

# Woolpit Neighbourhood Plan Community Consultation Summary Report

## Context

Over a period of six months during 2016 the pop-up stand was used to gather comments on eight separate occasions, at various locations in the village:

21 May	Institute (Garden Club Plant Sale)
18 June	Institute (Festival Day)
3 July	Borley Green
9 July	Village centre
16 July	Wrights Way
23 July	The Heath
12 November	Institute (Neighbour Hood Plan Exhibition & Presentation)
19 November	Institute (Green Fair)

Further consultations are not ruled out, but this report is made now as the Neighbourhood Plan is soon to conclude the initial phase of community engagement and consultation with a questionnaire which will be distributed to all residents.

## Findings

330 responses have been made on post-it notes. Some responses incorporate more than a single comment, so that there are 385 comments in all.

Major areas of concern were identified in February 2016 as a result of exploratory contacts with various stakeholder groupings (see Appendix A). The table below shows these areas and the number of comments received relating to issues within each area.

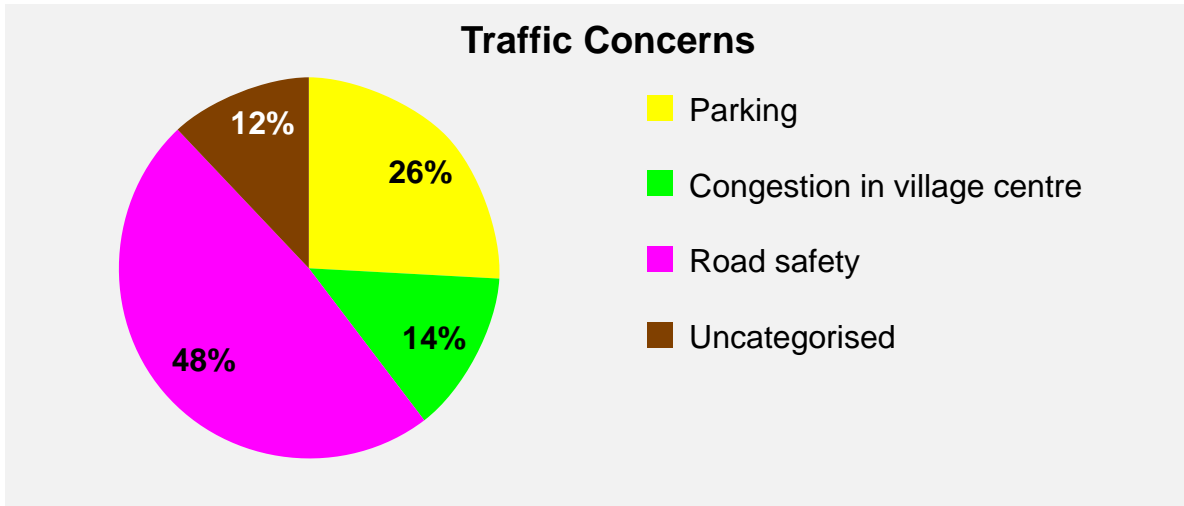
Areas of concern	Comments received	% of all comments	Responses received	% of all responses
Traffic	174	45%	138	42%
Housing	62	16%	60	18%
Footpaths and cycleways	60	16%	48	15%
Facilities and services	36	9%	32	10%
Wildlife and green spaces	27	7%	27	8%
Heritage and community	26	7%	25	8%
Total	385		330	

Explanation of the difference between *comments* and *responses* totals:

- Responses are the number of post-it notes written, which are classified by the first or main comment (in most cases, the only comment).
- Comments include secondary or additional points made, which in some cases may be to do with a different area of concern.

**Traffic** is clearly by far the most important concern for most Woolpit residents. **Housing** and **Footpaths and cycleways** are important, and of roughly equal standing, but each mentioned by less than half as many people as **Traffic**. The other three areas of concern are significant, but much less so than these three.

