Wollaston Neighbourhood Plan

Issues Consultation Statement

Wollaston Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
June 2013
Introduction

During 2012 and 2013 the Wollaston Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group (the Steering Group) has sought to involve the local community in identifying the issues that the Wollaston Neighbourhood Plan (the Plan) should try to address. Views were sought in a number of ways, though primarily through community events and questionnaires.

A key aim of the overall consultation process is to build agreement in Wollaston for the way forward for the neighbourhood area over the next 15 years or so. Whilst full agreement may not be possible, wider community involvement can create greater consensus regarding the nature of policies and proposals to be included in the Plan. As part of the process the Steering Group has also sought to engage with sections of the community that are often described as ‘hard-to-reach’. In particular, there has been a focus on consultation with young people and the elderly.

Whilst individual reports of the findings of each survey and event have been prepared, this statement provides a brief summary of how the community was consulted and the issues and concerns that have been raised to date. The statement will be published on the Neighbourhood Plan area of the Parish Council’s website at: http://www.wollastonparishcouncil.gov.uk/Wollaston_neighbourhood_plan/Neighbourhood_planning.aspx and the local community will be informed of the availability of the statement primarily through the regular Neighbourhood Plan article in the quarterly Wollaston and Strixton News and Views (WASNAV) magazine.

A neighbourhood plan must be concerned with the use and development of land. Some of the issues raised during consultation are not development related and therefore need to be considered through other mechanisms. The Steering Group will refer such issues to the Parish Council for it to determine what action it can and should take in response to the matters raised.

The Steering Group will use this report to identify the key issues that the Plan should address. It is anticipated that later in 2013 further consultation with the community will take place. As part of the consultation, comment will be invited in order to determine if there is consensus on the key issues that ought to be addressed in the Plan.

Consultation

Steering Group Event and Northamptonshire Rural Housing Association Survey

At a meeting held on 7th February 2012, the Steering Group used the ‘Placecheck’ method (see http://www.placecheck.info/), developed on behalf of the Design Alliance, in order to draw up some initial thoughts on the issues that the Plan might address. At the centre of the method is a list of questions which were used to define what the Steering Group like and dislike about Wollaston and what needs to be improved.
In addition, a village survey was undertaken by Northamptonshire Rural Housing Association (NRHA) in March 2011, primarily to identify the need for affordable housing in Wollaston. A number of comments relating to a wider spectrum of village needs were, however, made in response to that survey and the comments were incorporated into the Placecheck summary where they raised further issues that might be relevant to the preparation of a neighbourhood plan. The following provides a summary of the issues raised using the Placecheck:

**What facilities does Wollaston need?**
- A youth shelter in a reasonably central location;
- A ‘full-time’ youth club;
- A café which will provide a venue for young people to meet and chat.
- More places for children and teenagers to go;
- A restaurant;
- A garage/petrol station;
- A bank;
- More shops and a greater variety of shops, including a butcher’s, a green grocer’s and another general store;
- More litter bins;
- Village facilities to be concentrated around the Co-op store in Newton Rd and Underwoods Yard on the High Street;
- An outdoor bowling green (though the maintenance cost may be prohibitive);
- Cricket provision – whilst the 1st/2nd teams of Wollaston Cricket Club are able to play at the London Rd playing field, the 3rd team has to play home fixtures at Emberton;
- Consideration should, perhaps, be given to the provision of a green burial site;
- There may be a need for additional football provision as the existing London Rd playing facility is believed to be at capacity;
- Dual use of the playing pitches at the secondary school should be encouraged with a separate pavilion/changing facility provided;
- The library needs to be retained;
- A tip to dispose of rubbish and not just recycling material would be helpful; and
- The swimming pool at Scott Bader’s factory site needs to be more widely publicised.

**How can we make Wollaston a more special place?**
- The conservation area should be enhanced and a management plan should be prepared to determine the improvements that are needed;
- Buildings that are not listed but are of local importance should be identified. The Wollaston Heritage Society (and Borough Council’s Conservation Officer) should be approached to help with this work; and
- Consideration should be given to preparing a Parish Design Statement to provide guidance for future development in the village and surrounding countryside.

