

Branston Parish Plan

5 year review.

At the 2011 Annual Parish Meeting, I had the privilege of standing before you with, the much missed, Hilary Hawkyard, to launch the Parish Plan. It had been 4 years in the making and had been a long, hard slog, but we had achieved it.

5 years later, I am standing before you again, to look back at exactly what has been achieved during the process and since it was completed.

You will remember that the Plan was divided into 6 sections:

1. Business & Employment.

Our largest, local business, Branston Ltd, has seen huge growth in their factory, to include pre-prepared vegetables and there are new plans to further extend on that business, creating more jobs. We were grateful for their contribution towards new play equipment and £30k towards the Astro Court.

Other businesses also support local groups by providing raffle prizes, and several stepped up to make it possible to hold events for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. I am particularly remembering the luncheon for 150 residents aged over 60 - that was a real triumph.

The History Group's mosaic on the wall of the Co-op was an amazing achievement and Lincolnshire Co-op went on to award the group £10k to restore and promote the village pump, well and waterwheel.

The Plan found that small businesses felt isolated, which led to the creation of the Branston Business Network. The group has continued to grow and meets monthly to provide support and share skills with each other.

I have to say that they are also very good at building stalls for the Christmas market – we would certainly miss their input; the Waggon & Horses' electricity and the raffle prizes from our other local businesses.

It would perhaps be a good time, as we acknowledge the important contributions made by local business, to thank the manager of Branston Hall, for allowing us to hold this meeting here - for the 7th year running!

2. Community.

Apparently, *the village was divided and there was apathy towards village events*.

While it is impossible to reach those who don't want to be included, for those who are prepared to venture into the community, there is a warm welcome waiting, at the numerous clubs and groups that play a vital role in our community.

The Christmas Market and Christmas Tree Festival have grown in size and popularity over the last three years, becoming a respected part of the village events calendar. Other events have also been held in the village – Arts NK's Luminarium, the Jubilee events, Branston Ltd's McMillan Tea Party and last year's Skatefest and were all well attended.

The Village Hall Management Committee hold regular fundraisers from Fashion Shows, Race Nights and Wine Tasting to the increasingly popular Tribute Nights. Acts from Neil Diamond to Buddy Holly have packed the Village Hall with up to 140 people, raising funds to continue the improvements – all on the back of a good night out.

A range of new play equipment was installed in Branston & Branston Booths in 2010, using the evidence from the Parish Plan Questionnaire to secure grants. There are plans to further improve the play areas this year by relaying the safer surfaces and repainting the older equipment. Due to noise and anti-social behaviour complaints, two pieces of equipment will be moved from Lincoln Road to Moor Lane next month and another grant will be sought to add to the range there.

The Astro Court built in 2011 has been used almost every weekday evening throughout the winter, by U7s through to adults for training and at weekends by local teenagers, getting together for a kick about. It is still in excellent condition and is a fantastic facility for our community. The fees charged will ensure its long-term sustainability and replacement turf, when the time comes.

3. Environment.

The plan called for:

Less litter – One task that will always be a challenge, but winning the BKV competition in 2014 was a measure of the pride that the majority of residents have in their village. We are grateful to those residents who do actively litter pick.

More benches – Benches have been installed in the Jungle, at Waterwheel Lane and the Wildflower Meadow. The profit from the 2014 Christmas Market was used to put another seat in the Memorial Garden, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the start of WWI, complete with marching soldiers and red poppies cut into the back.

Parish attractions to be promoted – The Heritage Trail, plotted through the old village by the History Group in 2007, remains popular with locals and visitors and the trail's map is always in demand.

More artworks - The profit from the 2015 Christmas Market will be used to secure match funding for a new artwork – something that will appeal to all age groups, which will have a link to the heritage trail and something that children will want to touch and sit on – sheep!

They will be heading from Paddock Lane, towards the Sheepwash – Sheep of the artistic, metal variety. And hopefully we can afford more than one!

Watch the Newsletter and Sheepwash Times for more details.

4. Housing.

The Plan wanted to *protect the village curtilage and avoid large estates*.

The Parish Council has continued to submit robust comments on every application but has been unable to prevent a breach of the curtilage against central government imposed requirements for new housing.

There is currently outline permission on three sites, amounting to 362 new homes. The Council continues to press for funding from developers, to improve local services so that they will be adequate for the increase in the population and that they build the type of dwellings that suit Branston and meet local need.