Traffic

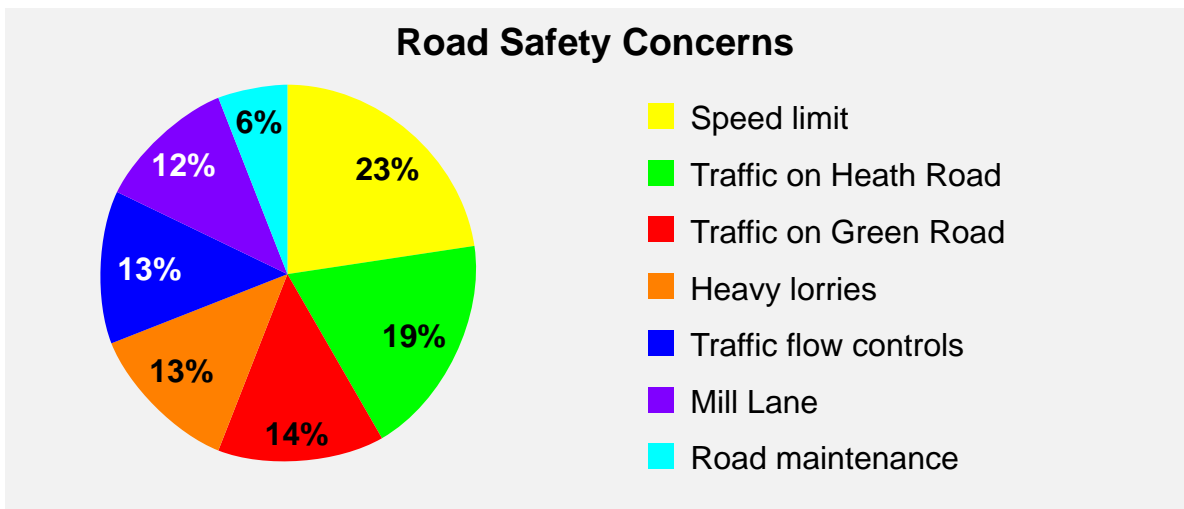


### Traffic

Total responses 138

Total comments 174

Traffic concerns			
Road safety	Parking	Congestion in village centre	Uncategorised
84	45	24	21



### Road safety

Total responses

Total comments 84

Road safety concerns						
Speed limit	Traffic on Heath Road	Traffic on Green Road	Heavy lorries	Traffic flow controls	Mill Lane	Road maintenance
19	16	12	11	11	10	5

**Road safety, parking, and congestion in the village centre** are the main concerns in the Traffic category.

This was already the case when the consultation interim report was made in July 2016. It also remains true that almost half of the comments mention some aspect of road safety, although these can be further broken down: 22% of these comments show concern about vehicle speeds, and almost one-fifth about the traffic on Heath Road. Most of the rest of the road safety comments are fairly evenly spread across concern for the traffic on Green Road (14%), heavy lorries (13%), traffic flow controls (13%) and traffic in Mill Lane (12%).

Woolpit enjoys good wider transport links — bus services, proximity to a railway station and a major trunk route. However, residents' concerns about **road safety** are not without cause.

- The majority of Woolpit's roads are fairly narrow, in some places very narrow. In many roads the width of the pavement is not adequate to allow two people to pass with ease without one of them stepping into the road. This is not the case around the Pump triangle, where the pavements are quite generous; but on the other hand several roads have a pavement only on one side, and some roads have no pavement at all. There are a few places where the pavement is extremely narrow - under one metre - and pedestrians feel unsafe, and exposed to danger from passing vehicles. Specific examples are on the south side of The Street just by the Institute; on Heath Road opposite the Health Centre; and on Green Road just south of the junction with Mill Lane. In these places the pavement is not wide enough for a pushchair or wheelchair.
- There are currently no marked pedestrian crossings in Woolpit. There is a 'lollipop lady' who assists parents and children to cross the road outside Woolpit Primary Academy at the beginning and end of the school day. At the crossroads by Costcutters pedestrians frequently have to wait for several minutes to cross the road during peak times.
- Heath Road in particular takes a lot of traffic, including HGVs accessing the lorry park at Rattlesden. Green Road takes a significant traffic flow during peak hours, rendering the pinch point just mentioned potentially dangerous. On several occasions houses in this vicinity have been struck by vehicles. The pavement outside Mullions, which is about 0.8 metres wide, is frequently mounted by passing vehicles.
- A national cycle route passes through the village, traversing junctions which can be difficult to negotiate: Rags Lane with the Street, Green Road with Mill Lane, and Mill Lane with Heath Road. Each one of these turns can be hazardous.
- Speed limits are frequently exceeded. This occurs mainly where vehicles are entering the built-up area, although they are already by then within the 30 mph limited zone. Speed counts have shown that the average speed of vehicles entering the settlement area when approaching from the south along Green Road is almost 40 mph. According to the police, traffic is often travelling faster than the speed limit when approaching Heath Road from the A14 to the north.

