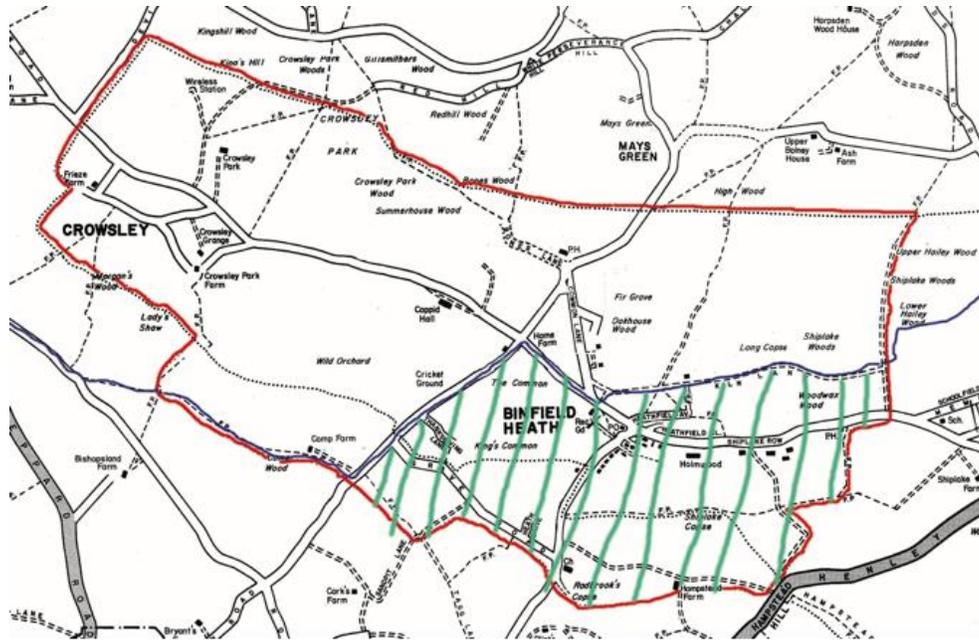
4: To introduce superfast broadband

Action complete – With money raised by the community, fibre optic broadband has been installed in the parish. The community-funded programme is seen as a pioneering initiative in the UK.

5: To ensure that planning policies at local and district level reflect the wishes of parishioners

Action continuing – Discussions are continuing with South Oxfordshire District Council on a range of planning matters (see Survey below)

6: To seek to include the entire parish in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (in conjunction with Shiplake, Harpsden and Eye and Dunsden parishes)



Action continuing – Part of the parish is already included in the Chilterns AONB. An application to include the whole parish has been made to the Secretary of State and the local MP has been asked to pursue the matter

7: To maintain the playground to the highest standards

Action complete – The playground has received further investment to keep it as a high-class facility. It remains the biggest cost centre of the parish council budget

8: To improve transport and the highways, including speeding and potholes

Action complete on speeding – A four-day speed survey has been conducted and the results discussed with Thames Valley police and Oxfordshire County Council. Lower speed limits through the village were discussed but were decided against. The police have agreed to carry out random speed checks.

Action ongoing on potholes – It is recognised that potholes remain a serious issue across the county and beyond

The six activities and their current status are:

1: Annual litter picking

This continues successfully each year, with some residents suggesting the activity be undertaken twice yearly

2: To improve the village environment

A subgroup of residents has been formed to maintain existing beds, install planters and plant bulbs around the parish. A heritage red phone box has been provided from the PC Improvement Fund



3: To support Village Society activities

The Village Day and Christmas carol singing continue. A party to mark the Queen's 90th birthday was celebrated on the recreation ground



4: To revive monthly walks in the parish

Discussions are underway to revive the village walks. Volunteers are required to chart local walks

5: To maintain the bus shelters

Volunteers clean the shelters on a regular basis

6: To regularly update the parish website

This is regularly maintained

4 PLANNING

The Parish Council felt that as part of the Community Led Plan, a more in-depth look at planning matters was required, to determine what parishioners want Binfield Heath to look like in the future. It had become apparent that villagers were becoming increasingly concerned with the planning process and the number of applications for new development. Considerable discussions with South Oxfordshire District Council and Community First Oxfordshire followed. In November 2015, a short survey was distributed to parishioners via email, by newsletter, door-to-door and through copies left in the village shop. The survey contained seven questions:

- 1: What is your general view on any future development in Binfield Heath?
- 2: Do you think there should be any more development in Binfield Heath?
- 3: Are you happy with the present size of Binfield Heath regarding:
 - a. Population?
 - b. Number of houses?
- 4: Should any new houses be sympathetic to the surrounding area?
- 5: Is sufficient publicity given to planning applications which affect Binfield Heath?
- 6: Binfield Heath is made up of several housing groupings, with fields and woodland in between. Do you support infilling between these groupings?
- 7: Are you in favour of infilling between neighbouring houses by building in gardens?

There were 73 responses to the survey, 24 per cent of the 281 households in the parish. Not every question was answered. From those responses it was clear that parishioners value the village greatly: 46 answers mentioned the word “character” and several described the village and its surroundings as “special”. The rural feel is important and 70 per cent want to preserve the fields and woodland that separate the housing groupings.

