

## Hedley Parish Community Consultation –Area West

### Overview:

My impression is that there is a very positive feeling about where we live and the specialness of this place. The vast majority of people are willing to be involved on some level with activities within the village (time pressures notwithstanding). Only a very small number (2) said that they would not be interested in any community facility development.

Over the past few months I have visited all of the properties in the western end of the village, (five outlying residences at Hedley West Farm and around Hedley Grange and the remaining fifteen on or around the front street of the village). Everyone that I contacted was very pleased to speak with me, although catching them in took some persistence.

One clear point made was that it would be good to see the initiation by the parish council of 'events' that fostered a sense of community rather than simply a bricks and mortar solution.

The need for greater effective communication from the parish council was also emphasised.

Households participated	19 (1 non-return)
Households declined participation	0
(Total households approached)	(20)
Adults in participating households	41
Children living in participating households	6
Visiting children to households (additional)	16
Willing trustees	6 (+1 possibly)
Willing managers/organisers	5 (+ 4 possibly)

### Discussions on a Village Hall:

The general feeling I got in regard to a proposed village hall was that many questioned the need for one and had doubts as to whether it would be sustainable. A majority said however that if one did exist they would likely use it (as least occasionally) and support it.

A number of residents (6) felt that a hall would be an asset for the village and were very positive about the possible range of activities that they and others could then participate in locally. One resident was in favour of a hall but has serious reservations as to whether it could be made sustainable financially.

A number of residents (6) felt that the potential financial burden/risk to the village was something that they would not support. One resident wanted it made very clear that if a

proposal for a hall was made, there would need to be substantial evidence that it would be a self-sustaining entity and that they would strongly oppose an increase in the parish precept as a means of securing a hall.

Some felt that having a busy village hall would necessarily change the character of the village and that the number of people coming from outside the village to access the hall would represent an intrusion and they would not support this.

Another resident highlighted the risks associated with increased traffic on the narrow winding roads approaching the village; County Council Planning having previously stated that this represents a barrier to previous development proposals.

Two residents mentioned that sewage systems within the village are believed to be unable to cope with extra development and large gatherings/events at a hall may represent a problem and risk overwhelming the infrastructure.

There were six people who said that they would be willing act as a trustee with regard to a hall or other village facility (two additional 'possibly'). One resident said that they would be willing to offer their legal skills and experience particularly in regard to setting up the community facility (considerable experience in this area). Another resident said they would be willing to offer their skills in financial modelling and accounting and another has project management experience they are will to offer. Four people said that they would be willing to organise events either regular or one off and three more said they would possibly be interested in organising an event. No one specifically said they would be interested in taking on the day to day management of a hall, although this was not directly asked in the survey.

Some people suggested events/activities they would be happy to organise, i.e. bridge events, local art event, canine care and safety, events for local teenagers (film night or similar).

For: 8

Against: 6

Neutral: 5 (would possibly use it if it was there).

### **Discussions on a play facility:**

By and large, the idea of a playspace met with a positive reception. Most felt that it would be good to have a community space where children could play safely. The images of the types of features shared with residents showed an emphasis on natural materials in the style of an adventure playspace, rather than those that use steel and brightly coloured coated plywood structures. Residents indicated that this use of more natural materials would be a welcome addition to the village.

Several residents said that regardless whether or not they had children, they felt that families and friends of families in the village would benefit now and other families who might move into the village in the future would also benefit from the facility.

Skills offered to support a playspace include; tractors for moving earth or timber etc, site surveying, two residents offered access to workshop for maintenance, several residents said they liked the idea of working bees for construction and maintenance of a playspace.

The resident who indicated that they would not support a playspace raised concerns relating to the capital costs of establishing of a playspace and the on-going costs of maintenance particularly. Another resident had reservations regarding potential liability if someone should be injured.

Development of the green space in and around a playspace and activities that might be organised there, were seen by many as an opportunity for community building.

For: 14

Against: 1

Neutral: 4 (did not indicate playground in response to Q2 however did indicate that either they had family who might use it or offered assistance to construct/maintain it).

### **Other potential development suggestions:**

A small community lending or swap library. Some felt it would be possible to acquire an old red phone box and fit it out as a micro-library.

Footpaths: Engaging with landowners with a view to establishing new linking footpath(s), that formed a circuit around Hedley. Most paths are radial from Hedley and this means that any walk requires a long walk down and a quite steep walk back up to the village. An intermediate circuit would make it easier for some people to go for walks. This may have health benefits for local residents.

Village fair: Some lamented the fact that the village no longer had events such as a village fair (or fireworks night), and they would like to see these sorts of events returning in some fashion.

Connecting Bus Service: Some thought that it would make sense for there to be a bus service that linked with the buses in Prudhoe and/or the train station in Prudhoe. There was suggestion that two AM and two PM links might be useful.

Community car pool: There was a suggestion of a car pool consisting of a rota of people who regularly drove from the village, who would be willing to offer free lifts to people wanting to access shops/broader transport links.

Honesty shop: A suggestion was made that in a similar way to a micro-library we could have a small honesty shop that kept basic goods.

Dog walk area: Somewhere that dogs could be walked/exercised off-lead without the risk to livestock or farmers crops.

Communication: Several residents said that they found it difficult to get a sense of what was happening in the village both socially and as a community. Mention was made of the need for the parish council to communicate more directly and regularly with the community. There was the suggestion of a Facebook page or possibly village WhatsApp group to make the dissemination of general information easier. A monthly or bi-monthly parish bulletin of some type was also suggested for those who preferred written communications.

### **Personal conclusion:**

In relation to a village hall, a majority of those households surveyed might be convinced of the viability of a hall, if it could be established that a hall was likely to have the following precursors:

- a sound financial basis
- that it would not have a detrimental effect on residents' access and enjoyment of the village (i.e. parking and traffic)
- infrastructure such as sewage were shown to be able to cope.

In relation to a playspace, a significant majority of those households surveyed already support the idea of a village playspace. Construction of a playspace itself represents an opportunity for a community building project. One landowner surveyed has already indicated their willingness to discuss making land available for a playspace.

## Recommendations:

1. The results of the survey need to be effectively communicated back to the parish. A simple one page summary should suffice that gives a summary of the outcomes including raw numbers and percentages relating to key responses to the main proposals.
2. Further investigate the possibility of construction of a playspace within the village as a separate project from a hall. These may eventually end up being co-located; however given the communities demonstrated desire to see a playspace progress, it would be good to begin under the assumption that a playspace could go ahead regardless of whether a hall is proved viable.

First steps might be:

- Use contacts within the National Trust to gain a greater understanding of how they develop and manage their playspaces within their estates;
  - Approach Infinite Playgrounds (or similar organisation), to ascertain whether they would be willing to undertake a community project that engaged the residents of the parish, the outcome of which would be a playspace within the confines of the village.
  - Investigate what funding and grants might be available to support the project.
3. Some of the additional suggested projects are worth pursuing in the short term as well.

A village micro-library could be established with minimal cost and people to manage the project would likely come forward, based on comments in discussions.

A sub-committee should be established to investigate the necessary steps and then engage with land owners with a view to establishing an intermediate linked network of public footpaths.