It is quite widely felt that further growth of the village is likely to increase traffic, and it seems clear that steps should be taken to reduce or eliminate existing dangers. If planning policy and planning decisions give due weight to these concerns, it should be possible to mitigate existing hazards and avoid the risk of aggravating the situation.



Parking in The Street outside the Co-op



Parking in the Pump triangle



Village car park opposite the church



Village Hall car park

All four photos above were taken on the same weekday, within 5 minutes of each other (just before 12.30 pm). Together they represent typical parking levels in the village centre.

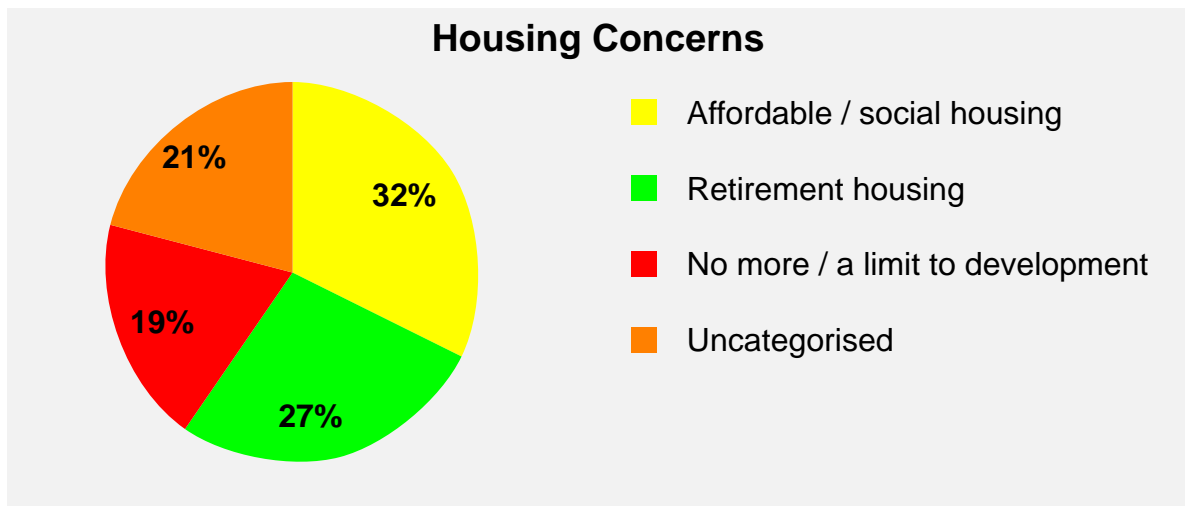
Although only 26% of traffic comments mentioned **parking** issues, and 14% focused on **congestion in the village centre**, the fact should not be overlooked that these concerns garnered 12% and 6% respectively of *all* comments received. There is a clearly perceived lack of parking in Woolpit, particularly in the village centre, but also at the school and health centre. At the same time, people feel that the centre of the village is badly congested (no doubt in part due to all the parked cars), especially at certain times of day.

Parked cars can help to slow traffic passing through the village centre. Comments make the following points:

- There are no parking spaces reserved for disabled users nearer than the church.
- A lack of parking may be affecting business for some of the shops. It has been reported that some cars seem to be parked in the centre all day long.
- The passage of large vehicles is often difficult, and can cause delays.

This is a difficult problem to resolve. There is little or no space near the village centre to create more parking, even if it was desirable to do so. Alternative strategies may be more productive: encouraging more people to walk or cycle, moving one or more of the shops / businesses to a different location when the opportunity arises, perhaps discouraging drivers from coming through the centre.

