



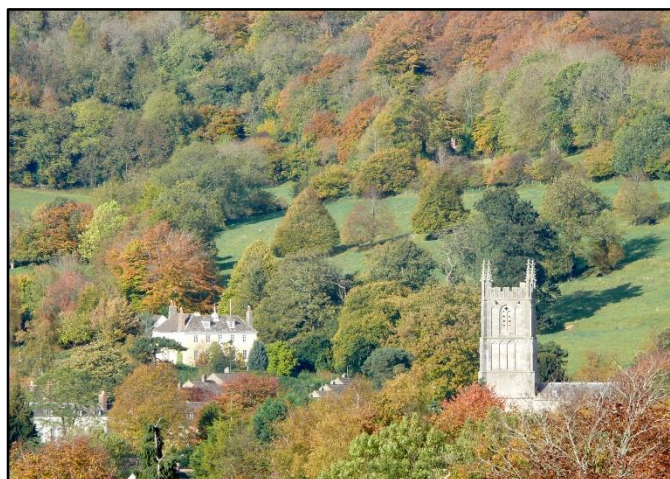
WOTTON-UNDER- EDGE

COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE 2016



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Picture Credits

Courtesy Jeff Walshe

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Courtesy Paul Smith

Page 3 (The famous and ancient Ram Inn), Page 7 (Holywell Leaze - public green space), Page 8 (Anne Bearpacker Almshouses), Page 11 (Synwell Playing Field - one of Wotton's precious green spaces, The Tolsey Clock of 1897 - restored 2015).

Courtesy Barry Batchelor/Meet Me In Winter

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Courtesy Wotton In Bloom

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Courtesy The Gazette

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Courtesy Wotton Community Sports Foundation/Barnwood Trust

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INTRODUCTION

Wotton's first Community Plan, which set out a long term vision for the town, was published in 2005. This Community Plan updates this first plan, summarises the progress made in the intervening period and sets some fresh targets for the next decade. The plan is not intended to be frozen in time but to be a living document, to be regularly checked for relevance and then used in formulating policy and making decisions. Although the plan has no statutory authority, it is seen as an important document in providing a framework for Council decisions at Town, District and County level. It is a joint

publication arrived at by a group of councillors, officials and community representatives, following a public consultation in early 2015. This plan covers the parish of Wotton-under-Edge, shown in Annex A, although the town itself serves a wider hinterland.



WOTTON IN 2016

The world looks very different since the 2005 plan was put together. The global financial crash of 2007, the resultant recession and the subsequent pressure on public purses and private budgets have squeezed resources dramatically. Some big economic and social changes have impacted on our town, resulting in pockets of deprivation as exemplified by the current demand at our Wotton Food Bank and Wotton Debt Centre.

We have permanently lost manufacturing jobs in the heart of the town with those brownfield sites now given over to new housing, but this is partly offset by our internationally renowned local manufacturing success story, Renishaw plc. Like many companies, Renishaw has weathered difficult times, but has come through them with a very strong profit and jobs growth record and tremendous prospects. As a community we need to help establish the quality employee pool and support service infrastructure that Renishaw and other local employers need for their own success.



Wotton is generally highly valued as a place to live but we do have to face continuing challenges:

- Our road infrastructure has been struggling. Road surfaces are regularly degraded by more frequent bad weather and HGV usage. Footways are likewise under maintained and subject to overriding by vehicles;
- The local road system has several acute pinch points, especially at rush hours and car ownership has grown continuously with no matching growth in parking spaces. Bus services are often little used, and those available are generally not convenient for travel to work, making life difficult for residents who have no other travel options;

- In some areas, our foul and surface water drainage systems are inadequate in capacity, especially in heavy rain. Power cuts are still too common. Some mobile phone networks are weak, although broadband has improved;
- Our library has been hit by budget cuts;
- Our two high-performing surgeries and related health services are pressured by an ageing population, new housing developments nearby, higher expectations and budget constraints;
- Our high street businesses have been hit by the recession, by structural changes in banking, by the growth in online shopping and home deliveries, by the acute lack of parking for cars and tourist coaches, by the lack of a supermarket with a trolley to car service and by the building of rival stores in Chipping Sodbury, Yate, Dursley, Thornbury, Tetbury and Nailsworth, as well as the growth of Cribbs Causeway;



- The national and global drive for sustainability has also escalated since the 2005 plan and the challenges for Wotton in terms of recycling, green space preservation and car/cycle/bus/walking options have also grown. On the positive side 'right to roam' areas have been established and the Cotswold Wardens, along with the Town Council's footpaths committee, have assisted with the upkeep of local footpaths. These pressures are common throughout Britain. Many of the issues are beyond the control of the Town Council but by working with all parts of the community we can help mitigate some of the effects.