To preserve this character and rural feel it is felt that unlisted houses of historical or architectural merit, and open spaces between existing housing groupings, should have greater protection and that demolition of these properties should be discouraged.

The small village designation affords Binfield Heath protection from major development. The survey respondents were keen to preserve this by restricting the size and type of any development.

A total of 81 per cent (57) of respondents were happy with the existing number of houses in the parish, and 73 per cent (58) were happy with the size of the existing population. While 74 per cent (52) said they were in favour of more development, 69 per cent (37) of them said it should only be on a very small scale and 31 per cent (16) mentioned affordable housing for young, local families.

A small majority, 57 per cent (39) were in favour of building in gardens. However, there was concern that large houses should not be shoe-horned into small spaces; that there should still be adequate separation between buildings and; that care should be taken to avoid creating ribbon development, ie long rows of houses with no open spaces in between.

An overwhelming 96 per cent (69) of survey respondents said that any development should be in keeping with its immediate surroundings.

The survey responses showed that some parishioners believe that the Parish Council has more influence over planning decisions than is actually the case. A majority, 55 per cent (32) thought the Parish Council should do more to publicise local planning applications – one suggestion was to display applications separately on village noticeboards in a larger typeface, or via an opt-in email, rather than as now in the body of the parish council minutes.

South Oxfordshire District Council and Community First Oxfordshire both endorsed the survey results, which were then distributed to parishioners door-to-door, by email and via the village shop in March 2016, together with an invitation to attend the Binfield Heath Annual Parish Meeting.

5 THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The annual parish meeting was held on April 25, 2016 in the village scout hut. It was attended by parish councillors, several parishioners as well as a representative from Community First Oxfordshire. The agenda included a presentation of the Community Led Plan up to that point, together with a proposed summary of the survey results. The summary was as follows:

“The respondents value highly the distinctive nature of Binfield Heath: it consists of several housing groupings, separated by fields and woodland. They value the character and differing styles of housing, together with the rural nature of the village and its surroundings, with little urbanization. Eighty one per cent of respondents believe that the parish should remain at its current size but recognise that, inevitably, there may be a small amount of development, such as the extension of existing properties or replacement of a building of no perceived architectural merit or heritage character.

“Just over half the respondents (57 per cent) would support small scale development in gardens, but that these should be considered on a case by case basis. It is worth noting that the South Oxfordshire Core Strategy, policy CSR1 for small villages only allows infilling on sites up to 0.2 hectares, is of an appropriate scale and is sympathetic to local character and distinctiveness.

“Nearly 70 per cent of respondents are against any development of the open spaces between existing groupings of houses. Where there is any development, 96 per cent say that it should be sympathetic to the location.

“Several respondents expressed surprise at the level of development approved or pending recently. Fifty five per cent were concerned that sufficient publicity is not given to planning applications: discussions are underway with South Oxfordshire District Council over a number of planning and process issues.”

The meeting overwhelmingly endorsed the summary. Residents were invited to comment on all aspects of the Community Led Plan and the following were received:

On speeding, two residents asked for “Slow” or “30mph” signs, or even sleeping policemen and “pinch points” through the village. One wanted flashing 30mpg signs between Holmwood and the Post Office, while another was firmly against any lighting in the road.

On village planters and walks, two residents were unhappy with planters, one called for action on the state of the footpath by the village well, and another would like a map of the village to be produced, detailing footpaths and bridleways and incorporating a short history of the village.

On planning, one resident wanted another question, asking what sort of development parishioners would feel is appropriate. Another said that efforts should be made to ensure a supply of 1 and 2-bedroom houses, as too many had been extended, making them too expensive for many people. A third resident was very much in favour of affordable housing, while a fourth would like the website updated and email alerts whenever a new planning application is posted.

On the subject of village amenity improvements villagers voiced their support for the installation of a replacement red phone box and more planting round the village to improve the visual environment.

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6 CONCLUSIONS

After listening carefully to the views of the community, a number of conclusions have been reached:

1. Having the whole of Binfield Heath parish included in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be actively pursued. Reducing litter, maintaining verges and controlling speeding through the village will continue to be monitored.
2. Planning appears to be the greatest concern in the community. The survey has given a very good indication of residents' views and consideration will be given to them in the parish council's representations to South Oxfordshire District Council and in the planning application process. These concerns include:
 - a. 81 per cent of respondents are happy with the existing number of houses in the parish
 - b. 73 per cent are happy with the size of the existing population
 - c. 70 per cent want to maintain the open spaces between housing groupings
 - d. 74 per cent are in favour of more development but of those, 69 per cent say this should only be on a very small scale
 - e. Above all, 96 per cent of respondents say that any development should be in keeping with its immediate surroundings and that the character of the village should be maintained
3. The 'Small Village' designation of Binfield Heath should also be protected.

We feel this Community Led Plan reflects the views of the residents of the parish of Binfield Heath.

THANKS

Our thanks go to Robert Davis, Philippa Sanders, Mark Dodson, Fiona Rollason, Tony Macarthur, David Fogden, Alan Greeley and Norman Lane from the community; Lis Ransom and Roger Roberts from the parish council; Fiona Mullins from Community First Oxfordshire; and Anne Richardson from South Oxfordshire District Council.

A special thanks to the residents of Binfield Heath who responded to the survey.

