

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped to fund, coordinate, collate and formulate the Astley Community Led Plan but in particular (and in no particular order):

Mathew Mead	Community Action Officer, Shropshire Council
Sarah Roberts	Formerly of Shropshire Rural Community Council
Gill Porter	Formerly of Shropshire Rural Community Council
Maxine Smith	Shropshire Rural Community Council
Councillor John Overall	Shropshire Council Ward Member for Tern
Shropshire Council	For grants received

Astley Parish Council and **Astley Parochial Church Council** for donations to our funds.

The Dog in the Lane for donation of a prize for all those respondents who wished to be included in a free prize draw; our congratulations to David Webb, the winner.

Last, but not least, all the residents of the various parts of the Parish who completed our Questionnaire and helped us to create your Astley Parish Community-Led Plan.

INTRODUCTION

The Localism Act (2011) was intended to bring about a shift in power to a local level. A Community-Led Plan is an opportunity for people to have their say about what they think is right for the place where they live and to provide a means by which the views of the community of itself, its ambitions and the shape of its future development can be taken into account when planning decisions are made.

Astley Parish lies near to and between the A49 and A53 roads at the heart of rural Shropshire. Its landscape is mainly agricultural however, dwellings ancient and modern, are scattered among several hamlets throughout the Parish and more concentrated at its centre in Astley village, a designated Conservation Area. Although agriculture and its diversified ventures comprise the majority of businesses within the Parish there are a significant number of non-agricultural business too.

Astley Parish Council organised a Rural Toolkit Event in April 2011 and followed it up with the Astley Community Vision Public Meeting in June 2012 at which the concept and ideas behind Community-Led Planning was explained. Unanimous support for a Community-Led Plan (CLP) for Astley was expressed at that meeting and volunteers were called for to come forward to form a Steering Group to set up, estimate the costs of and plan the process of creating the Astley Parish Community-Led Plan.

The Steering Group has comprised, throughout, of six members: Mark Cintas, Sandra Colclough, Heather and Nick Hall, Elwyn Jones and Maryon White. We met for the first time in November 2012 and with the initial support of Sarah Roberts (Shropshire Rural Community Council) and later Matthew Mead (Community Action Officer, Shropshire Council) we began by raising the small amount of money needed to fund the meetings, advertising, information gathering, number crunching and report writing of what would become the final Plan.

The main task followed, which was to look at all the information that had already been gathered about how people feel about living in the Parish and what is most important to them, see if anything had been overlooked by using more informal consultation so that we could identify the key topic areas of interest. Those topic areas formed the basis of the Questionnaire, the aim of which was to find out the broadest overall opinion of the whole parish community on Local Connections, Traffic Transport and Roads, Community Infrastructure and Activities, Crime Safety and Health, Planning and Development, Environment and Footpaths and Bridleways in our Parish. Respondents were also given

space to add further comments where appropriate and at the end of the Questionnaire to capture any issues, which may have been omitted.



Just over 200 questionnaires were hand delivered to every household in the Parish in September 2013, with the option to complete online, by prepaid postal return or by collection by a member of the Steering Group. 107 replies were received in total, representing a 54% response – well above the average for the County. Thank you to everyone who took part, the more people contributing

the more meaningful the results. Data input and analysis was carried out by Gill Porter (Community Support Officer, Shropshire Rural Community Council) who also produced a Survey Analysis Report which the Steering Group has used to produce the Astley Parish CLP and pinpoint the recommended actions to the Astley Parish Council.

A Public Meeting was held in Astley Village Hall in February 2014 to present a draft of the CLP to the parishioners. No new issues were raised but concerns about recent flooding across the Parish and support for a Newsletter endorsed some of the original recommended actions.

Those residents who run a business in the parish were asked if they would like a survey that looked at the business viewpoint and although there were only 10 ‘yes’ respondents it was thought there are businesses whose proprietors do not live in the Parish and would therefore not have been reached.

