

# The Langtree Parish Plan



Compiled by Langtree Parish Council  
January 2008

## **Langtree Parish Plan, 2008**

### **Background**

In 2005 LPC decided that a parish plan was needed, and sooner on a voluntary basis, rather than later under compulsion. The idea was to create a plan for our future and set attainable goals for improvements

A survey questionnaire was sent to every one of the 316 households with their 807 residents, with a specific set of extra questions for the younger residents. 359 parishioners from 144 households responded. That was a 45.56% response from residents, an excellent return. These results have been analysed, and 'extra' written comments have been noted and collated. This has not been without financial cost, but we have been most fortunate to have obtained a grant from the CCD that has defrayed most of the cost, therefore relatively little expense has fallen directly upon the Parish precept.

### **Our Parish**

It is one of the most rural of all North Devon's parishes with agriculture as the primary economy. Essentially it is two villages, that of Langtree and Stibb Cross, with further outlying hamlets at Berry Cross, Langtree Week and Withecott. Langtree and Stibb Cross each have a public house, whilst Langtree also has a shop and post office and a thriving community school. Some residents from Stibb Cross felt that their part of the parish was somewhat neglected in overall parish matters but as in all parishes, facilities are placed where they are by circumstance and Stibb Cross is recognised by the parish council as an integral and equally important part of the parish.

Tourism has a relatively small impact upon the parish, as it is somewhat off the usual tourist routes. However, passing trade from tourism is a valued income to the parish businesses, with the shop, several bed and breakfast operations and the pubs being examples.

There is the Parish Church and the Methodist Chapel in Langtree, and there are numerous thriving activities and societies utilising our superb modern Parish Hall. We have amateur dramatics with our Panto group, short mat bowls, skittles, fitness classes, the Women's Institute and the History Society to name but a few.



Langtree Parish Hall viewed from the Church Tower

Children are not forgotten either, with varied voluntary groups and outlets for most ages. The community spirit that supports these activities is strong. The public transport system that serves our parish is not as we would like it, but as in many cases, sheer budgetary constraint curtails its effectiveness.

Our demographic disposition is that Langtree village and Stibb Cross between them house the majority of our residents [82.2%], with Berry Cross accounting for 7.64%, and Withecott 4.17%. The remainder of the populace are spread among the varied farms and isolated homes within the parish.

An overwhelming majority of residents show this as their only or primary home [98.6%] and 91.6 of residences are owner occupied. The age breakdown shows that of our responders, 46 [12.8%] are under 11, 31 [8.6%] are between 11 and 18, 180 [50.3%] are between 18 and 59, 77 [21.5%] are from 60 to 74 and 25 [6.9 %] are over 74.

By gender, we are almost equally divided, with 48% male to 52% female inhabitants. Over 45% of residents have lived in the parish for more than 20 years, and a majority of our children under 18 have expressed a desire to remain here after leaving school. All of this appears to demonstrate a generally high degree of satisfaction as to quality of life here.

Our survey did not enquire as to family sizes and numbers of children, but calculated from other figures it is estimated there are approximately 100 children of school age within the parish and that the average family size is 4. There are relatively few single parent families.

These figures translate into a reasonably accurate overall demographic assessment.

### **The Younger Generation**

We specifically aimed part of the survey at younger residents, with separate surveys for under 11's and 11 to 18 year olds. Questions were broadly similar but skewed at a younger respondent.

From the under 11's, most seemed to want to remain living in the parish after leaving school [by a ratio of 21:4], and the 11-18 age group revealed a slightly smaller majority who wished to remain here [a 15:6 ratio].

The older group was disappointed with the lack of employment opportunities in the parish. Surprisingly, whilst poor public transport was cited, none of those polled had ever had to refuse a job interview or opportunity due to lack of transport. No young person asked had the intention of becoming self employed in the near future.

The majority of 11-18's travelled to school by bus, but in the younger age group the predominant mode of travel was the family car. Again a not surprising result, as parents are naturally more protective of the younger children. By and large both groups agreed very closely with the adult survey.

### **Employment**

30.5% are in paid employment and 20.5% are self-employed. There are only 1% who are unemployed, with a further 2.5% of adults who are in full time education.

