



BRANCEPETH, COUNTY DURHAM

PARISH PLAN

Issue 2, December 2017



INTRODUCTION

Parish Councils represent the first tier of local government. They have powers granted to them under a variety of statutes – including the power to lease land for the community, the power to comment on planning applications, provide allotments and maintain highway verges. They are empowered to raise money for their activities through a tax (the precept) which is collected as an addition to Council Tax.

The passing of the Localism Act 2011 with its emphasis on the devolution of power, influence and decision making to local communities has highlighted the significance of the role to be played by the Parish Council in the years to come.

In line with the Community Engagement – Statement of Intent (attached as an Appendix) adopted by the Council in March 2012, Brancepeth Parish Council determined that the production of a Parish Plan would enable the Council to fix their priorities for the next 5 years by reference to a document which reflected the thoughts and aspirations of the community it serves.

In 2012, the process which led to the production of the Parish Plan had 3 key elements:

1. The Parish Council conducted a survey amongst all the members of the community. The return rate from the survey was almost 30%
2. A Steering Group was set up consisting of 3 members of the Council, the Chairman of the Brancepeth Community Association and the Priest in Charge of the Parochial Church Council. The Steering Group prepared the first draft of the Plan after taking into account the views of members of the community as expressed in the survey and through a second request for views contained in the Parish Newsletter of February 2012.
3. A draft plan was prepared and promoted via the May 2012 Parish Newsletter. The draft could be downloaded from the Parish Council website and hard copies were also made available in the Village Hall. The Annual Meeting also held in May 2012 gave the opportunity for final input from the community.

This Parish Plan has been in place between 2012 and 2017 with some successfully completed actions. Issue 2 of the Plan, issued in 2017 updates this adding more detail by appending the Area Action Plan.

Brancepeth is a parish which benefits from a high degree of voluntary commitment on behalf of members of the community. The Community Association, the Church, the Castle and the Golf Club, along with initiatives started by individual members of the Parish and the work of the Council itself, all play an active part in providing facilities and opportunities to promote the physical, mental and spiritual well being of the community.

The Parish Council fully embraces this spirit of localism and co-operation. This Parish Plan is designed to set out how the shared priorities of the people of Brancepeth can be effectively taken forward over the next 5 years.

HISTORY

Settlement in Brancepeth can be traced at least as far back as Saxon times. The development of the Brancepeth Estate including church and castle mainly took place in the centuries of ownership by the Nevilles, one of the great Norman families. The Nevilles owned Brancepeth for four centuries until their lands became forfeit to the Crown after their support for the abortive attempt of Mary Queen of Scots to reclaim the English crown from Elizabeth the First – the so called “Rising of the North” in which Brancepeth Castle played a prominent role.



From that time until the end of the 18th century the estate passed through a series of owners. In 1796 it was bought by William Russell, an extremely wealthy coal owner and banker from Sunderland. His son Matthew married Elisabeth Tennyson, the aunt of the poet, and in 1817 they moved to Brancepeth on the death of his father. Over the next 5 years much rebuilding was undertaken, contributing very much to the way the castle looks today. Matthew and Elisabeth's daughter, Emma Maria, married the heir to the Viscount Boyne and the Boynes became an integral part of the history of Brancepeth well into the 20th century. The name of William Russell lives on in Brancepeth today through the provision of housing by the charitable trust which bears his name.

In 1948 the Brancepeth Estate was sold by the Boynes to the Duke of Westminster who retained ownership until the early 1960s and it was at this time that many of the properties in the village of Brancepeth passed into private hands for the first time. From the time the Boynes moved to their other family seat at Burwarton in Shropshire in the 1920s the castle had a number of occupants, serving, for example, as the regimental headquarters of the DLI and a research facility for the Sunderland glass manufacturer, Jopling & Co. In 1978 it was bought by the current owners, the Dobson family.

St Brandon's Church has stood for over 900 years. It was almost destroyed by fire in 1998 but after a successful fund raising campaign involving many members of both the Church and wider Brancepeth community, the restored church re opened in 2005.



BRANCEPETH TODAY

The majority of the Parish residents live in Brancepeth village but there other small settlements such as those at Stockley, Holywell and Peppermires alongside the farms which fall within the modern Parish boundary.

Since the time when the Brancepeth Estate was sold by the Duke of Westminster in 1961 there has been a significant amount of new housing development including Goodwell Lea , Stockley Grove and The Forge. However there has been no large scale residential development in recent years. The parish is home to a range of business activities, some housed in Brancepeth Castle, and also including the golf club and the farms based within the parish boundary.

Population and Housing

The population of Brancepeth remains constant and there has not been any significant residential development for many years. The Survey revealed that the majority of respondents did not favour more housing developments in the village. At the time of the Survey the returns suggested that the majority of residents have lived here for many years and this does show that once they move to Brancepeth it is a place where people want to settle.