Forty businesses were invited to complete a short survey on ‘Survey Monkey’ however because only two responses (5%) were received the Steering Group was unable to make any recommendations to Astley Parish Council on this topic other than suggesting that Astley Parish Council looks at new ways to engage the business community.

Similarly, families were asked if they would be interested in a drop in event to gather the viewpoint of the resident youth in the Parish. Only six replied ‘yes’ and it is therefore recommended that Astley Parish Council discuss whether they wish to take this forward.

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

Astley Parish Council

It is encouraging that 60% of respondents felt that Astley Parish Council represented their views and interests and only 20% were negative. However approx. 50% did not know when Astley Parish Council met or that there were 15 minutes prior to each meeting for representations to be made by the public. This leads to the need for a newsletter which 83% would use for information, 54% to advertise local events/activities and 32% would use it to advertise their goods/services.

Action: A Newsletter should be produced regularly.

Internet Access

86% of respondents have an internet connection at home – mostly for communication (84%) and pleasure (93%), 53% for education and 42% for business. Internet was not considered fast enough by an average 50% of respondents. This is being addressed by BT and Shropshire Council in the 'Connecting Shropshire' project.

Action: Information concerning 'roll-out' of fibre optic broadband to be included in a newsletter.

TRAFFIC, TRANSPORT AND ROADS

Road Safety

Speed of Traffic and Other Road Safety/Maintenance Issues

Although just over 50% of the responses show concern for the speed of traffic on the A53, when this is broken down it becomes 100% from Albrightlee, 80% from Bings Heath, 70% from Ebrey Wood, and 71% from Upper Astley, reflecting the proximity of this main road to these settlements; similarly, whilst only 20% of total responses show concern for the speed of traffic on the A49, 100% of responses from Upper Battlefield expressed concerns. Nevertheless, for traffic calming 71% supported a lower speed limit on the A53, 80% supported more enforcement of speed, and 70.9% supported electronic speed indicator signs. However, although only 38% supported a lower speed limit on the A49 this is the overall response and not the specific support of Upper Battlefield residents. A majority expressed concern about the speed of traffic in their village or settlement (50%) and on minor roads and lanes in the Parish (60%).

Road safety issues were raised at sites such as the A49 between Battlefield and Hadnall, the various junctions on the A53 from individual settlements, crossing the A53 and A49 and turning into or leaving properties, once again biased towards the individual settlements.



Other issues were raised about drainage, junctions, visibility, and verge maintenance, although road maintenance, signage and passing places were generally considered good or satisfactory. Problems were experienced with drivers using Sat Navs (24%), and with HGVs (26%); additional comments were made about farm vehicles damaging verges, the village (presumably Astley) being used as a “rat run” particularly by large vehicles (ignoring the 7.5 tonne limit), and other individual issues.

The Steering Group felt that, although Astley Parish Council has been pro-active with some of the issues, e.g. drains, the above responses were significant.

Actions:

- 1. Astley Parish Council should raise the issues of traffic speed, road safety and maintenance with Shropshire Council, the Highways Agency and the Police.**
- 2. Astley Parish Council should raise the drainage problems with the Highways Agency to ensure that the road levels direct surface water towards and into the drains.**



TRANSPORT

Main means of Transport

A very small number of residents (just 2%) use the bus or get a lift from others and 2% walk as main means of transport. 19% use the No 64 service and 4% use the 511 service for other reasons, mainly shopping or social/leisure. The great majority of respondents (94%) stated that their main means of transport was by car; of these 57% stated that they never use the bus, and 26% that the bus service does not match work or college schedules. Other reasons given for not using the bus included: restrictive bus times, too infrequent, too far to the nearest bus stop, restrictive destinations, that the roads are unsuitable for walking to the bus (17%) and that it does not suit personal needs.

The Steering Group felt that, whilst better roads or pathways or even a change to the service times might encourage a few more people to use the bus services, the percentage of car users throughout the rural parish is likely to remain very high and this alone raises questions about the sustainability of further housing development in the Parish.