## Housing



### Housing

Total responses 60

Total comments 62

Housing concerns			
Affordable / social housing	Retirement housing	No more / a limit to development	Uncategorised
20	17	12	13

**Housing** is the second major area of concern for Woolpit residents, and it must be recognised that the housing development proposals that have come forward since September 2015 have accentuated people's apprehensions. At present Woolpit's housing stock numbers about 900 (852 at the 2011 census), so the total represented by these five developments would increase the size of the village by over 80%. The table shows the situation in January 2017:

Development proposal	Houses	Status
Green Road	49	Amended application awaiting decision by MSDC
Old Stowmarket Road	120	Application approved; land under offer to a builder
Drinkstone Road / Rags Lane	60	Preliminary consultation held; no application yet
Street Farm	450	Pre-application proposal; consultation planned
Glebe land	79	Application awaiting decision by MSDC

The Housing Needs survey carried out by the Parish Council in the summer of 2015 revealed a shortage of 'affordable housing', ie homes which families without the means to buy at market prices can afford.

Population by age	2001	2011	
Under 16	21.1%	15.8%	(Mid Suffolk 19.8% & 18.4%)
Working age 16-64	60.4%	60.2%	(Mid Suffolk 62.7% & 61.4%)
Aged 65 and above	18.5%	24.0%	(Mid Suffolk 17.6% & 20.1%)

Study of demographic data shows that our community is ageing. Median age in Woolpit rose from 42 in 2001 to 47 in 2011.

Given these facts, although for residents Housing was a much less pressing issue than Traffic, it is not surprising that the three main concerns in this category were **affordable housing**, **retirement housing** and the perceived **threat or scale of housing development**. Affordable housing was the focus of 32% of Housing comments and 5% of *all* comments; retirement housing 27% and 4% respectively.

The local authority's policy for large developments is that affordable housing should comprise at least 35% of homes. Developers should be held to this commitment.

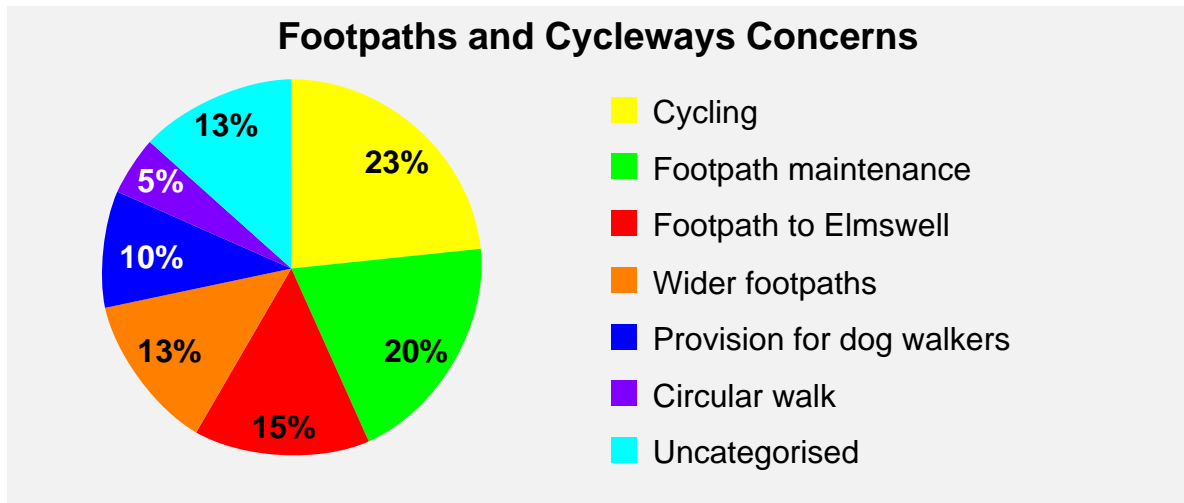
On 12 December 2016 the Minister of State for Housing & Planning announced a new policy, which affects neighbourhood plans in areas where the local authority lacks a 5-year land supply (so it applies to our case). The policy states that *relevant policies for the supply of housing in a neighbourhood plan, that is part of the development plan — we are not there yet but may be in a year or so — should not be deemed to be “out-of-date” under paragraph 49 of the National Planning Policy Framework where all of the following circumstances arise at the time the decision is made:*

- *The written ministerial statement is less than 2 years old, or the neighbourhood plan has been part of the development plan for 2 years or less*
- *The neighbourhood plan allocates sites for housing; and*
- *The local planning authority can demonstrate a three-year supply of deliverable housing sites.*

In other words, our Neighbourhood Plan will have force in planning decisions, but only if it allocates sites for housing.