Only 10% of those polled directly benefit from tourism, reinforcing the point mentioned in the parish description. We have a relatively large retired population, at 30%.

It was noted that the largest proportion of people in employment actually worked from home, and that few travelled very far to work. There are relatively few avenues to improve or increase employment opportunities in the Parish

### **Leisure activities.**

The Parish Hall offers a wide range of indoor facilities and is busy on a daily basis with activities as previously described. It is very well used and supported and a great asset to the community, with most parishioners using it regularly. A large proportion of responders

stated that they socialised regularly within the parish, attending the many activities and events on offer. We also asked about socialising outside the parish and not surprisingly many do, for with the best will in the world, a small parish like ours cannot hope to meet all the varied social needs of its inhabitants.

There is also a village playing field with recently updated facilities and safety equipment installed. It too is well used even if slightly too small for some uses. Some respondents asked if the 'no dogs' rule for the playing field might be relaxed to allow dogs on a lead.

Despite that, sports and outdoor leisure facilities are very limited. That said, we have noted that in the TDC Plan there was a reference to a potential site for a recreational facility at Langtree. Residents were asked for opinions on this particular subject and there is significant support for such a project. [79%]. There was also quite firm support [58%] for the idea that the precept be adjusted to help pay for such a project. Those that did not support the idea voiced concerns over costs and council tax increases and that it was altogether too expensive an idea.

When it came to active participation in sports at such a facility, the numbers naturally dropped, with 65% of respondents not likely to actively participate. With an age demographic pattern such as we have this is not surprising.

The numbers willing to assist in an organisational or training capacity were approximately the same, again no surprise and more than might have been expected. The most favoured sports were the obvious ones such as soccer, rugby, hockey and cricket. There already exists a Parish Council Working Group [WG] to research the idea of a recreational facility, and this will be tasked to produce a viable site and plan, but this is not something that will happen overnight. It is very much a long-term goal. A lot of information regarding this proposed facility was gleaned from the survey, and whilst not published in full in this plan, it will be available for the working group.

### **The Environment**

Environmental surveys were a subject offered for comment, and renewable energy was the most preferred option, followed by a tree survey. Trees and their maintenance were considered to be quite important. Fly tipping was seen as an increasing menace and indeed recent evidence shows it is on the increase within the parish. It is doubtful that such behaviour is that of residents, given that the majority of respondents rate the refuse collection service as 'excellent'. Likewise, the recycling collections are rated as 'good'.

When asked for thoughts as to how best protect our environment we had a small response in favour of wind turbines [2] and 6 asking for more use of 'renewable energy'. Local produce, sold both locally and in supermarkets was suggested by several people, as was better recycling, but overall there were only 25 specific responses to this question. Our landscape, countryside, archaeology, farming, wildlife and energy needs were all considered important factors within the parish. When asked to define any open areas needing protection there was absolutely no response. More litter bins, more dog mess bins and greater control over fly tipping were considered as important factors for action by LPC.



**Langtree environs as seen from the Church Tower**

### **Cars and public transport.**

There is an almost total reliance upon the private car to cater for everyday transport needs. Respondents who never or only rarely used buses were in a significant majority, with over 200 in this category as opposed to 9 who used them weekly and nobody who used buses on a daily basis.

Because of the availability and high use of the car very few residents suffer from poor public transport. As the bus service becomes progressively even less viable and services continue to reduce it is difficult to see how residents can be 'weaned' from the private car. For most, life would be untenable without one, and cars are seen as essentials, not luxuries. Car parking is not seen as a significant problem in the parish.

Car sharing schemes were not considered a viable proposition by a ratio of almost 6:1 and only five respondents actually agreed to participate should one be made available at parish level.

Taxis were considered a rare and expensive commodity and rarely used. Hardly surprising as the nearest service is over five miles away in Torrington and is insufficient even for the town's needs

Should anyone wish to visit a major city such as Exeter or Plymouth by public transport it would entail several hours travel each way with a minimal and insufficient time allowed to shop or whatever other reason the visit was intended for. Even Bideford and Barnstaple are effectively cut off for any form of evening social activity if public transport is the only option. The over 60's bus pass scheme is quite useless for most of those qualifying for it.