Cycling

Respondents believe that cycling should be encouraged in the parish through: designated cycle routes (65%): improved road surfaces & maintenance (37%) (although, surprisingly, this was not supported by comments under Road Safety): and through cycle parking at community venues.



The Steering Group is not convinced that cycle routes could reasonably be established along the major roads, let alone the minor roads in the parish, but that they might possibly be incorporated within any new footpaths e.g. alongside the A53.

Actions:

- 1. Astley Parish Council should consider retaining the “Open Countryside” designation for the Parish due to the heavy reliance on private transport.**
- 2. Astley Parish Council should approach the Village Hall Committee, the landlord of the Dog in the Lane and the Parochial Church Council for their views on cycle parking at their venues.**

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACTIVITIES

Community Assets

Whilst the majority of respondents felt that the Church (83%), Village Hall (88%) and the Dog in the Lane public house (66%) were important assets to the community the regular usage is comparatively low.

Action: Astley Parish Council should consider supporting the Church, Village Hall and the Dog in the Lane Pub as community assets.



Range of activities

Whilst it was felt that, on the whole community events were important and needed in order to bring members of the community together, there was no strong view about the type of additional activities that residents wanted in the parish even though 24 respondents had completed this part of the questionnaire. A small number of respondents also stated that they would be willing to get involved in organising and running activities but no particular type of activities were mentioned.

Thirty-nine per cent of respondents did not know what activities and amenities were available within the parish and therefore this suggests a need for more information such as a Parish Newsletter or website to advertise.



Action: Astley Parish Council should discuss how to resolve the lack of communication. A possible solution might be a newsletter, website, mail shot.

Action: Astley Parish Council to organise a meeting with those respondents who said they would be interested in organising/running activities and discuss possible events.

Village Green/Public Space

Whilst 42% of respondents felt that there was no need for any further facilities in the Parish, 34% felt there was a need for a play area and 28% for a village green.

Action: Astley Parish Council to discuss if it is viable to pursue either play area or village green.

CRIME, SAFETY AND HEALTH

Crime Prevention

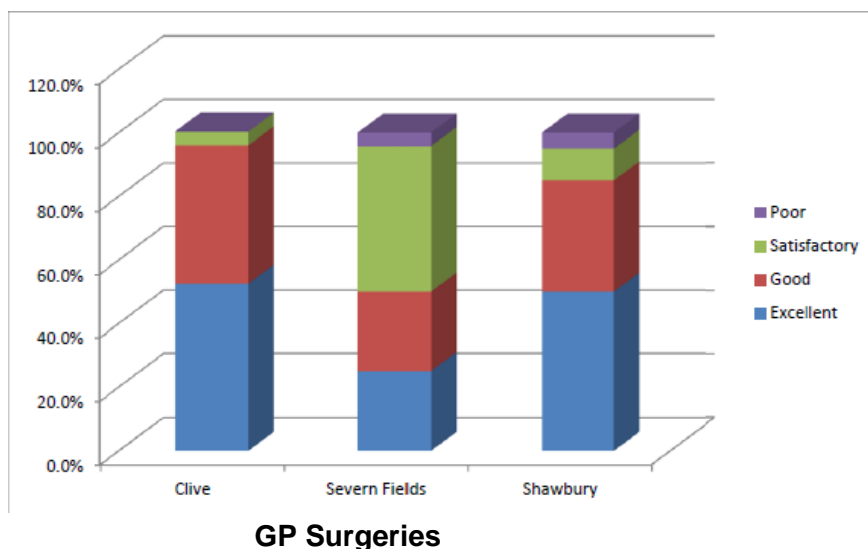
While 52% of respondents would like a greater police presence only 11 stated they had been affected by anti-social behaviour. 92% felt an active Neighbourhood Watch scheme was important. 35% already receive email bulletins from Shropshire Community Messaging with a further 38% wishing to know more about the scheme. 39% did not know how to contact local Police or Community Support Officers.

Action: Astley Parish Council to publicise Neighbourhood Watch information and Police contacts in a newsletter.