Yet the strengths of Wotton remain with our:

- wonderful network of volunteer-run bodies and charities;
- active and forward-looking Chamber of Trade;
- unique and entrepreneurial cinema;
- good schools and talented young people;
- churches all working together;
- relatively low crime level;
- artistic and craft traditions;
- award winning Silver Band;
- beautiful and accessible countryside;
- strong agricultural industry;
- pool of skilled and experienced residents and volunteer ethos.



It is unlikely in the course of the next Community Plan period that significant increases in income will be available to the people of Wotton or the three tiers of local councils that jointly provide public services. Only by working together can the people of Wotton deliver improvements.

We hope this Community Plan can help reset the agenda for the Town and encourage feedback.

TOWN REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP

The Town Regeneration Partnership exists to represent those who have an interest in Wotton-under-Edge and its future. It is a partnership between the Town Council and members of community organisations in the town. The Partnership was instrumental in producing the first Community Plan and, taking account of public desire expressed at the 2013 Annual Parish Assembly for the plan to be refreshed, has been heavily involved in the update activity.



PROGRESS TO DATE

Despite the country having been impacted by the global financial crisis for almost a decade, good progress has been made in a number of areas against the five action plans set out in the 2005 Community Plan. This is to the credit of the efforts of local people and the Town Council.



Parking Action Plan

The parking action plan recognised that inadequate parking provision was a constraint to achieving many of the Community Plan's desired outcomes and sought improvements.

Progress:

Parking provision remains a problem throughout the town. Previous Stroud District Council (SDC) planning policies, which permitted housing developments with insufficient off-

street parking, have exacerbated the situation leading to an increase of on-street parking on all main highways. The Town Council has continued to press the Local Planning Authority (SDC) to observe the current policy requiring two parking spaces per property for new developments but Wotton remains a difficult place to pass through by car and to visit. Wotton's parking problems were confirmed in a car parking survey carried out for SDC in 2011¹. Clear passage for the emergency services is a growing problem.

Discussions on parking times and charging have been held with SDC who manage the Chipping Car park but, to date - in the absence of any local consensus - no changes have been made.

More recently, discussions have taken place between the Town Council, Chamber of Trade & Commerce and a local developer on a proposal which would create additional public parking

¹ Car Parking Survey Report for Stroud District Council, Future Focus Research, September 2011

facilities in the town. Formal plans have not yet been received and public consultation has yet to take place.

Economic Action Plan

The economic action plan focused primarily on the need to encourage new business to improve economic vitality and make Wotton a more attractive place to shop.

Progress:

One of the most significant early outcomes was the re-establishment of a Chamber of Trade & Commerce for Wotton. Since its re-formation in 2005 the Chamber of Trade has been organising events and communicating with shops, businesses and the Town Council, and now has over eighty members, including local entrepreneurs.

The Town Council has opposed use of the town's industrial areas for housing development but, despite these efforts, it has not been possible to preserve these sites for employment use. As a result, both the Potters Pond and Water Lane industrial sites have been lost to housing development, although the continued expansion of nearby Renishaw plc provides significant local employment opportunities.

Like many market towns Wotton has seen a reduction in local banks with the closure of NatWest and Barclays. A second 24 hour ATM is still needed in the town.

The Stroud District Local Plan² produced by the District Council has identified Wotton as a local service centre for its surrounding communities and supports many Community Plan aspirations:



“Wotton-under-Edge itself will continue to be a town with commercial activity and local employment, meeting the everyday needs of its surrounding rural communities. High street vitality will be maintained, with a varied and well-used range of shops and services in its pretty town centre. This will be supported by strong community input into cultural and leisure facilities, such as the Picture House³”

Wotton has lost two pubs since 2005 but continues to benefit from a good range of cafes and other eating places, as evidenced by the Falcon Steakhouse becoming the Gazette “Pub of the Year” in 2015 but little progress has been made in providing more overnight accommodation for tourists and walkers.