5. Services & Facilities.

The Plan called for *improved shopping facilities, a cash machine, better sports facilities and more challenging play equipment*.

The Co-op built a large extension in 2009, with the requested butchery counter and has recently added an external, free to use cash machine. Cash machines were also installed at the Post Office and the pub.

The Astro Court has provided a floodlit training area, available for a fee that is less than charged at sports centres in Lincoln. The Community Academy opened Heron's Gym in 2015, making it more convenient to exercise locally.

The play areas were boosted by £60k of equipment in 2010, with grants supported by the findings of the Parish Plan Questionnaire. Play became even more challenging in 2015 when grants totalling £98k, realised the dream of a skate park in Branston, popular with children, teens and older from the village and the surrounding area and seems to have resolved the problems of children playing in the road, bumping against kerbs and taking over the car parks.

The threat to the Post Office and Library had concerned residents for some time and both services have seen huge change during the last year.

The post office was saved by moving it to the Newsagents on Linden Avenue. The store is smaller but it is open longer hours, over 7 days making it accessible to more people and has parking outside.

The Library had its hours further reduced and after 2 legal challenges, Lincolnshire County Council withdrew staffing from all but 15 Lincolnshire Libraries; leaving Branston facing a twice monthly mobile.

It is a credit to the community that more than 30 volunteers have stepped up to retain the service; with a new partnership between the Parish Council and the Academy. Lesa Appleyard is employed by the Parish Council as coordinator, to support the volunteers and ensure that there are no safeguarding issues for the students, volunteers or members of the public. The service is growing in strength and popularity; hampered only by the archaic IT system, which is still provided by the County Council.

The appointment system at the Branston surgery was highly criticised during the Parish Plan consultation and featured in almost every planning objection made by residents. Although the surgery remains oversubscribed and in need of larger premises with a car park, I understand that there is a new appointment system in place and that it's working well.

Although our police team has faced budget cuts requiring them to cover a larger beat, they continue to provide a good service to Branston and I am sure that we will soon hear from PC Hanson, that Branston is one of the safest places in the country to live – if not the world!

6. Traffic.

Always a major issue in the village!

On a positive note:

We still have a school crossing patrol at the Junior School and School Safety Zones have been installed outside the Infant and Junior Schools.

New bus shelters have been installed on Station Road, Beech Road and at Branston Booths, each receiving 50% funding from Lincolnshire County Council; unfortunately that grant pot has been closed in the latest round of cuts.

The Canwick Hill improvements have generally improved the journey into Lincoln – gone are the days when the queue stretches back to Beech Road (unless there has been a breakdown or accident)

The Eastern By-pass has finally been approved. Work is expected to start before the end of the year – although we haven't been told quite how the B1188 will be affected during the build.

Resident-led campaigns for parking restrictions on Curtois Close and Beech Road were successful; although both schemes have created new problems, highlighting the need for a Health Centre with a carpark, and increased parking on the B1188, creating a new pinch point and grass verges destroyed as they have become resident parking bays.

Less positive:

School leaving time remains manic, with parents arriving early to bag a parking space as near to the gates as possible and creating a single carriageway along Station Road.

The speed limit on the B1188 remains unchanged at 50 & 40mph until beyond the play area – against government guidelines but failing to meet Lincolnshire County Council criteria for a reduction. Hopefully, the data from the speed device will strengthen our case.

Branston also fails to meet criteria for an additional crossing on the B1188 – even with a 50% contribution towards the cost.

Street lighting and the cycle path to Lincoln remain poor with little hope of improvement in these times of austerity, budget cuts and plans to switch off street lights.

As for parking more considerately – more and more grass verges are rutted and destroyed by parked vehicles and home deliveries. In some places footpaths are narrowed or blocked on a daily basis, where properties pre-date the motor car or businesses are run from home.

But let's end on a positive:

Even before the launch and in each year since, steady progress has been made in realising the actions called for by local people.

These plans are led by community aspirations and enthusiasm – although not everyone's desire is achievable.

Has it been a success?

Was it worthwhile?

Yes!

Since 2007 when the process began, £260k in grants has been awarded to Branston for enhancements that make Branston & Mere a great place to live.

Public support is needed to back every application and the Parish Plan provided perfect evidence of what residents wanted.

Attendance at last year's Neighbourhood Plan workshops showed that most parishioners care passionately about the future of Branston, which is essential if that Plan is *also* to be successful.