Emergency Services and GP Surgeries

The majority of respondents rated response times as excellent (44%) or good (37%) with only 3% poor. The service received at GP surgeries was judged as excellent or good at Clive (over 80%) and Shawbury (over 85%) while Severn Fields was 40% excellent or good with another 43% satisfactory.

Action: None.



PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Housing Needs

92% of respondents felt that their present accommodation was adequate for their family's needs. Only 1 respondent cited lack of affordable housing to rent or buy as the reason that a member of their household had left the parish in the last 5 years and only 2 said there were adults in their property who needed their own home in the Parish, which they are currently unable to obtain.

Action: Astley Parish Council should note that there is no great pressure from within the parish, at this time, for housing needs for local people. There is only a small requirement for alterations/development to existing housing stock within the Parish.

Future Development

There is no overall majority answer to the question "what future development, if any, would you support in the parish".

Although the greatest support is for conversion of buildings for housing, it is in total, less than 50%. Bings Heath shows 70-80% and Ebrey Wood 60-70%, but all other areas show less than 50%.

There is between 30 and 40% overall support for both conversion for other uses and small business enterprises (SBE). Upper Battlefield and Ebrey Wood both show more than 50% support for SBE, with Ebrey Wood also showing 50% for conversion for other uses. Albrightlee shows a 60-70% support for conversion for other uses too. The most popular type of SBE conversion project is for a village/farm shop with just over 50% support.

Overall support for 'no development' is also between 30 - 40% with Astley Village showing more than 50% for no development and Upper Astley about 50%. All other areas show less than 40% support.

There is no overall support for social, open market freehold, open market rental and social housing within the parish. Results range from less than 10% overall support for social housing, to just over 20% support overall for open market freehold and affordable housing. No individual area shows a 50% or more support for this category.

A different, more clear-cut picture starts to emerge when respondents were asked how many of each type of property should be developed over the next 10 years. 91% wanted no social housing, 82% no open market rental housing, 64% wanted no affordable housing and 55% no open market freehold housing. Similar results are revealed across

the parish although, it should be noted that in Ebrey Wood only 25% supported no open market housing with the same number supporting 1-3, 4-7, and 15 plus open market development. Upper Battlefield also recorded only 33% against open market development with 17% supporting 4-7, 17% 8-10 and 33% 15 plus. Upper Battlefield respondents also recorded only 43% support for no affordable housing whilst supporting 1-3 by 14%, 4-7 by 29% and 8-10 by 14%. Although these results still indicate strongly that the majority of respondents are against new housing development in the parish overall, Astley Parish Council should be aware that there are significant minority viewpoints in pockets of the Parish.

The results for numbers of conversions for other uses and SBE show, interestingly, that there is overall majority support. Greatest overall is the support for SBE with 48% for none, 30% for up to 3 and much smaller percentages for 4-7, 8-10, 11-14 and 15 plus. Conversion for alternate use showed only 35% support for none, 33% for up to 3 and 21% for 4-7. However, in both cases the best supported development size group polled less than those supporting 'none'. Greatest support for 'conversion for alternate use' was in Albrightlee with 50% for 4-7, but the same number supported none. Astley Village polled 42% for up to 3 conversions for alternate use, 38% for no conversions and 21% for 4-7. Bings Heath polled 40% for up to 3 conversions for alternate use, 33% for 4-7 and only 13% for none. Ebrey Wood polled 38% for 15 plus, 25% for up to 3 and 13% each for none, 4-7 and 8-10. Upper Battlefield polled 29% for none, 4-7 and 8-10, and 14% for up to 3. Upper Astley is the only part of the parish with a majority vote against conversion for alternate use and SBE, or indeed, development of any kind. SBE support was greatest in Upper Battlefield (29% for none) and Bings Heath (also 29% for none), and least in Albrightlee (100% for none). Astley Village polled 50% for none and 41% for up to 3. Ebrey Wood polled 44% for none, 22% for 4-7 and 11% each for up to 3, 8-10 and 11-14.