**How can we make Wollaston a greener place?**
- There are a number of highway verges around the village and consideration should be given to improving the value of these for wildlife;
- Enhance the environment of, and access to, the Wollaston Brook to the south of the village and the brook on the northern boundary of the village; and
- The former quarry on the northern parish boundary is an important
wildlife site and the opportunity should be taken to examine if the value of the site could/should be enhanced for the benefit of wildlife and the community.

How can the streets and public spaces be made safer and more pleasant for people on foot?
- Whilst crime and road safety are not considered to be significant issues, there is some concern over the County Council’s decision to reduce street lighting;
- Speeding is an issue, particularly on the A509 and B569

How else can public spaces be improved?
- Environmental improvement are required to Backway (rear of Irchester Rd)

How can we make Wollaston more welcoming and easier for people to find their way around?
- There are 4 key entrances into the village (Cobbs Lane, Irchester Rd, London Rd and Hinwick Rd/Hookhams Path). Consideration should be given to enhancing these access points;
- There is a need to consider if further planting is necessary to screen Scott Bader’s when approaching the village from Irchester;
- Important views into the village are provided by the land between the A509 and Wollaston House and, on entering the village from the south, the land north of the playing field to the west of London Rd; and
- There are important views out of the village from the cemetery.

How can better use be made of resources?
- There are no known buildings, sites or areas that are under used;
- Consideration needs to be given to how the Plan might promote greater energy efficiency, particularly in respect of new buildings and existing public buildings, such as the village hall; and
- The installation of solar panels should be encouraged.
What should be done to make the most of public transport?

- Ideally, there should be a service into Wellingborough every half hour with the last service returning later in the day;
- The ‘on-demand’ bus service should be more widely publicised.
- An improved bus service to Milton Keynes should be provided.

How can routes be better connected?

- Cycling improvements need to be made to provide links with Irchester (primarily for school children from Irchester attending Wollaston School) and a circular route (Wollaston - Summer Leys nature reserve - Little Irchester – Irchester Country Park – Irchester - Wollaston);
- There is some concern regarding the speed of vehicles using the Irchester Rd/Bell End/Cobbs Lane route;
- Parking problems occur throughout the village but are particularly problematic within areas of terraced housing;
- Along Newton Rd, greater use of the Co-op car park should be encouraged and consideration should be given to improved signage;
- An approach should possibly be made to the owners of the pharmacy and WMC to see if they would be willing to permit greater public use of the rear car park; and
- Parking is also an issue outside the secondary school, particularly at 3pm.

Other key issues not covered by the Placecheck

Housing – Should the plan seek to provide solely for the needs of the local population or should it also provide for some level of in-migration?

- Whilst a survey has been undertaken to identify the need for affordable housing, further work needs to be undertaken to determine the scale of local population need for other forms of tenure. This work should be undertaken prior to considering what scale of growth should be provided and the most appropriate location for this.

The following types of housing should be provided:

- Housing for the elderly (including sheltered accommodation);
- Affordable housing for young people and first time buyers;
- Lower priced housing for people who have left the village;
- More bungalows;
- Affordable housing that is only available to local people;
- Affordable flats;
- Housing for people to downsize to in order to free-up homes; and
- Reasonably priced 5 bedroom houses.

Employment – Does the village wish to provide for additional employment and, if so, what type should this be and where should it be located?

- The village should encourage the development of office based employment, including research and development;
- Scott Bader should be approached to discuss the potential for such growth on its site;
- There may be some potential for development along Grendon Rd, where employment is currently sited. This area is divorced from the village and its use for employment would be less disruptive than might be the case with a development that was more integrated with the village;
The Hinwick Rd employment site appears to be well used (this needs to be confirmed) and, if this proves to be the case, retention for employment should be considered; and

The Tower Farm barn conversion scheme on the Irchester Road entrance to the village is an attractive and successful small development of office units that bring employment to the village. As such, this sort of development should be encouraged.

Older Persons Groups

During March 2012 meetings were held with members of the Bowls Club, Age UK, the Methodist Church Luncheon Club and the Salvation Army over 60’s Club.