The demand for retirement housing should be explored in the residents' questionnaire, and considered when the Neighbourhood Plan looks at potential site allocation, if no developer comes forward with a proposal to provide homes of this sort.

## Footpaths and cycleways



### Footpaths and cycleways

Total responses 48

Total comments 60

Footpaths and cycleways concerns						
Cycling	Footpath maintenance	Footpath to Elmswell	Wider footpaths	Provision for dog walkers	Circular walk	Uncategorised
14	12	9	8	6	3	8

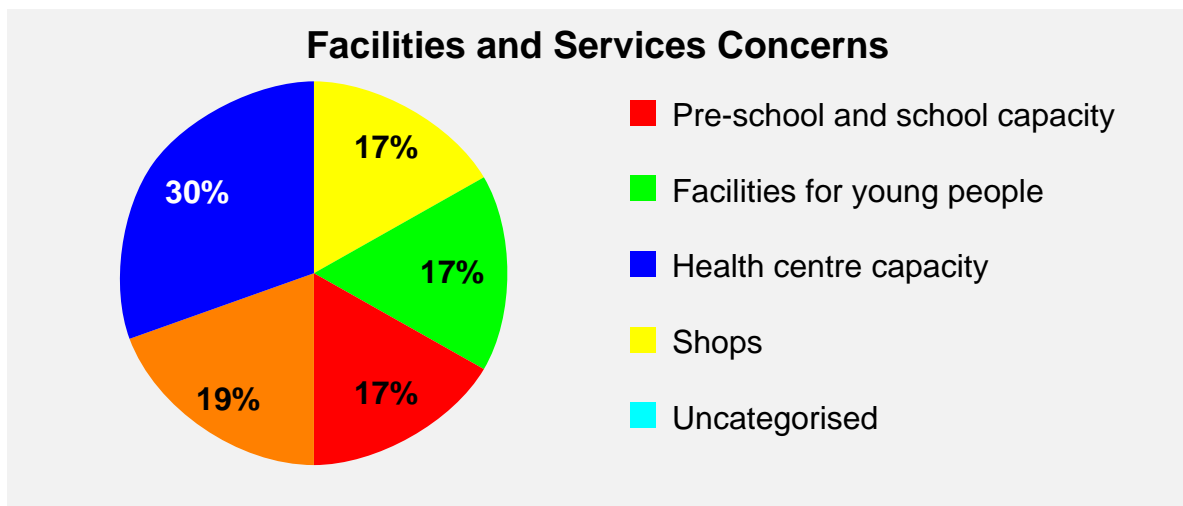
The demand for better **footpath** provision (including pavements) is quite clear. If concerns about the lack of a footpath to Elmswell, the perceived poor state of maintenance of many footpaths and pavements, and the need for better — often wider — footpaths are taken together (nearly 8% of *all* comments), it becomes an issue at least as important as the concerns about congestion in the village centre. Moreover, in some situations there is an evident overlap with road safety issues.

Concerns to do with **cycling** received nearly a quarter of the comments in this category (4% of *all* comments). Given that National Cycle Route 51 passes right through the village centre and from west to east through the parish, and that sustainable transport / access is an important consideration in planning decisions about housing developments, we should be looking to achieve more to make Woolpit a cycle-friendly village.

Due to its historical role as a local market hub, Woolpit's compact centre has many roads radiating out in different directions - seven in all (few villages have more than four). Of these, four have significant flows of motor traffic: The Street, Church Road, Green Road, and Drinkstone Road. The other three — Rags Lane, Rectory Lane, and Mill Lane — are very suitable for pedestrian and cycle use. As there are also two footpaths leading away from points very close to the centre, there is a clear opportunity to create a network of footpaths and cycleways.

Encouraging walking and cycling could make it easier to resolve some of the problems connected with motor traffic, in particular parking and congestion in the village centre. The residents' questionnaire should examine options to reduce car dependency by these means.