When respondents were asked to consider where any development might be the greatest overall support once again was almost 60% for replacement of existing buildings. This was reflected throughout the parish with the exception of Upper Astley. Least support was for the development of Greenfield sites showing overall support of less than 10%. Ebrey Wood showed the greatest support for Greenfield development, but it was less than 20%.

Overall support for infill, sites within village boundaries and brown field sites was less than 50% in all cases. Localised notable exceptions are Albrightlee with more than 60% support for use of brown field sites; Ebrey Wood supported infill and small sites within village boundaries to the tune of over 50% and Upper Battlefield also supported small individual sites at more than 60%.

All comments made about ‘specific sites to be protected’ and ‘protecting the built environment’ supported the notion of keeping green fields, open spaces, the conservation area and open countryside untouched. Green spaces within settlements, design respecting the scale of landscape and gaps between villages attracted more than 70% support overall. Use of materials in keeping with their surrounding polled more than 60% support and signage that respects the locality more than 50%.

Astley Parish Council should note that the evidence collated paints a picture of a community very much in touch with its environment and that wants to protect the surrounding open countryside and scattered nature of its settlements. At this moment in time it does not, overall, wish to see any new housing development however there is a significant minority who would support the conversion of existing buildings for housing or alternative uses, including SBE, providing it is in keeping with the rural nature of the parish and its architecture and culture.

Analysis of the responses to the Traffic, Transport and Roads section of the questionnaire shows that 94% of respondents say their main means of transport is the car and 57% state that they never use the bus. The reasons are varied, including the services not matching work or college schedules, restrictive times and destinations, too infrequent, too far to the nearest bus and unsuitable roads for walking there. The Steering Group felt that whilst better roads and pathways, or even a change of service, might encourage a few people to increase their use of the local bus services, the percentage of car users throughout the parish is likely to remain very high. This too raises questions about the sustainability of further housing development because of the inevitable impact an increase in traffic would have on road safety on the rural roads of the parish and entry to and exit from that A53 and A49.



At this time, the Steering Group would recommend, from the evidence, that the parish remains as ‘open countryside’ but where planning exceptions are relevant; there is significant minority support for building conversions.

It should also be noted that almost 50% of respondents have lived in the parish for more than 20 years and less than 20% for less than 5 years and this may or may not lead to a change in opinion as time passes. Astley Parish Council may wish to consider when to ask

these questions again to keep in touch with popular feeling. The Steering Group would recommend a review period of 4-5 years rather than the 10-year basis of the questioning.

Actions:

- 1. Astley Parish Council should consider retaining the “Open Countryside” designation for the Parish**
- 2. Astley Parish Council should be aware of significant support for building conversions when considering planning exceptions.**
- 3. There should be a 4-5 year review period of the Community-Led Plan.**

ENVIRONMENT

The vast majority of respondents are happy with the area we live in with between 70 and 80% identifying the peace and quiet, unspoilt open countryside and the natural landscape as reasons why they liked living in the parish. More than 60% also identified the parish as a friendly place to live.

Although 31% of respondents had no problems, the main problems identified were litter (37%), agricultural spraying/spreading (32%) and dog fouling (18%).

Fast food litter is a problem throughout the parish and fly tipping was identified in the Bings Heath Area. Encouragingly, over 50% of respondents indicated they would be willing to take part in a local litter clearance initiative and 24 individuals/families providing their contact details.

The key issues commented on in relation to agriculture are the mess created by agricultural vehicles and the use of chicken muck. Inclement weather has probably exacerbated these problems but certain statutory regulations do apply to muck, and specifically chicken muck spreading. We live in the midst of an agricultural environment, which we all enjoy, and agriculture as an industry and a business has to function day to day, whatever the prevailing weather, in order to maintain that environment. A balanced dialogue needs to be achieved between those members of the modern agricultural industry and the largely non-agrarian rural community

The worst areas for dog fouling are Upper Astley, Grange Farm Drive and Hatch Lane. Over 60% of respondents feel that dog owners should be responsible for clearing up their own dog's mess and only just over 30% thought that dogs litter bins should be provided.