Comments made included the following:

- The village footpaths are in a poor state of repair
- Cars parking on the pavements and blocking dropped kerbs make it unsafe or difficult to use mobility scooters
- Switching off street lights along with the above issues means that it is not safe for the elderly to go out at night.
- Wheelie bins left on the pavement all week present a further obstacle for elderly people.
- Cars going to Santa Pod can cause congestion in Hookhams Path. There are also problems with speeding traffic in Hookhams Path, particularly on Santa Pod race weekends.
- Lorry parking in Eastfield Road during the working day can be a nuisance.
- Possible village expansion is of concern. Many, however, accept that more affordable housing is needed for village people but it should be built within the village and near services and facilities. Some concern was raised regarding ‘problem families’ being moved into the village.
- If more houses have to be built, the old Vulcanizing industrial site may provide a possible option.
- There is plenty going on in the village for older people.
- Members of the Bowls Club thought that there was sufficient interest in bowls to sustain another club. Booking time in the village hall is, however, limited because the play group and dance classes take up time most convenient for elderly people.
- It was suggested that there should be more shops and that the Underwood’s Yard area of High St might be a good location for this.
- There was a mixed response regarding the development of wind farms with some people in favour, others against and others indifferent.
Launch Event

The Launch Event was held on April 25th 2012 at the Methodist Church Hall, College St, Wollaston commencing at 7pm. In order to raise awareness of the Plan and identify what residents like and dislike about Wollaston, the event was publicised in the WASNAV magazine; a leaflet was delivered to every household in the Parish; and a number of posters were displayed in locations around the village including the Parish Council notice-board, the library, the doctors’ surgeries, and the notice-board in South St.

The event was attended by approximately 70 members of the public. A presentation by the Steering Group explained the purpose of a neighbourhood plan, provided an overview of the process to be followed and gave some examples of what might be included in a neighbourhood plan and the sort of issues that it might seek to address.

The presentation by the Steering Group looked at each of the topics in turn and highlighted some of the thoughts and ideas that had already been expressed by Steering Group members; by residents in response to a village housing needs survey undertaken in 2011; and in the meetings with older persons groups referred to above. A handout which included a number of questions designed to prompt thoughts and ideas on each of the topics was also given to people as they arrived at the event.

Boards relating to each topic were placed around the room to highlight key questions and to provide a brief summary of Government policy and key facts and figures about the topic area. The following example is of the board relating to the local economy:

The event provided an opportunity for the Steering Group to find out what local people most like and dislike about Wollaston and what they would like to see improved. This part of the event was based around a series of five topics, as follows:

- Providing for housing needs;
- Building a stronger economy;
- Local facilities and services;
- Transport/connectivity;
- Making Wollaston a greener place; and
- Making Wollaston a special place.

At the end of the presentation people were asked to use post-it notes to write down their thoughts on the issues that they would like to see addressed in the Plan. Where comments related to a specific location they were invited to write the comment on a post-it note, attach it to a cocktail stick and insert it in a map on a
Providing for housing needs
- There is a need for more flats/shared ownership properties for young people and residential care home facilities in the village.
- Increased housing means more people, more traffic and the need for more facilities – the schools are full and parking in the village is terrible (by nature of the housing).
- New housing would impact on the size of schools in the village. I would not like to see the comprehensive school grow any larger or the volume of traffic into the village increase.
- I appreciate the major problem of affordable housing and hope that any future building will help the families of those already living here.
- Keep the village boundaries as they are – no huge housing estates on the edges as this would affect the whole character of the village.
- If houses are needed, existing sites/unused buildings should be used rather than ruining greenfield land.

Building a stronger economy
- It is good to have businesses in the village but lorries are a big problem and roads would be needed.
- I do not want any more industry or lorries pounding through the village.
- Better HGV access to Hinwick Rd industrial estate is needed.
- More employment within the village would create more pollution.
- Could village businesses offer apprenticeships?
- Provision must be made for access and parking for businesses as parking is already a problem.

Local facilities and services
Additional facilities that attendees thought were needed in Wollaston include the following:
- A dentist;
- More GP appointments and an updated surgery (St Michael’s Lane);
- A parking area close to shops;
- A venue for the display of artistic talent (adults and children);
- Make the courtyard a small shopping centre;
- A single large hall for village events;
- More use of the senior school facilities e.g. tennis courts;
- Facilities for the elderly – a day centre perhaps?
- A youth club;
- A baker’s and a butcher’s;
- More open spaces for children (the park is too far away)
- A play area on the Manchester Rd estate;
- If sheltered accommodation was built perhaps a bowling green could be incorporated into the scheme;
- A warehouse to be available for a bowling alley, laser or ‘whacky warehouse’ type scheme with in-house coffee bar and computer games etc. These are popular bookings for birthday parties. Perhaps the younger ones could use it until 7pm with teenagers using it thereafter?
- faster broadband, television reception and more tv/telephone packages;
- more use of the village hall - maybe enlarge and upgrade it to show films and for race nights/bingo etc)
- Wollaston Co-Op is a great asset but where the shop is situated presents parking problems, The Co-Op should relocate to the Hinwick Rd industrial estate where there would be plenty of parking and access is still convenient for customers