More recently, concern has been expressed as to the impact on the long term future of Brancepeth of the change in policy on school catchment areas. Some fear that an inability to get children into Durham schools will make living in Brancepeth unattractive to young families, there will be an increasingly aging population and housing values will be affected. In fact the change in policy with regard to school admissions does not mean that no child from Brancepeth will get into Durham schools and there are current examples of where it is happening. However the perception is part of a wider concern on behalf of many. The village has a longstanding and natural relationship with the city of Durham and this is in danger of being eroded by, amongst other things, actual and potential changes in political boundaries.

Brancepeth is one of a number of villages that are considered to be inappropriate locations for new housing development in the Durham City Local Plan of 2004 (policy H4). That plan is now being reviewed in the Durham County Council's Development Plan process. The Development Plan is at an early stage - the first draft is expected late in 2017 - and upon completion will provide a new and up to date policy context against which all planning applications and development proposals will be assessed and determined. Brancepeth Parish Council is consulted on planning applications in the parish and on many aspects of Durham County Council's policy and actions. At the start of the County Council's review of the Development Plan the Parish Council indicated it would not envisage any change to the 2004 policy for Brancepeth.

The village and surrounding land is scheduled as the Brancepeth Conservation Area, within which are many listed buildings. A detailed appraisal of the Brancepeth Conservation Area and the management proposals was adopted by the County Council in 2009. The document provides detail to the character and appearance of the Brancepeth Conservation Area designated under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990. The Act seeks to ensure that any development within the conservation area will preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the area.

Priority Given the size of population, the lack of appetite for further development and given the present economic situation it is unrealistic to anticipate any significant change in the facilities which are available in the village – such as a post office, shop, pub library etc and therefore we must do what we can as a community to maintain and further enhance the quality of village life. Part of this is keeping under continuous review any proposed developments and use of the precept to lease the field. **This is essential if Brancepeth is going to remain a desirable place to live and attract residents across all ages.**

Environment

Brancepeth`s natural environment is highly valued by its residents and the preservation of that environment is a critical element in the quality of life within the Parish. There is ready access to National Byway 20 and the work undertaken by the Brancepeth Archives & History Group to publicise and promote access to the network of public footpaths is indicative of a shared desire to help residents enjoy as much of their surrounding environment as possible.

Concerns have been expressed that the village whilst generally picturesque can also be regarded as untidy and there is particular concern about the verges, trees, pavements and paths along the A690 and up Wolsingham Road. This plan notes that the Area Action Plan contains several detail enhancements to the visible village environment. Further; the council has discussed whether the village should be aspiring to entering one of the prestigious village competitions; ‘most picturesque village’, ‘Britain in bloom’, etc and further work funded by the precept and by local volunteers to improve the appearance could be proposed to enable this.

The village does have litter bins and dog litter bins. Whilst there does not appear to be a prevailing view that there should be designated dog walking areas within the Parish it is clearly important that the use of the dog litter bins should be universal amongst all dog owners and that has not yet been achieved.

The Survey indicated that the majority of respondents would be willing to help keep the village tidy and the Parish Council intends to build on this spirit of volunteering .

Priority The look and appearance of the village in particular is the most obvious and tangible evidence of care and pride on behalf of the community. **Working together to present the physical environment in the best possible way is essential given that the funds available to the Parish Council to pay for services of commercial operators is limited.**

Facilities and Amenities

Working in partnership with the Allotment Association the Parish Council provides allotments and the lease for the allotment site has just been renewed for a further 10 years.

After a long campaign the Council was able to lease the field adjoining Wolsingham Road which traditionally was the village cricket field and can be used for all forms of recreational activity today. In previous years there has been a “Fun in the Field Day” to help encourage greater use and further opportunities exist but there remains a concern that this facility is very much underused. Recently responsible dog walking has been allowed but it is important for BPC together with BCA to encourage residents to put forward ideas to maximise its potential.





The Village Hall which is operated and managed by the Community Association plays a vital part in the life of the community with a wide range of activities taking place provide such a focal point for Brancepeth communal life. Previous changes in County Council funding has prompted the Parish Council to provide some funding from the precept to the Community Association. It is proposed that this continues to be supported.



The Church also has a prominent life in the life of the community – aside from offering the opportunity for worship it hosts a range of cultural events in the course of a year and is the main provider of activities for young people in Brancepeth through Sunday School and Youth Club. The beauty of the restored building itself together with surroundings represents one of the most attractive features of the village .

Brancepeth Castle Golf Club also makes a major contribution to the life of the community. Not only providing sporting and social facilities for the benefit of villagers but also attracting over 2000 visitors a year to Brancepeth. The Golf Club also contributes to the upkeep of the road from the Village to the club car park. The availability of social membership for local residents means that it is possible to use the clubhouse as a place to meet and socialise.