² Stroud District Local Plan – adopted November 2015

³ Stroud District Local Plan Vision 1.7: Vision for Parishes around Wotton-under-Edge

Environmental Action Plan

The environmental action plan was aimed at tackling untidy places, creating more small public gardens and enhancing the townscape.

Progress: Efforts have continued to keep the town attractive. The Town Council has developed and maintains flowerbeds at the town's main gateway points. The Town Council has maintained its vigilance to ensure that town centre developments and applications for Listed Building Consent do not harm the heritage of the town centre. Supported by a team of volunteers and the Town Council, the Wotton in Bloom initiative has done much to make the town sparkle during summer months and Christmas tree grants, provided by the Town Council to local traders, encourage colourful displays during the festive season. Despite efforts to work with County and District authorities it is recognised that more work is needed to keep the town, its verges, pavements and other and footways clean and tidy and the Town Council has made additional resources available to undertake this. Likewise, the town's two public toilet facilities remain in need of improvement and the Council has action in hand to address this.



In response to the recommendations of the 2005 Community Plan - that the town had insufficient community open space - the Town Council acquired a small piece of land at Holywell Leaze for community use. This land has picnic facilities and further improvements are being undertaken by the Cotswold Wardens with support from the Town Council.

Transport Action Plan

Surveys carried out for the 2005 plan identified public transport provision as being poor but recognised that it was unlikely that all local needs could ever be satisfied. The action plan targeted specific areas of need.

Progress:

The Wotton Hopper service, started by the Town Council in 2002, continues to provide an important service bringing people into the main shopping area from the further reaches of the town, and also from Kingswood. However, wider public transport provision remains uncoordinated and inconvenient for travel to work. Re-opening Charfield railway station remains a strong aspiration on which considerable work has taken place but, to date, only limited progress has been made.



Social Action Plan

The social plan sought to improve the provision of affordable and social housing; reducing crime through community policing and improved facilities for young people; better facilities for residents, and better communications between authorities and the community.



Progress: Some housing development has continued in Wotton with Potters Pond (46 houses), Water Lane/Mitre Pitch (24 houses) and the former Stokes Bakery site in Haw Street (20 units) being the most recent significant developments, the latter being exclusively for use by Renishaw - owners of the site. Of these developments, only four affordable housing units have been provided. Other smaller sites have, collectively, provided a similar number.

Wotton remains a low crime area. It was one of the first small towns in the area to install a CCTV system and its use has been very helpful to the police in their investigation of crimes and anti-social behaviour incidents in the town. The town's CCTV system was improved and expanded in 2014 and 2015 with financial assistance from the Police and Crime Commissioner and now covers most areas of the town centre.



Wotton continues to benefit from a high level of community support and engagement and this has resulted in a substantial improvement in facilities available to residents.

Through the good efforts of the Wotton Community Sports Foundation (WCSF), the generosity of Sir David McMurtry, other organisations and local people, two all-weather sports pitches have been installed on the New Road site, as has a skatepark for the young people. WCSF is continuing its fundraising

activities to finance a safe access path to the site and to provide on-site parking. Future plans for what is to become Wotton Community PARC include adding BMX tracks, a fitness and walking trail, a children's play area, a sensory garden with memory walk, a further all weather pitch, club house and changing rooms.

The town now has a commercially run cinema, building on the efforts of the volunteers who re-opened the cinema as a community operated facility in 2005. Following the withdrawal of most



youth services provided by the County Council, the Town Council converted the former police station into a youth centre and is now funding two youth club sessions a week with additional support from Wotton Youth Liaison Group. More recently, the Town Trust has taken over the ownership of the Chipping Club Room and this is now available for youth work as well as continuing

its use to other community groups.

The Town continues to benefit from having its own swimming pool, operated by a charitable company and volunteers since 2010, with substantial financial support from the Town Council, without which the pool would have closed.

Wotton-under-Edge Arts Association has organised an annual Spring Arts Festival and New Year's concert for the last forty years. For the last eleven years Under-the-Edge Arts has run a thriving programme from the Chipping Hall. This initiative is run by Wotton Arts Project which became a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee in the autumn of 2005.

