

## Commerce

The value of a range of shops and businesses in town is recognised by residents and visitors as illustrated by the very high response (86%) given to *support for local traders* as a reason for shopping locally. This, together with the value placed on being able to walk to shops and meeting familiar people, implies that WPC should do whatever it can to retain or grow the present range of High Street retailers.



**Loss of shop premises:** The loss of shop premises to residential use has been significant over the past 10 years. A clear majority of 57% think that this change of use should be opposed with another 25% having no strong feeling about it. Specific comments highlighted the loss of pubs to residential use as undesirable.

**Opening times:** The questionnaire responses showed that very few (less than 10%) find the shops' opening hours inconvenient.

**Charity or Swap Shops:** There is some demand for these with more than half of respondents saying they would use them, but with little interest in helping to set up or run them. More than a third of respondents do not want this type of shop in town.

## Housing and planning

**Growth:** When asked whether they supported the growth of Watlington with housing development, respondents show little enthusiasm for major new developments, with 39% wanting no more development and 44% wanting only sympathetic infill. The younger age group (16-25 years) are twice as likely to favour growth – not surprising as they are the group most likely to be looking for new homes in the future.

**Housing type:** People are strongly in favour of any new developments reflecting local building styles and materials. Developments that include affordable housing are well supported with *affordable housing to buy* supported by 49% of respondents. Assisted living for older people was next highest at 31%.

**Larger houses:** Development of houses with three or more bedrooms are least well supported, but this is at odds with the sort of house people planning to move are

looking for. Among those who plan to move in the next five years, 55% say they will be looking for houses with three or more bedrooms.

**Actions:** WPC have had a survey of housing need carried out which supports the need for additional affordable housing in town. They are now looking at prospects for another exception site development like Windmill Piece, but at present it is not clear how the changes in local planning being introduced by the national government will affect this type of development.

**Additional comments:** Many respondents to the questionnaire provided additional comments. Those relating to housing include several relating development to the needs of the surrounding villages, such as *Watlington's 'Market Town' relationship with surrounding villages to be considered in future plans or use empty houses a mile outside Watlington*. These comments have increased relevance now with the Localisation Bill.

## Other Matters

**Church Hall:** The future of the Church Hall was of major concern at the time the questionnaire was completed. Nearly half of respondents (45%) wanted to retain the hall for the community. Its future has not yet been resolved, but discussions are continuing between the Church Hall Concern group and the Parochial Church Council.

**General comments:** Thirteen pages of comments have been collected from the questionnaires and have influenced the selection and flavour of the content of this note. This short summary cannot reflect every opinion given, and we need to bear in mind that many of these comments arise from a single individual and may not be widely supported. WPC will not ignore them but will consider them at appropriate times.

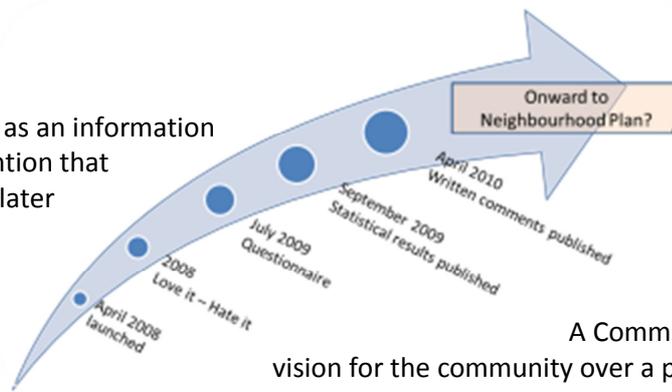
**Other successes:** Following Watlington Speaks a number of suggestions have been followed up by the community. These include

- *Watlington Volunteer Drivers* which aims to get anybody to their hospital appointment whether NHS or private;
- *Watlington in Bloom* which in 2011 led Watlington to win a Gold Award and the large village category in the Thames Valley and Chilterns Region;
- *Oxford Chilterns Community Action* has been formed to co-ordinate and assist with environmental sustainability and green issues for Watlington and the surrounding area;
- The *Christmas Fair* has been greatly expanded into a Saturday of fun and celebration by the Watlington Business Association and others.



## What Next?

Watlington Speaks was planned as an information gathering project, with the intention that this information would at some later date feed into preparation of a Community Plan.



A Community Plan sets out a shared vision for the community over a period of 10 or more years and contains actions for achieving this vision. It should show how community action can meet local needs and help to prioritise resources.

## The Localism Act (2011)

With this Act the government has provided the means by which communities can have a say in the future of the places where they live and work. This will be achieved through the use of Neighbourhood Plans. With a Neighbourhood Plan, communities will be able to establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood. They will be able to say, for example, where new homes and offices should be built, and what they should look like. The Neighbourhood Plan, like a Community Plan, will set a vision for the future but with the difference that once accepted it will have legal force. Decision-makers at all levels will be obliged by law to take account of what the Neighbourhood Plan says when they consider proposals for development.



### We must decide

The Localism Act gives communities the chance to have more of a say in their local planning. Watlington as one of the larger communities in the South Oxfordshire area, should take advantage of this opportunity and be seen to lead rather than follow.

We need to decide whether Watlington needs or wants a Neighbourhood Plan. Parishes are not required to have a Neighbourhood Plan. If they do not have one, the national and local planning policies will be applied. If they do have a Neighbourhood Plan, it cannot override national and local policies but it gives the community the ability to influence how these are applied in the community. The concept of Neighbourhood Plans will have detail added over the coming months, only then can Watlington assess the real opportunity, the cost and the appetite for local residents to get involved. Watlington Parish Council will discuss this in the near future, and the output of Watlington Speaks will provide some of the input into this discussion.

## It is a community decision

Although the Parish Council is expected to take a lead in developing a Neighbourhood Plan, the plan should reflect the needs and wishes of the community as a whole. Input from businesses, community groups and individuals is needed to define a sustainable development path for the town. Before the Neighbourhood Plan can be given its legal status it has to be approved by SODC and, most importantly, **it has to be supported by a majority of votes cast at a referendum of parish residents.** Your input is essential if a Neighbourhood Plan is to be successfully created for Watlington. Love it or Hate it – this is the way the future looks so make sure your views are included.

## Volunteering

The importance of people providing voluntary support for their communities is another aspect of the current government's aims to involve people more closely in the running of their own communities. The need for voluntary effort is central to this idea, and with the current financial constraints will become increasingly important. There are already many thriving organisations in Watlington that are entirely dependent on volunteer support whose contribution is gratefully acknowledged. There are nevertheless more than enough openings for further volunteers to help keep Watlington special – WPC will do what it can to put like-minded people in contact with each other. The Watlington Speaks questionnaire (which residents responded to long before the change of Government in 2010) included a number of requests for volunteer support.