Transport/connectivity
Expressed concerns and suggested improvements include the following:
- A better bus service is needed to Northampton and Milton Keynes;
• There are too many road signs at the bottom of Hookhams Path and Shepherds Hill crossroads
• Signposting would enable visitors to Santa Pod raceway to find the Co-op;
• The museum and shops should be signposted from Cobbs Lane;
• Wide cycle paths should be provided around the village to improve safety;
• Traffic lights should be installed at either end of Hickmire as there have been lots of near misses;
• Need a one-way system around part of the village to help traffic movement and parking;
• One way roads should be introduced to include High St, College St, Rotten Row, Queen’s Rd, Newton Rd and Howard Rd;

• Remove the double yellow lines on one side of High St;
• Introduce traffic calming into and out of the village as they have done in Irchester;
• The volume of traffic is a problem between Hinwick Rd and Green Lane and in the Cobbs Lane area;
• A roundabout should be constructed down Cobbs Lane/Priory Rd to prevent speeding. If a roundabout was positioned at the above junction, the noise of gear changes/lorries would be a big problem;

• Even though there is a speed limit and a crossing on Cobbs Lane, there are major problems with speeding cars. A traffic calming chicane should be constructed at the top and bottom of Cobbs Lane;
• Another road leading into the industrial area is needed for lorries;
• Measures should be taken to reduce traffic speeds;
• In the London Borough of Croyden they have a similar parking problem in streets of terraced houses. They allocated part of the pavement (using white lines), to put the offside wheels of the car off the road, but leaving enough space for push chairs etc;
• Pavements (and roads) such as Manchester Road are becoming positively dangerous. Priory Road seems to have been kept in good order but the surface on our pavements is very bad indeed;
• The roads should be better maintained with fewer pot holes - St Michael’s Lane and Queens Rd need improvement;
• Stop parking on pavements;
• More car parking is needed around the church;
• A small secure car park should be provided for people to leave their cars and pay a charge to the Council for security etc. Councils should also look at providing off-road parking for council house tenants where there is room for this; and
There are many cars parked on Hinwick Rd (from Hookhams Path to just before Williams Way) which narrow the road down to a single lane, which is especially hazardous on the brow of the hill opposite Timotay Garden Services. The stretch of grass between pavements in that area could be used to create parking bays (as in Irchester).

Making Wollaston a Greener Place
- Leaving the verges of Shepherds Hill and The Green Lane unmown would save money; make the environment look more natural and less manicured; and increase wildlife;
- We lack trees – what about a Wollaston Wood?;
- Green Lane is a beautiful lane which is vandalised by bikers and heavy 4x4s and rubbish dumped at the entrance both ends. This needs addressing;
- Keep the open views – these are one of the best things about Wollaston;
- Leave the grounds of Wollaston House as they are;
- The Cuckoo Triangle needs re-planning. There shouldn’t be a roundabout, only one road in front of the pub;
- The brook at the back of the Hinwick Rd industrial estate is not really valued in the village. It would be nice if it could be made much more of a feature and maybe used as a pleasant public walkway.

Making Wollaston a Special Place
- Bring back adult education to the village;
- Provide a sculpture in the pocket park;
- Make Miss Keep’s building a place of significance to the village;
- Only build on brownfield sites;
- Keep the existing planning policy line where it is;
- Stop building in gardens and allow more interesting, energy efficient houses; and
- There should be very limited development.