Wotton Heritage Centre and Museum is an Arts Council England Accredited Museum and is entirely volunteer run and managed. As well as advancing public interest in the history and archaeology of Wotton and its surroundings, the Centre also undertakes the preservation of records and artefacts pertaining to the area. The Town Council has agreed to provide a grant to the Heritage Centre to assist with its running costs and also to enable it to become a Visitor Information Centre for the town. The Town Council continues to provide financial support to the library. This, together with the efforts of volunteer helpers, has enabled the library to remain open and provide a four day service to the community.

More recently, in order to improve communications between the Town Council and the community, the Council has renewed its website and now has Facebook and Twitter accounts.



REFRESHING THE COMMUNITY PLAN

Community Involvement Questionnaire

The Town Regeneration Partnership decided at its September 2014 meeting that a good way of starting the process to refresh the 2005 Community Plan would be to canvass community opinion by issuing a Community Questionnaire to households across the town. Accordingly some 3000 questionnaires were distributed in December 2014 with a requested return date of mid-January 2015. The questionnaire contained 58 questions on which residents were asked to indicate their opinion. Comments were also invited. In the event, some 270 questionnaires were returned.



Results from the Questionnaire⁴

Responses to the questionnaire were analysed to determine the issues of most and least importance to the community. The highest priorities included the swimming pool, library, shops, local employment opportunities, condition of footpaths/pavements/ footways & verges, traffic management and roads, the bus service and Charfield Railway Station. At the bottom, the lowest priorities included introduction of

parking charges and the need for more private housing development. Around 170 of the questionnaires received contained additional comments, many of which were about the poor state of the Town's roads. A significant number of people also commented on the need for more parking, footway maintenance, traffic problems in the town, dog fouling, Charfield railway station and support for the swimming pool.

After putting the results of the questionnaire scores and comments together the following seemed to be the issues of most concern to the community:

- the need for proper road maintenance to deal with potholes, road condition and road marking (This is the responsibility of Gloucestershire County Council);
- the poor condition of verges, pavements and other footways;
- traffic problems in the town and problems caused by parked cars restricting traffic – although, based on the questionnaire returns, the enforcement of parking restrictions would not be welcome!

⁴ Community Questionnaire Results, Wotton-under-Edge Town Council, 22 April 2015

- the need for more parking in the town - although there was no appetite to pay for such a facility either through increasing the precept or introducing parking charges;
- initiatives to encourage tourism – although there were several comments about the need to obtain good value for money. There was a negative response to the suggestion that a coach park should be provided;
- a desire for the Town Council to continue its support for the library, swimming pool, Synwell playing field, Citizens Advice Bureau and youth services;
- re-opening Charfield railway station, the need for better bus services, a good selection of shops, local employment opportunities, improved police presence, littering, dog fouling, improved public toilets, and affordable housing;
- the need for a new supermarket was identified as a low priority in the questionnaire response, but the comments received showed an equal number for and against.



THEMES FOR THE 2016 PLAN

A Community Plan Working Group formed from members of the Town Regeneration Partnership, the Town Council and members of the public, was established in November 2015 to review and update the previous Community Plan taking into account the results from the questionnaire exercise. In considering the way forward, the Working Group agreed that the themes articulated in the 2005 Plan remained generally valid but proposed the following amendments which are underlined:

Theme 1 - Image and Heritage

Wotton-under-Edge will make full use of its high quality historic centre and its outstanding surrounding countryside. The town will be clean and green, an attractive place to live, work and visit. It will continue to be a lively, working, changing town. Change will be managed to maximise the environmental potential. The appearance of the town, its gateways and green spaces will be enhanced and protected.



This amendment reflects the fact that since the original plan was published, additional public amenity land has been acquired at Holywell, satisfying, at least in part, the need to provide more such space in the town, but the green spaces

that exist (such as Synwell playing field) need to be enhanced and protected (although it now is a Field in Trust)

Theme 2 - Commerce and Employment

Wotton-under-Edge will continue to be a Fairtrade town with significant commercial activity and access to local employment opportunities. The town will be a service centre for the surrounding area and will also provide specialist services for a wider region.

Constraints to economic activity, such as the lack of parking and traffic flow problems will be resolved. The control of Wotton-under-Edge's built environment will be constrained by the existing boundaries. Wotton-under-Edge will provide food retailing, including Fairtrade products, professional, commercial and community services which meet the needs of the community and the wider area. In addition, the specialist goods and services will bring in work and customers from a wide area.