### **Pedestrians and equestrians.**

Footpaths and bridleways are generally felt to be well marked and maintained, but a sizeable percentage [14%] felt that there were still problems with gates tied shut, electric fences, some poor signage and to some, even a lack of awareness of their existence. Roads and areas adjacent to both public houses and the general vicinity of Fore Street were singled out as potentially dangerous and in need of improvement.

### **Cyclists.**

Within the parish, whilst some anecdotal evidence suggests otherwise, cycling is perceived as the second most used form of transport after the car.

There were some 30% of respondents who wished for improved cycle lanes and improvements to safety of cyclists. Given the nature of our roads, with essentially only two roads even remotely suitable for additional tracks, there is very little scope for cycle

lanes. The only dedicated cycle way is the Tarka Trail, which, where it is actually within the parish, is remote and on the periphery of our area.

### **Emergency services**

Satisfaction with the Ambulance and Fire services is high. They were rated as 'excellent to good' overall, with only one respondent considering the ambulance service was poor. Given the distance from the ambulance stations and fire stations, on the actual usage of the services, average response times were almost identical, with the ambulance taking 19.5 minutes and the fire brigade 20 minutes.

### **Crime and the Police.**

Crime is very low in the parish by whatever standard it is measured by. It is in fact sufficiently low as to be almost non-existent, but that said, it does happen. Anecdotal evidence suggests some crime is not reported. If a crime is not reported then nobody knows about it and the subsequent figures will obviously be low, but in real terms, it is still very low.

The greatest concern is speeding traffic [41.7% of responders]. With regards to speeding, the police have carried out some speed checks and very few drivers were actually caught speeding. The highest speed reported was 46 mph in Fore Street, Langtree. That is due to a variety of factors, not least that the speed checks are very visible and give drivers time to slow down. A traffic count in 2005 showed that the average speed through Langtree and Stibb Cross was just 34 mph. Given those parameters police simply will not maintain a regular speed control presence in our parish. Every person reported for excess speed in recent checks has been a local resident of the parish, so perhaps much of the solution to perceived speeding lies in our own hands. Vehicle speeds on the B3227 and the Shebbear road were areas of specific concern, with pinch points such as near Buda farm and Homelea Farm being singled out. These of course are roads with a National Speed Limit, set at 60 mph, when in fact they are barely safe for 40 mph. Overall, we fortunately experience very few road traffic accidents where any form of injury occurs, but even so, minor collisions are more frequent than anyone would like.

Another area of concern was a lack of police presence [25.9%], but in fairness, if no crime is actually happening then police are better employed where it is happening. The isolation of our parish does inevitably heighten fears about possible crime and police response times. One aspect of the lack of a police presence is that very few residents know the name of our local beat officers. There is one regular Constable and two PCSOs who are based at Torrington and assigned to our 'area'. Our 'area' comprises some ten parishes and a lot of square miles, so we will inevitably not see a proactive role but a reactive one from our Officers. Burglary and antisocial behaviour [ASB] each accounted for a 15% response quoting it as a concern. Burglary is thankfully rare, but ASB is a wide spectrum of events and can range from a noisy child playing nearby to a full-blown drunk or a street fight. Again, thankfully, such episodes are extremely rare. When asked if they had been affected by crime or ASB, 82 responded that they had. The only event that made double figures was neighbour disputes. Fly tipping was again mentioned. In reality the quality of life is very good here, with problems such as graffiti, loud music from a neighbour, a noisy party and litter being listed under the heading of being affected by ASB. To be fair, crime is thankfully more perceived than actual.

### **Communications.**

We asked how we might better communicate information within the parish and answers in the main were positive. Some of the information in the format asked for was impracticable. It was suggested that small ads and public transport timetables be published in the Parish Newsletter. As this has long periods of time between publications this would not be viable. There is a considerable amount of information on the parish website that is

regularly updated and as the majority of homes have Internet access it is surprising this facility is not as well used as it might be. One recurring request was for the publication of the minutes of Parish Council meetings and these are but one of the items already published on the website. Personal advertisements are not allowed on the website by the service provider.