Wollaston Housing Needs Survey
In order to assess the housing needs of Wollaston a survey form was compiled by the Borough Council and delivered to every household in the village during September 2012. Pre-paid envelopes were included with the survey to encourage a sizeable response and a 4 week return period was permitted. A total of 441 forms were returned, which equates to a response rate of 29.07%. The replies were analysed by the Borough Council and a report of the findings is available to download at: http://www.wollastonparishcouncil.gov.uk/Wollaston_neighbourhood_plan/Wollaston_Neighbourhood_Plan_documents.aspx

In summary, the findings indicate that:
- Almost 80% of homes are owner occupied, as illustrated in the following figure:
Socially rented properties (i.e. homes rented either from a housing association or local authority) account for 9.52% of homes in Wollaston. There are now 167 social rented properties in Wollaston with a further single house in shared ownership. Most of these properties are owned by Wellingborough Homes (152) with smaller numbers owned by Jephson Housing Association, Rockingham Forest and Spire Homes.

9.3% of homes are privately rented.

Having regard to income and rental levels there is a need for housing in Wollaston over the next five years. This need includes open market housing (7 properties); homes for rent (23 properties); and shared ownership homes (9 properties).

A majority of respondents believe that there is, or maybe, a need for: open market housing to buy (approximately 56%); rental properties (approximately 62%); and shared-ownership properties (approximately 60%).

The survey also identified a small need for adaptations to some properties to provide for children with disabilities and for the elderly.

‘In our village it has become impossible for our children to be able to afford to buy a house, even renting is becoming too expensive’.

‘We feel that there is not enough housing for people with special needs (e.g. the aged and infirmed).’

Responses to the survey indicate a number of concerns regarding new development as outlined in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>% concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Parking</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Traffic</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Pressure on local schools</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Limited public transport</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Environmental issues</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Lack of facilities</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Not in keeping with the village</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Don’t want people without a local connection moving into the village</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments made about parking and traffic included the following:

There are too many cars parked on the road making it difficult and dangerous to drive in the village. More off road parking should be provided or else many of the streets should be one way only.
• Traffic calming in High St should be considered.

• Roadside parking needs to be provided in Hinwick Rd, Howard Rd, Council St and Newton Rd.

• The Hookhams Path/Hinwick Rd junction is extremely dangerous.

• If future business needs were created on the Doddington Rd industrial estate then the area which is the old vulcanizing factory could be used for housing need. This would reduce the heavy goods traffic through the village.

Comments made about services and facilities included the following:
• Further housing will place more strain on already over-subscribed services.

• Any development of housing needs associated development of facilities and services e.g. shops, recreational facilities, public transport, schools etc in order to prevent the village becoming a dormitory suburb of the neighbouring towns. Housing must not be developed in isolation.

• In addition there were a number of comments made about broadband of which the following was typical: ‘an increase in broadband speed would increase my ability to work from home’.

Comments made about environmental issues and the architectural style of new development included the following:
• The Parish Council needs to be strong enough to stop increased development to save our village; this includes garden development. If we allow continual development we will lose our village identity, community feel and the feel good factor.

• If the village is expanded with extra housing it will become too big and will lose its sense of community. The traffic situation here in Wollaston is already at breaking point and parking is a ‘nightmare’. Increased housing makes both worse.

Young Persons’ Questionnaire

A questionnaire was issued in October/November 2012 to young people living in Wollaston via the Sports Association, the Scouts and the Secondary School. In total 109 forms were returned. Respondents were generally between the ages of 10 and 15, although 9 people aged 16 to 18 also replied. When asked to indicate the 3 things that they particularly like about Wollaston the most common responses were as follows:

• I would like to see parking on the straight stretch in the High St – it would relieve parking in College St where they have to come up to park’.

• We already have serious problems with the amount of traffic and speeding in Cobbs Lane and this will probably make matters worse.

• With more and more houses going up it is becoming less like a village. We chose to live here because it was a village and not a town. We don’t want the village feel to be lost forever’.

• Many new developments erode the continuity of the style of the village – they are not in keeping’.
The facilities offered in Wollaston that are most often used by respondents are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% respondents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shops (particularly the sweet shop and take-aways)</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing fields/parks</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The library</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scouts</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The countryside</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scouts</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The countryside</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The library</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scouts</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A wide range of facilities were referred to as being in need of improvement, with the condition of roads and pavements highlighted most often (12.8% of respondents). No other improvements were specified by more than 6% of respondents.

Of the 270 trips per month made to facilities outside Wollaston the majority were to shops (97 journeys or 35.9% of trips), the cinema (52/19.3%) and to sports facilities (86/31.2%). The sports facilities most frequently visited are rugby (20), swimming (12), cricket and gymnastics (8) and skateparks (7). Overall, the most frequent destinations are Northampton (97 journeys/ 35.9% of trips), Wellingborough (86/31.9%), Milton Keynes (52/19.3%) and Kettering and Rushden (both 11/4.1%).