For Theme 2, it was felt that there was little prospect of increasing, or even maintaining local employment actually in the town with the loss of the Potters Pond and Water Lane employment sites during the intervening years. In that respect, the Working Group felt that Theme 2 should be re-cast to reflect this.

Theme 3 - Visitors and Tourism

More facilities will be provided for visitors, including a range of good quality accommodation, and places to eat. It will be easy for visitors to travel to Wotton-under-Edge. Tourism growth will, however, be balanced against local needs.

This amendment reflected the desire for Wotton to have good quality accommodation suitable for a range of visitors, such as more B&Bs, a walkers' hostel and camping facilities.



Theme 4 - Housing

Wotton-under-Edge will have a range of housing to meet the needs of the community, including affordable housing.

Theme 4 remains an aspiration for the town but decisions being taken by the District Council seem likely to deprive the town of the opportunity of much needed affordable housing at Fountain Crescent, where the SDC plan to build some 16 affordable/social housing units appears to have been abandoned. The lack of affordable rented housing is a threat to community cohesion.

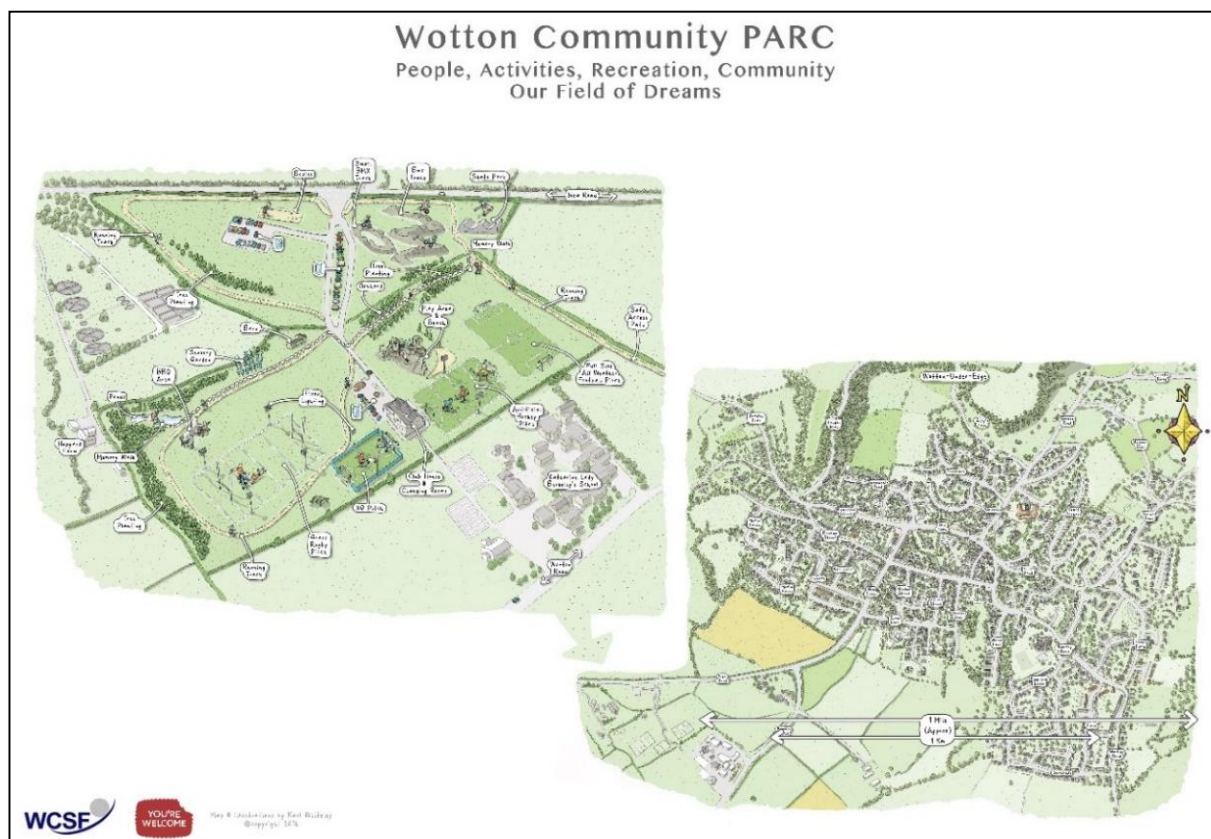
Theme 5 - Security

The low crime levels in Wotton-under-Edge and surrounding areas will be maintained and improved. People will feel safe in the community.