Langtree Parish website is accessible via [www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/langtree](http://www.thelocalchannel.co.uk/langtree). There are three Parish notice boards, one each in Langtree [Church Lane], Stibb Cross [by the bus shelter] and at Berry Cross. Notices can be placed on any of these boards via the Parish Clerk, space and priority permitting.

Most residents have a mobile phone, with reception varying according to service provider, with 123 complaining about reception to 94 who thought it good. 130 homes have broadband Internet connection and a further 66 have dial-up service. A further 58 respondents have Internet access at work. 251 respondents have digital television, either satellite or terrestrial. It is difficult to find a home without such access.

### **Housing.**

Whilst well over 90% of homes in the parish are owner occupied, there is still a perceived need for 'affordable housing'. There is an almost equal split between those who understand what affordable housing is and those who do not. Clearly this knowledge should be better disseminated, and LPC will take active steps to facilitate this. There was strong support for a 'locals only' style of development. Current Governmental planning controls preclude almost all housing developments unless deemed both needed and affordable. The definitions of need and affordability are not particularly clear.

Part of the survey asked for potential future needs as regards housing, and whilst the current need for "affordable" housing is small, **to those in that need it is a major problem.** There is therefore a need for LPC to help with any such problems. Government planning law guidelines are in a constant state of change, and specific responses are difficult to formulate.

When asked, 57% of respondents suggested there was a need for small affordable houses to buy, and 55% would agree to further housing developments if a survey showed a need. Currently, our survey does not show a current and urgent need for such developments.

Very few residents could suggest suitable sites for development of affordable housing, and those that were suggested were the old Stibb Cross cattle market area, behind the Parish Hall and behind the Fore Street holiday lets, but all of these are privately owned lands.

There are several households with special needs, such as for disabled occupants. As this survey was anonymous, LPC does not know where these households are, but perhaps should take steps to identify them with a view to being able to offer any assistance if possible.

In addition to our own survey, the Community Council for Devon [CCD] carried out a separate survey and their findings closely mirrored ours and the principle conclusions were that their survey identified the need for seven affordable homes within the next three years, showing two households in need now and another five within the three years.

### **Education**

Langtree Community School is a well respected and thriving primary school. It is an excellent and much sought after school by parents. There are no suggestions that it is underused and that evening classes for adult education be conducted there. There is however a potential demand for a variety of adult education classes in the Parish Hall, such as IT, languages, music, drama and craft courses. There are some concerns over the school bus facilities but overall they are considered effective.

### **Langtree Post Office**

It is perhaps unusual to single out one single business entity, but with the current Royal Mail and Government stances on Post Offices, parishioners were asked to comment upon the importance of the Post Office and shop in Langtree.

232 respondents stated they felt that the Post Office and shop was important to the Parish and only 18 felt it unimportant. These figures were paradoxically reversed when it came to the usage of the shop and Post Office. Only twenty respondents said they used the facility daily, with a hundred or more stating they used it very rarely or never. Those that did use it regularly mainly cited the importance of a local shop, especially for those without transport and for the older villagers.

### **Conclusions**

Essential components for the maintenance and improvement of our parish have been clearly identified following our consultation via the questionnaire. This has given parishioners the opportunity to tell the Parish Council what they feel about living and working in Langtree Parish, what they like or don't like about all aspects of Parish life. It was interesting to note that some felt the questionnaire too long whilst others thought it too short. It was also very gratifying to note that some respondents complimented the Parish Council upon the obvious hard work that went into its compilation, distribution and analysis.

At the end of the questionnaire where we asked for extra 'free comments', we have received many useful thoughts. They comment upon an inadequate play area at Stibb Cross, and a lack of a shop there. Visual enhancement of the 'gateways' to the two main villages was mentioned, as was a very general dislike of the traffic speeds and heavy goods vehicles using the B3227. Overall, Langtree Parish is a pleasant place to live and to raise families. Standards of behaviour are high, and community pride is evident. This too was borne out in the free comments. There are of course problems, and it will be the duty of LPC to address these problems to its very best ability. It is a duty the elected Councillors gladly accept.

Much of what was revealed in the questionnaire by way of wants and desires has already been addressed, with regard to the playing field, notice boards and the website.