## Facilities and services



### Facilities and services

Total responses 32

Total comments 36

Facilities and services concerns				
Shops	Pre-school and school capacity	Facilities for young people	Health centre capacity	Uncategorised
7	6	6	6	11

Woolpit, which is the third largest village in Mid Suffolk, is designated a Key Service Centre by the District Council. The *Suffolk Rural Services Review 2016* shows Woolpit to be a well-served community. The availability of health services, education and childcare, shops, and pubs and cafes is better, and transport services, recreation and community facilities, together with environment protection and crime prevention as good or better than most villages in Suffolk enjoy. This is reflected by the fact that the facilities and services heading comes only fourth in the areas of concern raised by public comments. Nevertheless, it attracted 9% of *all* comments, showing that there is a general concern about the ability of Woolpit's social and economic infrastructure to sustain a large increase in the population of the village.

The expansion of the **Health Centre** has been provided for by the inclusion of a large new car park in the housing development already approved on land south of Old Stowmarket Road. This is currently under offer to a national house builder, according to the developer.

Both the **pre-school and the primary school** are over-subscribed, and at present lack the space to expand. Young children are already having to attend schools in other neighbouring villages. This is an unsatisfactory situation for them and for their parents, involving unnecessary travel and separation from playmates. There is also a potentially undesirable consequence for our village; this could lead to the withering of our community. Young families may not wish to live in a place where their children cannot be schooled. New housing may attract only older people.

Many comments highlight the need to provide more and better play **facilities for young children**, and appropriately-equipped recreational space for older children and teenagers.



Mid Suffolk's planning policies require on-site provision of children's play space for housing developments of 50 or more dwellings (*Supplementary Planning Document for Social Infrastructure Including Open Space, Sport and Recreation, 2006*). Following the guidance with Woolpit's current population would require, for local play areas:

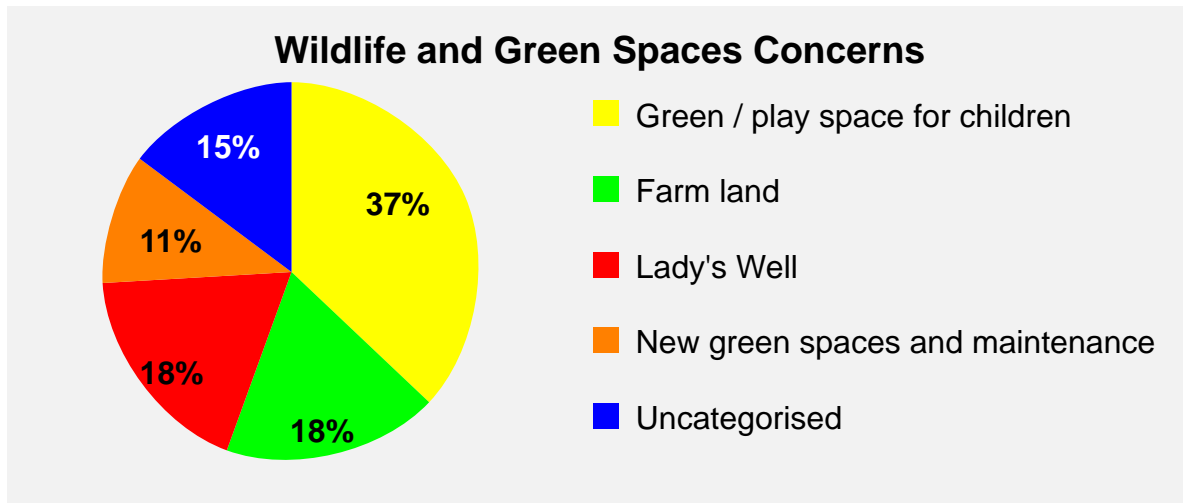
- TOPS (Toddlers Outdoor Play Space — accompanied 2-5 year olds): 0,04 hectares, small low key games area equipped with play features and 3 items of 'small scale' play equipment, within 10 minutes walking time of the child's home;
- JOPS (Junior Outdoor Play Space — 6-12 year olds): 0.16 hectares, about 5 items of play equipment and a small flat ball games area with kick walls and 'low level' hoops and very low key wheel play facility (undulating riding surface with features).
- YOPS (Youth Outdoor Play Space — teenagers): 0.2 hectares, about 8 types of play equipment, Ball Play and Wheeled Play opportunities, and seating for accompanying adults and for teenagers to use as a Meeting Place.