Respondents were asked to consider the importance of maintaining certain physical aspects of our environment in the parish and over 50% cited footpath and stile maintenance as very important. The greatest response was from Bings Heath where support reached almost 70%, Astley Village recorded almost 60%, Upper Battlefield and Upper Astley over 50% and Albrightlee 50%.

Overall, almost 50% of respondents supported keeping roadside verges mown and tidy as opposed to a total of between only 10 and 20% who wanted them left to grow for wildlife.

Only 40% of respondents in total supported stopping vehicles damaging verges.

On the subject of flooding, 38% of respondents had been directly affected with the greatest numbers in Bings Heath. Of those affected overall, 85% had been affected through their use of local roads and between 30 and 40% either had access to their property disrupted or had suffered damage to their garden/land. Only 8% suffered damage to their home. Reason for flooding were mainly due to drains/ditches being unable to cope or not being maintained, field run off and to a lesser extent road run off.

The final question was about structures in the environment and whilst 58% supported solar/solar pv panels, between 60 and 70% were against wind turbines and mobile phone masts.

Actions:

- 1. Astley Parish Council should seek to maintain the rural integrity of the parish because the vast majority of people living here enjoy the peace, quiet and unspoilt nature of our countryside environment.**
- 2. Litter has been identified as a blot on our landscape but there are a number of people in the community who have identified themselves as willing to help with a litter picking initiative, which the PC should facilitate.**
- 3. People should be made aware of the new regulations regarding owners cleaning up their dog's mess, which is supported by the parish community.**
- 4. Astley Parish Council should seek to initiate a balanced dialogue between the community and those involved in local agricultural activities, which impact most directly on the largely non-agrarian rural community.**
- 5. Parishioners want to see stiles, footpaths and grass verges maintained. Astley Parish Council should publicise its role regarding these matters.**

6. **Although flooding problems in the parish are probably directly related to the recent extreme weather conditions, Astley Parish Council should publicise its role in whatever areas it is able to help or direct people to those statutory bodies who can.**
7. **Astley Parish Council should note that there is general support for solar panels in the parish, subject to the previously stated sensitivities to location within the rural environment and conservation area, but there is no such support for wind turbines or mobile phone masts.**

FOOTPATHS AND BRIDLEWAYS

85% of respondents either use local footpaths and/or bridleways regularly or occasionally and they use them mainly to walk for pleasure. 67% felt that signage was adequate but almost the same number (63%) felt that there should be more information on footpaths bridleways and cycle paths in the community. 73% felt that no additional footpaths and bridleways were required. 78% would like to see roadside verges improved for use as footpaths in the parish to create a link between settlements and 66% said they would use footpaths more if they were improved. 70% of respondents did not know how to report problems they encounter with footpaths and bridleways. 26 individuals and families expressed an interest in joining a community group to help maintain footpaths and bridleways.

Rights of way and rights of access are quite complex. There are different classifications, rights and obligations of both the user and the owner or occupier of the land, and the various duties of different authorities with regard to maintenance, protection and enforcement.

The rights of way in the parish appear to be well used, well sign posted and there is not a pressing need for new footpaths to be created, apart from the support for roadside verges to be used to create a 'link' between settlements, e.g. Bings Heath. However, there is a need for further information about footpaths and bridleways in the parish and an educational aspect with regards to problems encountered. There is also a willingness of people to help maintain our footpaths and bridleways from within the parish.

Actions:

1. **Astley Parish Council should publicise its role regarding footpaths and bridleways, an information leaflet could be produced for the parish**

showing rights of way, their classification and what that means, rights and obligations, to whom problems can be reported to, etc.

- 2. Astley Parish Council could also encourage the establishment of a working group where it is possible for path users to improve things for themselves within a legal framework, which would include the interested parties, i.e. walkers, land owners/occupiers and councillors.**
- 3. Astley Parish Council should continue to support a footpath link between Bings Heath and Astley Village.**

Astley Community-Led Plan

Survey Analysis Report

November 2013