Avenues of exploration, actions needed and partners and working groups have been identified and whilst challenging offer us a route for the way ahead. The action plan has been adopted by the Parish Council. It will be acted upon. It is a long term goal, and progress and developments will be reported annually at the Annual Parish Meeting, and more frequently via regular council meetings if appropriate.

### **Plan synopsis and actions to be taken.**

The primary areas for action are housing, employment, leisure activities, the environment, crime and police and communications.

#### **Housing**

LPC will continually strive to find ways to improve our housing stock and find affordable homes for our future generations. Planning rules will be monitored carefully so as to be able to take advantage of any possible changes to the benefit of our residents. This is to be an ongoing action with no finite dates. The CCD survey shows parish support for the development of a suitable small site within the parish [less than 0.5 hectares]. The perceived need is for social rented and shared ownership accommodation, with a preferred mix of six two bedroom properties and one three bedroom property. This avenue will be explored.

### Employment

LPC are to actively seek to encourage further employment opportunities. Suggested avenues to explore are the possible use of redundant farm buildings as small craft based or light industrial units. The possibility of a local co-operative to encourage the purchase of local produce is to be investigated, with a local farmer's market or with greater exposure via the village shop.

### Leisure activities

The current working group [WG] will now sit to produce a detailed assessment of the viability of such a facility, with a remit also to investigate as many possible venues as it can, and not concentrating solely upon the site suggested by TDC. A full costing of such a development will be made and it is anticipated that an outline framework will be ready by Spring 2008. Council will discuss the question of dogs in the playing field soon after this plan is published.

### The environment

LPC is in constant dialogue with DCC over highway matters, and safer pedestrian and cycle routes are always being sought. Footpaths and bridleways have been the subject of discussions with DCC and where applicable, new and clearer signs will be asked for. Communication with the Police, the bus companies and other agencies will be ongoing to seek better services and safer roads. Road safety is a priority for LPC and will continue to be so. Roadside litterbins are the responsibility of DCC, and they have an active policy of not providing them, so as to encourage people to take their litter home with them.

Dog bins may be sited by the Parish, at a cost of approximately £300 per bin. There are currently two such bins, one by the bus stop in Langtree and one near the Travis Perkins store. These are emptied and cleaned by TDC at no further expense to the Parish. LPC will assess if more are needed.

Fly tipping will be monitored and where possible offenders reported. This would be greatly assisted by Parishioners reporting such activities, to LPC or the Police.

### Crime and police

LPC, as already mentioned, will maintain contacts with the Police to keep our crime figures low, and try to keep them even lower. Details of our community Officers will be posted on the website and notice boards. Parishioners will be encouraged to report all and any suspicious activity.

### Communications

The website to be advertised more widely in the Parish newsletter, and it's use encouraged. Much of what was asked as content for the Parish newsletter is already there, as is information on the website. Council minutes are published on the website as are contact addresses for the council.

Initial point of contact is the Parish Clerk and his details will be posted on the notice boards and in the newsletter.

***Acknowledgments. Barry Neal [Chairman LPC 2005-2007] , Mr. Gary McNeil & Mr Greg Mitchell. Mr. David Gubb and Miss Danielle Folland, all LPC Councillors, past and present . Michael Evans, Langtree Parish Clerk, The Community Council of Devon, Ali Boyd -DCC, Cllr John Rawlinson- DCC, Sgt P. Tyzack, Devon & Cornwall Police***

***Explanation of abbreviations used in this report.***

***LPC = Langtree Parish Council, TDC = Torridge District Council***

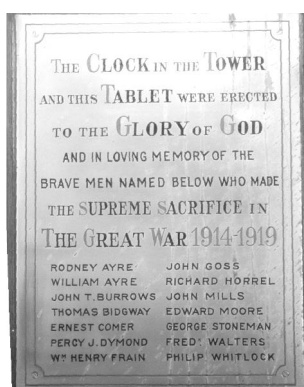
***DCC = Devon County Council, CCD = Community Council of Devon***

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***Community Council for Devon***



The external memorial



The 1914-1918 internal memorial



The 1939-1945 internal memorial

The three components of our Parish War memorial