Priority The contribution made by all organisations and the individuals who give their time and effort to such organisations cannot be over-valued. **Everything possible must be done by the Council to encourage and support such commitment on a continuing basis.**

Transport and Traffic

Historic and continuing Surveys revealed that speeding traffic on the A690 was, and remains, the main problem which faced Brancepeth residents; the fatality at the cross roads reminds us of the ongoing risk. Since the initial Survey was carried out the road through the village has been made subject to a 30 mile an hour speed limit and an electronic speed warning device has been installed. More recently some residents have been trained in the use of speed sensing equipment that can monitor traffic and encourage safer driving. Despite these developments the issue of safety from speeding traffic remains a prominent concern in the minds of residents.

Since the time of the Survey the condition and maintenance of not only the A690 but also other roads eg Wolsingham Road and pavements within the village have become another cause of concern on behalf of residents.

Brancepeth is served by a bus service which runs between Durham City Bus Station and Crook. The service has now been increased and there is a bus every 20 minutes going in either direction throughout the main part of the day. However the survey suggests that it is likely that the main mode of transport for local residents will remain the car with relatively few people being reliant on public transport.

Priority Despite the success in obtaining the speed limit and warning device the volume of traffic using the A690 continues to present an obvious road safety issue. **It is essential that all possible efforts are made to secure the effective enforcement of the speed limit.**

Community Safety

The quality of life for the residents of Brancepeth will be significantly enhanced if fear of crime and anti-social behaviour can be kept to the minimum. Given the nature of the Parish some of the greatest risks are faced by our farming community. Police presence and visibility in the village is high with regular drop ins' to the Wednesday Coffee Morning and the village is used for Police training exercises. Also there is a history of fly tipping along some of the quieter roads within the Parish. Brancepeth does have the services of a Neighbourhood Warden whose job is to reduce the level of anti social behaviour and tackle environmental problems. In addition Neighbourhood Watch and Farm Watch both have a role to play in maintaining a safe and secure community

Priority

The fact that we have a Neighbourhood Warden together with his contact details need to be widely publicised and the willingness of residents to participate in Neighbourhood Watch acted upon.

BRANCEPETH - THE FUTURE

The plan for the future of Brancepeth has 3 key elements – first class **communication**, coordinated **community action** and excellent **contacts** and relationships with all external agencies which have the power to affect the quality of life in the parish. Rather than focus on a multitude of individual actions the Parish Plan is intended to set out the framework and approach the Parish Council will adopt in seeking to advance and protect the community interest.

1 Communication

First class communication is essential – there has to be an effective exchange of information and opinions between the council, the residents and all relevant external agencies so that the interests of Brancepeth are best served.

The survey confirmed that the Parish Newsletter is a very effective form of communication on all aspects of community life , including the work of the Parish Council, and will continue to be a vital tool to publicise what is going on to take forward and achieve the priorities set out in this plan. In addition the survey showed that there is wide access to the internet and this will allow the Council to make greater use of its website to inform and consult on a continuing basis.

Actions

- **Further development of the Parish Council website to provide an up to the minute and interactive alternative communication channel to support communication via the Parish Newsletter.**
- **Pro active approach by the Parish Council to seeking out and disseminating - via website and Newsletter – information from external agencies of interest and concern to parish residents.**
- **Specific feedback on all interaction with external agencies again via website and Newsletter.**
- **Publication of directory of key contacts from both within and outside the parish.**

2 Community Actions

The sense of community and volunteering spirit which was displayed in the campaign to raise funds for the restoration of the church continues to be a feature of life in Brancepeth. The track record in offering time and effort in pursuit of community activities – both formal and informal – is both excellent and wide ranging.

The survey confirmed this willingness to get involved with a large majority of respondents indicating that they would be prepared to help keep the village tidy. The priority is to capture, organise and support this resource.

Actions:

- **Create a Forum which brings together representatives from all sections of the community.**
- **Use that Forum to develop a programme of work to enhance our village and parish environment.**
- **Recruit a taskforce of residents to help carry out the agreed programme of work.**
- **Communicate via the website and Newsletter the progress made in carrying out the programme.**

3 Contacts

Self help as set out above is essential but many of the issues which face Brancepeth can only be dealt with by external agencies. Brancepeth will have to fight its corner in securing attention and support when there will be many competing demands on time and resources. In order to do that there is a need to develop and maintain excellent contacts and working relationships with all the key external agencies eg highways and planning

Actions

- **Identify key agencies.**
- **Select individual councillors to develop working relationships with allocated agencies.**
- **Communicate the allocation of responsibilities via the website and newsletter.**

Appendix

See the separately issued Area Action Plan for more detailed initiatives for improving the village.