No change was proposed. Wotton remains a place where people feel safe and the Town Council's enhanced CCTV coverage should help preserve the comfort felt by local people.

Theme 6 - Sport and Recreation

Wotton-under-Edge will continue to benefit from a high level of activity in all sections of the community. This will be enhanced by the provision of improved outdoor sports and play facilities.





The Working Group felt that Wotton benefitted from a great deal of volunteer support which has provided, for example, new sports and skatepark facilities at New Road through the efforts of the Wotton Community Sports



Foundation. The town also has a high-quality bowling green. It was felt, however, that more effort was needed to enhance communications between groups to help make the community more inclusive and this should become a new Theme 8. The communications element of theme 6 was therefore deleted, in favour of Theme 8.

Theme 7 - Transport

Public and community transport will meet the needs of those not owning a car including people with impairments; people from surrounding villages using services in Wotton-under-Edge; those attending hospital; students attending colleges; and cyclists. There will be public transport options for commuters. Adequate provision will be made for car users, both those living in the town and those visiting. Traffic and parking will be managed to minimise congestion, particularly on through routes.



The Working Group recognised that the town centre was difficult to access for people with physical and visual impairments and felt that more needed to be done. Improved provision for cyclists – such as cycle racks – is also needed. The bus routes serving Wotton are vital to many people and it is important that bus usage is encouraged and services protected. As part of an

integrated transport future a re-opened rail station at Charfield would be a very welcome addition. However, this still remains a long-term aspiration, held back by rail network and funding constraints.



Theme 8 - Working Together

Wotton-under-Edge will be an inclusive society with people working together across the generations for the benefit of the town. All contributions will be valued and there will be excellent communications between local interest groups and volunteers. Facilities and activities will be accessible and welcoming to all, including those with disabilities and impairments.



This new theme recognised the very significant volunteering ethos in the town which needs to be encouraged and expanded across the generations with improved communications between community groups. Also, that facilities and events should be accessible to all.



PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

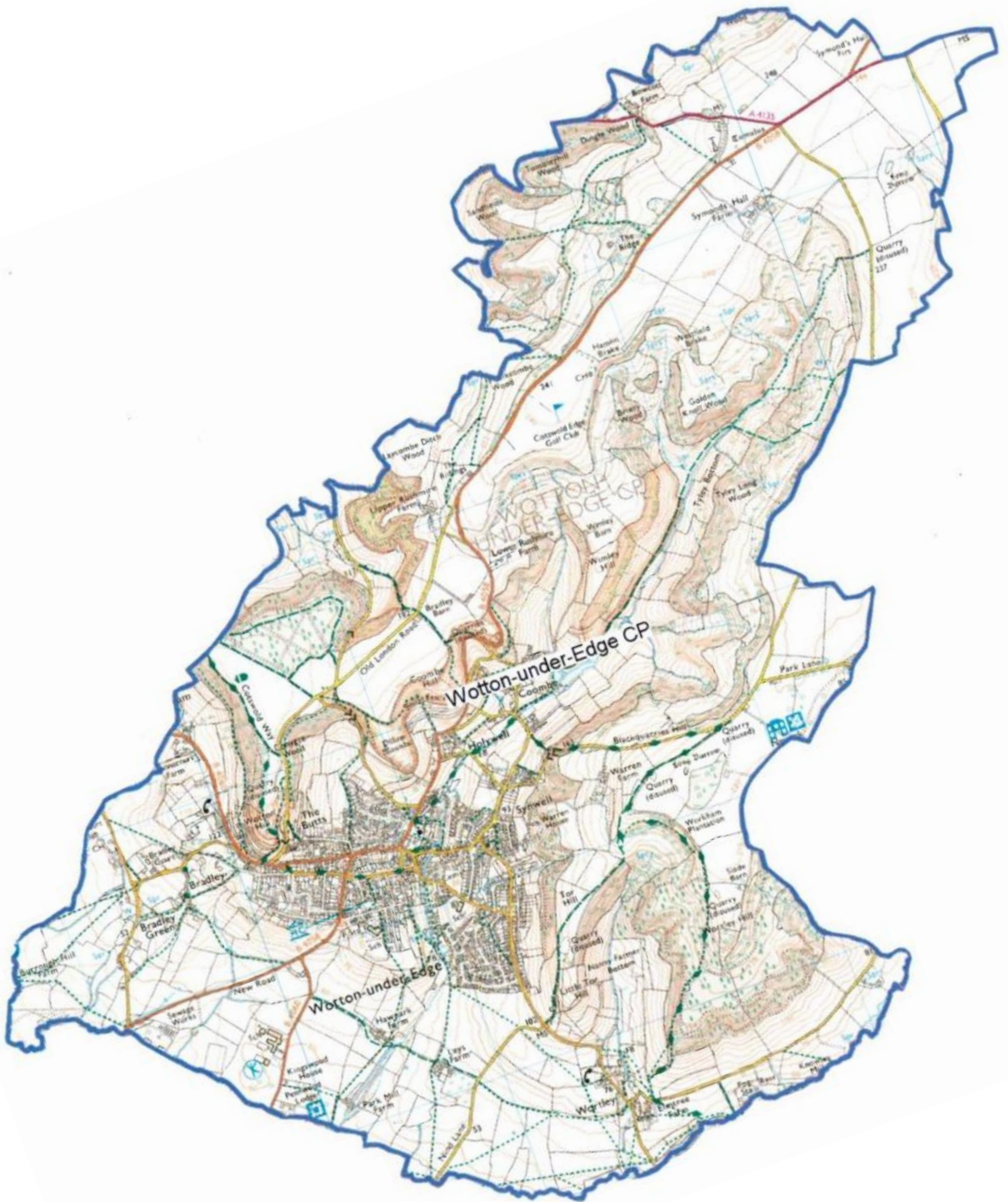
Based on advice received from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council on how best to update the previous Community Plan, the Working Group agreed the following collective priorities for action, with an action plan for each one:

- need for a diverse selection of shops and reduction in number of vacant premises;
- improve condition of verges, pavements and other footways;
- promote tourism;
- provide more parking in the town at no extra cost to residents;
- improve public toilets;
- improve footpaths and open spaces, including Holywell, the churchyard, cemetery and allotments;
- promote the arts, entertainments and festivals;
- expand youth facilities;
- promote and encourage a more inclusive society.



ACTION PLAN

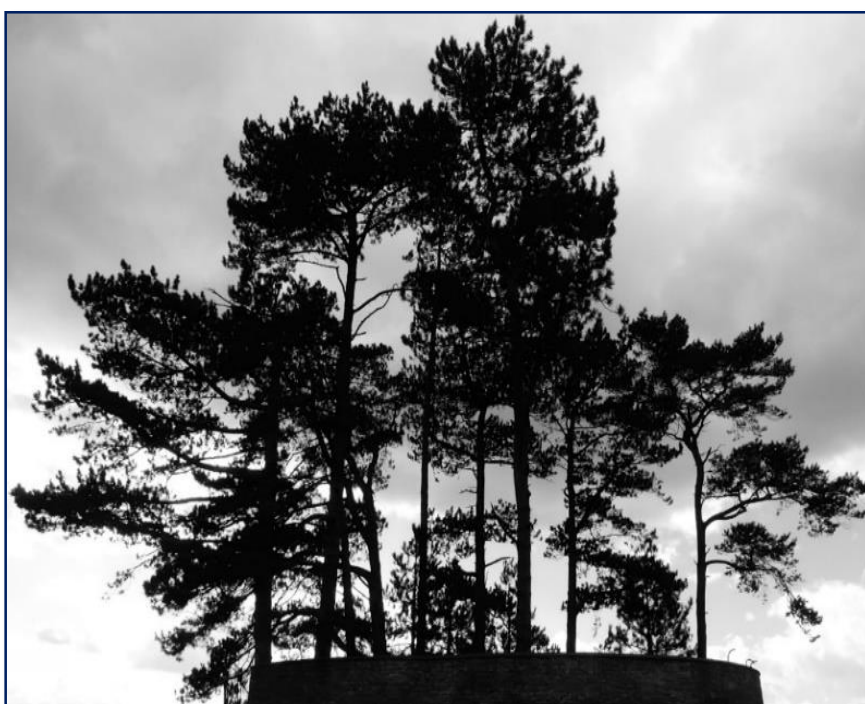
The Action Plan agreed by the Working Group is at Annex B. This will be used as a guide for future community and Town Council action and decision making.