Clearly, with regard to amenity provision for young people, there is an opportunity to use CIL contributions to rectify some of the deficiencies that currently obtain in our community.

For outdoor sports, Woolpit's sports field and tennis courts just about provide for current population levels, according to the guidance. Extra provision would be needed to avoid a shortfall, if there is any significant increase in population. More sports pitches mean more land for recreation; this is a difficulty which ought to be tackled when potential sites for housing are identified.

Although Woolpit's **shops** may be considered adequate for the present population, several comments identify a potential future need for a supermarket with better access, especially in terms of parking. New housing developments may offer such an opportunity, and provide sites for future expansion of shopping facilities, although it is vital that any such sites have easy pedestrian and cycle access from the centre. The residents' questionnaire could offer a way of estimating likely demand.

## Wildlife and green spaces



### Wildlife and green spaces

Total responses 27

Total comments 27

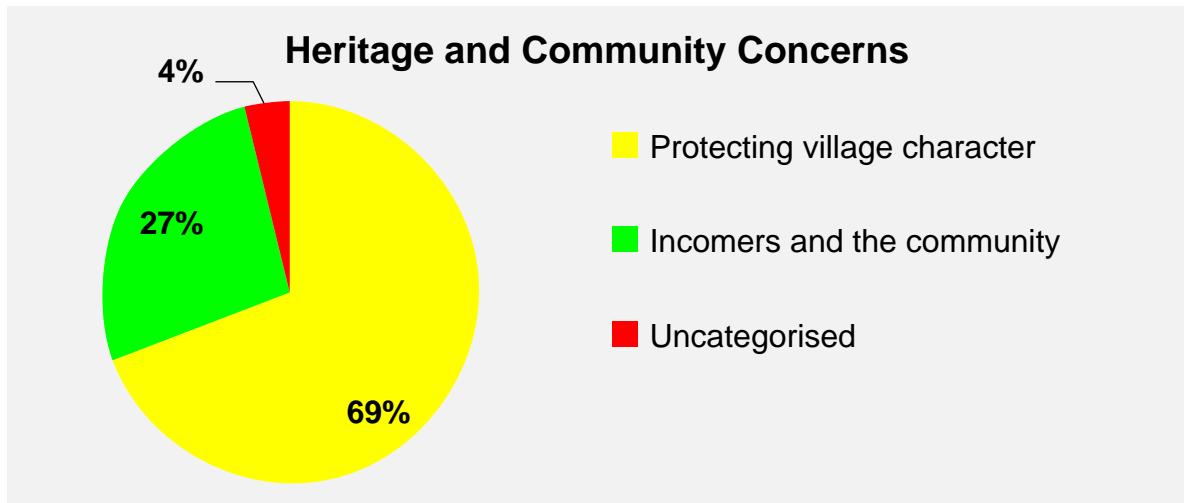
Wildlife and green spaces concerns				
Green / play space for children	Farm land	Lady's Well	New green spaces and maintenance	Uncategorised
10	5	5	3	4

Many people thought there should be new or improved **play spaces** for children (nearly two-fifths of comments in this category). This weight of opinion should be added to the demand for better facilities for young people expressed under the previous category.

The **green spaces** which punctuate the settlement area are one of the most attractive features of a rural village like Woolpit. In the surrounding countryside, particularly where people walk, **farm land**, old hedgerows, thickets and ancient woodland are equally important; on the skyline and around the settlement boundary, these create the setting for our historic village. Some green spaces and some views are especially significant, and with the Neighbourhood Plan the opportunity exists to designate and protect some of these, to manage and enhance wildlife habitats and transit routes, and to prevent poorly planned or executed development blurring the margin between the built and natural landscape.

Some commenters felt that such assets, such as **Lady's Well**, are not fully appreciated. The residents' questionnaire should try to gauge the strength of feeling about green spaces and the natural environment. It would also be useful to carry out an audit of these assets for the Neighbourhood Plan.