The vast majority of trips were made by car. In order to encourage greater use of public transport the most frequent responses indicated a need for cheaper fares (22 responses), cleaner/better buses (12), a direct bus to Northampton (9) and more regular buses (8).

When asked what other activities they would like to pursue in Wollaston, the most common responses from young people were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% respondents</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skateboard park</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More/different places to eat</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More/different shops</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More/better parks</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, when asked to indicate the 3 things that they would change about Wollaston the most popular replies were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% respondents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Litter/dog excreta</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More shops</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More facilities for the young</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skateboard park</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other issues that particularly concern young people are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% respondents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speeding vehicles (Cobbs Lane/Irchester Rd most of all)</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient pedestrian crossings</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal security</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority of respondents (65) would like to see more employment in Wollaston whilst a minority (19) would not. Only 26 respondents, however, indicated that they would want to remain/work in Wollaston after finishing their education. The most common response for young people intending to leave (23) is that there is no suitable employment in the village.

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**Business Event**

A Business Event was held on 4th October 2012 at the Village Hall, High St, Wollaston commencing at 5.30pm. The meeting was widely publicised with letters sent to local businesses.
The event was attended by 13 people along with members of the Steering Group. It provided an opportunity to raise awareness of the Plan and engage with the business community in order to develop a greater understanding of how the Plan might be used to promote employment within Wollaston.

A presentation by the Steering Group briefly explained the purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan; the plan preparation process and the planning policy background. Some facts and figures about the local economy were presented and a list of questions about the local economy facilitated a wider discussion involving attendees. The list of questions was subsequently circulated to attendees and those who had expressed an interest in attending but had been unable to do so.

Key points raised in response to the questions raised by the Steering Group were as follows:

- There is a need to promote a climate which will contribute to the establishment and expansion of businesses in Wollaston and help to create further wealth within the local economy.

- The number of retail businesses in Wollaston is in decline.

- The Plan needs to be cognisant of what is happening within the wider area at locations such as Wellingborough, Kettering and Rushden and assess the implications for Wollaston of development, including employment provision, at such locations. The village has insufficient infrastructure to support large businesses, which are more appropriately located in neighbouring towns.

- Wollaston is well located and should focus on accommodating small businesses including a range of small production type facilities and office accommodation. Working from home should be promoted along with live-work units.

- The poor public transport system does not provide a realistic alternative to travelling to the railway station at Wellingborough by car.

- Wollaston is not yet on fibre optic broadband, which restricts small internet based companies.

- There are problems with HGVs going to and from the Hinwick Rd employment area and it was suggested that the possibility of a relief road should be explored.

- The Hinwick Rd employment area has been under-utilised in the past, although the number of occupied units has been gradually increasing since 2007. It also offers opportunities for businesses wishing to expand whilst remaining in Wollaston.

- There is a need to have a discussion with Standard Life (owners of the Hinwick Rd employment area) regarding its plans for the future of the estate. The estate does not appear to be actively managed and needs upgrading if it is to continue to attract businesses.

- Existing employment sites should be safeguarded unless their loss would be in the best interests of the village.
Scott Bader Innovation Centre can accommodate further employment.

Further incentives that might encourage business development include attractive rents; reasonable rates; short-term leases; and parking.

Perhaps more could be done to make local people aware of the availability of jobs within the village e.g. via a village website? Businesses, particularly the large ones, should consider how they might improve their training opportunities for young people.

Other issues raised include a lack of parking; congestion; and the poor condition of pavements.

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**Individual businesses**

Several meetings were subsequently held with individual businesses which identified the following issues not raised at the earlier business meeting:

- The Hill is only open at lunch times on a Friday. On other days of the week there is nowhere to take visitors for a business lunch.

- For businesses that employ a significant female labour force an affordable crèche would aid recruitment.

- Public transport needs to be improved for employees reliant on this form of transport to travel to work in Wollaston from outside the village.

- Most enquiries on the Hinwick Rd estate are for units of 1,500 ft² - 5,000ft². Units on the estate are at the higher end of this range and above. Approximately 25% of units are vacant (January 2013).