ACTION PLAN

Action plan	Description	Desired Outcome	Actions Required
1	Need for a diverse selection of shops and reduction in number of vacant premises.	Better selection of quality shops to encourage shoppers into town. Increased prosperity of town centre.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss with landlords the possibility of reducing rents to help fill empty shops and improve appearance of shops. 2. Explore with SDC the possibility of reducing business rates. Recent changes in law which will enable District Councils to retain business rates may facilitate this. 3. Identify additional types of retailers needed and encourage their establishment in town. 4. Expand and rejuvenate Farmers Market. 5. Discuss with the Co-op the possibility of creating a rear entrance giving direct access to the car park.
2	Improve condition of verges, pavements and footways.	Improved appearance of town making it more attractive and welcoming.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify problem areas. 2. Action Town Council staff, including overtime. 3. Encourage shop owners to clean frontage pavement. 4. Action higher authorities where appropriate. 5. Make it easier for those with physical and visual impairments to travel around the town.
3	Promote tourism.	Increased number of tourists visiting and using town facilities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that any new parking provided includes provision for coaches. 2. Encourage more residents to provide bed and breakfast. 3. Explore opportunities for more hotel/inn accommodation, a walkers' hostel and camping facilities. 4. WTC and the Heritage Centre to work together to provide a Visitor Information Centre. 5. Explore ways of exploiting location on Cotswold Way. 6. Get Wotton walks into more guidebooks. 7. Encourage festivals (See Action Plan 7 below). 8. Encourage visitors to other local attractions (e.g. Newark Park, Berkeley Castle, Westonbirt, Tortworth, Slimbridge) to visit Wotton (brochures, signage etc). 9. Ensure that Wotton's amenities (pool, cinema, Heritage Centre, specialist shops, Arts Centre) are fully exploited and advertised. 10. Provide improved facilities for cyclists.

Action plan	Description	Desired Outcome	Actions Required
4	Provide more parking in the town at no extra cost to residents.	Extra parking available, thereby encouraging more shoppers into town.	1. Continue to explore and support initiatives which would provide additional parking in the town. 2. Work with community to seek support for additional parking.
5	Improve public toilets.	Improved facilities making town more attractive to visitors.	1. Take immediate action to refurbish Old Town toilets. 2. Establish longer-term plan to replace Old Town toilets with a modern multi-use facility. 3. Explore use of other facilities (such as the Parish Room). 4. Ensure that SDC takes action to improve Rope Walk toilets.
6	Improve footpaths and open spaces including Holywell, churchyard, cemetery and allotments.	Improved management, use and range of facilities.	1. Establish strategy and identify problem areas. 2. Seek ways of exploiting Synwell playing field. 3. Consider action to protect areas by designating land as Local Green Space in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework.
7	Promote the arts, entertainments and festivals.	Improved range of entertainments, etc and increased audiences.	1. Establish strategy. 2. Establish regular Blues Festival. 3. Establish Wotton Walking Festival.
8	Expand youth facilities and activities.	Identify and provide additional facilities and activities needed.	1. Consider additional facilities needed such as a meeting shelter for young people. 2. Encourage young people to express views on local issues and influence local decision-making. 3. Promote a comprehensive programme of summer events for young people.
9	Promote and encourage a welcoming and “inclusive” community.	Active, accessible, inclusive and welcoming community and facilities.	1. Continue to support and encourage the many volunteer and membership organisations serving the Wotton area (List available from One-Stop-Shop). 2. Hold a Clubs’ and Groups’ Fair to encourage volunteers and support community groups in the area. 3. Support and encourage intergenerational activities in the town. 4. Facilitate regular consultation with people across all sections of the community to ensure that all views are taken into account in local decision-making. 5. Work towards becoming a “Dementia Friendly Town”.



*This plan has been produced by Wotton-under-Edge Town Council
with support from Stroud District Council
and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council*

***Wotton-under-Edge Town Council**
www.wotton-under-edge.com*