## Heritage and community



### Heritage and community

Total responses 25

Total comments 26

Heritage and community concerns		
Protecting village character	Incomers and the community	Uncategorised
18	7	1

Although this category attracted the fewest comments, 5% of *all* comments received emphasize the importance of retaining the **village character** of Woolpit, particularly the historic centre. While this is Woolpit's greatest asset, we have to recognise that protecting the conservation area presents a considerable challenge when it comes to adapting to the demands of a growing community.

As **incomers** arrive, it will be important to welcome and integrate them, otherwise there is an increased risk of fragmentation. Several people expressed this reservation, while celebrating the village's vibrant community. A welcome package was suggested, and it could be useful to know more about patterns of socialising; the questionnaire should perhaps address these points.

## Appendix A: Issues identified by preliminary contacts, February 2016

Early informal discussions with village organisations allowed the nascent Steering Group to identify eight areas of concern. We were also able to assign an overall level of concern to each area, and pinpoint many of the specific issues.

Areas of concern	Level of concern
Housing	High
Traffic	High to medium
Services: health centre	Medium
Services: school	Medium
Other facilities	Medium to low
Environment and infrastructure	Medium to low
Community	Medium to low*
Village character	Low to medium

\* fewer organisations commented about this area

People were asked what they wanted to see happen in the village, and what they did not want.

- Housing            wanted: **affordable homes for local young people**; sustainable growth; rented housing to remain rented; a mix of types of home  
not wanted: excessive development, or to become a town; expensive houses
- Traffic            wanted: **to limit traffic on Heath Road, and pedestrian crossings; to limit vehicles in the village centre**; more parking  
not wanted: **more traffic**; HGVs in the village centre
- Health centre    wanted: **more doctors, or a bigger health centre**; another centre (perhaps in Elmswell); safer or better access; more parking  
not wanted: **increased pressure on the health centre and doctors**
- School            wanted: **a bigger school**; more and better parking; a bigger pre-school  
not wanted: **increased pressure on the school**
- Facilities           wanted: **new homes built, as it would be good for businesses**
- Environment     wanted: **better sewerage and drainage**; more and better maintained footpaths and cycleways
- Community       wanted: **to integrate newcomers**; activities for children
- Character          wanted: to keep the village centre as it is now; to keep a balance of services and facilities  
not wanted: to ruin a lovely village; to become a commuter or retirement village

Issues in bold were mentioned by more than one-third of the organisations consulted. In general, there were more responses to what they wanted than to what they did not want. There were some issues raised that affected more than a single area of concern, in particular: the ageing of the village population; the need to improve leisure facilities in line with growth; and the protection of green spaces.

As a result of these preliminary contacts, it was decided to use the pop-up stand as a way for individuals to tell us directly what they thought about the main areas of concern. They wrote their views on post-it notes, and stuck them to the display boards, in the relevant section. To get people started, we used prompt questions, derived from what we had already learned:

### **Traffic and transport in Woolpit**

These key issues have been identified:

- Volume of traffic through the village centre
- Speed of traffic on roads entering / leaving the village
- Lack of parking near the village centre

What do you think?

Are there any other issues relating to traffic and transport in Woolpit?

### **Housing in Woolpit**

These key issues have been identified:

- Lack of affordable homes for local young people
- Growth needs to be sustainable: that is, supported by equal growth in services, amenities and infrastructure
- Some people feel that excessive development may damage the character of the village

What do you think?

Are there any other issues relating to housing development in Woolpit?

### **Footpaths and cycleways in Woolpit**

Are there any issues relating to existing footpaths and cycleways?

What could be done to improve public footpaths and cycleways in the future?

### **Facilities and services in Woolpit**

These key issues have been identified:

- Lack of pre-school capacity
- Primary school capacity
- Health Centre capacity
- Lack of facilities for young people

What do you think?

Are there any other issues relating to facilities and services in Woolpit?

### **Wildlife and green spaces in Woolpit**

Are there any existing sites that you consider important for wildlife?

Are there any areas that you consider suitable for the creation of new wildlife sites?

Are there any areas that should be preserved as green spaces?

What do you think?

### **Heritage and community in Woolpit**

Are there any buildings or other heritage assets in Woolpit that you believe are important or of value to the community?

What could be done to welcome incomers and integrate them more effectively in our community?

Appendix B lists all the responses received on the post-its, organised by areas of concern and by specific issues within each area.